

# Alternative Format: Think Like a Third Year Toolkit

## Landing Page

Welcome and thank you for accessing this toolkit which has been designed to help support you with your academic skills development during your time at Edge Hill.

## Accessibility

### Our Commitment to Accessibility

As an Edge Hill student you are part of an incredibly diverse learning community. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students, we have placed accessibility at the heart of UniSkills support, which enables all students to participate.

### Alternative Formats

This is an alternative format for the Think Like a Third Year Toolkit.

## Welcome from UniSkills

Hello, we are the [Student Engagement team](#) – otherwise known as UniSkills! We are the people you'll meet (in real life and online) through various support channels, as we help you develop your academic skills while studying at Edge Hill University.

Later in the toolkit you will have the opportunity to explore our wider support, but this is your chance to [find out more about the team](#).

Access [this video from your friendly Student Advisor](#). Alternatively, you are welcome to access the video transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF version](#).

# Why Should I Complete This Toolkit?

This Think Like a Third Year Toolkit is designed for undergraduate students transitioning from second to third year (often called Level 5 to Level 6). It will help you consolidate and consistently embed the skills you developed in your first and second years.

As UniSkills Advisors, we know that 'levelling up' can sometimes feel daunting. This toolkit has been designed both to encourage you and to equip you with the skills you need to progress with confidence.

Access this [short video](#), featuring one of our friendly academic skills advisors, who will tell you more about the move from second to third year. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF](#) version.

## Toolkit objectives:

Upon completion of this toolkit, you will have developed the skills to:

- Explain the transition from second year to third year.
- Clarify which academic skills are important for you in third year.
- Signpost you to further help and support from the UniSkills team.

Completing this toolkit supports the following [Graduate Attributes](#):

1. Digital Proficiency
2. Resilience
3. Adaptability and Flexibility
4. Critical Thinking
5. Career Development

# Rest, Review, and Reflect

## Rest and Reset

Moving into third year marks a shift toward even greater independence, higher expectations, and often more substantial projects such as dissertations. Before you dive in, though, it's worth hitting pause. After the pace of your first and second years, it's important to give yourself time to rest and recover.

This might mean switching off from study for a while, taking time to unwind, spending time on hobbies, and/or catching up with friends and family. Remember: rest isn't wasted time - it is necessary in order to return more focused and energised.

Top Tip: If you have had a break between second and third year, why not come along to our Returning to Learning drop-in. For more information, visit your [UniSkills Workshops Page](#).

## Confidence Scale

Take a moment to think about how confident you feel studying in third year. Give yourself a rating between 1 and 10, with 1 being 'low confidence' and 10 being 'high confidence'. Reflect for a moment on why you feel like this.

Top Tip: Remember, confidence isn't fixed. Some days you'll feel more sure of yourself than others. Wherever you are on the scale, there's always room to grow, and you can [book a one-to-one appointment](#) with UniSkills at any point to support your progress.

## Reflection

Take some time now to reflect on your first and second years, drawing attention to what has supported your progress so far. This can help you to carry forward effective approaches, and move into your third year with confidence, purpose, and intention.

By the time you reach third year, you will already have developed a foundation of academic skills and experience. This stage of your degree brings greater independence, sustained projects, and work that (usually) contributes most heavily to your final classification. Taking time to reflect now can help you strengthen effective habits and avoid repeating mistakes.

This isn't about criticising yourself. It's about understanding how you learn best and making small, realistic adjustments to support your success in your third year.

Activity: Take a moment now to think about what has worked well so far. Explore the list below to give you some ideas.

