



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

Balancing Sport and Education



What's inside

Studying is the key to success in life. But how can you strike that perfect balance between training and learning? Come and discover the best way to get educated as an athlete.

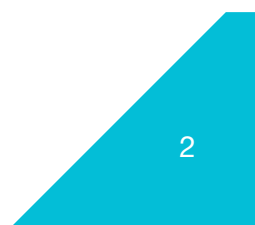
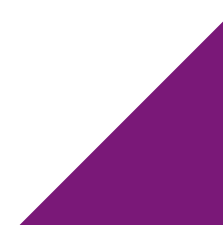
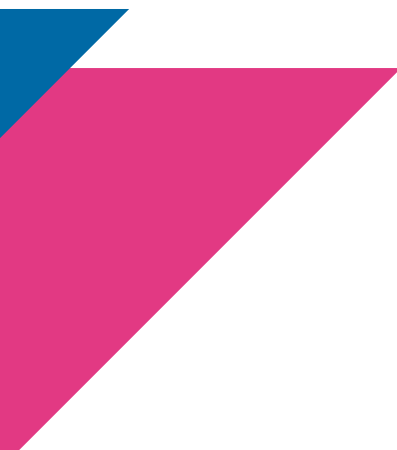


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1. Introduction

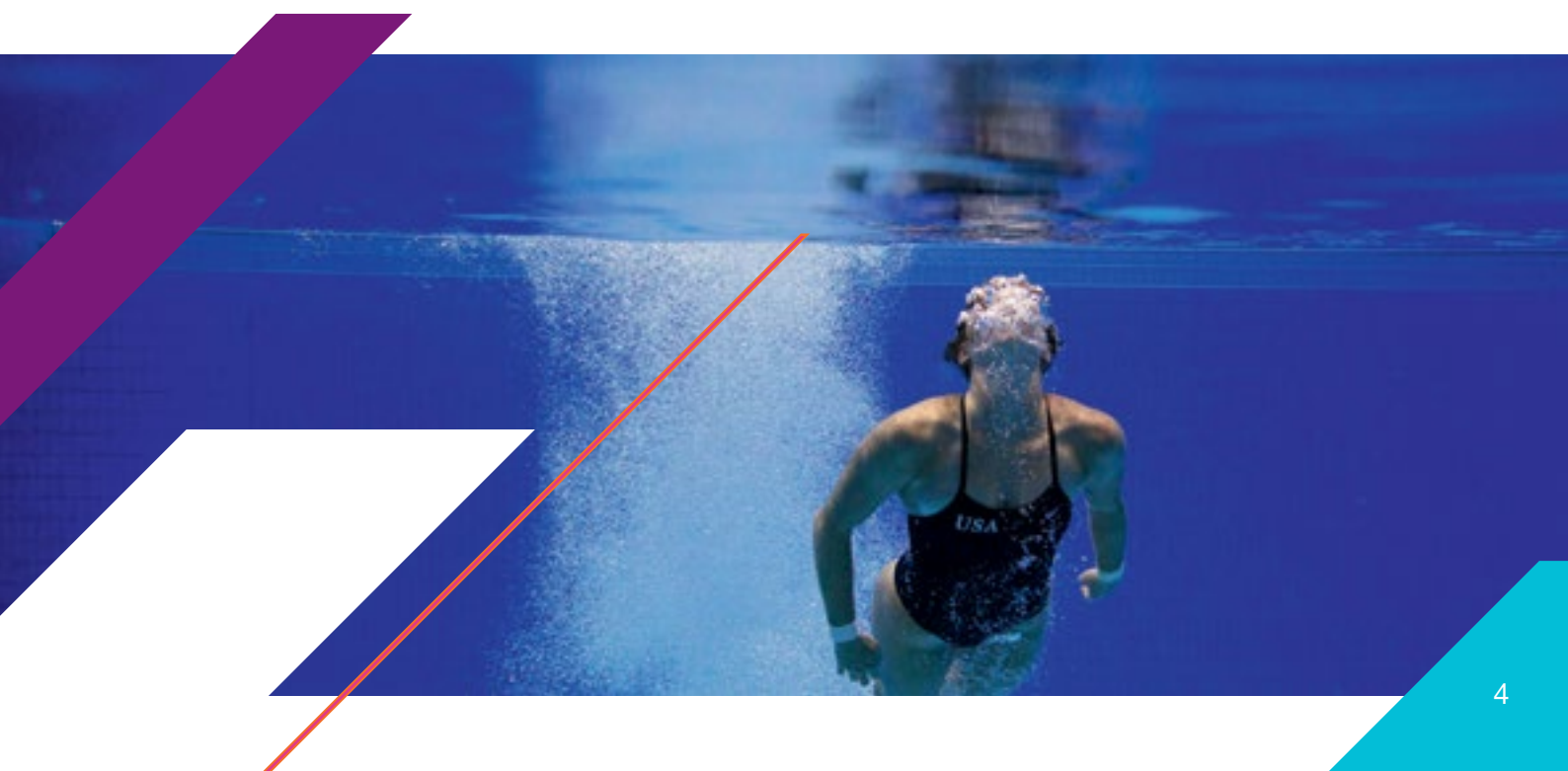
Do you want to broaden your horizons beyond sport? This is where we give you the tools and guidance to pursue your education. We'll help you balance learning with the demands of being an elite athlete, with resources that explain the educational opportunities available to you.

