

A Guide for Successful Students

A Guide for Successful Students

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WINDSOR, ONTARIO



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This adaptation has seen substantial reordering and reformatting of the original 2015 text, minor wording adjustments, addition of new content, replacement of images, and deletions.

The revisions made to the original textbook are listed below.

- Introduction – adapted from Chapt. 1.1
- Successful students have goals – adapted from Chap. 2.1
- Successful students embrace a diverse community – adapted from Chap. 9.1 & 9.2
- Successful students go to class – adapted from Chap. 7
- Successful students ask for help – adapted from Chap. 7.3
- Successful students get it together – adapted from Chap. 2.2 & 2.3
- Successful students take control of their health – adapted from Chap. 10.1 – 10.4 and 10.7
- Successful students practice mental wellness – adapted from Chap. 10.5 and 10.6
- Successful students manage their finance – adapted from Chap. 11
- Successful students get involved – adapted from Chap. 9.1 & 9.3
- Successful students learn independently – adapted from Chap. 1.3 & 4.5 (Learning); Chap. 5 (Reading); Chap. 4.4 (Notetaking); Chap. 6.5 & 8 (Writing); Chap. 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, & 6.6 (Studying); Chap. 6.3 (Tests); Chap. 6.2 (Group Work).

This textbook can be referenced. For example, in APA citation style, it should appear as follows:

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Preface

A Guide for Successful Students was created to accompany a non-credit series of modules for THRIVES, a project of the Student Services Department of St. Clair College. The intention was to develop a series of modules for students entering first semester that would give them information and tools that would ease their transition to college and through that, support mental wellness. A small team was gathered in February 2018 and THRIVES development began in earnest.

Wanting more than a series of policies and dry facts, the structure based on skillsets, attitudes and behaviours of successful students was taken from the Orientation Family and Friends workshop developed by Bob Birnie and Irene Stewart. So that the modules would cover a wide range of topics that would be useful to students throughout their college years, the OER College Success 2015 published by the University of Minnesota was selected for adaptation.

While the modules will be presented to St. Clair students within our LMS and will contain additional information specific to our college, this Guide is offered to the broader community of learners and educators, where ever you may be, under a Creative Commons license in hopes that you will benefit from our efforts.

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How to use this guide for self-study



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Dear student,

We are so glad you found (or were recommended) this Guide. We hope you will find ideas and advice that will help you adjust to the demands of college life and will help you be both successful and independent in your learning.

If you are using this guide for personal study outside of a course, you can take two pathways through this material:

1. You can certainly start reading from the beginning and continue right through the end. Of course, we think everything in this Guide is useful and thrilling.
2. OR you can start by scanning the Contents list with a critical eye. Consider your current state of skills, attitudes and behaviours and use the Content list as a check list. Do you already do the things that successful students do? If so, you can take that as a confirmation that you are on the right track. If not, or if not enough, slow down and read that section or subsection. Once you are aware of what is within this Guide, you can come back and read or re-read a section when you need a new idea or a reminder.

Regardless of the path you take, we recommend that you don't try to do it all at once. Choose one or two sections to focus on at a time. For example, if you are a new student scan through the sections of *Successful Students Have Goals* and *Take Responsibility*. Knowing how college fits into your overall plans can help you frame your college experience in a more positive way and understanding your responsibilities for your education will ease the culture shock

that some students experience in a new learning environment. After you have attended a few classes, you can come back and look at *Successful Students Get It Together* and *Learn Independently* to add some time management and study skills to your student tool belt. Later, do a check of your health: body, mind and wallet! And don't forget the social aspects of college!

We believe this Guide will be useful throughout your college career and we hope you will agree!

If you have suggestions for improvements or inclusions, email istewart@stclaircollege.ca with "A Guide for Successful Students" in the subject line. We would love to hear from you!

All the best,

Irene and Aaron

Dedication

For Coulson, representing all students yet to come.

PART I
10 THINGS SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS
DO

Introduction

Welcome to College

The first semester is almost every student's most important time in College and it can also be the most challenging. Why? Because, for many students, adjusting to college isn't easy. Students wrestle with balancing their time and other commitments to family, friends, and work. Statistics show that students who succeed in their first year are most likely to continue to complete their program. This guide presents some of what we know about the actions and attitudes of successful students.

From the outside looking in, it may seem that successful students are good students simply because they're naturally good at studying. But if you take a closer look, you'll see that, although college students differ in many ways, all successful students share certain common traits, including a positive attitude, effective learning and thinking skills, good time management, and strategies for personal well-being.

Like everything else in life that leads to meaningful results, success in college isn't automatic. But when you apply yourself to your studies and adopt behaviors of successful students, you'll find you can succeed. But first, what do we mean by success? The skills and experiences you gain as part of your academic program are intended to prepare you for the practical reality of working in the industry. From one perspective, success is achieving the



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credentials which tells employers that you have that foundation. The goal of your college education should be to build a body of knowledge that you'll carry into your career. But this is not the only definitions of success, each person has their own definition. For some students, success means graduating in the projected time frame and with all A's on their grade report. For other students, success may mean gaining that industry knowledge and experience over a longer period of time, through part-time studies, or taking courses that give students the knowledge they need now and as part of a longer career path. Regardless

of your personal definition of success, successful students understand why they are in college and what college can do for them.

Some students have difficulty in their first year, often due to financial barriers, or possibly a personal or family matter. But most commonly, students' difficulties are because they're having problems passing their courses, stemming from not having developed the skills needed to succeed in college and lacking in enthusiasm. The information in the Guide can help you stay motivated when things get tough, and you can learn the skills and behaviors for succeeding in college. Almost everything in this guide –from time management to social skills, from study skills to staying healthy– will contribute to your overall success and, yes, to achieving better grades.

A college education results in many other personal benefits, and these also should be part of your motivation for doing well and continuing with your college plans.

Here are a few additional, less tangible benefits of a college education:

- You will have a fuller life and a better understanding of the world around you.
- You will gain decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- You will meet many interesting and diverse people and have a richer social life.
- You will gain self-confidence.
- You will gain learning skills that can continue for a lifetime.
- You will make wiser decisions about lifestyle issues and live healthier.
- You will make wiser economic decisions the rest of your life.
- You will be better equipped to deal with other people, organizations, government agencies, and all the hassles of daily life.
- You will feel more a part of your community, the larger culture, and history.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/studyprocaff/?p=97>

Your Past Educational Experience



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It is important to understand how College is different from the last school you attended and how well your own past educational experiences have prepared you for what you will find in college.

College is a unique experience for all students – whether you just graduated from high school or are returning to education after years of working or studying in Canada for the first time. You are transitioning from one form of education to another.

Generally speaking, however, the college experience is usually different in these ways:

- Time management is more important in college because of varying class and work schedules and other time commitments.
- College professors seldom seek you out to offer extra help if you're falling behind. You are on your own and expected to do the work, meet deadlines, and so on, without someone looking over your shoulder.
- There may be no attendance policy for classes. You are expected to be mature enough to come to class without fear of penalties.
- Many classes are large, making it easy to feel lost in a crowd.
- Many professors, especially in large classes, teach by lecture—which can be difficult for those whose high school teachers interacted a great deal with students.
- College courses require more study time and require you to work on your own.
- Your social and personal life in college may be less supervised. Younger students may experience a sudden increase in freedom to do what they want.
- You will meet more people from more diverse backgrounds in college.
- All of these differences, along with a change in living situation for many students, can lead to emotional changes—both positive and negative.

What does all this add up to? For some students, the sudden independence and freedom can lead in negative directions: sleeping late, skipping classes, missing deadlines, failing to study adequately for tests, and so on. Other students who are highly motivated and work hard in their classes may also have difficulty transitioning to the higher academic

standards of college. Suddenly, you're responsible for everything. That can be thrilling but also a challenge to get used to. The Guide will help you make this transition successfully.



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Welcome to A Guide for Successful Students

This guide is organized into sections based on common skill sets, attitudes and behaviours of successful students. Here is what we consider common traits:

Successful students:

- have goals
- take responsibility
- embrace a diverse community
- go to class
- ask for help
- get it together
- take control of their health
- practice mental wellness
- understand their finances
- get involved
- learn independently

You can use these as a checklist when considering your own readiness for taking on the challenge of college. Feel free to read the entire guide or dip into the sections that interest

you now and come back when you feel you may need a new idea or a new approach to your studies and college life.

Key Takeaways

- The behaviors, attitudes and skills of successful students can be a guide for new students.
- Understanding the value of a college education in terms of career knowledge and skills as well as other personal benefits can help you be more successful.
- Students, in their first year, commonly struggle because they have not yet developed the skills needed to be successful at the college level and lack motivation to apply themselves to their studies. This guide can help you develop these skills and sustain motivation.
- It is important for students to understand how college is different than their last education experience and the adjustments they will need to make to be successful.

I. Successful students have goals

Succeeding in college is rather like succeeding in life. It's really much more about **you** than it is about college. So the most important place to start is to consider why you're here, what matters to you, and what you expect to get out of it. Even if you have already thought about these questions, it's good to reaffirm your commitment to your plan as we begin to consider what's really involved in being a college student. Let's take a look at successful student goals.



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Students who have long term life and career goals see college as one step towards achieving their goals. This can set a purpose and a direction for students. It can increase students' day-to-day and semester-to-semester motivation because they see that each course is part of a greater whole that will help them in the future. This can also help with persistence, with keeping at it when things are tough. There will be challenges during your college career. There may be times you feel like giving up or you just don't feel like going to class, reading your textbook, or writing that paper. Having that purpose, that long term goal can help you decide to move past that challenge and keep going. We call this resiliency.

Goals help you set priorities and remain motivated and committed to your college success. Setting a long term goal usually leads to setting medium and short term goals. These are practical goals related to being a student that can help you make better decisions when considering your choices of how to spend your time. Setting priorities with shorter term goals can help you see what you need to do next. Working through goals can help you feel more in control and can reduce stress.

Attitude is the largest factor determining success in college. Work to stay positive and surround yourself with positive people, and you'll find you are motivated to carry out the activities that will help you succeed in your courses.

Goal Setting

A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions.

Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final examination may completely prevent reaching that goal. That's fairly obvious in an extreme case, yet still a lot of college students don't reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have conflicting goals. One way to prevent problems is to think about all your goals and priorities and to learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals.

It all begins with setting goals and thinking about priorities.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You're also a person with individual needs and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student, you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life.



Photo by Estée Janssens on Unsplash

Goals also vary in terms of time.

- Short-term goals focus on today and the next few days and perhaps weeks.

- Midterm goals involve plans for this school year and the time you plan to remain in college.
- Long-term goals may begin with graduating college and everything you want to happen thereafter.

Often your long-term goals (e.g., the kind of career you want) guide your midterm goals (getting the right education for that career), and your short term goals (such as doing well on an exam) become steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals.

Write out your goals.

You should literally write them down, because the act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them.

Follow these guidelines:

- Goals should be realistic. It's good to dream and to challenge yourself, but your goals should relate to your personal strengths and abilities.
- Goals should be specific. Don't write, "I will become a great musician;" instead, write, "I will finish my music degree and be employed in a symphony orchestra."
- Goals should have a time frame. You won't feel very motivated if your goal is vaguely "to finish college someday." If you're realistic and specific in your goals, you should also be able to project a time frame for reaching the goal.
- You should really want to reach the goal. We're willing to work hard to reach goals we really care about, but we're likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we don't feel strongly about a goal. If you're doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it's not your own personal goal – and you may have some more thinking to do about your life.



