











# Your first-year success guide

Helping you settle in, find support, and succeed at Unisa



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***The information in this publication is correct as of June 2026. Visit the Unisa Counselling and Career Development (DCCD) [downloads page](#) to check for updates.***

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## Welcome

This guide is compiled to help you in your first year of studies and beyond, ensuring that you do not feel lost and alone. It is your starting guide to understanding how Unisa works and how to succeed as a Unisa student. In addition to this guide, there are other support programmes to help you find your way as a Unisa student. These include Orientation sessions at the beginning of each semester or year, as well as the Student Retention Unit First-year experience programme.

## Understanding Unisa and CODEL

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is a Comprehensive Open Distance e-Learning (CODEL) institution. Unisa offers flexible learning opportunities that are accessible to students across various locations, including those who may not be able to attend physical classes.

At Unisa, learning takes place remotely and primarily online. In other words, you're in charge of your own learning: studying at your own pace, mostly online, and managing your studies independently.

Key features for online learning at Unisa include:

- **Self-learning:** You are responsible for managing your studies by attending online lectures as advised by the lecturers, understanding their module content, and ensuring you submit assignments, projects, and write tests before the submission dates.
- **Digital access:** Course materials, assignments, feedback and communication with lecturers are accessed online.
- **Support structures:** While the learning is independent, Unisa offers academic and administrative support through various channels.

Studying at Unisa does require motivation, organisation and time management, but you do not have to master everything at once. Start with the basics, build a routine, and ask for help early.

## Your first steps

[Read](#) the 12-step guide to navigate your first weeks at Unisa.

## Common first-year traps and what to do instead

Trap	Try this instead
Waiting until you feel motivated	Start with 20 minutes. Motivation often comes after starting.
Only checking <i>myUnisa</i> before assignments are due	Check your <i>myLife</i> email and <i>myUnisa</i> daily, even for five minutes.
Reading without tracking deadlines	Put all due dates into one calendar.
Feeling embarrassed to ask for help	Ask early. Many students need help learning the system.
Trying to study everything at once	Break work into one module, one topic, one task.

## Checklist: Preparation is key

Key areas	Action	Tick
<b>Getting started: Do you have the essentials you need to start your study journey</b>	Device(s) e.g. a laptop and smart phone	
	Access to <i>myUnisa</i> and <i>myModules</i>	
	Downloaded all study material	
	Updated your personal information	
	Understand your academic requirements	
<b>Time management</b>	Create a personalised weekly schedule	
<b>Study environment</b>	Create a conducive study space free from distractions	
	Be organised	
<b>Learn to navigate <i>myUnisa</i> and <i>myModules</i></b>	Engage regularly	
	Check emails and announcements daily	
<b>Study tools and Apps</b>	Explore study tools and Apps to use	
<b>Preparing for exams and assignments</b>	Read all your tutorial letters for each module	
	Learn to use Turnitin (if applicable)	
	Learn how to use exam proctoring tools	
	Do mock exams	
<b>Seeking help and staying motivated</b>	Seek help if needed	
	Attend orientation and other support workshops	
	Engage with your peers	
	Create your personalised resiliency plan	

## Getting started: what you need

To succeed at Unisa, make sure that you have the necessary tools and systems in place from the outset. This section outlines the essential requirements for starting academic activities effectively.

### 3.1. Digital equipment

A laptop or smartphone is essential for accessing online learning platforms, reading study material, submitting assignments, and communicating with lecturers and tutors.

### 3.2. Internet connectivity

A stable internet connection is required to log in to university systems, participate in online activities, download study content, and access announcements or feedback.

### 3.3. Platform access

After registration, you will have access to the following:

- **myLife** email address. This is the Unisa email address that will be allocated to you. All communications from Unisa will be to this email address, and you should also use this email to communicate with the University.
- **myUnisa**. This is the main student portal where you can check your registration status, fees outstanding, assignment results, your exam timetable and exam results. You can view your academic records, change your contact details and address or even edit your registration. You will access *myUnisa* by using your student number and password.
- **myModules**. This is where you will access your study guides, tutorial letters, submit and view your assignments, check announcements from your lecturer regarding the module and information for online classes, discussion forums and any other extra studying materials that the lecturer might provide.

### 3.4. Study material

Ensure you have the correct study material for each module by double-checking the module code.