- Study habits:
  - Refining and maintaining a study routine that works for you.
  - Managing longer-term workloads.
  - Balancing independence with knowing how and when to seek support.
- Securing understanding:
  - Drawing connections between different themes and theories.
  - Moving beyond recalling knowledge, to applying knowledge critically.
  - Explaining why theories matter, not just what they are.
- Confident criticality:
  - Analysing and evaluating evidence and arguments.
  - Cultivating your own perspective, informed by research.
  - Justifying academic choices.
- Approaching assignments:
  - Reading briefs and expectations strategically.
  - Making deliberate choices about scope, focus, and structure.
  - Taking responsibility for planning and organising your time.
- Personal growth:
  - Building your resilience after setbacks or challenges.
  - Engaging more proactively in your learning.
  - Recognising how far you have come as an independent learner.
- Using feedback:
  - Linking feedback directly to marking criteria.
  - Turning feedback into specific actions.
  - Asking tutors and/or UniSkills for help if feedback is unclear.

Now think about what you could have done better in second year. Could you have attended more sessions? Engaged more in lectures? Organised your time more effectively?

Keep this in mind as something to improve in third year.

## Review Feedback

You may also want to reflect on how you use feedback. While it's natural to focus on the grade, feedback offers important insights that can help you strengthen your future work.

Remember, though, that not all feedback will be positive, and there may be times when you find it challenging. Ironically, those challenging bits are often the ones that help you grow the most. When you can step back, reframe the emotion, and look at the message underneath, that's when real progress happens.

Understanding feedback as useful guidance, rather than criticism, can help you effectively reflect and action plan (or feed forward) to improve future assignments. Taking action is what will help you progress in your academic journey.

Take some time to explore your [Focus on Feedback Toolkit](#) for more support.

Student View: "Try to keep track of the themes that emerge from your feedback, and review these with every assignment to pick out key areas to focus on and target. One way of doing this is by making a spreadsheet to note down assessment types, grades, and feedback concerns. You could then start tallying the common feedback themes and pick them as a key area to work on in your next assignments" – Lauren, Year 3 BA (Hons) Media.

Top Tip: In addition to the helpful advice from Lauren, it is a good idea also to review the third year marking criteria in your Module or Programme Handbook and compare this with the second year criteria. Use feedback to identify how well you are meeting the marking criteria. Pay attention to directive words such as analyse, critically evaluate, synthesise, justify, and apply. What do you need to work on in third year?

## Recap

Whilst you are certainly consolidating and securing skills in third year, it is important to remember the essentials:

- Organise your time and your ideas.
- Ensure you know what is expected of you.
- Keep track of submission and exam dates.
- Engage with wider research.
- Find study habits that work for you.

- Use your feedback to help you improve.
- Ask for help when you need it.

### Moving Forward

Whilst perfection is an admirable goal, the focus really for third year is on proficiency rather than perfection. It's about working with confidence, independence, and purpose in a more adept manner. By reflecting on your skills now, you are putting yourself in a strong position to meet third year expectations.

## Prepare to Progress

The best way to succeed in third year is through careful planning and preparation. This is the stage of your degree where work typically carries the greatest weight towards your final classification, and where extended projects often demand sustained focus and independent decision-making.

This section will help you recognise the key changes that define third year and support you in planning for them in pragmatic and positive ways.

Academic View: "The future depends on what we do in the present" - Indira Gandhi, Former Prime Minister of India.

## Moving Up to Third Year

Here we explore how you can get to grips with the key changes you'll encounter in third year - what shifts, what becomes more demanding, and what new expectations you'll be working towards.

Activity: Explore the list below to familiarise yourself with what's coming and to start thinking about how you can adapt your approach.

### Marks Matter Most

In your third year, your grades often carry the most weight and play a pivotal role in determining your final degree classification. The foundations you have built in previous years are essential, and now is the time to really apply them consistently and confidently.

### Workload Grows

The workload increases again in third year. You may have more assignments, bigger projects, and also be doing some future planning. Strong organisation and time management are most essential this year.

### Depth Increases

Assignments are more demanding, with larger word counts, deeper critical analysis, and a stronger emphasis on independent research.

# Library and Learning Services

---

## Greater Autonomy

Your tutors will still be here to support you, and in some cases you may work more closely with them (especially if you are doing a research project). However, there will likely be more responsibility placed on you. You will be expected to take more ownership of decisions, topics, and how you approach your work.

