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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, I am joined now by HJ and Rachel, who we have decided to unleash from the social media desk. Because this is all about students and about the experience of studying with the Open University.

Now, you've both graduated. You've got through. You've shown it can be done with the OU. And this is how we met. And your challenge has been to look at super-awesome tips from social science students. And here, we're hoping that you can both share your tips. But also, we want to know your tips in the chat. And I'm going to magically somehow know what those are because I've been doing this mind reading course. But we want to share your tips as well. So do let us know what study tips you have, share those in the chat with each other. And I'm sure that between the lots of us, we'll pick up a lot of really good ideas to really get going with our study.

OK, so what are your top tips? You've brought a lot of stuff here, which is pleasing. Good.

[DING]

HJ: Oh, that usually means something.

KAREN FOLEY: The mail.

HJ: What does that mean? The mail.

KAREN FOLEY: We can't get to it.

HJ: Oh, no.

KAREN FOLEY: How do we--

HJ: Oh, dear. You can't get into the post box.

CREW: Special delivery.

HJ: Oh, brilliant.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you.

HJ: The postman always comes while we're out, doesn't he?

KAREN FOLEY: I knew it was a bad idea to get you off the desk. Who's this from?

RACHEL: This one came directly to me. Oh, look. We finally have--

HJ: Oh, fantastic.

KAREN FOLEY: I have Syeda's picture. And Syeda is in Sidcup. So welcome, Syeda. We can finally add you to our board when we head back over there. When we get shoved back over there in the corner. But it's been lovely to see your face. So we're very grateful for that. So welcome. We really need to just pop her on the couch because she can be one of our panellists, can't she?

HJ: Oh, there we go. Just over there. Got pride of place.

KAREN FOLEY: We do love having your selfies. So do send us those. If you've just logged on recently, we're accepting them at connections@open.ac.uk. So email us. We'll put those on the board. Or you can send them on Twitter, the hashtag is #scc15. But the mailbox is probably a little bit easier because that goes straight to that mailbox over there. So wonderful. Well, everyone's chatting. Everyone's very hungry as well. It's that time of day, isn't it? So lots of food-based things going on. And of course, our jelly beans here.

HJ: Jelly beans.

RACHEL: We can't escape jelly beans in this studio, can we?

HJ: Yeah, we had a big discussion about favourite flavours. So yes, if you've got a favourite flavour jelly bean, I really want to know. Because I can't decide. So we're going with--

KAREN FOLEY: But all you do is you know, and then you just go, oh, I still can't decide. Pointless. Absolutely pointless. Right. What study tips have you got for us?

RACHEL: Oh, well. Firstly, understand that study journey is-- it's a very serious thing that you engage in. And it becomes the sort of thing where you know you have to knuckle down and you have to do some study. So what we thought was that it doesn't always have to be incredibly serious. There can always be some funky stationary, personalised study spaces, being comfortable while you're studying-- snacks, treats, and pyjamas.

HJ: Oh, yes. We need them.

RACHEL: And also, to remember motivation, reward, and praise. So firstly, we thought maybe we should look at some of our funky stationary because we really are funky students.

HJ: It's one of those things I always find having nice, neat things, like funky stationary and colourful stuff, always motivates you. Because I always think, oh, I'm not up to doing this assignment. And then I think, oh, but I've got all my awesome pens that I can write with it.

KAREN FOLEY: Does it really help, though?

HJ: It helps me. I think it makes it fantastic. Because you got all your funky stuff and you're like--

KAREN FOLEY: So what do you do with it?

HJ: Well--

RACHEL: [INAUDIBLE]. I'm a pencil person, so you'll have to excuse me. Firstly-- oh.

HJ: Team pen.

RACHEL: *Dr. Who* fan. There you go. You can have one of my very special pencils.

HJ: Oh, awesome.

RACHEL: *Dr. Who*. Yes.

HJ: Now I'm psyched up and excited to write with this.