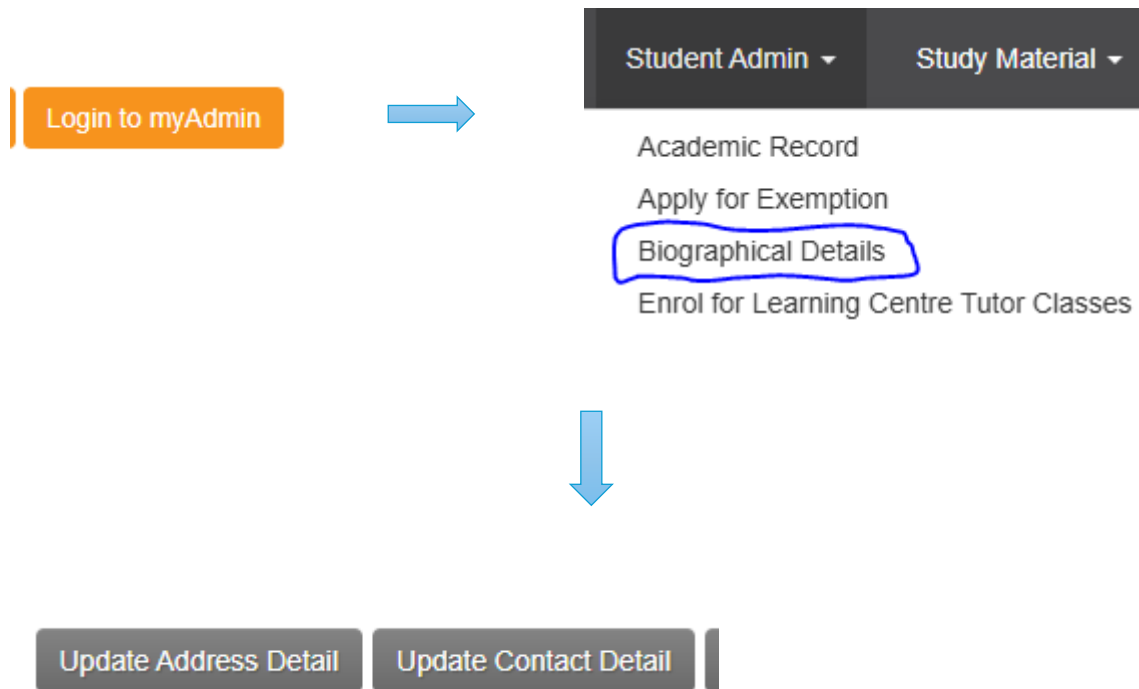
Study materials can be found at the following places:

- Online: download your study material on the *myModules* site under each module.

- Hard copy material: can be delivered to you, provided that there is printed study material for the modules.

### 3.5. Updated contact information

It is vital to update your contact details on *myAdmin* to receive data allocations, academic notices, and system announcements. Make sure that your cellphone number is always up to date.



### 3.6. Academic requirements

We recommend that you check progress with your qualification at least every 6 months or annually to ensure that you are on track to complete the relevant modules needed.

Familiarise yourself with the qualification and module requirements as outlined on the Unisa website:

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Undergraduate-qualifications/Qualifications/All-qualifications>

### 3.7. Daily checks and communications

You need to log in to *myModules* and your *myLife* email daily to review module announcements related to assignments, submission dates and online classes.

## Navigating *myUnisa* and *myModules*

**myUnisa** and **myModules** are the two primary online platforms that you must use to manage your academic activities. Getting to know these systems and familiarising yourself with them is very important, as this is where you will access module resources, submit assignments and communicate with lecturers.