## Owning Your Voice

You will continue to develop and defend your own ideas with greater confidence, making more independent and critical judgements about the perspectives you engage with.

## Professional Expectations

Your work will increasingly be expected to reflect disciplinary and real-world standards. Depending on your subject, this could include research practice, professional conventions, or applied problem-solving.

Third year is more demanding, but you are better equipped than ever. As workload and expectations rise, you will be drawing on the skills and experience built across your degree to tackle challenges with confidence.

Student View: "If you are doing a dissertation or final project, make sure you start early by booking lab or study time, and planning meetings with your supervisor" - Phoebe, Year 3 BA (Hons) Geography.

Top Tip: Whether you started preparing for a dissertation or research project in second year, or are coming to this fresh in your third year, do (re)visit your [Dissertations and Research Projects Toolkit](#) for support with developing this.

## Setting Your Space

So now you know the expectations, but you might be thinking, “how do I actually make this work in my everyday life?”.

Well, a good starting point is to think about where you study. By third year, you may be more settled in your living situation, but it’s still worth considering whether your current environment supports your study and focus.



If it doesn't always work for you, you're not limited to studying at home. [Catalyst](#) offers a range of spaces, including [bookable rooms](#) for quieter or group study. Finding a place that suits how you work can help you develop more intentional practises that you can carry forward into the future.

### Preparing for Life beyond Third Year

In addition to preparing for third year, it's also natural to start thinking about what comes next. For some students, this can feel exciting; for others, it can feel uncertain or even overwhelming. All of these feelings are completely normal. Still, when you are ready, you might start to think about your options moving forward. Whether you're considering further study, employment, or exploring different options, you can draw on advice from your tutors and the [Careers Team](#).

It's also worth thinking about the time between finishing third year and moving on to your next step. Taking on temporary work over the summer, for example, can help you stay financially secure while gaining additional experience. You might find it useful to explore the [Graduates](#) and [Vacancies](#) Careers pages for more information.

Remember also that you can continue to access support from the [Careers and Employability Team](#) for three years after you graduate, along with being a lifelong member of the [Alumni community](#), so you never have to navigate this transition on your own.

# Research Skills – Being Strategic

In first year, you likely focused on becoming familiar with finding academic information. In second year, you may have developed this further - refining your search techniques, and using subject-specific tools to read more widely and critically.

In third year, the emphasis shifts again: you're encouraged to research independently and strategically, selecting and using high-quality sources to support your own arguments and judgements. This still requires wide reading, but it is now more selective.

Top Tip: For a reminder of the 'why?', 'where?', and 'how?' of research skills, do revisit your [Think Like a Second Year Toolkit](#).

## From Searching to Shaping

In third year, then, the focus shifts slightly to how you use your sources. You are now expected to select evidence carefully. You should spend time weighing up the relevance, credibility, and significance of your sources. You should also seek to deploy sources in order to support, develop, challenge, and refine your own argument. In short, you are moving from simply searching for information towards using it to shape your position.

Top Tip: What counts as strong research will depend on your discipline, so always consult with your tutor and assignment guidance. Methods, sources, and conventions vary, and quality is judged differently across subjects. Remember, though, that expectations are higher, not narrower, and expectations of rigour and independence increase across all subjects.

## Critical Reading

In third year, reading is not just wider and deeper - it is inherently critical and purposeful. You are expected to actively engage with what you read - interpreting ideas, evaluating evidence, questioning assumptions, and judging how useful sources are for your own argument. Reading is no longer just about gathering information, but about making informed academic decisions.

Critical reading at this level also means being selective: deciding what to prioritise, how sources relate to each other, and whether they genuinely deepen and/or challenge your thinking. Think: does the source provide additional evidence, a counter-argument, some context...or nothing?! Don't be afraid to discard sources if you feel they are not adding value to your work.

