

Study Success Guide for International Students in Poland

MS in Poland Resource Guide



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For International Students

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Studying at a Polish university presents unique challenges and opportunities for international students. This guide offers practical strategies to help you excel academically while adapting to the Polish educational system.

Understanding the Polish Academic System Academic Calendar

The Polish academic year typically consists of:

- **Winter semester:** October to February (with a 2-week Christmas break)
- **Examination session:** February
- **Spring semester:** February to June
- **Examination session:** June
- **Retake examination session:** September (for failed exams)

Grading System

Polish universities use a 2-5 scale, with 2 being a failing grade:

| Polish Grade | Description | ECTS Equivalent |

|-----|-----|-----|

| 5 | Very good (bardzo dobry) | A |

| 4.5 | Better than good (dobry plus) | B |

| 4 | Good (dobry) | C |

| 3.5 | Better than satisfactory (dostateczny plus) | D |

| 3 | Satisfactory (dostateczny) | E |

| 2 | Unsatisfactory/fail (niedostateczny) | F |

Course Types

Polish courses generally fall into these categories:

- **Lectures (wykłady):** Traditional professor-led presentations, often with limited interaction
- **Exercises (ćwiczenia):** Interactive classes focusing on practical problems and discussions
- **Seminars (seminaria):** Discussion-based sessions, often requiring student presentations
- **Laboratories (laboratoria):** Practical sessions for hands-on experience
- **Projects (projekty):** Independent or group work on specific topics

TIP: Different course types require different study approaches. Lectures typically require more independent notes and review, while exercises and labs require active participation and preparation.

Effective Study Strategies Adapting to Teaching Styles

Polish education traditionally emphasizes:

- Theoretical knowledge and memorization
- Independent study and self-discipline
- Less frequent but more comprehensive assessments
- Formal relationships with professors

However, many programs (especially those in English) are adopting more interactive, Western approaches.

Class Preparation

- Review lecture materials before attending class
- Prepare questions about concepts you find difficult
- Complete assigned readings, as professors may not cover all material in class
- For exercises and labs, solve practice problems in advance

Note-Taking Techniques

- Use the Cornell method (divide page into sections for notes, cues, and summary)
- Record lectures (with permission) to review difficult concepts

- Create mind maps for complex topics
- Review and organize notes within 24 hours of the lecture
- Form study groups to compare and supplement notes

Time Management

- Create a semester calendar with all deadlines and exam dates
- Develop weekly and daily study schedules
- Use the Pomodoro technique (25-minute focused study sessions with 5-minute breaks)
- Prioritize tasks using the Eisenhower Matrix (urgent/important)
- Schedule regular review sessions throughout the semester

NOTE: Polish university courses often have fewer regular assignments but higher-stakes exams. Don't be misled by the seemingly light workload during the semester—regular self-study is crucial.

Exam Preparation Understanding Exam Formats

Common exam formats in Polish universities include:

- **Written exams:** Essay questions, problem-solving, or multiple choice
- **Oral exams:** Face-to-face questioning by the professor
- **Practical exams:** Demonstrations of skills or laboratory procedures
- **Project presentations:** Defense of your project work

Preparation Strategies by Exam Type For Written Exams:

- Create condensed study guides for each subject
- Practice with past exams if available
- Form study groups to discuss potential questions
- Focus on understanding core concepts rather than memorizing details

For Oral Exams:

- Prepare concise answers to potential questions
- Practice speaking about the subject matter out loud
- Anticipate follow-up questions
- Prepare visual aids or examples to support your answers

General Exam Preparation:

- Start preparing at least 2-3 weeks before exams
- Create a specific exam study schedule
- Use active recall techniques (flashcards, self-quizzing)
- Implement spaced repetition for better retention
- Take care of your physical health (sleep, nutrition, exercise)

TIP: For oral exams, which may be unfamiliar to students from some countries, practice is essential. Work with classmates to conduct mock oral exams, taking turns as examiner and student.

Language Challenges Studying in English

If your program is in English:

- Expand your academic and field-specific vocabulary
- Don't hesitate to ask for clarification during lectures
- Find a language exchange partner to practice with
- Use tools like Grammarly for writing assignments
- Consider working with the university writing center for important papers

Learning Polish

Even if your program is in English, learning basic Polish will:

- Help you navigate university administration
- Improve your experience during practical placements
- Allow you to understand important announcements
- Enhance your overall study experience in Poland

Take advantage of Polish language courses offered to international students, often at reduced rates.

TIP: Create a personalized glossary of academic terms in both English and Polish (or your native language) to help with technical vocabulary in your field.

Resources and Support University Resources

- **Academic advisors:** Schedule regular meetings with your assigned advisor
- **Department consultations:** Many professors hold weekly consultation hours

- **Library services:** Research assistance, database access, study spaces
- **Writing centers:** Help with academic papers and language improvement
- **Tutoring programs:** Peer-to-peer academic support

Digital Resources

- **University e-learning platforms:** Access to lecture materials and assignments
- **Digital libraries:** Journal databases and e-books
- **Study apps:** Anki (flashcards), Notion (notes organization), Forest (focus timer)
- **Academic resources:** Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu

Student Communities

- Join subject-specific study groups
- Participate in academic clubs and societies
- Connect with senior students in your program
- Engage with international student organizations

NOTE: Don't underestimate the value of study groups with Polish students. They can provide invaluable insights into professor expectations and effective study methods for specific courses.

Academic Integrity Understanding Plagiarism

Polish universities take academic integrity very seriously. Understand what constitutes plagiarism:

- Copying text without proper citation
- Paraphrasing without attribution
- Submitting work completed by someone else
- Reusing your own work from another course without permission
- Fabricating data or sources

Citation Practices

Different departments may use different citation styles:

- APA (social sciences, business)
- MLA (humanities)

- Chicago/Turabian (history, arts)
- IEEE (engineering, computer science)
- Vancouver (medicine, sciences)

Confirm the required citation style with your professor and learn it thoroughly.

WARNING: Plagiarism can result in serious consequences, from failing a course to expulsion from the university. When in doubt, cite your sources and ask your professor for guidance.

Balancing Academics and Well-being Stress Management

- Develop healthy study habits to avoid cramming
- Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques
- Maintain physical activity in your routine
- Get adequate sleep, especially before exams
- Recognize when to seek help for overwhelming stress

Work-Life Balance

- Set boundaries between study time and personal time
- Schedule regular breaks and social activities
- Participate in university clubs and events
- Explore Poland during less intensive academic periods
- Maintain connections with family and friends from home

IMPORTANT: Remember that your well-being directly impacts your academic performance. Taking care of your physical and mental health is not separate from your studies—it's essential to your success.

Success Stories and Tips from Alumni

- "Form study groups early in the semester. My international study group became both an academic support system and some of my closest friends." — Sara, MBA Graduate
- "Don't be intimidated by oral exams. With proper preparation, they can actually be easier than written exams because professors can guide you if you get stuck." — Ahmed, Computer Science

- "Take advantage of professors' consultation hours. Polish professors expect students to be independent, but they're usually very helpful during designated office hours." — Maria, Psychology
 - "Learn the local academic culture. In Poland, being precisely on time for lectures and addressing professors with their proper titles is important." — Thomas, International Relations
 - "Balance your theoretical knowledge with practical applications. Polish employers value both academic excellence and practical skills." — Karolina, Engineering
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