

Induction to Honours

“It's a different way of learning within the first two years compared to the next two . . . there was such a big jump from second year to third year”



(McCune and Hounsell (2005) p. 283)

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What this induction will cover

- What is Honours like?
- What is expected of me?
- Academic skills self-audit: Where am I now?
Reflection on years 1 and 2
- Honours studying: what works?
- Your next steps



1. What is Honours like?



Activity: Discussion

In pairs, discuss your views/thoughts/feelings about Honours:

- What do you already know/what do you want to know about Honours?
- Is there anything that you would like to ask?



Honours: some descriptions

It's a move to a more independent type of learning where students will often be asked to produce their own research (usually in the form of a dissertation)

“Honours study is analogous to an ‘in-between space’, a **transition between** the coursework orientation of **undergraduate study** and the traditional research focus of **postgraduate study**”

“Honours is not considered to be a short-term process. The aim is for students to perceive Honours as a long-term commitment”



What is Honours like?

Builds on years 1 and 2 but

more specialised courses in year 3

more independent study in year 4

- History: 4MAs
- Classics: original language courses
- Archaeology: original collection study

Dissertation: opportunity for engaging with original research and with researchers (supervisors)



What our students say

Challenging but rewarding:

“for me third year was, in terms of academics was **the best year so far . . .** I made the biggest **improvement in terms of efficiency of working** and also the number of hours I’d spend studying. . . I paid more attention to my studies and allocated way more time to study”



What our students say

Challenging but rewarding: similar comment to those from larger scale research on Honours dissertations

“It [my dissertation] was much more rewarding than I could ever have imagined. And I learnt so much about myself.”

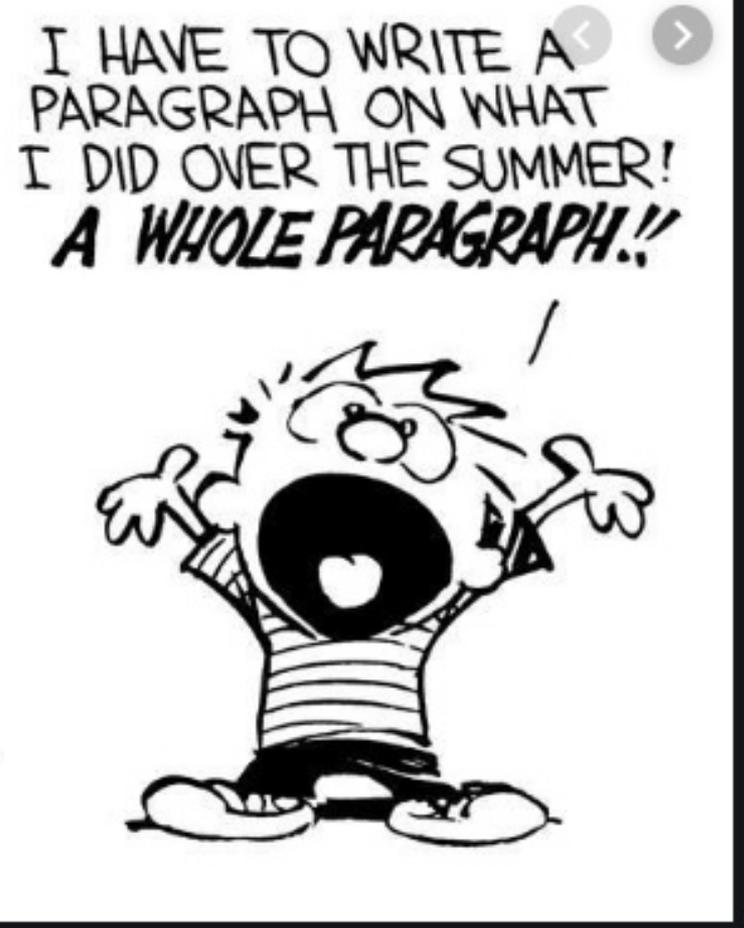
“Doing a research project of my own- I loved it!”



2. What is expected of me?



Honours is a step up





Activity: identify and describe the shift, in your own words

Pre-Honours



Honours

Undertake critical analysis and evaluation within the common understandings in your subject

Critically identify, define, conceptualise and analyse complex/problems and issues and offer professional insights, interpretations and solutions

Use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve targets

Interpret, use and evaluate a wide range of numerical and graphical data to set and achieve goals/targets

Work under guidance with others to acquire an understanding of current practice in your area

Work with others to bring about change / development/ new ways of thinking



The shift up: from 'common' to 'complex'

Pre-Honours



Honours

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From “common understandings” to “complex problems”

Study group: Interpreting the Dutch Revolt

This task requires you to think about the historiography of the Dutch Revolt. It will not be a great surprise that the Dutch Revolt is very much part of the national story of the Netherlands. Over time, the narrative has moved from religious freedom and Dutch Calvinism to religious toleration. More recently the history of Dutch toleration has come under severe scrutiny, with historians now emphasising the persecution of Catholics and the exclusion of religious minorities. Other interpretations have highlighted the secular nature of the Revolt and focused on the political story, emphasising the democratic or anti-democratic aspects of Dutch republicanism. In other words, the historiography of the Dutch Revolt, and in fact all historiography, is reinterpreted with every generation and is bound up with current debates and topical issues.