For more support with critical reading, do visit the following [UniSkills Toolkits](#):

- Academic Reading Toolkit
- Being Critical Toolkit

## Joining the Conversation

Part of becoming a critically engaged reader is recognising that academic work can be a conversation. This matters both in your research and your writing, so we'll return to it in the next lesson. For now, the key point is that your reading should be active (for example, using note-making), so that you can:

- Notice patterns and recurring ideas.
- Identify what is already established in the field.
- Recognise areas of debate, disagreement, or uncertainty.
- Appreciate how different sources respond to each other.
- Spot where there is space to add something of your own.

Top Tip: For more support with note-making, do visit your [Note-making Toolkit](#).

## Never Enough?

As mentioned, strategic reading includes having the confidence to discard sources that don't add value. In other words, recognising that sometimes enough *is* enough.

This is not to say you should not read widely - we have already established that breadth as well as depth is crucial. Rather, this is about tackling over-researching: the illusion of progress created by constant searching, and the habit of staying in "research mode" instead of moving into writing.

Many third-year students spend too long trying to find *everything*. Knowing when to pause your reading, start writing, and let gaps emerge is not a weakness - it is a strategic academic move.

Activity: Work through the questions below to help you identify ways to be strategically selective with your research.

1. Which of the following might signal that it's time to pause searching and start writing? (Choose all that apply)
  - a. New sources are repeating the same ideas.
  - b. Your sources express a few different perspectives.
  - c. Your argument is taking shape but feels incomplete.

- d. You keep saving sources 'just in case'.
- e. You are unsure about the meaning of some key terms or ideas.

Correct answers: options a, b, and d. If you do not feel your understanding is solid or sound, or you still need to work on formulating your argument, it makes sense to continue reading.

However, if you are exhausting ideas and perspectives, or simply adding to your reference list, it is probably time to pause your searching and start writing.

2. You have read a journal article that broadly agrees with your argument and repeats ideas you have already cited, but does not add new evidence or perspectives. What might you use this source for? (Choose all that apply)
- a. Offering new evidence.
  - b. Strengthening consensus.
  - c. Reiterating your point.
  - d. Challenging your position.
  - e. You would not use this source.

Correct answers: options b and c (and, arguably, e). It can be helpful to use multiple sources to make the same or similar point, as this can strengthen consensus and help reiterate your point. However, they would not contribute anything new or challenging. As such, whether you choose to use the source or not is a judgement call: if your point already has enough support, you may not need another source.

3. You are searching for critical perspectives on a topic. Which source would you remove or discard first? (Choose one)
- a. A recent peer-reviewed article.
  - b. An introductory textbook.
  - c. An older but seminal text.
  - d. A source that repeats points you have found elsewhere.

Correct answer: b. Criticality isn't only about disagreement - showing consensus (or repetition) matters too. Peer-reviewed and seminal texts are also key at this level. However, introductory textbooks are unlikely to give you the depth needed for critical analysis in third year.

4. A source is most useful when it... (Choose one to complete the sentence)
- a. Uses complex and impressive language.
  - b. Agrees with your own argument.

- c. Adds evidence, perspective, or comment.
- d. Is long and detailed.

Correct answer: c. Complexity and length are not necessarily indicators of useful (or even good!) academic sources. Moreover, you don't want to build an echo chamber where your sources simply agree with you. Instead, prioritise those that add depth and new dimensions to your thinking.

5. Which approach can best help you partake in the academic conversation? (Choose one)
- a. Collecting as many sources as possible before writing.
  - b. Only focussing on sources that support your argument.
  - c. Avoiding sources that are hard to read.
  - d. Reading actively and noting how sources relate.

Correct answer: d. Difficult texts can feel off-putting, but skipping them risks missing important ideas. Simply stockpiling sources isn't effective either. The key is to engage thoughtfully with what you read, using notes to make sense of it.

Top Tip: Note the language of pausing, rather than stopping, reading. Research and writing can move in cycles - once you start writing, you may well return to reading as new questions emerge.

Academic View: "Books will help her understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she wants to become" - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigerian writer.

