

tech setup for new students: accounts, platforms, and tools at aelo swiss academy

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Every autumn, AELO Swiss Academy fills up with new students carrying two things: a folder of acceptance paperwork and a quiet, unshakeable belief that the technology will sort itself out. It will not sort itself out. It will wait politely, the way Swiss trains wait, and then depart without you at exactly the wrong moment, usually the night before your first assignment is due. I have worked several orientation seasons on the staff side of the helpdesk, and I can tell you the difference between a calm first semester and a chaotic one rarely comes down to intelligence or effort. It comes down to one good afternoon of setup, done early, ideally before the lectures even begin.

So consider this the unofficial field guide. One afternoon of clicking now buys you a semester where the machines work for you instead of staging small rebellions.

one login to rule the campus: your student account

The student account is the master key. Timetable, grades, library loans, print credit, housing forms, exam registration: nearly everything hangs off it. Activation starts with the welcome email, which contains a temporary code and a link, and which a surprising number of students delete as "probably marketing". Do not delete it. It is the most important email you will receive all year, and it expires.

When you set your password, go long rather than clever. Three random words beat a short password with a symbol swapped into it every single time, both for your memory and for anyone trying to guess it. Then comes the part people skip https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ and regret: multi-factor authentication. It is an app prompt that takes about ten seconds per login, and it turns "someone guessed my password from an old forum leak" from a catastrophe into a non-event. Enroll a backup method while you are at it, and store the recovery codes somewhere that is not a screenshot on the same phone that holds the authenticator app. Print them. Put them in your wallet. This is the single highest-value thirty seconds in the whole setup.

A password manager helps more than it sounds like it would. The browser built-ins are perfectly fine, and the rule they enforce is the one that matters: a different password for every service, so that one bad breach at some unrelated website does not cascade into your academic life. In my experience, forgotten passwords are the most common helpdesk ticket of the entire year, and many of them trace back to a password reused from somewhere else. The reset works. The queue in week one, however, is not where you want to spend your first sunny afternoon in Switzerland.



email: the least glamorous tool you will use most

Nobody gets excited about institutional email, which is precisely why it deserves a paragraph of respect. Every official thing that matters travels through it: exam room changes, extension approvals, invoice corrections, library notices, the occasional apology from a professor who double-booked a lecture hall. Personal inboxes are lovely, but official decisions get sent to the address on file, and if you miss them because the address forwards to a spam folder you have never opened, the administration's sympathy has limits.

Two habits make it painless. First, set up filters in week one: one label for anything from the academy domain, one for the learning platform's notifications, and let everything else breathe. Second, put a short signature on anything official, with your program and student number. The people who process hundreds of requests a week genuinely appreciate it, and your request moves faster.

One warning, delivered with feeling: the academy will never ask you for your password, and no legitimate library fine is payable in gift cards. A student some years back very nearly settled an invented "overdue item" with app-store credit before a flatmate asked why the library was texting them. The real library, whatever its budget woes, does not accept iTunes balance. Check the sender domain before you click anything, and if an email makes your heart race, that is usually the tell.

the learning platform, where deadlines have teeth

The learning platform is where your courses live: syllabi, readings, submission boxes, grades, and the discussion forum where someone will ask the question you were too shy to ask, usually two days before you needed it. Learn its layout early, because familiarity built in calm weather is what keeps you functional in a storm.

A few quirks are worth knowing before they cost you anything. Submission windows close hard. The platform does not care that your wi-fi flickered at 23:58, and it will not reopen out of pity. Upload as PDF unless told otherwise, because the system reads PDFs and regards exotic formats with suspicion. It has never accepted a .pages file. It will not begin accepting .pages files out of sympathy. Name files sensibly, surname, course, assignment, so that a marker at midnight does not have to open four documents to find out which one is yours.

Then the ritual that separates the prepared from the panicked: after every upload, open the file from the platform and check it. Right document, right version, correct page count. The confirmation screen is your receipt, so keep the confirmation email or take a screenshot. Someone once submitted a photograph of their printed essay lying on a wooden desk because they believed "upload" meant "scan". It did not mean scan, and no amount of good lighting saved the grade. Turn on announcement notifications in week one; you can always tune them down later, once you have learned which announcements matter and which are about the vending machines.



the unholy trinity: wi-fi, vpn, and print credit

Three systems cause a wildly outsized share of first-week misery, and all three can be tamed in under an hour.

Campus wi-fi runs on eduroam, which is a genuinely nice piece of infrastructure: once configured, your login follows you to hundreds of participating institutions across Europe and beyond, which is excellent for field trips and for working from a partner university's library during a break. The classic trap is the username format. In many eduroam setups, including, the last time I checked the guide, ours, your identity is your full academy address rather than the short username, and entering the wrong form is the most common wi-fi ticket we see. The exact format is in your welcome email. Read it. Set it up on day one, while the helpdesk is staffed and the queue is short.

The VPN exists mainly for one reason: licensed library databases check where you are coming from, and off campus they want you to arrive through the academy's connection. Install and test the client before you need it at two in the morning, because a citation that is one click away on campus becomes a locked door without it. The VPN adds one connection step and maybe thirty seconds, which is a bargain.

Print credit is the third member of the trio. You get an allowance or a top-up balance, and pages cost a few centimes in black and white, colour several times that, in recent years anyway. Set duplex printing as your default; your wallet and the planet both send thanks. Top up online before you need forty pages of a course reader in ten minutes, and remember that the large-format poster printer in the library is its own beast with its own pricing, usually discovered the night before a poster session.



hardware: what to buy, and what to leave in the shop window

The laptop advice is boring because boring is correct. A 13 to 14 inch machine with a battery that survives a full lecture day and a keyboard you actually like beats a flashy desktop replacement you leave home because it weighs as much as a small dog. If your program runs statistics, CAD, or video editing, aim for 16 GB of memory; otherwise 8 GB survives, though it breathes heavily by year three. If you are eyeing a Chromebook, check your program's requirements page first, because some specialist tools simply do not exist for it, and discovering this in week two is an avoidable tragedy.

Then there is the shopping list of things people buy in a rush

— usually at the campus kiosk, at heroic markups, at 22:00. Buy them before arrival instead:

- a USB-C hub, because modern laptops offer one port and a dare
- wired headphones, for exams that permit them and for when Bluetooth betrays you mid-presentation
- a mouse; trackpads are tolerable until you meet a spreadsheet
- a power bank, since lecture-hall outlets are a beautiful myth
- an actual notebook, because some professors still believe in paper, and they grade

That is the whole ritual: one calm afternoon, one checklist, and a semester in which the only mystery left is the material. Set it up early, and the machines will serve you punctually — Swiss-like, even.