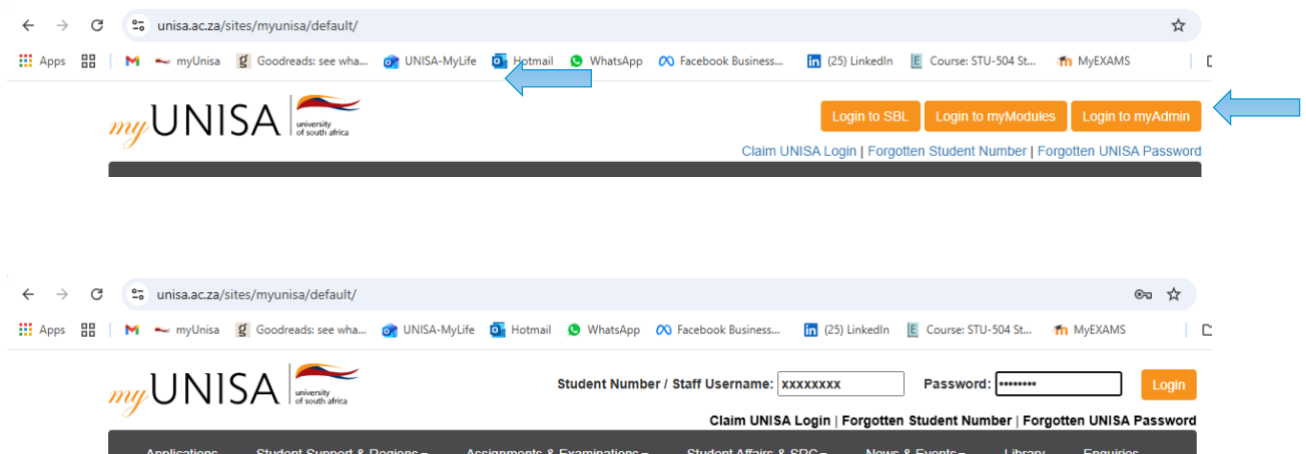
### 4.1. Accessing *myUnisa*

You should log in to [myUnisa](#) and *myModules* every day to stay informed and to ensure you don't miss important updates related to deadlines, system changes, or university-wide communications. You are advised to:

- Log in daily to check for new announcements, updates, or messages.
- Monitor module-specific portals to ensure consistent progress
- Use available navigation menus to explore tools like quizzes, tutorials, and support forums.

#### Tip:

Set a daily reminder on your phone for a time you are usually awake and available. Label it: "Check myLife and myModules".



### 4.2. Use the Unisa Student App

Download the App from the Apple iStore, Google Play Store or the Huawei AppGallery and log in with your student number and Unisa password.

You can manage your application and registration, pay your study fees, view your assessment information, access self-help, and view information about your graduation on the app.

## Study tools and apps

Leveraging the right tools and applications can significantly enhance your learning experience. You are encouraged to integrate digital tools into your study routines to manage tasks, organise materials, and access academic content more effectively.

### 5.1. Productivity and note-taking tools

- **Microsoft Office:** Free for registered Unisa students on Microsoft 365. Includes Word, Excel, and PowerPoint for assignments, presentations, and data work.
- **Other Unisa Microsoft 365 Apps:** Include cloud-based storage and communication tools (e.g., Teams and OneDrive), facilitating file sharing, collaboration, and document backup.
- **OneNote / Evernote/ Notion:** Digital notebooks that are ideal for organising notes by module and syncing across devices.
- **Outlook / Google Calendar:** Useful for tracking deadlines, scheduling study sessions, and setting reminders for assignments and exams.

### 5.2. Online learning resources

- **YouTube & Khan Academy:** Resources like these help you to access free online training and conceptual explanations. You could use relevant resources to help you understand specific concepts related to your studies more effectively.

### 5.3. Device compatibility

Most apps and platforms mentioned are compatible with smartphones and laptops. You should ensure that your devices support these tools for seamless integration into your learning workflow.

By incorporating these resources into daily academic activities, you can streamline your study process, remain organised, and enhance comprehension. Familiarity with these tools not only supports current academic tasks but also develops digital literacy for future professional contexts.

## Preparing for assignments and exams

Assignments and exams are critical components of academic assessment at Unisa. Your preparation for these assessments must be deliberate and well-structured. This section

outlines essential practices to help you perform effectively in both assignments and examinations.

**Tip:**

Before the semester gets busy:

Write your assignment due dates into your calendar or note these on your digital calendar

## 6.1. Understand assignment instructions

Before starting any task, you must:

- Read all instructions carefully.
- Follow formatting, word count, and referencing requirements.
- Review the tutorial letters for the module (e.g. Tutorial Letters 101 and 201), which provide module-specific guidelines and expectations.

**Tip:**

Before your first assignment:

Open Tutorial Letter 101 and highlight the assessment instructions.

## 6.2. Use clear and academic language

If you need to complete a written assignment, it should be written in a simple, structured, and formal tone, with proper grammar and clarity of argument. Always support statements with evidence, and reference sources where applicable.

## 6.3. Referencing and plagiarism

Apply the correct referencing style as prescribed for the module (e.g., Harvard, APA, OSCOLA).