Top Tip: The increased expectations for reading can feel overwhelming, especially in our time-poor world. Please know you are not alone if you feel this. Do visit your [Time Management Toolkit](#) for some practical tips, and remember that the [Student Support and Wellbeing Teams](#) are also always here for you.

# Academic Writing – Leading the Conversation

In the previous lesson, you explored what it means to join the academic conversation. In your third year, the expectation develops further: you are no longer only participating in that conversation through your reading, but beginning to lead it through your writing. This is your chance to show off not only what you have read, but also how effectively you can engage with and use your sources.

The same habits (questioning, evaluating, and analysing) are still central, but now you are in charge: tutors will be assessing how you position yourself in, and how confidently you can lead, the academic discussion in your assignments.

Academic View: "By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it" – Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Chicana feminist theorist, writer, poet, and scholar.

## Working with Evidence

The way you are expected to use information becomes yet more complex in third year. Identifying and engaging with relevant sources is only the starting point. You are now also expected to work with information critically in your writing, shaping it to support and advance your own line of argument. Essentially - to lead the conversation.

You will therefore rely less on quotations and more on paraphrasing, integration, and synthesis. This will allow your writing to be cohesive and well-connected. Clear signposting, structure, and analytical language will help to ensure that your tutor can follow both your logic and your contribution to the academic conversation.

## Trusting the Process

Strong third year writing is also characterised by a commitment to **redrafting** and **refining** your work. This goes beyond correcting surface-level issues such as spelling or grammar. Rather, it is about engaging with previous feedback and current sources in order to fine-tune your arguments. Crucially, this also means accepting that your first draft will be imperfect. Giving yourself permission to produce work that is not yet submission-ready creates space for learning, experimentation, and idea-generation.

## Library and Learning Services

---

The goal is not perfection at the outset. Instead, it is a willingness to return to your work, rethink it, and deliberately reshape it into something stronger. Of course, this takes time, so be sure to factor this in when planning your work. It is, though, time very well spent.

Activity: Explore the table below to help clarify what is productive at each stage of the drafting process.

| First Draft                                   | Final Draft                            |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Making quick notes on a topic.                | Polishing the academic tone.           |
| Idea-dumping.                                 | Clarifying the structure.              |
| Identifying gaps in evidence.                 | Making connections between sections.   |
| Asking questions on the page.                 | Strengthening the main argument.       |
| Writing to understand.                        | Justifying choices.                    |
| Allowing uncertainty or contradiction.        | Removing repetition or irrelevance.    |
| Leaving placeholders for information.         | Refining referencing.                  |
| Sketching out an introduction and conclusion. | Editing introductions and conclusions. |

## Zooming Out

In third year, tutors also consider whether your argument develops logically across the entire assignment, not just within individual paragraphs. Try to take a macro view of your work and think about the whole picture - does it all fit together? How does each section build on the previous? What are the connections?

An essential element of this is recognising academic writing as a series of intentional, informed decisions. At this level, you are expected not only to make choices about sources, structures, theories, and methods, but also to be able to justify them. Your writing should communicate why certain approaches were taken, and how they support your aims and argument.

Sustaining a line of argument is particularly crucial if you are tasked with completing a research project or dissertation.

Top Tip: For more support with dissertations, do visit your [Dissertations and Research Projects Toolkit](#).

## Academic Conventions

Finally, your tutors expect you to demonstrate confident control over academic conventions. Although these skills continue to develop over time, there is an expectation that conventions are now applied consistently and purposefully in your writing. This includes ensuring:

- Accurate and consistent referencing throughout, with correct in-text citations and reference lists.
- Clear adherence to presentation and formatting requirements, as outlined in your module or programme guidance.
- An appropriate academic tone and style, with clear expression and effective paragraphing that supports a sustained argument.
- Appropriate and ethical use of Generative AI, if you decide to use it at all. For more guidance, visit your [UniSkills GenAI Webpage](#).

Meeting these expectations helps the focus remain on the quality of your writing, rather than avoidable technical or ethical concerns.