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Attitude

Everything people do and how they do it starts with attitude.

One student gets up with the alarm clock and cheerfully prepares for the day, planning to study for a couple hours between classes, go jogging later, and see a friend at dinner.

Another student oversleeps after partying too late last night, decides to skip his first class, somehow gets through later classes fueled by fast food and energy drinks while dreading tomorrow's exam, and immediately accepts a friend's suggestion to go out tonight instead of studying.



Photo by Zachary Nelson on Unsplash

Both students could have identical situations, classes, finances, and academic preparation. There could be just one significant difference— but it's the one that matters.

Here are some characteristics associated with a positive attitude:

- Enthusiasm for and enjoyment of daily activities
- Acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and feeling good about success
- Generally upbeat mood and positive emotions, cheerfulness with others, and satisfaction with oneself
- Motivation to get the job done
- Flexibility to make changes when needed
- Ability to make productive, effective use of time

And here are some characteristics associated with a negative attitude:

- Frequent complaining
- Blaming others for anything that goes wrong
- Often experiencing negative emotions: anger, frustration, resentment
- Lack of motivation for work or studies
- Hesitant to change or seek improvement
- Unproductive use of time, procrastination

Stay Focused and Motivated

Okay, you've got a positive attitude. But you've got a lot of reading for classes to do tonight, a test tomorrow, and a paper due the next day. Maybe you're a little bored with one of your reading assignments. Maybe you'd rather play a computer game. Uh oh—now what?

Attitude can change at almost any moment. One minute you're enthusiastically starting a class project, and then maybe a friend drops by and suddenly all you want to do is close the books and relax a while, hang out with friends.

One of the characteristics of successful people is accepting that life is full of interruptions and change— and planning for it. Staying focused does not mean you become a boring person who does nothing but go to class and study all the time. You just need to make a plan.

Plan ahead

Planning ahead is the single best way to stay focused and motivated to reach your goals. Don't wait until the night before an exam. If you know you have a major exam in five days, start by reviewing the material and deciding how many hours of study you need. Then schedule those hours spread out over the next few days – at times when you are most alert and least likely to be distracted. Allow time for other activities, too, to reward yourself for successful studying. Then when the exam comes, you're relaxed, you know the material, you're in a good mood and confident, and you do well. Planning is mostly a matter of

managing your time well, there is more about this topic in the *Successful Students Get it Together* chapter.

Here are some other tips for staying focused and motivated:

- If you're not feeling motivated, think about the results of your goals, not just the goals themselves. If just thinking about finishing college doesn't sound all that exciting, then think instead about the great, high paying career that comes afterward and the things you can do with that income.
- Remember your successes, even small successes. As you begin a project or approach studying for a test, think about your past success on a different project or test. Remember how good it feels to succeed. Know you can succeed again.
- Get the important things done first. Stay focused, motivated and concentrate on the things that matter most. You're about to sit down to read a chapter in a book you're not much enjoying, and you suddenly notice some clothing piled up on a chair. "I really should clean up this place," you think. "And I'd better get my laundry done before I run out of things to wear." Don't try to fool yourself into feeling you're accomplishing something by doing laundry rather than studying. Stay focused!
- If you just can't focus in on what you should be doing because the task seems too big and daunting, break the task into smaller, manageable pieces. Don't start out thinking, "I need to study the next four hours," but think, "I'll spend the next thirty minutes going through my class notes from the last three weeks and figure out what topics I need to spend more time on." It's a lot easier to stay focused when you're sitting down for thirty minutes at a time.
- Imitate successful people. Does a friend always seem better able to stick with studying or work until they get it done? What are they doing that you're not? We all learn from observing others, and we can speed up that process by deliberately using the same strategies we see working with others. Visualize yourself studying in the same way and getting that same high grade on the test or paper.



Image by rawpixel from Pixabay

- Separate yourself from unsuccessful people. This is the flip side of imitating successful people. If a roommate or a friend is always putting off things until the last minute or is distracted with other interests and activities, tell yourself how different you are. When you hear other students complaining about how hard a class is or bragging about not studying or attending class, visualize yourself as not being like them at all.
- Reward yourself when you complete a significant task – but only when you are done. Some people seem able to stay focused only when there’s a reward waiting.

Priorities

Thinking about your goals gets you started, but it’s also important to think about priorities. We often use the word “priorities” to refer to how important something is to us. We might think, this is a really important goal, and that is less important.

Try this experiment: go back to the goals you wrote and see if you can rank each goal as a

1. Top priority
2. Middle priority
3. Lowest priority

It sounds easy, but do you actually feel comfortable doing that? Maybe you gave a priority 1 to passing your courses and a priority 3 to playing your guitar. So what does that mean—that you never play guitar again, or at least not while in college? Whenever you have an hour free between class and work, you have to study because that’s the higher priority? What about all your other goals – do you have to ignore everything that’s not a priority 1? And what happens when you have to choose among different goals that are both number 1 priorities?



Photo by Veri Ivanova on Unsplash

In reality, priorities don't work quite that way. It doesn't make a lot of sense to try to rank goals as always more or less important. *The question of priority is really a question of what is more important at a specific time.* It is important to do well in your classes, but it's also important to have a social life and enjoy your time off from studying. You shouldn't have to choose between the two – except at any given time.

Priorities always involve time: what is most important to do right now. As we'll see later, time management is mostly a way to juggle priorities so you can meet all your goals.

When you manage your time well, you don't have to ignore some goals completely in order to meet other goals. In other words, you don't have to give up your life when you register for college—but you may need to work on managing your life more effectively. But time management works only when you're committed to your goals. Attitude and motivation are very important. If you haven't yet developed an attitude for success, all the time management skills in the world won't keep you focused and motivated to succeed.



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Key Takeaways

- Having long-term goals (college diploma) lead to setting midterm goals (by semester) which can be broken down into short-term goals (completing an assignment).
- Writing out your goals helps you think more clearly about what you want to achieve.
- Having enthusiasm for daily life, accepting responsibility, being motivated and flexible, and making effective use of time are signs of a positive attitude.
- Planning ahead is the single best way to stay focused and motivated to reach your goals.

- When deciding what to do with your time, considering your priorities is a good way to decide what to do next.
- Goals help you set priorities and remain committed to your college success.

2. Successful students take responsibility

A college campus is almost like a small town—or country—unto itself. The campus has its own security force, its own government, its own stores, its own ID cards, its own parking rules, and so on. Colleges also have their own policies regarding many types of activities and behaviors. Students who do not understand the rules can sometimes find themselves in trouble.



Photo by Mark Duffel on Unsplash

The most important academic policy is academic honesty. The principle of academic honesty is simple: every student must do their own work. Colleges also have policies about alcohol and drug use, sexual harassment, hazing, hate crimes, and other potential problems. The college registrar has policies about course add and drop dates, payment schedules and refunds, and the like. Such policies are designed to ensure that all students have the same right to a quality education—one not unfairly

interrupted by the actions of others. You will find these policies on your college website. It is vital that you are aware of these policies as you begin your college career and that you are aware of how to solve problems, and make good decisions.

Self-Management

To succeed in college, you need to take control of your life. Gone are the days when you could just “cruise” through school, or life, or let others motivate you or establish schedules to manage your time. This change presents an exciting opportunity. It’s your first step in your new life and the key to your future.

Here are a few thoughts to get you started in the right direction:

Accept responsibility for your life. You are on equal footing with everyone else and have the same opportunities to succeed.

Decide what you want to do. Don't let things just happen—make them happen by deciding that they should happen.

Realize you can change. You can change your habits to become a better student. You can change your attitudes and become a more positive, motivated student.

Develop a personal ethical code. Do what is right for you and for others. The college world demands ethical standards and rewards responsible, ethical behavior. Be proud of who you are and your good decisions.

Enjoy your life! Going to college might seem overwhelming at times, but no one is asking you to “give up your life” to succeed in college. Enjoy meeting new people, learning new things, and experiencing the diversity of the college experience. Most college graduates look back on their college years as one of the best periods in their whole lives!

Academic Integrity – The Honest Truth

At college, we focus on the active process of learning, not just on how to get good grades. The attitude of some students that grades are the only thing that matters in academics has led many students to resort to academic dishonesty to try to get the best possible grades or handle the pressure of an academic program. Although you may be further tempted if you've heard people say, “Everybody does it,” or “It's no big deal at my school,” you should be mindful of the consequences of cheating:

- You don't learn as much. Cheating may get you the right answer on a particular exam question, but it won't teach you how to apply knowledge in the world after school, nor will it give you a foundation of knowledge for learning more advanced material. When you cheat, you cheat yourself out of opportunities.
- You risk failing the course or even expulsion from school. Ignorance of the rules is seldom considered a valid defense.
- Cheating causes stress. Fear of getting caught will cause you stress and anxiety; this will get in the way of performing well with the information you do know.
- You're throwing away your money and time. Getting a college education is a big



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investment of money and effort. You're simply not getting your full value when you cheat, because you don't learn as much.

- You are trashing your integrity. Cheating once and getting away with it makes it easier to cheat again, and the more you cheat, the more comfortable you will feel with giving up your integrity in other areas of life—with perhaps even more serious consequences.
- Cheating lowers your self-esteem. If you cheat, you are telling yourself that you are simply not smart enough to handle learning. It also robs you of the feeling of satisfaction from genuine success.

Technology has made it easier to cheat. But be aware that technology has also created ways for professors to easily detect these forms of academic dishonesty. If you feel uneasy about doing something in your college work, trust your instincts. Confirm with the professor that your intended form of research or use of material is acceptable.

Cheating just doesn't pay.

Problem Solving: When Setbacks Happen

Even when you have clear goals and are motivated and focused to achieve them, problems sometimes happen. Accept that they will happen, since inevitably they do for everyone. The difference between those who succeed by solving the problem and moving on and those who get frustrated and give up is partly attitude and partly experience –and knowing how to cope when a problem occurs.

Lots of different kinds of setbacks may happen while you're in college – just as to everyone in life. Here are a few examples:

- A financial crisis
- An illness or injury
- A crisis involving family members or loved ones
- Stress related to frequently feeling you don't have enough time
- Stress related to relationship problems



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Some things happen that we cannot prevent. But many other kinds of problems can be prevented or made less likely to occur.

- You can take steps to stay healthy.
- You can take control of your finances and avoid most financial problems common among college students.
- You can learn how to build successful social relationships and get along better with your professors, with other students, and in personal relationships.
- You can learn time management techniques to ensure you use your time effectively for studying.
- You can learn to do well in your classes with effective reading, notetaking, test-taking, and writing skills for classes.

Preventing the problems that typically keep college students from succeeding is much of what this Guide is all about.

Not all problems can be avoided. Illness or a financial problem can significantly set one back – especially when you’re on a tight schedule and budget. Other problems, such as a social or relationship issue or an academic problem in a certain class, may be more complex and not easily prevented. What then?