### What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is when you use another person's words, writing, or thoughts without saying where you got them from. For example, if you copy text from a book or website and don't give credit to the author, that's plagiarism. For more information on plagiarism, please click on the link or copy the link to Google:

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/static/myUnisa/Content/Assignments%20&%20Examinations/Documents/Turnitin%20Student%20Guidelines%20Jan%202025V2.pdf>

- To avoid plagiarism, you need to properly cite all sources.
- Some assignments will require you to use Turnitin as a plagiarism detection tool before submission. Please see your tutorial letters for more information about this.

## 6.4. Get to know the Unisa Library and the services it offers

The Unisa Library has branches in different Unisa regional centres. Learn more about the Library services for new students here:

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Library/Services-for-new-students>.

## 6.5. Save and backup work

Ensure that all your work is:

- Saved regularly while editing
- Stored securely using platforms such as Microsoft 365 OneDrive or external storage to prevent data loss

## 6.6. Submission and deadlines

- Submit assignments well before the deadline to avoid technical issues and the system being offline.
- Confirm submission success on *myUnisa* or the relevant platform

## 6.7. Exam preparation strategies

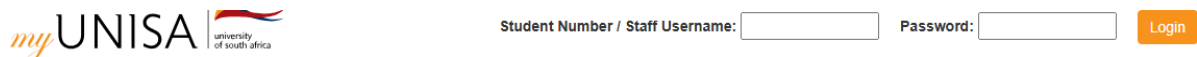
- Ensure that you have worked through all your study material for a module before the exam. Use your study guides and tutorial letters to identify key learning outcomes and expected competencies
- Review past exam papers available on *myUnisa* to familiarise yourself with typical formats and structure of the question paper.
- Create a revision timetable that allocates time to each module.
- Familiarise yourself with the [guidelines and support for the online examinations](#).
- Participate in online workshops, webinars, and exam readiness sessions.

## 6.8. Tools for exam readiness

Access your exam timetable, check your examination dates and plan your studying time accordingly.

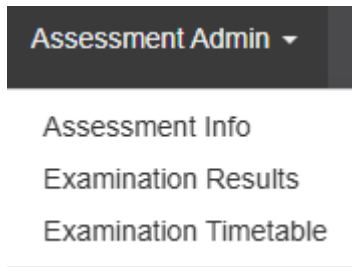
## How to access your exam timetable:

Step 1: Log onto *myUnisa* by using your student number and password



The image shows the myUNISA login interface. On the left is the myUNISA logo with the text 'UNISA university of south africa'. To the right are two input fields: 'Student Number / Staff Username:' and 'Password:'. A blue 'Login' button is positioned to the right of the password field.

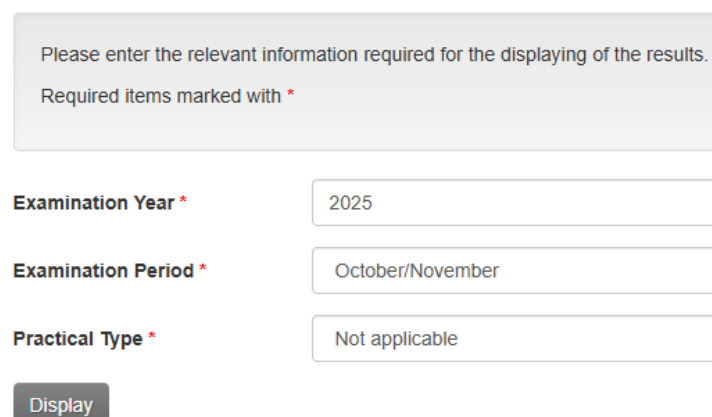
Step 2: Click on “assessment admin” and select examination timetable



The image shows a dark grey dropdown menu titled 'Assessment Admin'. Below the title are three options: 'Assessment Info', 'Examination Results', and 'Examination Timetable'. The 'Examination Timetable' option is highlighted with a white underline.

Step 3: Make sure you select the correct and relevant information for the current semester

### Timetable Information



The image shows a form titled 'Timetable Information'. At the top, a grey box contains the text: 'Please enter the relevant information required for the displaying of the results. Required items marked with \*'. Below this are three input fields: 'Examination Year \*' with the value '2025', 'Examination Period \*' with the value 'October/November', and 'Practical Type \*' with the value 'Not applicable'. A blue 'Display' button is located at the bottom left of the form.