RACHEL: I don't like writing with a boring pen because it's just boring. There's not much on it. But that's why I like the funky pencils. So would you like one of my funky pencils?

KAREN FOLEY: I would. I'll have a pink one, please.

RACHEL: Pink one.

KAREN FOLEY: That's beautiful.

RACHEL: But the great thing about things like pencils, you can pick them up really cheaply. And you can colour code debates, arguments, and key pointers in your study books, and while you're drafting TMAs and things like that. So it's actually quite handy.

And it's also quite a cheap way as well of doing your stationary. What else? What have you got?

KAREN FOLEY: Can I just say one thing that I think suddenly strikes me about that? Is the thing about colour coding things is that you can sort of see where there are gaps. You can suddenly see, oh, there's lots of pink or there's lots of green. So maybe this is like a really theoretical thing or a really example led thing. And they can just help you sort of make those distinctions, can't it? When you think, well, if I'm colour coding like this. So what are some of the ways that you color code? What are the important terms or things you would account for then when you're sort of doing your reading?

RACHEL: Well, what I'll do is, if I'm comparing and contrasting say, for instance, I would just take two completely different colours and I would compare-- so one theory would be in one colour. Another theory would be in a different colour. So then I can sort of see where the arguments are and where they overlap. And it helps me sort of build more coherent arguments because I'm not looking at a block of text. All of a sudden, I'm looking at the lines there.

And if you get pencils like this, you can normally rub them out. So you're not going to destroy your textbooks for a long time.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, this idea about textbooks and graffiting them. Davin said that he likes handwritten flash cards and things like that. What do you guys think about this idea then of taking stuff out of there and putting it somewhere else?

RACHEL: It's a very good idea. Your wonderful list. There you go. You can have a mountain of Post-It notes.

HJ: All these colored Post-It notes. But I think one of the other great things about colour coding as well is that it's great for revision. So we talked about in one session that with the OU exams, you tend to pick your questions. And usually if you're-- I was doing politics, so I would-- any case concepts in British politics I'd do a certain colour. So then when it came to revising, I thought, right, I know I want to answer a question on British politics. So I'm going to look through my books. And all those were coloured in a certain way, which is one of the ways I like to use funky stationary.

But in terms of putting it somewhere else, there's loads of great things. You can use those online apps that you can use.

We had pictures on MyFace board of people actually printing out things for them to remember and putting them on their wall so they're easily there, which I thought was a fantastic tip.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, this colour coding thing is all well and good. But what about Natasha, whose son hid all her highlights in the radiator? What's she going to do?

HJ: Oh, no. Oh dear.

RACHEL: Take the whole radiator apart if that's possible.

KAREN FOLEY: I think that's a bit extreme.

RACHEL: Is it? There's highlighters there.

KAREN FOLEY: Everyone loves highlighters, don't they? Yeah.

RACHEL: Highlighters, again, are another fantastic to use them. And there's a lot of sales. When it comes to stationary, a lot of people think that they need to buy stationary before uni starts. You don't need it. You've already got your books. Just wait a little bit until the uni has started, and then hit the sales and pick them up really, really cheap. You can get things like this in sales for 25 p-- big wedges. Rather than spending all of your student cash on having it there ready. It's great to see all the deskies and the shelvies as well.

But also when we talk about study spaces, it's about personalising study spaces as well. A lot of people say, I only have a desk or a little lap tray, things like that. But that's fine. You can personalise a lap tray. You can put little motivational quotes. And this is one of mine that comes from my study space.

Unfortunately--

KAREN FOLEY: Knowledge talks, wisdom listens.

HJ: It's a little unreferenced there. We need to find a reference for this.

RACHEL: It's a bit plagiarised. So we don't have that. So another tip, just make sure your referencing is key. But yeah, it's little things in your study areas or places where you can go for motivation.

KAREN FOLEY: I just wanted to touch on this with the study spaces and things, because you're talking very much about physical study spaces. And Syeda saying she likes planning ahead so she doesn't

miss the deadlines. So there's this idea about a physical sort of study space. But also, an emotional or a mental one in terms of how you're planning ahead.