First, work to resolve the immediate problem:

1. **Stay motivated and focused.** Don’t let frustration, anxiety, or other negative emotions make the problem worse than it already is.
2. **Analyze the problem to consider all possible solutions.** An unexpected financial setback doesn’t automatically mean you have to drop out of school – not when

alternatives such as student loans, less expensive living arrangements, or other possible solutions may be available. Failing a midterm exam doesn't automatically mean you're going to fail the course – not when you make the effort to determine what went wrong, work with your professor and others on an improved study plan, and use better strategies to prepare for the next test.

3. **Seek help when you need to.** None of us gets through life alone, and it's not a sign of weakness to see your academic advisor or a college counsellor if you have a problem.
4. **When you've developed a plan for resolving the problem, work to follow through.** If it will take a while before the problem is completely solved, track your progress in smaller steps so that you can see you really are succeeding. Every day will move you one step closer to putting it behind you.

After you've solved a problem, be sure to avoid it again in the future:

1. **Be honest with yourself: how did you contribute to the problem?** Sometimes it's obvious: a student who drank heavily at a party the night before a big test failed the exam because he was so hung over he couldn't think straight. Sometimes the source of the problem is not as obvious but may become clearer the more you think about it. Another student did a lot of partying during the term but studied all day before the big test and was well rested and clearheaded at test time but still did poorly; he may not yet have learned good study skills. Another student has frequent colds and other mild illnesses that keep him from doing his best: how much better would he feel if he ate well, got plenty of exercise, and slept enough every night? If you don't honestly explore the factors that led to the problem, it's more likely to happen again.
2. **Take responsibility for your life and your role in what happens to you.** Earlier we talked about people with negative attitudes, who are always blaming others, fate, or "the system" for their problems. It's no coincidence that they keep on having problems. Unless you want to keep having problems, don't keep blaming others.
3. **Taking responsibility doesn't mean being down on yourself.** Failing at something doesn't mean you are a failure. We all fail at something, sometime. Adjust your attitude so you're ready to get back on track and feel happy that you'll never make that mistake again!
4. **Make a plan.** You might still have a problem on that next big test if you don't make an effective study plan and stick to it. You may need to change your behavior in some way, such as learning time management strategies.



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Making Decisions

Much of your college and professional life will be spent solving problems; some will be complex, such as deciding on a career, and require time and effort to come up with a solution. Others will be small, such as deciding what to eat for lunch, and will allow you to make a quick decision based entirely on your own experience. But, in either case, when coming up with the solution and deciding what to do, follow the same basic steps.

- **Define the problem.** Use your analytical skills. What is the real issue? Why is it a problem? What are the root causes? What kinds of outcomes or actions do you expect to generate to solve the problem? What are some of the key characteristics that will make a good choice: Timing? Resources? Availability of tools and materials? For more complex problems, it helps to actually write out the problem and the answers to these questions. Can you clarify your understanding of the problem by using metaphors to illustrate the issue?

- **Narrow the problem.** Many problems are made up of a series of smaller problems, each requiring its own solution. Can you break the problem into different facets? What aspects of the current issue are “noise” that should not be considered in the problem solution? (Use critical thinking to separate facts from opinion in this step.)

• **Generate possible solutions.** List all your options. Use your creative thinking skills in this phase. Did you come up with the second “right” answer, and the third or the fourth? Can any of these answers be combined into a stronger solution? What past or existing solutions can be adapted or combined to solve this problem?

• **Choose the best solution.** Use your critical thinking skills to select the most likely choices. List the pros and cons for each of your selections. How do these lists compare with the requirements you identified when you defined the problem? If you still can’t decide between options, you may want to seek further input trusted friends and family, your professors or college counsellors.



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Contributing to Decision Making

You will be called on to make many decisions in your life. Some will be personal, like what to major in, or whether or not to get married. Other times, you will be making decisions on behalf of others at work or for a volunteer organization. Occasionally, you will be asked for your opinion or experience for decisions others are making.

To be effective in all of these circumstances, it is helpful to understand some principles about decision making.

First, define who is responsible for solving the problem or making the decision. In an organization, this may be someone above or below you on the organization chart but is usually the person who will be responsible for implementing the solution. Deciding on an academic major should be your decision, because you will have to follow the course of study. Deciding on the boundaries of a sales territory would most likely be the sales



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manager who supervises the territories, because he or she will be responsible for producing the results with the combined territories.

Once you define who is responsible for making the decision, **everyone else will fall into one of two roles:** giving input, or in rare cases, approving the decision.

Understanding the role of input is very important for good decisions. Input is sought or given due to experience or expertise, but it is up to the decision maker to weigh the input and decide whether and how to use it. Input should be fact based, or if offering an opinion, it should be clearly stated as such. Finally, once input is given, the person giving the input must support the other's decision, whether or not the input is actually used.

Consider a team working on a project for a science course. The team assigns you the responsibility of analyzing and presenting a large set of complex data. Others on the team will set up the experiment to demonstrate the hypothesis, prepare the class presentation, and write the paper summarizing the results. As you face the data, you go to the team to seek input about the level of detail on the data you should consider for your analysis. The person doing the experiment setup thinks you should be very detailed, because then it will be easy to compare experiment results with the data. However, the person preparing the class presentation wants only high-level data to be considered because that will make for a clearer presentation. If there is not a clear understanding of the decision-making process, each of you may think the decision is yours to make because it influences the output of your work; there will be conflict and frustration on the team. If the decision maker is clearly defined upfront, however, and the input is thoughtfully given and considered, a good decision can be made (perhaps a creative compromise?) and the team can get behind the decision and work together to complete the project.

Finally, there is the approval role in decisions. This is very common in business decisions but often occurs in college work as well (the professor needs to approve the theme of the team project, for example). Approval decisions are usually based on availability of resources, legality, history, or policy.

Key Takeaways

- Every college has policies that students should review and follow. It is vital that you seek out and review the policies in place at your college as early as possible.
- The principle of academic honesty is that every student must do their own work.
- Self management requires you to take control of your life, accept responsibility, make good

decisions and make changes as needed.

- Making good decisions and taking control are ways to prevent problems.
- When problems occur, work through the problem solving steps and consider how to avoid similar problems in the future.
- When making decisions, clearly define the problem before considering various solutions and choose the best solution available.

3. Successful students embrace a diverse community

Successful student use their college experience to meet new people and gain understanding of others' viewpoints. Sometimes, we can have preformed ideas about people who are different than we are and may feel more comfortable with people who are "like" us. However, by starting with being open to getting to know people as individuals, we can break down many barriers and misconceptions. This can help you become a better global citizen as well as better understand the values of multiculturalism that we hold dear in Canadian society. Multiculturalism involves an attitude of respect for the feelings, ideas, behaviors, and experiences of others who differ from oneself in any way.

Learning about different people can help us learn more about ourselves as often our own culture is invisible to us. We may have ideas about what is customary behavior and we may have negative reactions when someone does something different. To prevent or resolve conflicts that may occur in any social interaction, you should maintain an attitude of respect for others, be open minded and willing to compromise, and know how to work together calmly to resolve conflicts.



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As you begin to explore how you are different than others in a respectful way, you begin to understand why you think and behave in certain ways based on your upbringing and past experiences and appreciate that this does not have to be the only way to approach life. Experiencing new ways of thinking, ideas, concepts and values leads to deeper and more

complex thinking and creativity. Diversity on campus is beneficial for all students, not just those from ethnic or minority groups. The wider perspectives of students from different backgrounds and the greater variety of teaching methods help everyone gain more fully in educational experiences. Socially, students develop a more mature worldview and are better prepared for interacting with a diverse world in the future. Students who embrace opportunities to experience diversity have greater satisfaction with their college careers and take a personal responsibility both for broadening their own social world and for speaking out against prejudice and discrimination wherever encountered.

What Diversity Really Means

Ours is a very diverse society and increasingly so. But diversity means much more than a variety of racial and ethnic differences. As we'll use the term here, diversity refers to the great variety of human characteristics, ways that we are different even as we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity.

We'll look first at some of the ways that people differ and explore the benefits of diversity for our society generally and for the college experience. While we should all celebrate diversity, at the same time we need to acknowledge past issues that grew from misunderstandings of such differences and work together to bring change where needed.



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Differences among people may involve where a person was born and raised, the person's

family and cultural group, factual differences in personal identity, and chosen differences in significant beliefs. Some diversity is primarily cultural, other diversity may be biological, and some diversity is defined in personal terms. Diversity generally involves things that may significantly affect some people's perceptions of others, not just any way people happen to be different.

When discussing diversity, it is often difficult to avoid seeming to generalize about different types of people and such generalizations can seem similar to dangerous stereotypes. The following descriptions are meant only to suggest that individuals are different from other individuals in many possible ways and that we can all learn things from people whose ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors are different from our own. This is a primary reason college admissions departments frequently seek diversity in the student body.

Types of Diversity

The following are various aspects of diversity. These are just some of the types of diversity you are likely to encounter on college campuses and in our society generally.

Diversity of race. Race refers to what we generally think of as biological differences and is often defined by what some think of as skin color. Such perceptions are often at least as much social as they are biological.

Diversity of ethnicity. Ethnicity is a cultural distinction that is different from race. An ethnic group is a group of people who share a common identity and a perceived cultural heritage that often involves shared ways of speaking and behaving, religion, traditions, and other traits. Race and ethnicity are sometimes interrelated but not automatically so.

Diversity of cultural background. Culture, like ethnicity, refers to shared characteristics, language, beliefs, behaviors, and identity. We are all influenced by our culture to some extent.

Diversity of educational background. Colleges do not use a cookie-cutter approach to admit only students with identical academic skills. Diversity of educational background helps ensure a free flow of ideas and challenges those who might become set in their ways.

Diversity of geography. People from different places within Canada or the world often have a range of differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviors.

Diversity of socioeconomic background. People's identities are influenced by how they grow up, and part of that background often involves socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic diversity can contribute a wide variety of ideas and attitudes.

Diversity of gender roles. Women have virtually all professional and social roles, including those once dominated by men, and men have taken on many roles, such as raising a child, that were formerly occupied mostly by women. These changing roles have brought diverse new ideas and attitudes to college campuses.

Diversity of age. While younger students attending college immediately after high school are generally within the same age range, older students returning to school bring a diversity of age. Because they often have broader life experiences, many older students bring different ideas and attitudes to the campus.

Diversity of sexual orientation. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and two spirited make up a significant percentage of people in Canadian society and students on college campuses. Exposure to this diversity helps others overcome stereotypes and become more accepting of human differences.

Diversity of religion. For many people, religion is not just a weekly practice but a larger spiritual force that infuses their lives. Religion helps shape different ways of thinking and behaving, and thus diversity of religion brings a wider benefit of diversity to college.

Diversity of political views. A diversity of political views helps broaden the level of discourse on campuses concerning current events and the roles of government and leadership at all levels. College students are frequently concerned about issues such as environmentalism and civil rights and can help bring about change.

Diversity of physical ability. Some students have athletic talents. Some students have physical disabilities. Physical differences among students brings yet another kind of diversity to colleges, a diversity that both widens opportunities for a college education and also helps all students better understand how people relate to the world in physical as well as intellectual ways.

Diversity of extracurricular abilities. Students participate in a wide variety of activities outside of class: clubs, activities, abilities in music and the arts, and so on. A student body with diverse interests and skills benefits all students by helping make the college experience full and enriching at all levels.