For access to our free online education courses, visit the IOC Athlete Learning Gateway here: www.olympic.org/gateway

You can find more information about education opportunities in the course '[Athlete Career Transition](#)'.

“The importance of education was instilled into me from an early age. It really helped me to achieve a lot knowing that if something happened with sport, I would still be on track for a different career. Having an education that I could come back to has given me the motivation and confidence to achieve at the top level. ”

— Tony Estanguet, Canoe.



2. Choosing the right educational institution

As an athlete it's important to choose an educational institution that will work with you to achieve your aims; both for your education and your sports career.

“There's a vital trio in the sport-education setting – you, your performance lead, and your course director. It is so important to get both to understand about the other activity, and that one activity can actually benefit the other. Choosing the right course and university can help. But building these relationships and communicating early and effectively can make all the difference in balancing sport and education. ”

— Adam Pengilly, Skeleton.



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

You may have unique challenges to face, if you combine study with a lot of sports. Don't worry there are some high schools and universities that help athletes balance sports and education.

Many athletes don't realise these support systems exist, so you have to talk to your institution about your specific requirements.

As an elite athlete you need to know what is possible, rather than struggling with the unknown of a high school or university which will not be able to support the balance needed to perform at your best.

The following questions will help you to think about your needs in relation to each of the educational institutions you are considering and guide you in obtaining the relevant information that will assist you to make the right decision.

For each of the institutions, consider:

The programme

- Does it allow you to balance training and competition by providing flexibility with timetables, class work and assignments? For example, does it utilise online learning or other flexible learning so you can keep up with class work when you need to travel?
- Does it cater for different learning requirements and various abilities, whilst maintaining the highest academic standards?
- Is there a programme that supports combining your sport and education? How many students are involved in the programme? And how do sport students integrate with mainstream students?
- Is there a dedicated coordinator or key point of contact to assist you and your entourage to resolve any issues?
- If your circumstances change in the near future, are you able to transfer your credits that you have completed, and if so how easily within your country and internationally?
- What type of links does the educational institution have to the broader sporting community?
- Is the educational institution supported by the local government and / or community?



The facilities

- What type of facilities does the educational institution have access to?
- Are the facilities that are provided “fit for purpose” with regard to your training needs and located close to the educational institution?
- Do the transport options available make it possible, in a reasonable time, to access these facilities?
- Does the educational institution have access to the required expertise in terms of coaching and support services (for example biomechanics, nutrition, sports psychology, physiotherapy, etc.) if you are to be based there?
- Does the educational institution have demonstrated links with other national or international sporting authorities from which to draw expertise and advice?
- Is access available for personal coaches to use the venues and facilities?

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it should provide you with some key areas to focus on in your search for an education.

Print out the following worksheet to help you choose the right educational institute for you.

[Printable worksheet](#) 

> **What to ask potential
educational institutions**



HOW TO BUILD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Your needs as an athlete are different from other students. You may need to seek approval for time away to train or attend competitions, extra time to hand in work, or to sit exams at another time or place. It's important that you build a good relationship with your institution. This starts with good planning and communication.

