



British International School Riyadh

The art of making decisions

The difficulty with making decisions when you are at university is that they can end up affecting the rest of your life. Decide to snatch an extra hour in bed rather than attend a lecture, and you miss hearing a point that could land you a first, inspire a thesis and secure you a Nobel prize. Plump for a pint at the Bell and Compass rather than at the Bee and Caterpillar, and you miss meeting the potential father of your five children.

Worse, at university you spend a lot of time learning to weigh up different bits of evidence and points of view, which is enough to make anyone inclined to dither. The first thing to do, therefore, is to be realistic about how much time and effort a particular decision deserves. Whether or not to have a fringe does not demand as much reflection as ditching your degree to travel in Afghanistan.

Don't be afraid of using your instincts, but remember they aren't quite the same as tossing a coin. Instincts based on years of experience making similar kinds of choices are more reliable than instincts based on whichever option features your lucky number. So, the more informed you are, the better your instincts are likely to be. If you have attended every lecture since the beginning of term given by Dr Yawn and have not heard an interesting point yet, choosing a lie-in will be less of a gamble than if you've never heard of him and don't know what he's supposed to be talking about.

Also, if you're basing your decision on information, the information has to be up to date. Nor should you have selected it entirely because it backs up the decision you're already inclined to favour - like staying in bed. It may help if you avoid getting bogged down in the rights and wrongs of the decision itself and try thinking instead about what you want to achieve as a result of it. Picture what will happen if you decide one way, and then if you decide the other, and go for the picture you like best.

Or, write down the advantages and disadvantages of your various options and see which list is longer. Talk to people about your dilemma. Putting it into words can often make it clearer in your own mind, and others may have experience of making similar decisions. Listen to them, even if they're your parents, but don't expect them to make the decision for you, even if they're your parents.

Don't make important decisions, such as getting a tattoo, or married, after a heavy night out. But don't try to duck them altogether. Good decision-making takes practice, and the more often you do it, the easier it gets.

You shouldn't get so hung up on the impact of your decision-making that you can't make up your mind at all. Most decisions are reversible. Plus, you may not even be aware of making some decisions that turn out to be the most important ones of your career. In most cases, how far the decisions you make at university influence what happens in the rest of your life will be up to you to decide.