# Final Thoughts

We hope you now feel more confident as you move into your third year of study at Edge Hill University. Remember that this stage of your degree is not only about completing assignments, but also honing your academic voice; refining how you think; and becoming more confident in the decisions you make as a learner.

Whether your next step is postgraduate study or moving into professional life (or something entirely different!), the skills you are developing now will continue to matter beyond this year. Be encouraged by the progress that you've made thus far and remember that growth comes from practice, reflection, and patience with yourself.

Access this [short video](#), featuring one of our friendly academic skills advisors, who will share some final thoughts on the transition from second to third year. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF](#) version.

## Related Resources

### Useful Reading

To learn more about some of the skills that are essential in third year, you might find the following texts useful:

SMALE, B. and FOWLIE, J. 2015. *How to Succeed at University* [eBook]. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Inc. Available from: <https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1228891143> [Accessed 23 April 2026].

GREETHAM, B. 2019. *How to Write Your Undergraduate Dissertation* [eBook]. 3rd ed. London: Red Globe Press. Available from: <https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1084350077> [Accessed 23 April 2026].

### Useful Links

Check out your [Preparing to Study](#) webpage, which contains helpful reminders of some of the foundational elements of undergraduate study.

Take some time to also explore your other [UniSkills Toolkits](#).

### UniSkills Blog

UniSkills write regular [blogs](#), including a monthly focus on library resources and academic skills. In these quick reads you can learn about useful resources, how to access them and their benefits to your studies. You might even find us exploring new ways of thinking!

### Other Resources

Check out [LinkedIn Learning](#) for access to free, unlimited access to thousands of high quality online courses and video tutorials written by industry experts.

# UniSkills Support at Edge Hill University

As well as our toolkits, there are many ways you can access support for your academic skills development. No question or query is too big or too small. Whether you are new to studying or need to refresh or develop skills, we have a range of options for you to access at both graduate and postgraduate taught level.

## Webpages

Reach your potential and visit our [UniSkills web pages](#). Find out more about the support designed to help you develop your academic skills and confidence at university and beyond. Whatever your subject or level of study, UniSkills has something to offer.

## Workshops and Webinars

[UniSkills workshops and webinars](#) are an opportunity for a deeper dive into a specific skill that will support you on your academic journey. Facilitated by our friendly and knowledgeable Academic Skills Advisors, these sessions provide an informal safe space where you will be supported alongside other students in a small group setting.

## Appointments

All students are able to book [a one-to-one appointment](#). Our experienced Academic Skills Advisors can help you develop your academic skills and strategies throughout your time at university. One-to-one support is available on a wide range of topics including academic reading, writing, and referencing, finding information, and preparing your assignment for submission.

## AskUs

For any questions across any of our library and learning services, you can [Ask Us](#) online.

## Campaigns

Explore our year-round [UniSkills campaigns](#) to enhance your academic journey at Edge Hill. From pre-arrival prep to acing your exams, we've got something for everyone!

## Keep in Touch

### Library and Learning Services Instagram

Make sure you're following us over on [Instagram](#) for all the latest Library and Learning Services news, events and support.

You'll discover weekly 'what's on' stories; reminders about upcoming campaigns and events; fun, interactive polls and competitions; hidden treasures from our Archive; and reading for pleasure recommendations.

### Library and Learning Services Blog

In the [Library and Learning Services Blog](#) you'll find lots of information, ideas and support curated by a wide range of staff and students from across the service.

Browse through all our useful blogs via the Home tab or visit individual areas of interest via the sub-blog headings along the menu bar.

## Your Views Count

Thank you for engaging with this toolkit.

We'd love to know what you thought, and you can share your feedback in our short [UniSkills Toolkit Satisfaction Survey](#). The survey should take you no longer than five minutes to complete.

Your feedback helps us to continually improve our support - thank you!

You have now completed this UniSkills toolkit and can close the window. We hope you found it useful, and we look forward to continuing to support you with your academic skills development.