Have a clear picture of your sporting commitments for the semester or year ahead. Although this can change, early preparation ensures that you know what support you need from your sport, teacher or institution.

The following points can also help you develop a good relationship with your institution:

Be reliable

Make sure you deliver on your agreements. If, for some reason, you cannot fulfil your obligations, then give the institution plenty of advance notice and offer an alternative solution.

Be professional

When you complete your education or change institutions, make sure that you finish in a respectful manner. For instance, you could send them a thank you letter and perhaps a signed action photo.

Be proactive

Try to think about how to give value back to your institution. For example, you could run some coaching clinic, or volunteer at events run by your institution.

Promote the relationship

If you're lucky enough to get media exposure, make the most of it. Think about the people who helped you get there and remember to mention them. Make sure you keep a copy and give it to the institution in case they didn't see it. If you get the chance to do any public speaking, it's always good to try and mention your supporters.

Keep in contact

Keep a mailing list of the people who supported you (scholarship providers, sponsors, teachers, etc.) and keep them up-to-date on your progress at major competitions. Keep your institution in mind if you can gain access to any tickets or corporate tickets at local competitions. This may also apply for sporting functions, if appropriate.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR STUDIES FLEXIBLE

You might finish your secondary education (college, high school, etc.) at the same time as you're progressing up the ranks in your sport. Luckily, many institutions now recognise that they need to be flexible to better cater for athletic students.

Here are some things to talk about with your institution. You should discuss your needs as early as possible and have some ideas of possible options. But always listen to any alternatives provided by the institution too.

Extended period of time

Some athletes prefer to spread their secondary education out over an extended period of time. This can suit some athletes, especially if they have a heavy training, competition or travel schedule. If you are interested in doing this, contact your institution, advising them of your situation and asking for their support.

Distance education/online education

If you have a heavy travel component and think that it's unlikely that you'll be able to regularly attend classes, you may wish to consider options through one of the distance education centres. They can offer a good range of subjects through a combination of correspondence and online courses.

Explore the IOC Athlete Learning Gateway

This is an exciting new service featuring short academic courses, interviews with Olympic champions, discussion forums and articles on a wide

range of subjects connected to sport – available anytime, completely free.

There are over a dozen courses with key subjects such as nutrition, psychology, leadership, sports, technology and injury prevention.

You can join the IOC Athlete Learning Gateway community today by just [signing up for free on the platform](#). It's a great way to boost your performance and shape your future career.

Home education

Some countries may have home education options with special permission from the education board in their country. Each country has a different system, contact your institution or education department for more information. This option could be very challenging and requires support from your family and friends, and discipline from you.

Special consideration

You may be eligible for special consideration. So as soon as the term or semester starts, make sure you have a clear plan of your sporting commitments. Although this can change along the way, early preparation ensures that you have a clear picture of the type of support that you may need.

Early entrance to university

Some universities now include programmes where a student can gain early entrance to a course. More universities are starting to implement these programmes. Make inquiries with the university of your choice for more information.

WHAT TO CONSIDER IF YOU ARE THINKING OF STUDYING ABROAD

These days, athletes move from country to country for a number of reasons. You may like a particular country because of its sporting opportunities. Or it may be because it has better educational support (for example – a scholarship to attend university). These suggestions will help you make that decision.

Part of your choice will be weighing up the cost/benefit equation. How much will this decision cost you in terms of family, home support, money, or personal sacrifice? How much will you gain in terms of sports development, personal development, opportunities or lifestyle? And do you need any special visa or permit approvals to study in another country?

THE BENEFITS OF STUDYING ABROAD

- You might increase your sporting opportunities.
- Develop as an athlete.
- Give yourself an opportunity to receive an offer to play professionally.
- Continue your education.
- Gain qualifications.
- Learn to manage yourself.
- Have a “life experience” and broaden your cultural horizon.
- Or – all of the above!

For more help, take a look at the printable worksheet [Deciding to study abroad](#).

If you decide to relocate for study

At times in your sporting career, you may need to relocate to study. It's exciting, but there's a lot to think about. The printable worksheet [Things to do before you relocate checklist](#) can help you.