Proper preparation improves performance, reduces anxiety, and ensures academic integrity. Following these structured steps supports success in assignment- and exam-based assessments.

## Time management tips

Effective time management is a critical skill for study success since you are responsible for organising your own schedules and meeting academic deadlines independently.

Here are some strategies to help manage time efficiently.

### 7.1. Use a calendar or planner

Maintain a physical or digital calendar to record assignment deadlines, exam dates, and study sessions. Digital tools such as Google Calendar or Outlook can be used to set automated reminders and alerts.

### 7.2. Create a weekly study timetable

Develop a personalised weekly timetable that includes your academic responsibilities (study, assignments, online classes) as well as work or family commitments. This approach helps ensure a realistic and balanced schedule, reducing the risk of burnout.

**Tip:**

If you are overwhelmed, start with this minimum routine

For the next seven days:

Daily action	Time needed
Check <i>myLife</i> email	5 minutes
Check <i>myModules</i> announcements	5 minutes
Read or revise one small section for one of your modules	25 minutes
Write down one question or next step	5 minutes

### 7.3. Study in manageable sessions

Divide study time into focused intervals of 1-2 hours, followed by short breaks. This technique, known as the Pomodoro method, can improve focus and retention over time.

## 7.4. Start early and avoid last-minute work

Avoid procrastination by beginning assignments early, giving yourself time to review and edit. Aim to complete tasks at least one week before their deadline to allow for unforeseen issues such as technical errors during submission.

## 7.5. Submit through Turnitin in advance

Assignments, when instructed by lecturers, should be submitted early via Turnitin to ensure successful processing and to address any potential upload failures before the final deadline. Turnitin is a tool that checks whether the information you provided is your own work and how similar it is to other texts.

## 7.6. Balance responsibilities

Plan around all areas of responsibility, including employment, family obligations, and personal well-being. Incorporating rest and recreation into your schedule supports long-term academic performance.

By implementing these structured practices, you can manage your time more effectively, reduce academic stress, and maintain steady progress throughout your studies at Unisa.

### Template: Weekly study planner

Day	Study time available	Module/task	Done
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

**This week I will focus on:**

**If I fall behind, my next small step will be:**

## Example: Weekly study planner

Day	Study time available	Module/task	Done
Monday	5:00-7:00 19:00-22:00	Module A Read Chapter 1 Module B Start Assignment 01	
Tuesday	5:00-7:00 19:00-22:00	Module C Read Chapter 3 Module D Start Assignment 02	
Wednesday	5:00-7:00 19:00-22:00	Module E Read Chapter 2 Module A Read Chapter 2	
Thursday	5:00-7:00 19:00-22:00	Module B Read Chapter 4 Module C Read Chapter 4	
Friday	5:00-6:00	Module D Complete and submit Assignment 02	
Saturday	10:00-12:00 14:00-16:00	Module E Read Chapter 3 Module B Finish and submit Assignment 01 Revise notes for the week	
Sunday	14:00-16:00	Revise notes for the week Plan for next week	

### **This week I will focus on:**

Submitting Module B Assignment 01 and Module D Assignment 02

Revising my notes on Saturday and Sunday

### **If I fall behind, my next small step will be:**

Schedule catch-up time on Saturday and Sunday, and say no to further social events

## Study environment and routine

You need to take active steps to design and maintain a productive study environment and routine.

### 8.1. Designate a study space

Choose a dedicated area for studying that is:

- Quiet and free from distractions, such as TV or social media.
- Comfortable, with appropriate seating and lighting.
- Organised, with all study materials, notes, books, and stationery within easy reach.

A consistent study location promotes concentration and routine.

## 8.2. Develop a study routine

Establish a regular daily or weekly study routine that fits your personal and academic schedule. Even short but consistent sessions, such as one hour per day, can significantly contribute to learning outcomes.

## 8.3. Minimise distractions

Turn off notifications, limit phone use, and avoid multitasking during study sessions. Let family or housemates know your designated study times to avoid interruptions.

## 8.4. Attend online lectures and engage

Active participation in virtual academic activities is essential. This includes:

- Attending scheduled online classes or tutorials.
- Engaging with lecturers and fellow students through forums, emails, and chats.
- Reaching out to lecturers via email when clarification or academic support is needed.

Timely engagement fosters better understanding and keeps you aligned with module requirements.

## 8.5. Stay organised

Use folders, either digital or physical, to file notes and assignment feedback by module. Track progress, deadlines, and lecture content systematically to avoid last-minute confusion.