Now, we all start as we know with the idea that we're going to plan ahead. We're not going to miss any deadlines. We're all going to be absolutely perfect. And then, of course, that tends to go down the tube in about a week, we'll say. So what connections could you then make with planning your physical space, planning your emotional space, and sort of connecting the two so that you can try and keep relatively on track with things?

And by "on track," I don't mean according to schedule. I mean with the comfortable parameters that you can wriggle around and catch up or get ahead or behind at various points in that schedule. Physical spaces and planning, what are your thoughts both on that?

RACHEL: Well, you've seen the diary, haven't you?

HJ: I have. Yeah. Rachel's got this fantastic diary where she's extremely organised. And it's extremely colourful.

RACHEL: Well, it looks organised. Again, it's colour coding. Get a planner. You can print one out online. You don't need to spend the money. But just put key points, realistic points, and balance the study with rewards as well. Because that's one of the things, reward and praise. So do a certain amount of study. Going ahead, you've got a TMA that needs to be done. But break it down into manageable chunks. And then after those, you've got family. Enjoy a walk with the children to the park. Or do something that is a reward and praise yourself as well. So that's a way that I've managed my organisation is to try and break it down into sort of chunks of work, reward, sleep.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, tell me then how you both use this. Because what a lot of students-- and if you're new to the OU, you'll notice-- is that you have your StudentHome page and then you have your Study Planner on your module website. And that's got a handy sort of tick list. If you like tick lists, you're in your element with this.

If you don't-- like I'm not really a tick list person. I like writing write TMA, do dishes. That sort of is my to-do list, which is really unquantifiable in terms of time and effort. So you've got this study planner. How do you guys work with that? And is that for everyone, or do you know people who do things differently?

I mean, you're saying sort of-- have these ideas of what you want to do and reward yourself.

How do you know what you've done? And how do you know that that's a good thing? How do you manage that?

HJ: I think one of the things I always like to think is that whatever you do, as long as you're moving forward and making steps, you should see that as successes because it's building up to this bigger thing.

So sometimes, on the study planner, it's just these massive, big chunks that it says. So finish TMA, read a whole chapter. But what I like to do when I'm planning that sort of thing is I like to break it down a bit further. So just setting up the document for the TMA with the title, with the different sections. I think that's a success. And I think working that way can be very encouraging as well when you're studying. Because it can seem a bit daunting with a planner like that. Some people like the planner like that. It's nice to see all those lovely ticks there as you're going through as well.

RACHEL: But the thing about that, what you're saying with the planner, is that you have to go through big chunks before you can tick something off. So where you're saying breaking it down even further. And if you're a tick box kind of person, you can kind of tick, tick, tick a lot more often than you can read whole chapter, read Section 1 of chapter. You can tick.

And another thing. If you're using the OU Planner, view the entire planner. You have a choice of a couple of weeks or the entire plan in view mode. And just get an idea of how the workload is going to be throughout the year. Especially if you've got birthdays, events, jelly bean club.

KAREN FOLEY: Things to do. And things often get away. I mean, we've been having a lot of great chat. And Natasha and Davin are saying they like doing little and often. Davin recommends two-hour sort of chunks at a time, which I think is great advice. Even two hours, I'm not sure I could quite manage that. But just being clear about what you're trying to do and having a goal, I think, can be quite useful.

Angela says that she keeps going at her own pace. And I think that's a really, really important thing because we have these sort of chunks. You'll see on your study planner, well, this is a half an hour activity. It's a whatever. Sometimes, it isn't. And it's really important to know how you're reacting to those sorts of things. It might take you less time to watch a video, but longer to read. So it's being aware of those own parameters that I think is very useful.

We've had another great tip, which is about using e-quizzes to find out what type of learners

you are. And as a psychologist, I would also say this is a really important thing. And there are loads of online quizzes that you can use to look at your learning styles.

Some people are very visual. Thank you, Elena for that. It's great Some people are very visual. Some people prefer to have audio. And so it's about learning things.