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Diversity Thought Activity

Part 1

Activity: Challenge Your Thinking

Read each of the following scenarios quickly and respond immediately without stopping to think. There are no right or wrong answers.

Scenario 1. You are walking home down a dark sidewalk when ahead you see three people standing around. Something about the way they are hanging out makes you a little frightened to walk past them.

- Be honest with yourself: what did you just imagine these people looked like?
- Why do think you might have associated this particular mental picture with the emotion of feeling frightened?

Scenario 2. In a café on campus, you see a student from another country sitting alone—someone you know casually from a class—and you walk over and are just about to ask if you can join him, when two other students also from his country appear and sit down with him.

- You hesitate. Would you have hesitated if this person had the same cultural background as you? What makes this situation different?
- As you hesitate, you overhear them conversing in a language other than English. Be honest with yourself: how does that make you feel now?

Scenario 3. A couple you know invites you to join them and one of their friends, whom you have not met, on a “double date”—a movie and dinner after. When you meet them outside the theater, you see that their friend, your date, is of a race different from your own.

- Are you surprised or shocked? What is your first reaction?
- Do you anticipate any more difficulty making conversation with your date than with anyone else whom you have just met?
- Should your friends have told you in advance? Why or why not?
- If they had told you, would that have made any difference?

Part 2

Now think for a minute about how you responded in these scenarios.

- Did your mental image in the first scenario involve a negative stereotype? What images in the media or society might have contributed to that response?
- The second and third scenarios involve simple situations in which you couldn't help but note some difference between you and another person. What might you feel in such situations in real life?
- Again, there is no “right” answer, and an awareness of differences is normal and natural even if it may cause some discomfort at first. On the other hand, if you have had significant experiences with diverse others, you might have read these scenarios and simply wondered, “So what? What's the big deal?” It's worthwhile thinking about what that means.

Don't try to ignore differences among people. Some people try so hard to avoid stereotyping that they go to the other extreme and try to avoid seeing any differences at all among people. But as we have seen throughout this module, people are different in many ways, and we should accept that if we are to experience the benefits of diversity.

Don't apply any group generalizations to individuals. As an extension of not stereotyping any group, also don't think of any individual person in terms of group characteristics. People are individuals first, members of a group second, and any given generalization simply may not apply to an individual. Be open minded and treat everyone with respect as an individual with their own ideas, attitudes, and preferences.

Develop cultural sensitivity for communication. Realize that your words may not mean quite the same thing in different cultural contexts or to individuals from different backgrounds. This is particularly true of slang words, which you should generally avoid until you are sure the other person will know what you mean. Never try to use slang or expressions you think are common in the cultural group of the person you are speaking with. Similarly, since body language often varies among different cultures, avoid strong gestures and expressions until the responses of the other person signify he or she will not misinterpret the messages sent by your body language.

Take advantage of campus opportunities to increase your cultural awareness. There are multiculturalism special events, cultural fairs and celebrations, concerts, and other programs held frequently on campus.



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The Benefits of Diversity

The goal of many college admissions departments is to attract diverse students from a broad range of backgrounds involving different cultural, socioeconomic, age, and other factors—everything in the preceding list. But why is diversity so important?

There are many reasons:

* Experiencing diversity at college prepares students for the diversity they will encounter the rest of their lives. Learning to understand and accept people different from ourselves is very important in our world.

* Students learn better in a diverse educational setting. Encountering new concepts, values, and behaviors leads to



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thinking in deeper, more complex, and more creative ways, rather than furthering past ideas and attitudes.

- * Experiencing diversity on campus is beneficial for all students. Students have more fulfilling social relationships and report more satisfaction and involvement with their college experience.

- * Diversity experiences help break the patterns of segregation and prejudice that have characterized North American history. Discrimination against others, whether by race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or anything else, is rooted in ignorance and sometimes fear of people who are different. Getting to know people who are different is the first step in accepting those differences, furthering the goal of a society free of all forms of prejudice and the unfair treatment of people.

- * Students of a traditional college age (early 20's) are in an ideal stage of development for forming healthy attitudes about diversity. The college years are a time of growth and maturation intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and a sustained experience of diversity is an opportunity to heighten this process.

- * Experiencing diversity makes us all better citizens in our democracy. When people can better understand and consider the ideas and perspectives of others, they are better equipped to participate meaningfully in our society.

- * Diversity enhances self-awareness. We gain insights into our own thought processes, life experiences, and values as we learn from people whose backgrounds and experiences are different from our own.

A word about multiculturalism

More than anything, multiculturalism is an attitude. Multiculturalism involves accepting and respecting the ideas, feelings, behaviors, and experiences of people different from oneself—all the forms of diversity described earlier. Canada is not actually a “melting pot” in the sense that people from diverse backgrounds somehow all become the same. Canada has always included a great diversity of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. People of diverse religious backgrounds are not expected to “melt” together into one religion. Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the equal rights of all people regardless of skin color, gender, age, and other differences—including, equality under the law for those with diverse sexual orientation.



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Getting Along With Others

Interdependence

Humans are social creatures—it’s simply in our nature. We continually interact with other students and professors, and we can learn a great deal from these interactions that heighten the learning process. This frequent interaction with others forms a state of interdependence. College students depend on their professors, but just as importantly, they depend on other students in many ways.

As important as our interactions with others are, we do not automatically possess the skills that help us form good relationships and make the most of our experiences.

Consider how these two college students are different:

John often arrives just as class is beginning and leaves immediately afterward. He makes little effort to talk with other students in the classroom, and after class he goes off to study alone or to his part-time job, where he spends most of his time at a computer screen. He is diligent in his studies and generally does well. After two months, he has not gotten to know his roommate very well, and he generally eats alone with a book in hand. He stops by to see his professors in their offices only if he missed a class due to illness, and on weekends and holidays he often hangs out at his parents’ house or sees old friends.



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Kim likes to get to class early and sits near others so they can talk about the reading for class or compare notes about assignments. She enjoys running into other students she knows from her classes and usually stops to chat. Although she is an older working student who lives alone off campus, she often dines in a campus café and asks students she meets in her classes to join her. After two months, with the approach of midterms, she formed a study group with a couple other

students. If she feels she doesn't understand an important lecture topic very well, she gets to her professor's office a few minutes ahead of office hours to avoid missing out by having to wait in line. A few weeks into the term, she spent a weekend with a student from another country and learned much about a culture about which she had previously known little.

These students are very different. Which do you think is more fully enjoying the college experience? Which do you think is more likely to do well academically? Most of us fall somewhere between these two extremes, but we can learn to be more like Kim and more actively engage with others.

Recognize the Value of Social Interaction

Building good relationships is important for happiness and a successful college experience. College offers the opportunity to meet many people you would likely not meet otherwise in life.

Make the most of this opportunity to gain a number of benefits:

- A growing understanding of diverse other people, how they think, and what they feel that will serve you well throughout your life and in your future career
- A heightened sense of your own identity, especially as you interact with others with different personalities and from different backgrounds
- Emotional comfort from friendship with someone who understands you and with whom you can talk about your problems, joys, hopes, and fears
- An opportunity to grow with wider intellectual and emotional horizons, college often offers an opportunity to be stimulated and excited by new relationships and interactions with people who will challenge your thinking and help you become your

best. Still, it can be difficult to get started with new relationships in college.

Making New Friends

Some people just make friends naturally, but many first-year college students are more shy or quiet and may need to actively seek new friends. Here are some starting points:

1. Keep all doors open for meeting new people. Try to sit with different people at meals so you can get to know them better. Study in a common area or lounge where you'll be among others.
2. Be open in your interests. Don't limit yourself to people who share only certain interests. Meeting people by studying together is an excellent way to get to know people with different interests.
3. Don't try to get involved in everything going on around you. Committing to too many activities or joining too many social groups will spread your time too thin, and you may not spend enough time with anyone to get to know them.
4. Let others see who you really are. Let people get to know the things you're interested in, your real passions. People who really know you are more likely to become good friends.
5. Make an effort to get to know others, too. Show some interest. Don't talk just about your interests—ask them about theirs. Show others that you're interested, that you think they're worth spending time with, and that you really do want to get to know them.
6. Once a friendship has started, be a good friend. Respect your friends for what they are and don't criticize them or talk about them behind their back. Give emotional support when your friends need it and accept their support as well when you need it.

Are You Shy?

If you're shy, try meeting and talking to people in situations where you can interact one-to-one, such as talking with another student after class. Start with what you have in common—"How'd you do on the test?"—and let the conversation grow from there. Avoid the emotional trap of thinking everyone but you is making new friends and start some conversations with others who look interesting to you. You'll soon find other "shy" or quiet people eager

to interact with you as well and get to know you. Shy people may be more likely to feel lonely at times, especially while still feeling new at college. Loneliness is usually a temporary emotional state, however.

Managing Conflicts

Conflicts among people who are interacting are natural. People have many differences in opinions, ideas, emotions, and behaviors, and these differences sometimes cause conflicts. So how can such conflicts be resolved?

Two things are necessary for conflict resolution that does not leave one or more of the people involved feeling negative about the outcome: attitude and communication.

A conflict cannot be resolved satisfactorily unless all people involved have the right attitude:

- Respect the opinions and behaviors of others. Accept that people are not all alike and learn to celebrate your differences. Most situations do not involve a single right or wrong answer.
- Be open minded. Just because at first you are sure that that you are right, do not close the door to other possibilities. Look at the other's point of view. Be open to change—even when that means accepting constructive criticism.
- Calm down. You can't work together to resolve a conflict while you're still feeling strong emotions. Agree with the other to wait until you're both able to discuss it without strong emotions.
- Recognize the value of compromise. Even if you disagree after calmly talking over an issue, accept that as a human reality and understand that a compromise may be necessary in order to get along with others.



Image by geralt on Pixabay.

With the right attitude, you can then work together to resolve the issue. This process depends on good communication:

- Listen. Don't simply argue for your position, but listen carefully to what the other says. Pay attention to their body language as you try to understand their point of view and ask questions to ensure that you do. Paraphrase what you think you hear to give the other a chance to correct any misunderstanding.
- Use "I statements" rather than "you statements." Explain your point of view about the situation in a way that does not put the other person on the defensive and evoke emotions that make resolution more difficult. Don't blame the other for the problem, that would just get emotions flowing again.

In most cases, when the people involved have a good attitude and are open to compromise, conflicts can be resolved successfully.

Yet sometimes there seems to be no resolution. Sometimes the other person may simply be difficult and refuse to even try to work out a solution. Regrettably, not everyone on or off campus is mature enough to be open to other perspectives.

With some interpersonal conflicts, you may simply have to decide not to see that person anymore or find other ways to avoid the conflict in the future. But remember, most conflicts can be solved among adults, and it's seldom a good solution to run away from a problem that will continue to surface and keep you from being happy with your life.

Steps to follow

In any friendship or relationship, conflict will eventually happen. This is just natural because people are different. If a conflict is ignored, or the partners just argue without resolving it, it may simmer and continue to cause tension, eventually weakening the relationship. It's better to take steps to resolve it. Conflict resolution is a process of understanding what's really going on and then finding a solution. The same general steps of conflict resolution can work to solve a relationship conflict or a conflict between any people or groups because of a disagreement about anything. Following are the general principles of conflict resolution:

- Allow things to cool off. It's difficult to resolve a conflict while either party is still emotional. Wait a few minutes or agree to talk about it later.
- Using "I statements" rather than "you statements," each party explains what bothers him or her about the cause of the conflict. "You statements" put the other person on the defensive and evoke emotions that make resolution more difficult.
- Listen carefully to what the other person says. Then restate the message in your own words to give the other a chance to clarify their thoughts and feelings. Each party

know it if you are harassed, and you should know also that it is your basic right to be free of harassment and that all colleges lay out strict policies against all forms of harassment.