## Building resilience

The Four S' of Resilience is a tool that allows individuals to draw on resilience sources they have used in the past and create a plan for tackling adversity in the future.

There are two parts to the plan:

In Part A, you reflect on a past difficulty you overcame and identify the Four S' (supports, strategies, sagacity, and solution-seeking) you drew on at that time.



Part B uses those responses to create a plan of resilience for any present or future difficulty you may face.

## Create your personal resiliency plan

Take a few moments to reflect and answer the following questions in the table below. Be honest with yourself; this is a tool for growth, not perfection.

Area	My answer
<b>Support:</b> Who can I contact?	
<b>Strategies:</b> What helps me cope? (e.g. deep breathing, writing down my problems, talking to a friend)	
<b>Sagacity:</b> What have I learned from past challenges?	
<b>Solution-seeking:</b> What is one small step I can take this week? What is one small step I can take in the next 24 hours?	

### Final Tips

- Don't give up: your future is worth it.
- Ask for help: smart students ask when unsure.
- Celebrate small wins: every effort towards your studies counts.

**Stay consistent: small steps build success.**

*A testimonial from a 2025 Student Mentor*

I started my studies with Unisa in 2015, and by 2018 I dropped out mainly because I wasn't performing well, and I felt lost without any support.

Challenges I experienced:

1. In 2015, when I first started studying at Unisa, I did not have access to a computer or laptop, so I used my phone for some of the work and submitted assignments at the Unisa drop-off assignment box.

2. I struggled to choose modules in a way that would ensure that I at least achieved the required credits per year
3. I did not realise that I needed to check my emails every day, which led to missing out on important information.
4. Eventually, I started working and studying, which led to me having a hard time navigating work, school and responsibilities at home.
5. I then dropped out and went to other institutions and did a few qualifications, and I passed.
6. What I had initially studied for at Unisa was something I was passionate about, and Unisa was convenient for me. By 2020, I decided that I was going to go back to start over, and I had to find ways to ensure that I put in the effort to ensure I pass and complete my qualification.

Steps I took to learn from my mistakes:

1. Checked my emails every day.
2. Wrote down all my modules according to requirements per semester, per year.
3. I spent time navigating the *myUnisa* website, and by the second year, I even knew the shortcut to access certain information.
4. I was motivated to finish my qualification, so I challenged myself to do 9 modules in my second year and 11 in my final year, as compared to the previous years, where I could only do 3 or 4 modules.
5. At some point, I almost had a mental breakdown, so I searched to see if Unisa could assist, and I came across the counselling department and made contact.

Even though it was a challenging journey, and I gave up along the way, I came back to really follow my passion and that demanded me to be determined, dedicated and resilient, seek assistance and use my mistakes and experience to ensure I do things differently.



## Seeking help and staying motivated

Various academic, emotional, and technical support systems are in place to assist you. Staying connected to these resources and maintaining motivation are key to long-term academic success.

## 10.1. Academic support

- You are encouraged to engage with your lecturers who are available for academic content queries.
- Unisa Library: Offers access to online journals, books, and academic databases.
- Computer Labs: Available at regional campuses for internet and study access.

## 10.2 Student mentors

As student mentors, we assist and support first-year students with:

- Navigating online systems
- Time and study management
- General academic guidance
- Group sessions
- Mentors provide peer-level assistance and share practical insights from their own experience.

## 10.3. Mental health and wellbeing services

Unisa provides access to Student Counselling Services, offering:

- Academic and career guidance
- Mental health support, personal counselling and wellness tools
- Workshops on study skills, exam preparation, time management, resilience, motivation goal setting, anxiety, depression, grief, career development, employability skills, etc.)
- Referral to professional counselling services where needed

## 10.4. Peer support and community engagement

- Student study groups facilitate peer-to-peer learning.
- You are encouraged to participate in workshops, extra-curricular activities, and student events when available.
- Knowing your Student Representative Council (SRC) can also help in accessing advocacy and university-related support.

## 10.5. Staying motivated

- Revisit personal goals and motivations regularly to maintain focus.
- Develop a positive support system of peers, mentors, and family.
- Celebrate small wins—every completed task contributes to overall progress.

- Engaging with support systems, staying connected to the student community, and proactively managing well-being are vital for academic endurance.

**Tip:**

When you feel stuck:

Send one email asking for help instead of waiting until the problem feels bigger.

