# **Getting started**

## Understand your course

It’s important to understand your course (or your ‘programme’). You may have done some research when you were applying to university, or when you accepted your offer of a place – but there is usually more to learn! You can ask your programme director or coordinator, your head of year, your [Student Support Officer](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/student-advisors/) (every College has a dedicated Support Officer), staff in your College, School, or Discipline, or your research supervisor(s) about anything you’re unsure about. You can also check with your classmates, CÉIM leader, or the Students’ Union.

**How long is your course?** Most undergraduate degree courses last for three or four years. Sometimes you can opt to spend a year working and/or studying abroad, thus adding a year to your degree. The academic year is made up of two semesters, each of which usually incorporates twelve weeks of teaching, one study week, and two to three weeks of exams. It does not equate to a full calendar year. Most final-year students complete a thesis, dissertation or final-year project, often over the summer.

**Course instance:** Your course instance is a code that summarises your year of study, the course that you are taking and, in some instances, a ‘stream’ within a course. This is not related in any way to the CAO code for your programme. The first number of the code denotes your year of study and the letters denote your course. For example, 1BAJ1 is the unique code for the first year of the Bachelor of Arts with Journalism, while 3BG1 is the unique code for the third year of the Bachelor of Engineering (Biomedical Engineering). It is useful to know your course instance, especially when figuring out timetables, completing forms, or searching for past exam papers.

**Modules and module codes:** Each module (or subject) that you take also has a unique code. You will see these codes when you register for individual modules, log in to Canvas, or consult past exam papers. The module code is made up of some letters that denote the subject area (for example, AC for Ancient Classics or OC for Oceanography) followed by some numbers. For example, the module code SP159 is the unique code denoting the module Concepts and Practices of Politics & Sociology, while the module code NS308 denotes the module Neuroscience. Again, it’s helpful to know these codes, especially when searching for past exam papers.

**ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System):** ECTS are a measure of the work that the average student will complete to achieve the learning outcomes for a specific module. Each module is assigned a number of ECTS or credits – usually 5, but sometimes 10 or 15. Full-time undergraduate students usually take a maximum of 60 ECTS, and postgraduate students 90 ECTS, per academic year. ECTS help to make courses and qualifications comparable across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond. As a rule of thumb, one credit corresponds to 25 – 30 hours of work, so full-time undergraduate students are looking at a commitment of between 1,500 and 1,800 hours in the academic year. This includes classes, tutorials, labs, and exams, as well as studying and completing coursework. As people learn at different paces, you may need more or less time than this.

**‘Course’ outlines:** Many lecturers will provide ‘course’ (more properly called ‘module’) outlines, setting out information such as the learning outcomes you are expected to achieve, the topics that will be covered, details of assignments, coursework and exams, and, possibly, reading lists, for their modules. These are key documents: make sure that you find, read, and save them.

**Grading system:** Grading systems at university differ from those in schools and other educational settings. Some lecturers and tutors may give you a percentage mark, others a ‘letter’ grade, and still others an ‘honours’ grade for your work. For most modules, 40% is the pass mark, but there are exceptions (for example, in Medicine and Health Science programmes, the pass mark is 50%). You can find out more about grades, pass marks, and much more, by consulting the undergraduate and postgraduate [Marks and Standards](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/exams/policies-procedures/).

**Work placement, work-based learning, and study abroad:** Some courses have built-in work placement requirements or opportunities to work or study abroad. Other courses may allow you to apply or compete for such opportunities. If you are studying Nursing or Medicine, for example, you will be required to spend a significant amount of time in health care settings. If you are taking a course such as the Bachelor of Commerce (International Hotel Management), or studying a language to degree level, you will spend at least one semester or year abroad. Second-year Arts and Commerce students can apply to spend a year in the US or in Europe, studying through English.

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