Here's what you should do if you are being harassed:

1. Tell the person to stop the behavior or if you feel at any risk of harm, get out of the situation immediately.
2. Document the incident, particularly with ongoing harassment. Keep notes of the details. Tell someone you trust about the situation.
3. Report the harassment to the appropriate college authority. If you are unsure which to go to, go to the Campus Hearing Officer.

Take a Stand against Prejudice and Hate

Unfortunately prejudice and hate still exist in Canada, even on college campuses. In addition to racial prejudice, some people are also prejudiced against women, people with disabilities, older adults, gays and lesbians – virtually all groups that can be characterized as “different.” But it is not enough for only college administrators to fight prejudice and hate – this is a responsibility for all good citizens who take seriously the shared Canadian value of equality for all people.

So what can you as a college student do?

Decide that it does matter. Prejudice threatens us all, not just the particular group being discriminated against in a specific incident. Don't stand on the sidelines or think it's up to the people who may be victimized by prejudice or hate to do something about it. We can all do something.

Talk with others. Communication has great value on campuses. Let others know how you feel about any acts of prejudice or hatred that you witness. The more everyone openly condemns such behavior, the less likely it is to reappear in the future. This applies even if you hear another student telling a racist joke or putting down the opposite sex—speak up and tell the person you find such statements offensive. You don't want that person to think you agree with them. Speaking up can be difficult to do, but it can be done tactfully.



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Be a good citizen. People can and do learn what is acceptable in a diverse environment. Report incidents you observe. If you happen to see someone spray-painting a hateful slogan, for example, be a good citizen and report it to the campus security or the police.

Support student groups working for change. Canada has a great tradition of college students banding together to help solve social problems. Show your support for groups and activities that celebrate diversity and condemn prejudice. Even if you are a shy, quiet person, your attendance at a parade or gathering lends support. Once you become aware of such student activities on campus, you'll find many ways you can help take a stand.

Celebrate diversity. In many ways, you can learn more about diversity through campus programs and activities. The more all students participate, the closer the campus will come to being free of prejudice and hate.

Be a role model in how you act and what you say in relation to diversity, and you may have more effect on others than you realize.

Key Takeaways

- Experiencing new people at college prepares you for the diversity of every day life and helps gain understanding of others' viewpoints
- Diversity on campus is beneficial for all students, not just ethnic or minority groups because students learn better in a diverse educational setting.
- Understanding the value of social interaction and building good relationships regardless of background can lead to greater self awareness and a richer social life.

4. Successful students go to class

There is just no better way to be successful than to go to class. Plan to be at every single class. It is in class that you will receive the direction and guidance you need to be successful. By attending every class, you will not miss important material, you will also think more clearly about course topics and be better prepared for tests. You will also benefit in many ways from class interaction, including becoming more actively engaging in learning, developing a network with other students, and forming a relationship with the professor.



Photo by The Climate Reality Project on Unsplash

You will not be able to rely only on notes from your professors' lectures. You will be responsible for material beyond what is presented in class as most lectures and activities are intended to highlight important material but not cover it in depth. You should prepare for class by keeping up with required readings and completing self-study between classes on the materials covered. There is an expectation that you will also bring your questions to class and participate in discussions and activities to confirm and deepen your understanding. Being in class and participating in class will help you build your knowledge base, ensure you are study the right materials and will reduce stress and reduce confusion.

It is important to understand your personal learning strengths and use it well in classes, while also making the effort to learn in new ways and work with other students for a more effective overall learning experience. If your learning preferences do not match the professor's teaching style, adapt your learning strategies and study with other students to stay actively engaged. It is up to you to make the most of your class time.

The Importance Of Going To Class

Make it your goal to attend every class—don't even think about not going.

Going to class is the first step in engaging in your education by interacting with the professor and other students. Here are some reasons why it's important to attend every class:

- Miss a class and you'll miss something, even if you never know it. Even if a friend gives you notes for the class, they cannot contain everything said or shown by the professor, written on the board for emphasis, questioned or commented on by other students. What you miss might affect your grade or your enthusiasm for the course.
- While some students may say that you don't have to go to every class to do well on a test; that is very often a myth. Do you want to take that risk?
- Your final grade often reflects how you think about course concepts, and you will think more often and more clearly when engaged in class discussions and hearing the comments of other students. You can't get this by borrowing class notes from a friend.
- Research shows there is a correlation between absences from class and lower grades. It may be that missing classes causes lower grades or that students with lower grades miss more classes. Either way, missing classes and lower grades can be intertwined in a downward spiral of achievement.
- Your professor will note your absences—even in a large class. In addition to making a poor impression, you reduce your opportunities for future interactions. You might not ask a question the next class because of the potential embarrassment of the professor saying that was covered in the last class, which you apparently missed. Nothing is more insulting to a professor than when you skip a class and then show up to ask, "Did I miss anything important?"
- You might be tempted to skip a class because the professor is "boring," but it's more likely that you found the class boring because you weren't very attentive or didn't appreciate how the professor was teaching.
- You paid a lot of money for your tuition. Get your money's worth!



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Professor's Teaching Style versus Your Learning Strengths

Most professors tend to develop their own teaching style and you will encounter different teaching styles in different courses. When the professor's teaching style matches your learning strengths, you are usually more attentive in class and may seem to learn better. But what happens if your professor has a style very different from your own?



Photo by Tra Nguyen on Unsplash

Let's say, for example, that your professor primarily lectures, speaks rapidly, and seldom uses visuals. This professor also talks mostly on the level of large abstract ideas and almost never gives examples. Let's say that you, in contrast, are more a visual learner, that you learn more effectively with visual aids and visualizing concrete examples of ideas. Therefore, perhaps you are having some difficulty paying attention in class and following the lectures.

What can you do?

- Capitalize on your learning strengths. For example, you could use a visual style of note taking, such as concept maps, while listening to the lecture. If the professor does not give examples for abstract ideas in the lecture, see if you can supply examples in your

own thoughts as you listen.

- Form a study group with other students. A variety of students will likely involve a variety of learning strengths, and when going over course material with other students, such as when studying for a test, you can gain what they have learned through their styles while you contribute what you have learned through yours.
- Use ancillary study materials. Many textbooks point students to online resource centers or you can search the internet for additional learning materials. Such ancillary materials usually offer an opportunity to review course material in ways that may better fit your learning strengths.
- Communicate with your professor to bridge the gap between their teaching style and your learning strengths. If the professor is speaking in abstractions and general ideas you don't understand, ask the professor for an example.

Finally, take heart that a mismatch between a student's learning strengths and a professor's teaching style is not correlated with lower grades.

The Value of Interaction in Class

As noted earlier, there are many good reasons to attend every class. But it's not enough just to be there, you need to interact with the professor and other students to enjoy a full educational experience.

Participating in class discussions is a good way to start meeting other students with whom you share an interest. You may form a study group, borrow class notes if you miss a class, or team up with other students on a group project. You may meet students with whom you form a lasting relationship, developing your network of contacts for other benefits in the future, such as learning about internships or jobs.

Asking the professor questions, answering the professor's questions in class, and responding to other students' comments is a good way to make an impression on your professor. The professor will remember you as an engaged student—and this matters if you later need extra help or even a potential mentor.

Paying close attention and thinking critically about what a professor is saying can dramatically improve your enjoyment of the class. You'll notice things you'd miss if you're feeling bored and may discover your professor is much more interesting than you first thought.

Students actively engaged in their class learn more and thus get better grades. When you

Speak out in class and answer the professor's questions, you are more likely to remember the discussion.

Participating in Class – Preparing

Smaller classes generally favor discussion, but often professors in large lecture classes also make some room for participation. A concern or fear about speaking in public is one of the most common fears. If you feel afraid to speak out in class, take comfort from the fact that many others do as well and that anyone can learn how to speak in class without much difficulty. Class participation is actually an impromptu, informal type of public speaking, and the same principles will get you through both: preparing and communicating.

- Set yourself up for success by coming to class fully prepared. Complete reading assignments. Review your notes on the reading and previous class to get yourself in the right mind-set. If there is something you don't understand well, start formulating your question now.

- Sit where you can have a good view of the professor, board or screen, and other visual aids. In a lecture hall, this will help you hear better, pay better attention, and make a good impression on the professor. Don't sit with friends—socializing isn't what you're there for.

- Remember that your body language communicates as much as anything you say. Sit up and look alert, with a pleasant expression on your face, and make good eye contact with the professor. Show some enthusiasm.

- Pay attention to the professor's body language, which can communicate much more than just their words. How the professor moves and gestures, and the looks on their face, will add meaning to the words and will also cue you when it's a good time to ask a question or stay silent.

- Pay attention to the professor's thinking style. Does this professor emphasize theory more than facts, wide perspectives over specific ideas, abstractions more than concrete experience? Take a cue from your professor's approach and try to think in similar terms when participating in class.

- Take good notes, but don't write obsessively and never page through your textbook (or browse on a laptop). Don't eat or play with your cell phone. Except when writing brief notes, keep your eyes on the professor.

Participating in Class – Communicating

How you communicate in class can be as important as the content you want to convey:

- Pay attention to your communication style. Use standard English when you ask or answer a question, not slang. Avoid sarcasm and joking around. Be assertive when you participate in class, showing confidence in your ideas while being respectful of the ideas of others, but avoid an aggressive style that attacks the ideas of others or is strongly emotional.
- Follow class protocol for making comments and asking questions. In a small class, the professor may encourage students to ask questions at any time, while in some large lecture classes the professor may ask for questions at the end of the lecture. In this case, jot your questions in your notes so that you don't forget them later.
- Don't say or ask anything just to try to impress your professor. Most professors have been teaching long enough to immediately recognize insincere flattery—and the impression this makes is just the opposite of what you want.
- It's fine to disagree with your professor when you ask or answer a question. Many professors invite challenges. Before speaking up, however, be sure you can explain why you disagree and give supporting evidence or reasons. Be respectful.

Questions in Class



Image by geralt on Pixabay.

When your professor asks a question to the class:

- Raise your hand and make eye contact, but don't call out or wave your hand all around trying to catch their attention.
- Before speaking, take a moment to gather your thoughts and take a deep breath. Don't just blurt it out—speak calmly and clearly.

When your professor asks you a question directly:

- Be honest and admit it if you don't know the answer or are not sure. Don't try to fake it or make excuses. With a question that involves a reasoned opinion more than a fact, it's fine to explain why you haven't decided yet, such as when weighing two opposing ideas or actions; your comment may stimulate further discussion.
- Organize your thoughts to give a sufficient answer. Professors seldom want a yes or no answer. Give your answer and provide reasons or evidence in support.