What would you guys say about what types of learners you are? And has that been important in terms of how you then do things?

RACHEL: We did do an OU app, didn't we? We completed about the best time of day to study. You did--

HJ: I can't remember the app name. We'll have to find it and pop it on the resource page. I can't remember what the app name is.

But what you do is you do all these different quizzes and activities and fun stuff at different times of the day and it shows you when your mind is best focused to study.

And I think that's the other important thing. A lot people think, oh, I've got to set this certain time, and that's it. That's when I study. And that's the only time when I can study.

But when I was doing my degree, I'd study any time because I didn't like to have too much of a fixed schedule. So if I was on the bus, which I was on the bus a lot for long journeys, I'd always get the books out. Or even if you're just heading off somewhere, you've got access to your OU stuff. So your OU Anywhere through apps, so you can listen to stuff as well. But in terms of types of learner, I think that branches into that as well.

RACHEL: I think that's a good thing about being a distance learner, is that you're not fixed to lectures, seminars lectures, seminars. You can study anywhere. And if you've seen the Open University adverts, you'll see that people were jogging and listening to things-- and on the bus and doing the books. And that's the great thing. Find a place and space. And it can be anywhere.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, there's intriguing talk about daddy pig's office and organising space around that. So I'm looking forward to finding out a bit more what that's about. That's probably a jelly bean-type moment.

But other ideas as well. Davin's actually recommended one of the MOOCs. And we'll be talking about that a bit later, which is the Learning to Learn MOOC. And I think it's really useful to sort of think about your learning style, how you learn, what space you're in, et cetera.

You'll love this one. Lots of ideas about rewards and what sort of things they would be. And people are recommending video games. So some ideas are things like studying and then playing a game, or playing until your three lives run out and then doing some study. Which I guess is an incentive to get very good at these things.

HJ: But if you're very bad at video games, you'll--

KAREN FOLEY: You'll do a lot of studying.

RACHEL: Well, just keep it really simple. And if like Laura's watching-- we're part of the chocolate buttons club. And rewards can be cheap and simple. And not healthy, but--

HJ: But I think going back onto your point about learning how to learn, I think that's super-important. Because when I started off, I had this idea, which wasn't very good, about the perfect student and what that looks like.

I'd sit at my desk from certain hours. And I'd be very studious. And I'd get everything done on time. But that just didn't happen with me. I was sort of all over the place.

RACHEL: Did that last a week?

HJ: That lasted about a week. So if you start off and you've got this idea, maybe when you get the module materials, instead of waiting-- some people wait, some people don't like to. Give it a test out. Find out the best times for you to learn. Find out how you learn better, how you retain knowledge.

And instead of thinking, oh, how do other people do it? Think, how can I do it? What best suits me rather than thinking what's the example of what I see it should be.

KAREN FOLEY: I think that it's so important because we're so used to normalising things. And when you sort of see something, you say, well, it should take this or it should be this. I should do it this way, et cetera. It's really difficult sometimes to be able to combine those. And I know Georgina, who's coming on later, she's a real advocate of this idea that whilst we have a study planner, and a very thoughtfully considered progression about how we're going to teach you this module and what skills you've got, you can also pick and choose things. How do you guys both do these things. Do you both study in a linear order?

I mean, I don't. I always picked the bits that I think-- I'm saying too much. I always picked the

bits that looked the best to do, and then I'll sort of pick those. Or, I might sort of thing, actually I could read that on the train, but I can't have my internet then. So I might do things in a different order. And I'm OK with that because I'm not a very linear person. But learning styles, what do you both do in terms of how you learn and how you normalise or compare yourself with what you were supposed to be doing?

RACHEL: Well, mainly it's-- first things, pyjamas-- comfort. Unless you've left the house, obviously.

KAREN FOLEY: I wondered what studying comfortably was all about.

RACHEL: Yeah. I should have known with you, Rachel. And you look so lovely when you've got clothes on.

