

# Studying at the Open University with an Apple Mac computer

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This document describes the current situation at the Open University (OU) for students who use Apple Macintosh computers.

Open University students use a range of printed materials, CDs, DVDs and online resources. In February 2007 the University launched a new virtual learning environment (VLE), providing increasing amounts of this learning content via the Web, and giving access to dynamic information such as assignment results. Online content is currently tested with the following browsers: Internet Explorer versions 6 and 7, and Mozilla Firefox. In addition, the University is considering testing web content on the Mac-based Safari platform. In the meantime, Mac users can access the VLE by downloading and installing [Mozilla Firefox](#), version 2 or higher.

The OU has developed considerable amounts of CD/DVD-ROM based content for Windows PCs. The policy of authoring for Windows machines was decided at a time when most courses used fixed media rather than the Internet and less than 3% of the public (and OU students) were using Macs. It was not possible to justify the costs of developing and supporting cross-platform fixed media products. Most new DVDs for OU courses are however being produced using a browser-based interface which means they will run on Macs as well as PCs. The costs of converting the considerable legacy of fixed media products on existing courses (730 CD/DVD-ROM titles) would be prohibitive.

Another aspect of OU study is the submission of assignments online using the electronic Tutor-Marked Assignment (eTMA) system. This system accepts documents in any format. Tutors need to be able to embed comments in the documents so have to receive them in a format they can edit. Students who do not use Microsoft Word can submit their work in a platform-independent format such as RTF (rich text format). They do not therefore require a Windows PC to submit assignments electronically and could use a Mac running the open source product OpenOffice and a standard web browser.

OU Students who participate in FirstClass forums can download [Mac-based client software](#) or use the FirstClass web interface to do so.

Finally, some courses particularly in modern languages require the use of the PC-based audioconferencing and shared whiteboard system, Lyceum. However the University is about to deploy a new synchronous collaboration system which will function on both PCs and Macs.

There is a [Mac self-help group](#) organised by OU students which has compiled their own list of OU courses and Mac compatibility. In addition, many Mac users run Windows emulation software to access successfully most of the legacy Windows software provided by the University.

The University is currently carrying out its own audit of course materials to check Mac compatibility, and is examining ways to provide access for both Mac users and users of other platforms such as Linux.