When you want to ask the professor a question:

- Don't ever feel a question is "stupid." If you have been paying attention in class and have done the reading and you still don't understand something, you have every right to ask.
- Ask at the appropriate time. Don't interrupt the professor or jump ahead and ask a question about something the professor may be starting to explain. Wait for a natural pause and a good moment to ask. On the other hand, unless the professor asks students to hold all question until the end of class, don't let too much time go by, or you may forget the question or its relevance to the topic.
- Don't ask just because you weren't paying attention. If you drift off during the first half of class and then realize in the second half that you don't really understand what the professor is talking about now, don't ask a question about something that was already covered.
- Don't ask a question that is really a complaint. You may be thinking, "Why would so-and-so believe that? That's just crazy!" Take a moment to think about what you might gain from asking the question. It's better to say, "I'm having some difficulty understanding what so-and-so is saying here. What evidence did he use to argue for that position?"
- Avoid dominating a discussion. It may be appropriate in some cases to make a follow-up comment after the professor answers your question, but don't try to turn the class into a one-on-one conversation between you and the professor.



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Online Courses

Most colleges now offer some online courses or regular courses with an online component. You experience an online course via a computer rather than a classroom. Many different variations exist, but all online courses share certain characteristics, such as working independently and communicating with the professor (and sometimes other students) primarily through written computer messages. If you have never taken an online course, carefully consider what's involved to ensure you will succeed in the course.



Image by mohamed Hassan from Pixabay

Online courses have a number of practical benefits but also pose special issues, primarily related to how students interact with other students and the professor. Some online courses do involve “face time” or live audio connections with the professor and other students, via Webcasts or Webinars, but many are self-paced and asynchronous, meaning that you experience the course on your own time and communicate with others via messages back and forth rather than

communicating in real time. All online courses include opportunities for interacting with the professor, typically through e-mail or a bulletin board where you may see comments and questions from other students as well.

Many educators argue that online courses can involve more interaction between students and the professor than in a large lecture class, not less. But two important differences affect how that interaction occurs and how successful it is for engaging students in learning. Most communication is written, with no or limited opportunity to ask questions face to face or during office hours, and students must take the initiative to interact beyond the requirements of online assignments.

Many students enjoy online courses, in part for the practical benefit of scheduling your

own time. Some students who are reluctant to speak in class communicate more easily in writing. But other students may have less confidence in their writing skills or may never initiate interaction at all and end up feeling lost. Depending on your learning strengths, an online course may feel natural to you (if you learn well independently and through language skills) or more difficult (if you are a more visual or kinesthetic learner). Online courses have higher drop-out and failure rates due to some students feeling isolated and unmotivated.

Success in an online course requires commitment and motivation. Follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you have the technology. If you're not comfortable reading and writing on a computer, don't rush into an online course. If you have limited access to a computer or high-speed Internet connection, or have to arrange your schedule to use a computer elsewhere, you may have difficulty with the course.
- Accept that you'll have to motivate yourself and take responsibility for your learning. It's actually harder for some people to sit down at the computer on their own than to show up at a set time. Be sure you have enough time in your week for all course activities and try to schedule regular times online and for assignments. Evaluate the course requirements carefully before signing up.
- Work on your writing skills. If you are not comfortable writing, you may want to defer taking online courses until you have had more experience with college-level writing. When communicating with the professor of an online course, follow the guidelines for effective e-mail outlined elsewhere in this text.
- Use critical thinking skills. Most online courses involve assignments requiring problem solving and critical thinking. It's not as simple as watching video lectures and taking multiple-choice tests. You need to actively engage with the course material.
- Take the initiative to ask questions and seek help. Remember, your professor can't see you to know if you're confused or feeling frustrated understanding a lecture or reading. You must take the first step to communicate your questions.
- Be patient. When you ask a question or seek help with an assignment, you have to wait for a reply from your professor. You may need to continue with a reading or writing assignment before you receive a reply. If the professor is online at scheduled times for direct contact, take advantage of those times for immediate feedback and answers.
- Use any opportunity to interact with other students in the course. If you can interact with other students online, do it. Ask questions of other students and monitor their communications. If you know another person taking the same course, try to synchronize your schedules so that you can study together and talk over assignments. Students who feel they are part of a learning community always do better than those

who feel isolated and on their own.

Key Takeaways

- Attend and participate in every class.
- Your professor's teaching style may not fit your learning strengths, it is up to you to adapt.
- Participating in class is a good way to meet other students, impress your professor, improve your enjoyment and increase your engagement; this leads to more learning and better grades.
- Speaking up in class can be a concern for some students. By being prepared for class, paying attention to class protocols and asking and responding to questions, you can become more comfortable participating in class.
- Online courses require you to motivate yourself to remain involved and up to date. Maintaining regular contact and participating in discussions is just as important in online courses.

5. Successful students ask for help

Always remember that your college staff and faculty want you to succeed. That means that if you are having any difficulties or have any questions, there are college resources available to help you get assistance or find answers. This is true of both academic and personal issues that could potentially disrupt your college experience. Never hesitate to go looking for help or information—but realize that usually you have to take the first step. Asking for help requires two things, self-awareness skills and self-advocacy. Self-awareness is an understanding of your particular strengths and weakness and an awareness of when you need help. Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself and to ask for help when you need it. So self-awareness is recognizing that you need help and self-advocacy is asking for it.

Successful students recognize that they do not need to do this all alone. There are two important groups on campus available to you as a student, your professors and Student Services. Talking with your professors is your best first step for most issues. Your professor may recommend you contact Student Services or Campus Services for additional support. Successful students find out about the different services that are available at the college early in the semester, even before they need services so that when something does happen, they can access support because they already know what is available. Having an idea of what is available really helps when something goes wrong because you don't then have to figure out what might be possible when you are already in crisis or panic mode.



Photo by Nik MacMillan on Unsplash

Student Services are in place because colleges know that students benefit from having

support at different points in their college career. It is expected and accepted that students will use services as needed. In some cultures, asking for help or accepting help can be seen as a sign of weakness; in college culture, if you have questions or have difficulties that impact your learning, NOT seeking help is seen as a weakness. Take the example of tutoring. Tutoring is a service used by students who are doing quite well in their studies as a way to confirm their learning and understanding. It is also used as a support to students who are having difficulty in understand some aspect of their course materials. Using tutoring is not a sign of weakness but is seen as a smart move on your part.



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Student Services and Campus Services

All colleges provide a variety of supports to students during their college careers. Student Services and Campus Services are available on campus to provide academic and out of class services geared to supporting students' success and retention. The names may be different at your college but the purpose of services will be similar. Read on to learn more about typical services available at Ontario Colleges:

Student Services

These services can be accessed through the Student Services Department on your campus:

Accessibility Services

Accessibility Services provides equal access to educational resources and an optimal learning environment for all students with disabilities, both temporary and permanent, with valid supporting documentation. Colleges give all Human Rights Code-related requests for accommodation meaningful consideration.



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Generally, the student is responsible to meet with a counsellor in Accessibility Services to discuss their functional limitations and accommodation needs and provide Accessibility Services with supporting documentation. Students are not required under the Ontario Human Rights Code to disclose their disability diagnosis (with the exception of Learning Disabilities) to receive accessibility supports and services and/or academic accommodations. Students are encouraged to meet with a counsellor prior to the start of a semester to provide information and arrange accommodations.

Counselling Services

Counsellors assist students in adjusting to the demands of college life by helping them with academic planning, stress management, problem solving, and career and educational planning. All counselling is voluntary, may be by appointment or drop-in, easily arranged and confidential.

Academic Counselling/Advising – Counsellors provide guidance to plan program coursework, select electives, or deal with academic challenges. Students can explore options and gather information on how to become a more effective learner.

Stress Management and Problem Solving – When stress and pressure of school or life affect a student's ability to cope with their program, counsellors provide short-term support to develop coping strategies, problem solving, and decision making skills. Community referrals may be made.

Career and Educational Planning – Through exploration and assessments, counsellors assist students with career decision-making and developing a personal educational plan.

Indigenous Services

Most, if not all, colleges provide students a centre and services that provide a culturally

based support system to its First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) student population. The centre is a place where FNMI students are welcome to gather, study, access computers and socialize. Counselling and Advisor services are usually available to assist current and prospective students in the areas of individual, academic, personal and social support.

Library Resource Centres

The Library Resource Centre supports teaching and learning by providing students with the information resources they need. Discover scholarly articles, eBooks, and streaming video that will help you with your studies.

On campus, the library generally offers print collections, group student spaces, a computer lab, and a quiet study environment. Library staff offer support to students to develop their information and research skills.

Research assistance is available in person or by phone, and often by email, text, or online chat.



Photo by Paul Schafer on Unsplash

Tutoring Services

Tutoring services are often available to enrolled students who need assistance to improve academic performance. Services may include one-on-one peer tutoring, walk-in services and groups. Peer Tutors can provide one-on-one help with course content, and pass along useful study strategies, but they will not do a student's homework or assignments. Walk In offers brief tutoring assistance by faculty and senior tutors in Math and English as well as other core subjects. Group tutoring provides an effective setting for students to learn from each other with the assistance of a peer or faculty facilitator.

Campus Services

Campus Bookstore

The Campus Bookstore serves the needs of the College community for required and supplemental textbooks and supplies. In addition, the Campus Bookstore Store often has a line of school supplies and a variety of convenience items.

Health Services

Most college campuses have a health centre where medical professionals provide first aid

and primary health care services to all staff and students. The Health Centre may also be able to assist with pre-placement health clearance needs.

Financial Aid

The Financial Aid Office administers the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), as well as the College's Tuition Bursaries, Entrance Awards, Scholarships, and many other external awards available through the community. Your application to OSAP may also qualify you for assistance through government grants and other funding sources. The Financial Aid Office also administers applications for Work Study Programs for jobs on campus. Work Study Programs provide employment opportunities to domestic full-time post-secondary students with a demonstrated financial need.

Registrar's Office

The Registrar's Office (sometimes called Registration) serves all current and potential students, from the initial application to a College program, through to your graduation, and beyond. Here are some of the ways the Registrar's Office can assist:

- Application to a program
- Admissions information
- Registration to a program or to part-time studies
- Student fees and billings
- Academic grades
- Academic transcripts
- Education tax receipts (T2202As)
- Letters of enrollment
- Convocation
- General information



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Talking With Your Professors

College students are sometimes surprised to discover that professors like students and

enjoy getting to know them. The human dimension of college really matters, and as a student you are an important part of your professor's world. Most professors are happy to see you during their office hours or to talk a few minutes after class.

Active participation in learning is a key to student success. Talking with your professors often leads to benefits beyond simply doing well in that class.

- Talking with professors helps you feel more comfortable in college and more connected to the campus. Students who talk to their professors are less likely to become disillusioned and drop out.
- Talking with professors is a valuable way to learn about an academic field or a career.
- You may need a reference or letter of recommendation for a job or internship application. Getting to know some of your professors puts you in an ideal position to ask for a letter of recommendation or a reference in the future when you need one.
- Because professors are often well connected within their field, they may know of a job, internship, or research possibility you otherwise may not learn about. A professor who knows you is a valuable part of your network. Networking is very important for future job searches and other opportunities. In fact, most jobs are found through networking, not through classified ads or online job postings.
- Think about what it truly means to be **educated**: how one thinks, understands society and the world, and responds to problems and new situations. Much of this learning occurs outside the classroom. Talking with your highly educated professors can be among your most meaningful experiences in college.