Ideas for further resources and help

- Talk to a counsellor at your educational institution.
- Seek information from your local government education department.
- Contact your NOC or Institute of Sport for further information and advice.
- Ask current or retired athletes for ideas and guidance – they've been there and done it all.

Printable worksheet 

> **Deciding to study abroad**

> **Things to do before you relocate**

3. Balancing your education and sport

There are four key skills to master as an athlete who studies: time management, overcoming procrastination, active study skills and learning how to study whilst travelling.

We can help you learn these skills and improve. You can find more information on our free on-line education platform, the IOC Athlete Learning Gateway. Specifically lecture 8 and 9 of the course '[Athlete Career Transition](#)'.

“When focusing on simply being the best athlete you can be, it is difficult to think about anything else. Unfortunately, however, our careers as athletes will one day come to an end, and it is important that when this happens we are prepared for a future which allows us to reach other goals. In order to be prepared, we must focus on absorbing as much education and experience as possible while competing.”

— Angela Ruggiero, Ice Hockey.



“As athletes, we are often praised for our ability to focus on a goal and achieve it. We are dedicated to our sport and disciplined in following a rigid and heavy training schedule. Unfortunately, however, this focus and dedication to our sport can often be detrimental to other aspects of our life. In order to be the best athlete possible we should try to live a balanced life. But with so much time spent on sport how can we find this balance?”

— James Tomkins, Rowing.



Further resources and help

- Talk to a counsellor at your educational institution, if available.
- Research online tips and hints using the search terms “time management”, “procrastination” or “effective study techniques”.

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

Time management skills are essential for elite athletes. The highest achievers even under intense pressure have mastered these techniques.

When you know how to manage your time you gain control. Rather than busily working here, there and everywhere (and not getting much done), effective time management helps you to choose what to do and when. Try this [Time Management Quick Quiz](#).

When you know where you’re going, you can figure out what to do, in what order. Without proper goal setting, you won’t make the most of your time. For more information on setting goals, take a look at [How to set SMART goals](#), in our Life Skills section.

Prioritising what to do is especially important. Without it, you might work very hard, but you won’t achieve the best results.

There are two simple ways to improve your prioritisation skills:

(a) Write a to-do list

Most athletes have a to-do list of some sort. The problem with many of these lists is they are just a collection of things that need to get done. There is no rhyme or reason to the list and, because of this, the work they do has the potential to be unstructured.

So how do you work on the tasks – top down, bottom up? Easiest to hardest?

A good rule is to always work on the most important things first. Then you won’t have trouble getting something critical done as the deadline approaches.

[Printable worksheet](#) 

> [Grouped tasks To Do List](#)

(b) Simple prioritisation

At a basic level, you can prioritise based on deadlines, on the task's benefits, or on the pressure you're under.

Prioritisation is based on what you value or what you think you need to achieve. Whether this is based on a guess or a sophisticated evaluation, it often gives the most efficient results.

Use a yearly or weekly planner. It's a good way to make sure you're achieving what's most important to you.