RACHEL: I would be here in my pyjamas if it wasn't vetoed.

KAREN FOLEY: I know. Well, it was a group thing, I'm sorry.

RACHEL: But I think personally, I don't study in order. If I'm in the car and I know I've got a 40-minute journey, I'll download the audio. Say for instance, from the OU websites, from my module page, and listen to that in the car. Then I might read a chunk from the book in my lunch break from somewhere. And then when I'm travelling back in the car, I might listen to the audio again. So I'm actually able to listen and visit the material more than once. And that's part of integrating it.

If you integrate your study into your life, you actually can embrace it a lot more because it's not just this thing that I must do that. It's part of I've got to study. I've decided to study with the OU, so let's bring it on.

KAREN FOLEY: What about you?

HJ: I'm a bit lost now. I forgot what we're talking about. I'm so interested. I do like your point about integrating it with the everyday life. Because sometimes we can think it has to be separate from everything else and it's not to do with anything else. And appropriate time to study. But yeah, I think that point about integrating--

KAREN FOLEY: Well, a lot of people are saying. I mean, Natasha, in particular, are saying she'd be lost without her list. And there's a lot of love for lists and checklists and things. And I guess we're on the topic of normalising. And the fact that the OU have these lists that you're supposed to go through.

We then do those in our own sorts of ways.

How useful do you think these lists are? And how do you break them down into sort of these chunks? I like the way that they say, this will take half an hour. And I think, it took me 20 minutes. Didn't do it properly. But how do you work with those lists? Are lists sort of inevitable part of begin an OU student?

RACHEL: I think as a new student, the lists are quite handy to get yourself into kind of a system. But as you go along, it's the same with all of this kind of stuff, really. You learn to sort of study at your own pace rather than at the pace that's set. And that might be people say, oh, it's 16 hours. So trying to find 16 hours to study depends on how you study. It might not necessarily be 16 hours.

But anything-- a check box on a list. Again, it's a reward. Something simple like ticking a box reward.

KAREN FOLEY: But it's having the right list. And you made this point, Rachel, earlier. And it's something that I'd like to mention as well, I guess in my tutor role, is that often people think, I'll write the essay. Right. I need to get the books and I'm going to start writing the essay.

And then they start writing the essay. And I say, no. If you had a list and you knew that the writing the essay bit should be right at the end after you've done all the thinking, and found the bit that you're going to put in the essay, and reference them, and done all of this.

The writing of the essay actually, on the part of the list, could be very, very easy if you just did it last. Whereas, if your list is write an essay, it's a much more [INAUDIBLE].

HJ: That's something that seems quite daunting.

KAREN FOLEY: So how do you break them down? What have you done to get those in a more meaningful way of doing things? Because I'm aware as well that not everyone writes essays in the same way. Some people start writing and don't plan. Some people plan more. What do you both do?

HJ: I think I'm a bit of a mix when it comes to approaching these big tasks. Sometimes, I do break them down nicely, like you said. I'll start with just setting up the document, having the title there, and then that's one step ticked off. But sometimes as well, I just go for it and go, right, OK. I'm going to start typing and that's it.

And even then, I think, oh, I've written the whole paragraph. And I come back to it and I think, oh, that wasn't very good and I scrap it all. But sometimes, just going into it and the fact that you've started and given it a good go, it can also focus your ideas as well. If you're unsure what you're writing about, just anything that comes to mind and just go with it.

RACHEL: We're going to sign post slightly here and go back to the library session yesterday. So you need to watch that and catch up. But the prompt-- using that printout, the prompt-- little things like organising your work and breaking it down into chunks. So that's like a draft of a draft for a TMA or an essay. And then moving on and doing a second draft.

And then things like thought showers-- I'm not sure what word we're supposed to use now. But things like thought showers to lay your ideas down. And that's breaking that write an essay down into even smaller chunks.

If you colour code, you can bring all of those kind of things-- and you make the whole TMA experience a lot more interactive rather than it being dread. It's that time. When all students should be doing TMAs and they're on Facebook instead procrastinating.