## When everything feels like too much

1. Pause and take one small step.
2. Write down what is worrying you.
  - Circle the one issue that needs attention first.
  - Choose one action you can take today.
  - Contact someone if you need support.

Examples of small actions:

Situation	One small action
I do not know where to start	Open myUnisa and check one module announcement.
I missed a deadline	Contact the lecturer to enquire about an extension.
I feel anxious about exams	Attend an exam preparation session or contact the DCCD.
I am falling behind	Make a list of outstanding tasks and choose the next one only.

### “I feel overwhelmed” action

Complete the following questions to help you turn emotional overwhelm into one manageable step:

1. What is worrying me right now?
2. Which one thing needs attention first?
3. What is one small action I can take today?
4. Who can I contact for support?
5. When will I do this? (date and time)

**Reminder: You do not have to solve everything today. Start with one next step.**

## Important Contacts and Resources

### Tips for Efficient Use

- Keep these emails for quick access.
- Be sure to provide your student number, modules, and region when contacting Unisa
- Always use your *myLife* email address when emailing Unisa.
- Unisa website: <http://www.unisa.ac.za/>
- **Unisa Specific contact details for student assistance and service**
- *myUnisa*: <https://my.unisa.ac.za/>
- *myModules*: <https://mymodules.dtls.unisa.ac.za/>
- First year experience at Unisa webpage:  
<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/myunisa/default/First%E2%80%93year-experience-at-Unisa>
- Unisa Regional Centres: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Contact-us/Regional-Centres>

### Information services and support:

- Support for Students with Disabilities: [arcswid@unisa.ac.za](mailto:arcswid@unisa.ac.za)
- Assistance with *myLife* email: [myLifeHelp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:myLifeHelp@unisa.ac.za)
- Despatch services: [despatch@unisa.ac.za](mailto:despatch@unisa.ac.za)
- Assignments: [assign@unisa.ac.za](mailto:assign@unisa.ac.za)
- Exams: [exams@unisa.ac.za](mailto:exams@unisa.ac.za)
- Finance: [finan@unisa.ac.za](mailto:finan@unisa.ac.za)

## Counselling and career development services at Unisa

The Unisa Directorate for Counselling and Career Development offers career, academic, and personal counselling services to Unisa students and the broader community. You can talk to a counsellor about:

**Career decisions.** I am not sure which career path to follow; I don't know which qualification would be best; I want to change my career direction...

**Career information.** How can I find out more about a career in ...

**Employability.** How do I market myself to employers? How can I look for work? How can I compile an effective CV? How do I go about networking with others? How do I put together my career portfolio? How can I meet potential employers? How can I improve my interview skills?)

**My studies at Unisa.** How can I get started with my studies? How do I plan my studies? How can I study more effectively? I don't feel motivated to continue with my studies... I feel worried about preparing for/ writing the exams. I failed my exams – what now? I need to improve my reading/ writing/ numeracy skills

**Personal issues and mental health.** How can I have better relationships with others? How can I cope more effectively with issues that impact my studies?

### Contact us

- Send an email to [counselling@unisa.ac.za](mailto:counselling@unisa.ac.za).
- Make an appointment to see a counsellor:
  - [In-person at a Unisa Centre](#)
  - [Online \(on MS Teams\)](#)

### Further self-help resources for career, academic and personal development

Our website: [www.unisa.ac.za/counselling](http://www.unisa.ac.za/counselling)

Our YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/unisacareers](http://www.youtube.com/unisacareers)

## Student Mentor Programme

The Student Mentor Programme is a volunteer programme aimed at empowering senior students to become the Champions of Graduateness and Success at Unisa. Staff members of the Unisa Directorate: Counselling and Career Development will mentor students who are accepted into the programme regarding their graduate development, who will, in turn, be able to provide mentoring to others regarding their career management and studies.

[Learn more about the Student Mentor Programme.](#)

## Sources

1. [FYE Student Orientation](#)
2. [Additional resources for Unisa first year students](#)
3. [Study @ Unisa \(Do your assessments\)](#)
4. [Rules around plagiarism and cheating](#)
5. [Exam Preparation: A guide to preparing yourself for exams](#)
6. [Your step-by-step guide for successful online examinations](#)
7. [Time management](#)
8. [Manage your studies: Plan](#)
9. [Resilience Examples: What Key Skills Make You Resilient?](#)
10. [Building Resilience: The 4 S's Plan](#)