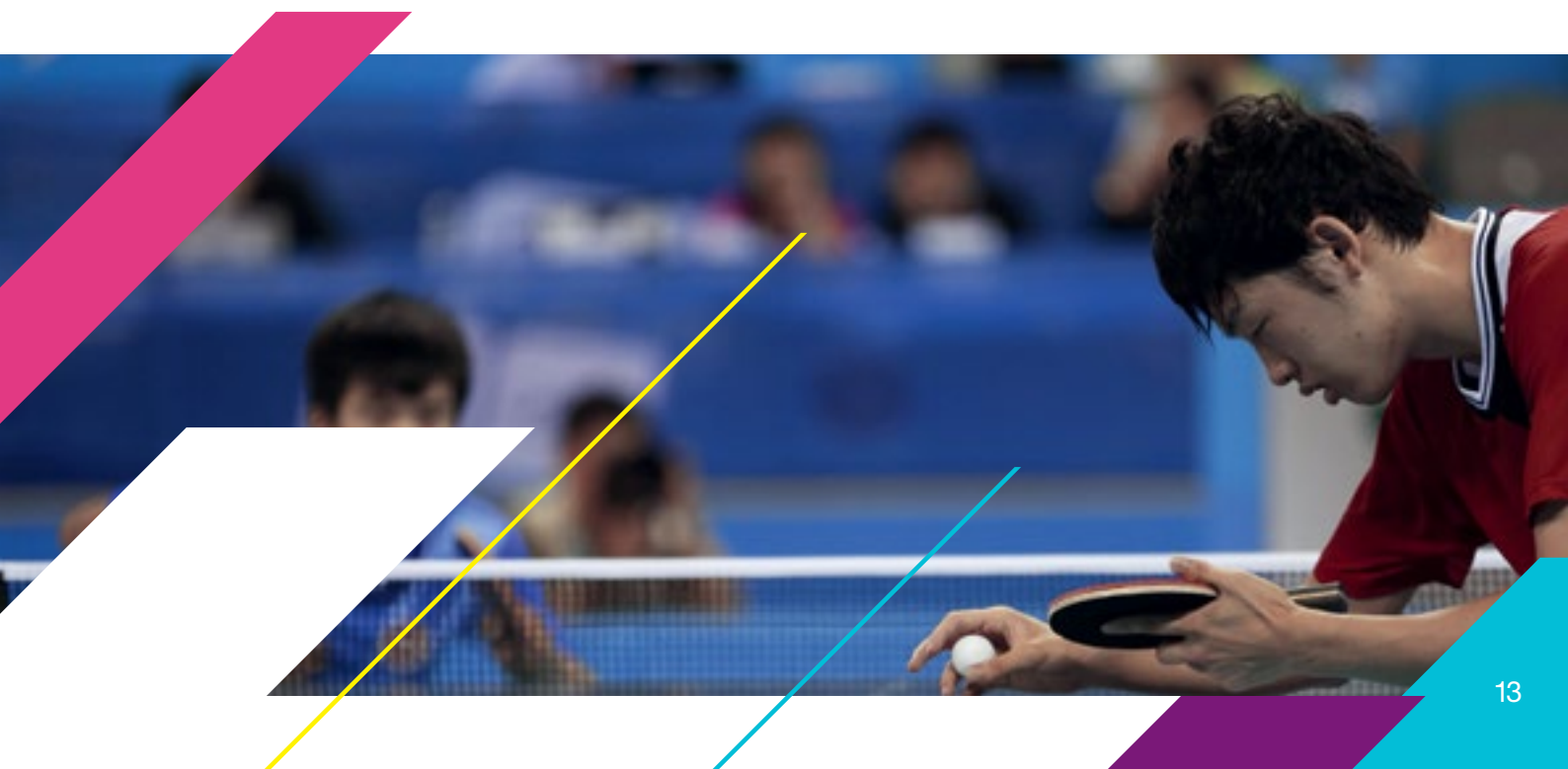
Many good planners are available free on the internet. You can also pick one up from your book or stationery supplier. Use the planner to map out what you need to achieve by when, and allocate time to each day or week.

For more tips on how to create a great plan, use the printable worksheet [Creating an effective yearly planner](#).

Time constraints are important when other people are depending on you to complete a task. Particularly when this task is a critical part of a project. Here, a small amount of your own effort can go a very long way. Also, you may have to link into other people's plans or requirements. This may be your coach, family or friends or your employer.

Printable worksheet 

> [Creating an effective yearly planner](#)



The urgent matrix

This technique asks you to think about whether tasks are urgent or important. Sometimes what you think is an urgent task, actually isn't that important. And often, really important activities (like working towards your life goals) just aren't that urgent. This approach helps you cut through this.

Here's an example of the urgent matrix:



In this matrix you should manage those tasks that are urgent and important. Your daily and long term focus should always remain on the items in the important but not urgent box. Anything not in these two boxes should be avoided as they are generally time wasters and will distract you from the tasks you need to achieve.

HOW TO OVERCOME PROCRASTINATION

We all want to stay positive and set priorities. Time is precious for athletes; so it's very important to make the most of what time you do have. Have you ever found that you put off tackling important tasks, whilst still finding time to do the more interesting or easier things? This is procrastination. We all do it, but some athletes believe they must turn in perfect work, which can prevent them from finishing it on time. Ultimately, the more you delay, the worse the problem becomes.

Here are a few tips to help you make the most of your time.

A good approach is to think:

- There's no time like the present.
- The sooner I get it done, the sooner I can do what I like.
- It's less painful to do it right now rather than wait until it gets worse.

