



7. How to use the online journal

In this section we highlight some of the key do's and don'ts when managing your Universal Credit claim online. This should help keep your claim running smoothly.

When you get Universal Credit, you'll get an online account. This allows you to do a number of things:

- communicate with your work coach and case manager
- report any change in your circumstances
- check what you have agreed to do in your claimant commitment
- keep a record of the things you've done to prepare or look for work
- see how much your Universal Credit payments are.

“Don't be afraid to ask a work coach for help. My work coach pointed me in the direction of support that I wasn't aware of previously”

UC:Us Team

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What is a work coach?

When you begin your claim, you will normally be assigned a work coach. As part of your claim you will be expected to attend regular appointments with your work coach at your local Jobs and Benefits Office (if you are in Northern Ireland) or Jobcentre Plus office (if you are in England, Wales or Scotland).



The main role of your work coach is to support you in finding work by making sure that you are meeting the conditions set out in your claimant commitment. Some people will not have a work coach - whether you have one depends on what work-related conditions you are expected to meet.

“If you are unsure of anything about your claim or work commitments, don't be afraid to ask your work coach. UC is a complex system and we are all learning together”

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What I'd wished I'd known about the online journal

“I wish I'd known the technical difficulties using the journal can present. I was sanctioned for a total of 21 days for missing appointments I thought I had already rearranged. I'd been helping a friend move who lived in an area of bad reception when I had changed appointment dates on my journal - I thought they had been uploaded but they hadn't. I couldn't evidence this or appeal this. My advice is when you are



communicating with UC make sure you have good internet connection. If it's something important like rearranging a meeting, check it's gone through/ been received. You are best to get in the habit of checking your journal every day and take a screen grab of important messages for your records."

Managing your claim online - Do's and Don'ts

UC:Us members 12 do's to make life easier

- When accessing your journal, make sure you have your username and password written down and stored away in a safe place so you don't forget it.
- Complete tasks in the 'to do list' as soon as possible.
- Disclose any change of circumstances in your life or work through the 'Report a change' link on your UC account home page. Do this as soon as possible to ensure you are not underpaid or overpaid UC. For example, you should disclose when you change address, you have a new job, a new baby, or you have an illness which prevents you from attending appointments/completing activities set out in your claimant commitment. Look for the change you want to report and follow the instructions. If you do not see the change you want to report, contact UC staff using your journal or by telephone.
- Treat it as part of your routine. It is best to do things daily, little and often so it's not a massive task. That way you minimise the risk of facing a sanction. You may want to set an alarm on your phone to remind you.
- There might be tasks that you do on a regular basis (like job searching). It's useful to have a template to carry out your job search, like having a list of recruitment websites that you check regularly. This can make the process of documenting your job search easier.

- Record all jobs you apply for and anything related to that search. This includes writing a CV, contacting employers, travelling to an interview etc.
- Response times and information you receive from your work coach via the journal can vary. So if it's something urgent or really important, make a phone call to your office instead. For example, a phone call might be suitable if you are unable to make an upcoming appointment.
- If you have recently experienced domestic violence, bereavement or have another good reason why you can't fulfil your Claimant Commitment then you should leave a message on your journal asking for your commitment to be reviewed.
- Check your journal daily for updates. Do not rely on updates or notifications from UC as this is not reliable and you may miss a message.
- If you update the journal or online account with a key piece of information it can be worthwhile to screenshot it for your own records. If this is something you are able to do, you can also store your screenshots in a separate folder for ease of future access.
- Once your claim is 'closed' you will lose access to all documents and information stored in the journal. So, as you go along, make sure to screenshot or download information that may be useful in the future.
- It's also important to update any increases in your rent charge as this may affect your entitlement to Housing Costs.
- If you are self-employed, you will have to provide monthly cash-in cash out figures. There will be a special tool on your UC online account which will allow you to report these figures. You should be asked to report monthly between 7 days before and 14 days after the end of each assessment period. You should try to report the figures as close to the end of the assessment period as possible as reporting earnings late may delay your UC payment.
- It is important to continue to check your journal and keep up to date with what your work coach expects from you, even if you move into paid work. If you are in low-income, part-time or non-permanent work, you

could still be expected to search for more work as part of your UC claim.

UC:Us members top 3 dont's

- Don't leave filling in your journal until the last minute. It will build up as a bigger job, you'll forget what you've done and it will cause you more stress.
- Don't ignore any messages in your journal. If you don't understand what your work coach is asking you to do, say so and ask them to explain it to you in a simpler way.
- If you are self-employed, don't forget to provide your monthly 'cash-in and cash-out' figures.

"I have found the journal useful for keeping track of and documenting all communication with my work coach"

UC:Us Team

Access more of our info sheets

This document is part of a series of info sheets that have been produced from content hosted on ucus.org.uk/ucguide. There are a number of guides in the series you can visit them here or view the guide in its original web form:

Download all the guides here!

[Helping you understand our guide](#)

[UC Lessons from Lived Experiences](#)

Key lessons our group have learnt from their lived experiences. Includes our "Talking Universal Credit: What I wish I'd known" videos

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[Before you apply](#)

Highlights key things that you need to know before making a claim for UC.

[How to make an application](#)

A checklist with all the information you need to have ready to make a claim online for Universal Credit.

[How to understand the UC elements](#)

Sets out all the different elements of Universal Credit to help you to understand more about the benefit.

[Where to get extra financial support](#)

Places where you may be able to seek financial help in addition to your UC claim.

[How to use the online journal](#)

Here we highlight some of the key do's and don'ts when using your online journal, which should help things run smoothly.

[How to challenge a decision](#)

A step by step guide to appealing decisions and lodging complaints along with details of help available.

[Managing Overpayments & Deductions](#)

Information on the reasons why overpayments and deductions occur and some options to manage them.

[Crisis support](#)

Find out support available for people living on a low income who are undergoing difficult circumstances.

[Want to change things?](#)

A quick run through of ideas for trying to change things and ways you can get involved.

[Important contacts](#)

Contacts for a number of free, independent advice agencies who can provide advice and assistance, free of charge.

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