Photo by The Ear Depot on Unsplash

Guidelines for Communicating with Professors

Getting along with professors and communicating well begins with attitude. As experts in their field, they deserve your respect. Remember that a college education is a collaborative process that works best when students and professors communicate freely in an exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives. So while you should respect your professors, you

shouldn't fear them. As you get to know them better, you'll learn their personalities and find appropriate ways to communicate.

Here are some guidelines for getting along with and communicating with your professors:

- **Prepare before going to the professor's office.** Go over your notes on readings and lectures and write down your specific questions. You'll feel more comfortable, and the professor will appreciate your being organized.
- **Don't forget to introduce yourself.** Especially near the beginning of the term, don't assume your professor has learned everyone's names yet and don't make him or her have to ask you.
- **Respect the professor's time.** In addition to teaching, college professors sit on committees, do research and other professional work, and have personal lives. Don't show up two minutes before the end of an office hour and expect the professor to stay late to talk with you.
- **Realize that the professor will recognize you from class** – even in a large lecture hall. If you spent a lecture class joking around with friends in the back row, don't think you can show up during office hours to find out what you missed while you weren't paying attention.
- **Don't try to fool a professor.** Insincere praise or making excuses for not doing an assignment won't make it in college. To earn your professor's respect, come to class prepared, do the work, participate genuinely in class, and show respect—and the professor will be happy to see you when you come to office hours or need some extra help.
- **Try to see things from the professor's point of view.** Imagine that you spent a couple of hours preparing PowerPoint slides and a class lecture on something you find very stimulating and exciting. Standing in front of a full room, you are gratified to see faces smiling and heads nodding as people understand what you're saying – they really get it! And then a student after class asks, "Is this going to be on the test?" How would you feel?
- **Be professional when talking to a professor.** You can be cordial and friendly, but keep it professional and on an adult level. Come to office hours prepared with your questions – not just to chat or joke around. Be prepared to accept criticism in a professional way, without taking it personally or complaining.
- **Use your best communication skills.** Learn the difference between assertive communication and passive or aggressive communication.

Tips for Success: Talking with Professors

- When you have a question, ask it sooner rather than later.
- Be prepared and plan your questions and comments in advance.
- Be respectful but personable and communicate professionally.
- Be open minded and ready to learn. Avoid whining and complaining.
- There is no such thing as a “stupid question.”



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Resolving a Problem with Your Professor

The most common issue students experience with a professor involves receiving a grade lower than they think they deserve – especially new students not yet used to the higher standards of college. It’s depressing to get a low grade, but it’s not the end of the world. Don’t be too hard on yourself – or on the professor.



Photo by NeONBRAND on Unsplash

Take a good look at what happened on the test or paper and make sure you know what to do better next time. Review the chapters on studying habits, time management, and taking tests. If you genuinely believe you deserved a higher grade, you can talk with your professor.

How you communicate in that conversation, however, is very important. Professors are used to hearing students complain about grades and patiently explaining their standards for grading. Most professors seldom change grades. Yet it can still be worthwhile to talk with the professor because of what you will learn from the experience.

Follow these guidelines to talk about a grade or resolve any other problem or disagreement with a professor:

- First go over the requirements for the paper or test and the professor's comments. Be sure you actually have a reason for discussing the grade – not just that you didn't do well. Be prepared with specific points you want to go over.
- Make an appointment with your professor during office hours or another time. Don't try to talk about this before or after class or with e-mail or the telephone.
- Begin by politely explaining that you thought you did better on the assignment or test (not simply that you think you deserve a better grade) and that you'd like to go over it to better understand the result.
- Allow the professor to explain their comments on the assignment or grading of the test. Don't complain or whine; instead, show your appreciation for the explanation. Raise any specific questions or make comments at this time. For example, you might say, "I really thought I was being clear here when I wrote...."
- Use good listening skills. Whatever you do, don't argue!
- Ask the professor for advice on what you might do on the next assignment or when preparing for the next test. You may be offered some individual help or receive good study advice, and your professor will respect your willingness to make the effort as long as it's clear that you're more interested in learning than simply getting the grade.

Controlling Anger over Grades

If you're going to talk with a professor about your grade or any other problem, control any anger you may be feeling. The GPS Life Plan project of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System offers some insights into this process:

- Being upset about a grade is good because it shows you care and that you have passion about your education. But anger prevents clear thinking, so rein it in first.

- Since anger involves bodily reactions, physical actions can help you control anger: try some deep breathing first.
- Try putting yourself in your professor's shoes and seeing the situation from their point of view. Try to understand how grading is not a personal issue of "liking" you – that they are really doing something for your educational benefit.
- It's not your life that's being graded. Things outside your control can result in not doing well on a test or assignment, but the professor can grade only on what you actually did on that test or assignment – not what you could have done or are capable of doing. Understanding this can help you accept what happened and not take a grade personally.

E-mail Best Practices

E-mail has a growing role in education and has become an important and valuable means of communicating with professors. Especially when it is difficult to see a professor in person during office hours, e-mail can be an effective form of communication and interaction with professors. E-mail is also an increasingly effective way to collaborate with other students on group projects or while studying with other students.

Getting Started with E-mail

- If you don't have your own computer, find out where on-campus computers are available for student use, such as at the library or student computer lab.
- Use your college e-mail for all communications with college staff and faculty.
- Give your e-mail address to professors who request it and to other students with whom you study or maintain contact. E-mail is a good way to contact another student if you miss a class.
- Once you begin using e-mail, remember to check it regularly for messages.

Be sure to use good e-mail etiquette when writing to professors.

Using e-mail respects other people's time, allowing them to answer at a time of their choosing, rather than being interrupted by a telephone call. But e-mail is a written form of communication that is different from telephone voice messages and text messages. Students who text with friends have often adopted shortcuts, such as not spelling out full words, ignoring capitalization and punctuation, and not bothering with grammar or full sentence constructions. This is inappropriate in an e-mail message to a professor, who expects a more professional quality of writing. Most professors expect your communications to be in full sentences with correctly spelled words and reasonable grammar.



Image by Jared Soto from Pixabay

Follow these guidelines:

- Use the subject line to label your message effectively at a glance. “May I make an appointment?” says something; “In your office?” doesn’t.
- Address e-mail messages as you do a letter. Include your full name if it’s not easily recognizable in your e-mail account.
- Get to your point quickly and concisely. Don’t make the reader scroll down a long e-mail to see what it is you want to say.
- Because e-mail is a written communication, it does not express emotion the way a voice message does. Don’t attempt to be funny, ironic, or sarcastic. Write as you would in a paper for class. In a large lecture class or an online course, your e-mail voice may be the primary way your professor knows you, and emotionally charged messages can be confusing or give a poor impression.
- Don’t use capital letters to emphasize. All caps look like SHOUTING.
- Avoid abbreviations, nonstandard spelling, slang, and emoticons like smiley faces. These do not convey a professional tone.
- Don’t make demands or state expectations such as “I’ll expect to hear from you soon” or “If I haven’t heard by 4 p.m., I’ll assume you’ll accept my paper late.”

- When you reply to a message, leave the original message within yours. Your reader may need to recall what he or she said in the original message.
- Be polite. End the message with a “Thank you” or something similar.
- Proofread your message before sending it.
- With any important message to a work supervisor or professor, it’s a good idea to wait and review the message later before sending it. You may have expressed an emotion or thought that you will think better about later. Many problems have resulted when people sent messages too quickly without thinking.

Key Takeaways

- The college and its staff want to see you succeed, but you have to ask for the help you need to succeed.
- Using Student or Campus services is not a sign of weakness, but seen as a trait of successful students.
- Participating in your learning by respectfully talking with professors. The benefits of active communication with professors often leads to benefits beyond class grades.

6. Successful students get it together

It begins with simple things like making sure you have all your books and materials with you when you get to class and leads to more complex things like creating a study schedule. It is about getting a handle on what you need to do as a student and what demands will be on your time in terms of preparing for classes, reading, studying and working on homework and assignments. Planning ahead, and then following your plan, is the essence of time management. Thinking about what needs to be done and having a plan for doing the work can really help you reduce your stress. Learning strategies to stay on track, avoiding distractions of people and technology, and to preventing procrastination will pay off not only in college but also in your career thereafter. Plan your use of time based on your “time personality” after assessing how you typically use your free time. Then use an academic weekly and daily planner to schedule blocks of time most efficiently. Start well ahead of deadlines to prevent last-minute stresses and problems completing your work.

Going to college will be challenging and to do well in your studies will take more time than you might first think. You will probably spend about fifteen hours a week in classes and you can expect to spend two hours of prepping, reading, studying and homework for each hour in classes. This means you are looking at forty-five hours of your week devoted to your studies. This is about the number of hours you might expect to spend at a full time job. It is important that you are willing to put in the time but it can be difficult to manage the competing demands of different courses, outside work and personal/social needs. That is why it is vital to get it together now by organizing you space and your time.

Organizing Your Space

It's time to get organized. You need to organize both your space and your time.

Space is important for many reasons—some obvious, some less so. People’s moods, attitudes, and levels of work productivity change in different spaces. Learning to use space to your own advantage helps get you off to a good start in your studies. Here are a few of the ways space matter:



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- Everyone needs their own space. This may seem simple, but everyone needs some physical area, regardless of size, that is really their own—even if it’s only a small part of a shared space. Within your own space, you generally feel more secure and in control.
- Physical space reinforces habits. For example, using your bed primarily for sleeping makes it easier to fall asleep there than elsewhere and also makes it not a good place to try to stay awake and alert for studying.
- Different places create different moods. While this may seem obvious, students don’t always use places to their best advantage. One place may be bright and full of energy, with happy students passing through and enjoying themselves—a place that puts you in a good mood. But that may actually make it more difficult to concentrate on your studying. Yet the opposite—a totally quiet, austere place devoid of color, sound, and pleasant decorations—can be just as unproductive if it makes you associate studying with something unpleasant. Everyone needs to discover what space works best for them—and then let that space reinforce good study habits.

Use Space to Your Advantage and to Avoid Distractions

Begin by analyzing your needs, preferences, and past problems with places for studying. Where do you usually study? What are the best things about that place for studying? What distractions are most likely to occur there?

The goal is to find, or create, the best place for studying, and then to use it regularly so that studying there becomes a good habit.

- Choose a place you can associate with studying. Make sure it's not a place already associated with other activities (eating, watching television, sleeping, etc.). Over time, the more often you study in this space, the stronger will be its association with studying, so that eventually you'll be completely focused as soon as you reach that place and begin.



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- Your study area should be available whenever you need it. If you want to use your home, apartment, or dorm room but you never know if another person may be there and possibly distract you, then it's probably better to look for another place, such as a study lounge or an area in the library. Look for locations open at the hours when you may be studying. You may also need two study spaces—one in or near where you live, another on campus. Maybe you study best at home but have an hour free between two classes, and the library is too far away to use for only an hour? Look for a convenient empty classroom.
- Your study space should meet your study needs. An open desk or table surface usually works best for writing, and you'll tire quickly if you try to write notes sitting in an easy chair (which might also make you sleepy). You need good light for reading, to avoid tiring from eyestrain. If you use a laptop for writing notes or reading and researching, you need a power outlet so you don't have to stop when your battery runs out.
- Your study space should meet your psychological needs. Some students may need total silence with absolutely no visual distractions; they may find a perfect study carrel hidden away in the library. Other students may be unable to concentrate for long without looking up from reading and momentarily letting their eyes move over a pleasant scene. Some students may find it easier to stay motivated when surrounded by other students also studying; they may find an open space in the library or a study lounge with many tables spread out over an area. Experiment to find the setting that works best for you—and remember that the more often you use this same space, the more comfortable and effective your studying will become.
- You may need the support of others to maintain your study space. Students living at home, whether with a spouse and children or with their parents, often need the support of family members to maintain an effective study space. The kitchen table probably isn't best if others pass by frequently. Be creative, if necessary, and set up a

card table in a quiet corner of your bedroom or elsewhere to avoid interruptions. Put a “do not disturb” sign on your door.