This study group examines the various historiographical interpretations of the Dutch Revolt. Aside from the overviews provided in the articles below, you should have a look at the work of Martin van Gelderen, Wyger Velema and Judith Pollman. Note that you do not necessarily need to read their work cover to cover but assess the themes they concentrate on to get a sense of where Dutch historiography is now at.

The group must submit an overview of the various interpretations of the Dutch Revolt over time, and answer the question ‘How should we interpret the Dutch Revolt today?’





3. Honours skills audit: where am I now?



What is STAR-L?

STAR-L is a reflection tool and stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result
- Learning



Reflecting with STAR-L

STAR-L emphasises **active learning** over description.

STAR-L example:

- **Situation** - 2nd year exams
- **Task** - to revise and write exam answers
- **Action** - started revising too late
- **Result** - didn't do as well as I would have liked
- **Learning** - start earlier in third year!





Activity: Your own experience

Think back to your experience in first and second year.

Choose an example of studying / coursework / exams that:

- worked well
- **AND** one that worked less well.

Think through the steps of **STAR-L** for each situation, focusing on what you **learned** from the situation.



Situation - task - action - result . . . learning

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Activity: Learning together with STAR-L

Following on from your individual STAR-L reflection, in pairs / groups discuss the:

- **Skills**
- **Behaviours**
- **Attitudes**
- **Approaches**

that you think are necessary for success at Honours (answers on sticky notes)



Activity: Honours study skills audit



Reflecting on your academic skills in more detail.

The following hand-out is split into 3 sections:

- A. Discussing and presenting ideas and interpretations in a clear and reasoned way
- B. Demonstrating skills in information gathering, analysis, communication and presentation
- C. Undertaking independent study and managing your time



4. Honours level: what works?



What works?

Success at Honours study requires ‘high quality learning’ (HQL).

High quality learning includes:

- Systematic,
- Well-organised,
- And self-regulated studying*

But what does HQL look like in practice?





High Quality Learning

Ineffective



Effective

Reading without making notes

Reading and summarising and / or relating this new information to someone else

Highlighting text without writing key points in your own words

Highlighting and evaluating the strengths and weakness of the text in your own words

Looking over lecture notes

Synthesising material into a conceptual mindmap and practicing self-testing

Passive style of learning (taking in knowledge and reproducing it without adding your own analysis)

Demonstrating a higher level of criticality by testing concepts and connecting new knowledge to prior learning

How students describe HQL

“in the second year a lot of what you could do is just study at the last minute, pick up the notes and learn. Whereas in third year you’ve reached the stage where it’s like ‘Oh, I can’t do that anymore!’ **it isn’t just a case of reading the notes and turning up on the day. . . .**

. . . . so, I think third year required a lot more understanding of the material rather than just being able to learn it by rote almost . . . and now I have to sit and think through the material and **almost be able to teach myself in it.**”

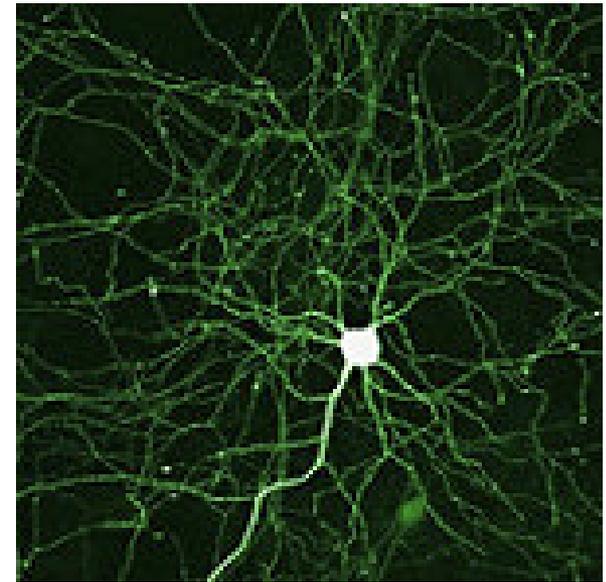
Excerpts from an interview with a fourth year student of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh (Shovlin and Docherty, 2017)



HQL: Learning from mistakes

“When students think about why something is wrong, new synaptic connections are sparked that cause the brain to grow. . . [this] suggests that [we] should **value mistakes** and move from viewing them as learning failures”

Boaler (2103)



‘Neurons’ by Mike Seyfang (2008)

Mistakes have the potential to be turned into learning achievements

5. Your next steps

Developing your skills for Honours

Making adjustments

What are the most important messages for me?



What will be similar to my previous experience?



What will be the main changes for me?



What steps can I take to adjust to them?



What can I start working on now?





IAD support and resources

Online resources and workshops for developing and enhancing study skills (e.g. critical thinking, time management, literature review, dissertations and projects).

Study Hub: www.ed.ac.uk/iad/studyhub

Study skills workshops: <https://edin.ac/2FFIptL>



References

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Seyfang, M. (2008). *Neurons*. Flickr (Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0) downloaded September 2015 from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mikeblogs/3101400087/>