It is important to:

- Set clear goals – think about what you need, and want, to get done.
- Stay positive – jumping to negative conclusions will make a wall of fear and it becomes harder to start the tasks.

Focus on the present and take positive steps towards your goals

- Set priorities – draw up a list, write down the things that need to be done and rate them in terms of importance.
- Break projects down to the smallest and most manageable sub-parts; tackle the worst parts first.
- Set a goal for the next five minutes to work – often you end up doing more than five minutes' work because you get into the task and lose track of time.

- Get organised by listing the tasks of the day or week realistically, check off the tasks you have completed.
- Have all materials with you (computer with power cable, pens, books, paper, printer ink etc.) that you need to carry out the task before you begin.
- Reward yourself!

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR STUDY TIME

Study methods really do help. If you use them from the start, they'll become an automatic part of your routine. So let's get started with some basic study guidelines and advice to help make the most of your time.

Summarise

Make a summary of notes at the end of each module, topic or chapter. This will help you to think clearly about the information and understand it better. It will also provide you with a quick review of the information covered – perfect for exam time.

When you write a summary, develop a list of key points that you can keep for revision later in the year. If something isn't clear, make a note and investigate the topic a little more.

Read actively

Most of your reading should include some additional interaction like taking notes, underlining or highlighting. You may want to think about reading quickly or "speed reading" to get an overview. If you have a unit or module outline, you may find it useful to ask yourself questions that you can answer as you read.

Draw diagrams

Many athletes find that diagrams or visual aids really help them to remember. The more visual something is, the more effective a learning tool it could be.

Use mind maps

The use of mind maps will help you follow the theme of the work and also revise the material at a later date. Here are some tips:

- Write the main idea in the middle of the page with supporting points and details radiating outwards.
- This visual characteristic will help you recall the information, identifying and linking the main ideas and points.
- It can be great for exam revision too (use different colours for different points).

Say things aloud

Each time you go over material, you are cementing information in your long-term memory. Talking about what you learn, even to yourself or with a friend or teacher, helps you to gather information and have a clearer understanding of the topic.

Develop definition and formula cards

Put the word or formula on one side of a small card and its definition on another. This helps if you're learning vocabulary too.

Do pre-reading activities

Pre-reading activities are like practice or training for your sport. It allows you to prepare and be ready to perform by bringing some knowledge of what is ahead. Have a piece of paper or a notebook with all the information you will need (formulae, acronyms, key words and definitions). Then ask yourself questions: what, when, where, why and how to start the understanding and learning process.

Take effective notes

Good notes help you understand and remember what you're learning. Here are some note-taking tips:

- For lectures, record the unit, the name of the lecturer, the date and title of the lecture at the top of the first page, and number and date the following pages.
- For printed material, record the bibliographical details you may need later when you use the notes for your essay.

For example: The author, title, place of publication, publisher, editor and year of publication must be clearly recorded at the top of the first page. Next to each key point or direct quote, place the exact page reference.

Use abbreviations

Use abbreviations whenever you can; it will help you keep pace with what the lecturer or teacher says.

Organise your notes

Make your notes easy to understand and easy to retrieve. Try to make them:

- Systematic – use a clear layout with main and sub-headings clearly differentiated.
- Well-spaced so they are easy to read and recall, set out on suitably sized paper.
- Use one side of the paper only; use the other side for additional information.
- In point form, based on key phrases and using abbreviations or your personal shorthand system.
- Organised and structured by using lettering, numbering, highlighting, colour coding, underlining, capitals/brackets, boxes/circles, etc.

Review your notes after the lecture

After the lecture or lesson, it is a good idea to review your notes. Ideally 10 minutes after the lecture, but, if that's not possible, no later than that night, review and check over your notes this way:

- Make sure they make sense and are easy to understand. Organise them by using colour coding, underlining, highlighting and numbering.
- Add comments and ideas of your own.
- Write a summary to further reinforce your learning.
- Fill in any parts you have missed by talking to your classmates or lecturers.
- Follow up on information and/or references mentioned in the lecture while it is still fresh in your mind.



Organise your notes into a filing system. Loose-leaf binders or a system of file folders are a great idea – as you can add extra information or ideas as you go.