HJ: At TMA time, I'm sure a lot of ovens get cleaned.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes.

RACHEL: It's always shiny.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Now, you've mentioned the idea of studying comfortably, and that that involves pyjamas, which we all know. But I would also like to sort of see how you guys but study comfortably in other sorts of ways. So we've mentioned your physical space, having stuff set up, having a nice stationary, doing all this, that, and the other. But we've also talked about the fact that most people will pick up their books and be on trains and things. And it may not always be possible for people to actually have their nice space with their nice stationary and things. They then have to think about how they study in their head, I guess. And there's a different sort of mindset.

So what advice would you give, in particular for new students who want to do it the right way, but probably need to wriggle around with life a bit to get stuff done. How did you both deal with that sort of thing when maybe you needed to study in places you didn't necessarily want to or write those TMAs at hours of the night you didn't want to?

RACHEL: Yeah. One thing that I always do, when I'm in the supermarket I quite often take my book with me. Especially if it's the Friday big shop because everybody's there with their children.

One little point, I would stand in the queue, which would be sort of a half-hour queue. And I would just have my book on the trolley. And it's just small, little things of getting used to the fact that I'm studying outside of a study, if you know what I mean. And then I would-- if I was going to watch friends play hockey or something like that, I would take my book with me and just take a couple of minutes every now and then just to look. And just to introduce the concept of studying away from a study space. And that then introduced it as studying comfortably.

But things like, if you're on a bus or you're listening to your audio on a journey, things like that are-- don't listen. If it's your first week and you have to listen to an audio, don't use that as your official listening time. Learn how to study comfortably. Listen to it. Then, listen to again. And then study it properly when you're supposed to be there writing notes because we obviously need to write notes for it.

HJ: I think that's a good point about using sessions to sort of get a preliminary idea of what you're going to be doing later. And especially like you said about starting off, about not using it as official spaces. But in the sense that it may be good when you're starting off just to try different spaces and areas to see what you're comfortable in.

I always study late at night because I preferred how the light was then. And I found that helped me, focused me more than when it was during the day as well. So I would just give it a go. Give different spaces a go.

If, like you said, you're in a queue, give it a go. If you can listen to audio stuff on a bus or something, just give it a go and find out how you learn and the spaces that help focus you.

KAREN FOLEY: I suppose you could always listen again if it doesn't work so well, can't you?

HJ: Yeah.

RACHEL: Just one funny point, though. If you listen to it in a car, make sure you turn the CD off. Not CDs anymore. They're MP3s. Make sure you turn it off before you take your car for an MOT. Because people look at you rather strangely when you're studying a politics module and there's-- and now we have the capitalist system of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So yeah, just make sure that you turn those things off if you're going to take your car somewhere.

KAREN FOLEY: Right. Well, I'm intrigued to know about a comment about kung fu punctuation. So I think we'll just go to the social media desk to find out a bit more.

[WIND BLOWING]

Right. Well, I'll get to the bottom of this, don't you worry. OK, so thank you very much, HJ and Rachel, for that last session. And we'll get them back on the social media desk, where I think I'd love to hear some of your thoughts and comments.

And thank you at home as well for all of those great ideas. It's really good to see such brilliant ideas and such enthusiastic students. I hope there are some of my students out there because it would be a pleasure.

So we're going to break the livestream again. So if you do get booted off air, just come back on in the same way you did before. If you're watching only and you would like to see what the comments are going on in the Chat Box, and about this kung fu punctuation, then choose the Live and Interactive button from the website, which is connections.kmi.open.ac.uk.

So do log on there and choose the Live and Interactive button. And there you can both chat and also see what other people are talking about as well. But because there are so many new students, we're going to replay a video we showed yesterday, which incidentally features HJ, Rachel, and I, which is about where to first. So for new students, this will outline some of the things we were talking about before. So the advisers and students support team that we had before this session, it will mention where you can access some support for them. So we'll see you back here in about five minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]