Open University students are typically mature and part-time, fitting their studies around employment, family and other commitments. Aware that life events may impact their studies, a deferral process allows students to pause and subsequently return to study on the following presentation of their module. Interviews with sixteen students explored the triggers and impacts of having a break from study through deferral.

Poetic inquiry was used to analyse the data, and selected participant words used to produce transcript poems (Faulkner, 2017). The resulting ‘poem-like’ representations (Lahman, Richard and Teman, 2019) give authentic voice to the participants and help to portray emotional aspects of their experience (Carr, 2003). Selected poems presented here focus on the decision to defer, which most participants found challenging. All names are pseudonyms.

Ingrid (36, employed single parent)
Suited my lifestyle, suits my work
best option for me

Something happened,
always something
We want to be educated
but we have a life

I needed time, more time
extra time to finish
enough time to finish

A huge load lifted
I had enough time

Stephen (36, employed single parent)
Life was getting busy,
it just all got too much.
The time, the inclination
too far behind, can’t catch up