HOW TO STUDY WHILE TRAVELLING

You will have to combine your study commitments with your athletic commitments. Although this is not an easy task, you can get as organised as possible. And it will get easier.

Know your commitments

- As soon as your subjects/units/classes for the semester have been finalised, draw up your timetable and compare it with your sporting commitments. Your sporting commitments should be available from your coach or team manager.
- Get in as early as possible to ensure you get the times you need in order to make your timetable work for you.

Get organised before you leave

- Write to your lecturers and teachers in advance. Let them know you will be away and ask if it's possible to email you the notes, questions or work.
- Find out what service you will have for your computer while you are away and what adaptors you will need.
- Understand what your schedule is and what downtime you realistically have to complete tasks. Identify clashes in times or busy times (hot spots).
- If you are forced to miss lectures or classes as a result of your sporting commitments, let the lecturers know at the earliest possible date and arrange for another option to obtain the work, e.g. a buddy to take notes, the lecturer to give you the notes and reading in advance, etc.

- Planning and communication is the key to success.
- Ensure that you are aware of expectations of tutorials in terms of participation and possible assessment tasks. Many tutorials have some assessment component attached to them, whether it is in the form of an attendance mark, participation mark or regular assessment tasks. Ensure that you address these issues and identify alternative options that may be available to you, including: a change of assessment weighting, ability to miss a small number of tutorials, availability to complete assessment tasks early/late, etc.
- With many sports, the busy time of the year quite often clashes with exam blocks and assignment tasks. Try to address these issues and research alternative options. This may include: sitting exams away from your institution or university, changing dates for exams, changing dates for assignments and changing the weighting of these assessment pieces to others.

Seek assistance

Remember you have a support team to assist you. This includes not only teachers and lecturers, but also coaches, team managers, family and friends. Don't be afraid to ask them for help.

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 1

What to ask potential educational institutions

Does the educational institution understand the needs and unique challenges that you face in combining your academic and sporting pursuits? Take this list with you next time you visit a potential educational institution and ask some of the questions below.

Question	Answer/Comment
<p>Does it allow you to balance training and competition by providing flexibility with timetables, schoolwork and assignments? Does it utilise online learning or other flexible learning so you can keep up with school work when you need to travel?</p>	
<p>Does it cater for different learning requirements and various educational abilities, while maintaining the highest academic standards?</p>	
<p>Is there a programme that supports combining your sport and education programmes? How many students are involved in the programme and how do you relate and integrate with other sports students along with the mainstream students at the educational institution?</p>	
<p>Is there a dedicated coordinator or person responsible within the institution who is the key point of contact to assist you and your entourage to resolve any issues that you may encounter in combining your educational and sporting pursuits?</p>	
<p>If you are in a team sport, it is worth understanding how your particular needs will be supported and discussing this with the school and your team management.</p>	
<p>If your circumstances change in the near future are you able to transfer the credits that you have completed, and if so how easily within your country and internationally?</p>	

What type of facilities does the educational institution have access to?

Question	Answer/Comment
Are the facilities that are provided “fit for purpose” for the training needs of all athletes, and are they located close to the educational institution?	
Do the available transport options mean it is possible, in a reasonable time, to access these facilities?	
What type of links does the educational institution have to the broader sporting community?	
Does the educational institution have access to the required expertise in terms of coaching and support services (for example biomechanics, nutrition, sports psychology, physiotherapy, etc.) if you are to be based there?	
Does the educational institution have demonstrated links with other national or international sporting authorities from which to draw expertise and advice?	
Is the educational institution supported by the local government and/or community?	
Is access available for personal coaches to use venues and facilities?	

Deciding to study abroad

Considering studying abroad? Complete the three activities below.

Activity 1

Use this list and add to it, and then rank the items according to how important they are to you.

Considerations	+	+/-	-
What might you have to give up? - Family and friends - Current sporting environment - Coach and team mates - Development opportunities in your own country			
What sports-related information do you need to know about the other country's opportunities? - Level of the team - Current performance - Knowledge of the coach - The season - Your role in the team - Development focus of the team - Team environment			
Other: (develop yourself)			

Once you have completed the above, you will need to decide which areas are most important to you. Rank the items in order.

Now move on to activities 2 and 3.

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 2

Activity 2

In relation to the institution, you should consider the following points and then rank them in terms of importance.

Considerations	+	+/-	-
Location			
Possibility of aligning or transferring your current studies			
Campus facilities			
Size			
Type of institution/degrees offered			
Cost			
Availability of financial assistance			
Entrance difficulty			
Subjects taught			
Ranking and reputation			
Academic statistics of students			
Availability and cost of accommodation			
Academic facilities			
Types of sporting teams and athletic facilities			
Support services and programmes for athletes			
Other: (develop yourself)			

Now move on to activity 3.

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 2

Activity 3

It is always important to gather as much information as possible to help you decide what may be the best option for you. From the list above, decide which of these are critical to your decision-making.

Share the results of activities 1 and 2 with your family, friends, coach or mentor. These are the people who can help you make a choice. However, in the end, the decision to study in another country will rest largely with you.

Studying in another country can provide you with a fantastic opportunity to not only develop your sporting experiences and allow you to obtain an academic qualification, but can also provide you with the unique experience of living abroad.

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 3

Things to do before you relocate

Thinking about relocating? Use this checklist of “things to do” to prepare for the move.

Item	Completed/ Comments
<p>Your coach Have you discussed with your current coach (and your new coach) the likely educational opportunities and risks associated with relocation for your sporting development?</p>	
<p>Your family Have you raised any other queries or concerns that you have with your parents/partner, coach, team manager or significant others?</p>	
<p>School/University/Employer Have you discussed with your school/university/employer how relocation will affect your school/university/work and what opportunities there may be at your new location? Have you inquired about how much spare time from your sports schedule you will have for studying or work? Will the country allow you to work as well as study?</p>	
<p>Living arrangements Do you know where you will be living? Will this be for the short term, or longer? Will you need transport or are you able to access public transport to travel to training, physiotherapy, conditioning, school, university or work?</p>	
<p>Budget Living away from home can bring some unexpected costs. Do you know how much money you will need to survive? Have you investigated any income support or allowances you may be able to access?</p>	
<p>Support Do you understand the support networks you can access to ease the effect of the move on your sports performance, school, university or work? Also, do you know where to go to access this information?</p>	

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 4

Time Management Quick Quiz

Assess how you currently manage your time with this quick quiz.

Instructions

1. For each question, tick the column that most applies to you.
2. Now add up the ticks in each of the columns.
3. The answers to the questions and the total scores will now give you some insight into the areas where your time management skills may need attention.

Considerations	never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
Do you successfully prioritise your tasks?					
Do you complete tasks as soon as you can and not leave things to the last minute?					
Do you plan, prioritise and make "To Do" lists?					
Do you know how much time you spend on each task?					
Do you find yourself successfully dealing with unexpected interruptions?					
Do you set and regularly adjust your goals?					
When you are given an assessment item do you note the importance and weighting of the item and allocate time accordingly?					
Do you always get everything done?					
TOTAL					

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 5

Correspondence

Projects

Miscellaneous

Creating an effective yearly planner

Create an effective schedule in your planner using the following tips :

Start with the end in mind

Firstly, list all of the big items or projects you want to achieve in the next 12 months.

Consult with your coach, trainer, team manager, educational institution, family and friends to help you to determine what your big projects are.

Cover areas of your life that are important to you, for example :

- Training
- Competitions
- Financial (earning and saving)
- Family and friends
- Learning/study
- Health
- Spiritual, including time for reflection
- Other: depending on what you are doing, these may include business, travel, mentoring and another hobby you may have.

Depending on your sport, consider dividing your year into pre-season, in-season and post-season, and set long- and short-term goals for each season.

WORKSHEET - EDUCATION 6

Fill in detail

1. Find a planner that suits your style either from the internet or a local stationery supplier.
2. Start with the most important goals and enter them into your planner.
3. From these big items, list the short-term goals or action items that you will need to include in order to achieve your long-term aims.
4. Consider colour-coding the various areas of your life so that each area is clear.
5. When it is filled in, check to see if there is some balance in your life – this will be easier if you have used colour-coding.
6. Transfer your yearly goals to monthly and weekly time slots or schedules.

Review

Plan in time to review your schedule and to check whether you are achieving your goals, and if not, think about what changes you need to make in order to achieve them.