- Keep your space organized and free of distractions. You want to prevent sudden impulses to neaten up the area (when you should be studying), do laundry, wash dishes, and so on. Unplug a nearby telephone, turn off your cell phone, and use your computer only as needed for studying. If your e-mail or message program pops up a notice every time an e-mail or message arrives, turn off your Wi-Fi or detach the network cable to prevent those intrusions.
- Plan for breaks. Everyone needs to take a break occasionally when studying. Think about the space you're in and how to use it when you need a break. If in your home, stop and do a few exercises to get your blood flowing. If in the library, take a walk up a couple flights of stairs and around the stacks before returning to your study area.
- Prepare for human interruptions. Even if you hide in the library to study, there's a chance a friend may happen by. At home with family members or in a dorm room or common space, the odds increase greatly. Have a plan ready in case someone pops in and asks you to join them in some fun activity. Know when you plan to finish your studying so that you can make a plan for later—or for tomorrow at a set time.

Studying While Living with Others



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Sometimes going to the library or elsewhere is not practical for studying, and you have to find a way to cope in a shared space. Part of the solution is time management. Agree with others on certain times that will be reserved for studying; agree to keep the place quiet, not to have guests visiting, and to prevent other distractions. These arrangements can be made with a roommate, spouse, and older children.

If there are younger children in your household and you have child-care responsibility, it's usually more complicated. You may have to schedule your studying during their nap time or find quiet activities for them to enjoy while you study. Try to spend some time with your kids before you study, so they don't feel like you're ignoring them. The key is

to plan ahead. You don't want to find yourself, the night before an exam, in a place that offers no space for studying.

Finally, accept that sometimes you'll just have to say no. If your roommate or a friend often tries to engage you in conversation or suggests doing something else when you need to study, just say no. Learn to be firm but polite as you explain that you just really have to get your work done first. Students who live at home may also have to learn how to say no to parents or family members—just be sure to explain the importance of the studying you need to do! Remember, you can't be everything to everyone all the time.



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Time Management



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- Using effective long- and short-term study strategies
- Scheduling study activities in realistic segments
- Using a system to plan ahead and set priorities
- Staying motivated to follow your plan and avoid procrastination

Time management for successful college studying involves these factors:

- Determining how much time you need to spend studying
- Knowing how much time you actually have for studying and increasing that time if needed
- Being aware of the times of day you are at your best and most focused

For every hour in the classroom, college students should spend, on average, about two hours on that class, counting reading, studying, writing papers, and so on. If you're a full-time

student with fifteen hours a week in class, then you need another thirty hours for the rest of your academic work. That forty-five hours is about the same as a typical full-time job. If you work part time, time management skills are even more essential. These skills are still more important for part-time college students who work full time and commute or have a family. To succeed in college, virtually everyone has to develop effective strategies for dealing with time.

Do you have two hours of study time for every hour in class? Many students begin college not knowing this much time is needed, so don't be surprised if you underestimated this number of hours. Remember this is just an average amount of study time – you may need more or less for your own courses. To be safe, and to help ensure your success, add another five to ten hours a week for studying. To reserve this study time, you may need to adjust how much time you spend in other activities.

Where Should Your Time Go?

Plan for the ideal use of a week's worth of time. Fill in your hours in this order:

1. Hours attending class
2. Study hours (2 times the number of class hours plus 5 or more hours extra)
3. Work, internships, and fixed volunteer time
4. Fixed life activities (sleeping, eating, hygiene, chores, transportation, etc.)
5. Discretionary activities

Now subtotal your hours so far and subtract that number from 168. How many hours are left?

This will help you find the remaining hours for “discretionary activities” (things you don't have to do for school, work, or a healthy life).

This activity shows most college students that they do actually have plenty of time for their studies without losing sleep or giving up their social life. But you may have less time for discretionary activities than in the past. Something, somewhere has to give. That's part of time management – and why it's important to keep your goals and priorities in mind. The other part is to learn how to use the hours you do have as effectively as possible, especially the study hours. For example, if you're a typical college student who plans to study for three hours in an evening but then procrastinates, gets caught up in a conversation, loses time to checking e-mail and text messages, and listens to loud music while reading a textbook, then maybe you actually spent four hours “studying” but got only two hours of actual work done.

So you end up behind and feeling like you're still studying way too much. The goal of time management is to actually get three hours of studying done in three hours and have time for your life as well.

Where Does Your Time Go?

See if you can account for a week's worth of time. Try this Time Activity. For each of the activity categories listed, make your best estimate of how many hours you spend in a week. (For categories that are about the same every day, just estimate for one day and multiply by seven for that line.)

- Sleeping
- Eating (including preparing food)
- Personal hygiene (i.e., bathing, etc.)
- Working (employment)
- Volunteer service or internship
- Chores, cleaning, errands, shopping, etc.
- Attending class
- Studying, reading, and researching (outside of class)
- Transportation to work or school
- Getting to classes (walking, biking, etc.)
- Organized group activities (clubs, church services, etc.)
- Time with friends (include television, video games, etc.)
- Attending events (movies, parties, etc.)
- Time alone (include television, video games, surfing the Web, etc.)
- Exercise or sports activities
- Reading for fun or other interests done alone
- Talking on phone, e-mail, Facebook, etc.
- Other—specify: _____

Now use your calculator to total your estimated hours. Is your number larger or smaller than 168, the total number of hours in a week? If your estimate is higher, go back through your list and adjust numbers to be more realistic. But if your estimated hours total fewer than 168, don't just go back and add more time in certain categories. Instead, ponder this question: *Where does the time go?* We'll come back to this question.

Think about your time analysis in Time Activity. People who estimate too high often feel

they don't have enough time. They may have time anxiety and often feel frustrated. People at the other extreme, who often can't account for how they use all their time, may have a more relaxed attitude. They may not actually have any more free time, but they may be wasting more time than they want to admit with less important things. Yet they still may complain about how much time they spend studying, as if there's a shortage of time.

People also differ in how they respond to schedule changes. Some go with the flow and accept changes easily, while others function well only when following a planned schedule and may become upset if that schedule changes. If you do not react well to an unexpected disruption in your schedule, plan extra time for catching up if something throws you off. This is all part of understanding your time personality.

Another aspect of your time personality involves time of day. If you need to concentrate, such as when writing a class paper, are you more alert and focused in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Do you concentrate best when you look forward to a relaxing activity later on, or do you study better when you've finished all other activities? Do you function well if you get up early—or stay up late—to accomplish a task? How does that affect the rest of your day or the next day? Understanding this will help you better plan your study periods.

While you may not be able to change your “time personality,” you can learn to manage your time more successfully. The key is to be realistic. How accurate is the number of hours you wrote down in Time Activity? The best way to know how you spend your time is to record what you do all day in a time log, every day for a week, and then add that up. Make simple chart of the hours in a day and carry it with you. Every so often, fill in what you have been doing. Do this for a week before adding up the times; then enter the total hours in the categories in Time Activity. You might be surprised that you spend a lot more time than you thought just hanging out with friends—or surfing the Web or playing around with Facebook or any of the many other things people do. You might find that you study well early in the morning even though you thought you are a night person, or vice versa. You might learn how long you can continue at a specific task before needing a break.

Time Management Strategies

Following are some strategies you can begin using immediately to make the most of your time:

- **Use a calendar planner, weekly schedule and daily to-do list.** At the beginning of each semester, log important due dates for assignments and tests on a four month calendar. This will give you an overview of the semester and identify particularly busy weeks. Next prepare your ideal weekly schedule with class times and study periods for each day and on the weekends. Add work and other fixed activities after classes and study periods. Consult your calendar and weekly schedule to help determine the tasks you need to complete each day to create a to-do list and consider what study periods you have available that day. For each study period, plan out your activities based on due dates for assignments, preparation needed for next classes and general study to prepare for tests and exams.



Photo by STIL on Unsplash

- **Prepare to be successful.** When planning ahead for studying, think yourself into the right mood. Focus on the positive. “When I get these chapters read tonight, I’ll be ahead in studying for the next test, and I’ll also have plenty of time tomorrow to do X.” Visualize yourself studying well!
- **Use your best—and most appropriate—time of day.** Different tasks require different mental skills. Some kinds of studying you may be able to start first thing in the morning as you wake, while others need your most alert moments at another time.
- **Break up large projects into small pieces.** Whether it’s writing a paper for class, studying for a final exam, or reading a long assignment or full book, students often feel daunted at the beginning of a large project. It’s easier to get going if you break it up into stages that you schedule at separate times—and then begin with the first section that requires only an hour or two.
- **Do the most important studying first.** When two or more things require your attention, do the more crucial one first. If something happens and you can’t complete everything, you’ll suffer less if the most crucial work is done.
- **If you have trouble getting started, do an easier task first.** Like large tasks, complex or difficult ones can be daunting. If you can’t get going, switch to an easier task you can accomplish quickly. That will give you momentum, and often you feel more confident tackling the difficult task after being successful in the first one.
- **If you’re feeling overwhelmed and stressed** because you have too much to do, revisit

your time planner. Sometimes it's hard to get started if you keep thinking about other things you need to get done.

- **Review your schedule** for the next few days and make sure everything important is scheduled, then relax and concentrate on the task at hand.
- **If you're really floundering, talk to someone.** Maybe you just don't understand what you should be doing. Talk with your professor or another student in the class to get back on track.
- **Take a break.** We all need breaks to help us concentrate without becoming fatigued and burned out. As a general rule, a short break every hour or so is effective in helping recharge your study energy. Get up and move around to get your blood flowing, clear your thoughts, and work off stress.
- **Use unscheduled times to work ahead.** You've scheduled that hundred pages of reading for later today, but you have the textbook with you as you're waiting for the bus. Start reading now, or flip through the chapter to get a sense of what you'll be reading later. Either way, you'll save time later. You may be amazed how much studying you can get done during down times throughout the day. Keep your momentum. Prevent distractions, such as multitasking, that will only slow you down. Check for messages, for example, only at scheduled break times.
- **Reward yourself.** It's not easy to sit still for hours of studying. When you successfully complete the task, you should feel good and deserve a small reward. A healthy snack, a quick video game session, or social activity can help you feel even better about your successful use of time.
- **Just say no.** Always tell others nearby when you're studying, to reduce the chances of being interrupted. Still, interruptions happen, and if you are in a situation where you are frequently interrupted by a family member, spouse, roommate, or friend, it helps to have your "no" prepared in advance: "No, I really have to be ready for this test" or "That's a great idea, but let's do it tomorrow—I just can't today." You shouldn't feel bad about saying no—especially if you told that person in advance that you needed to study.
- **Have a life.** Never schedule your day or week so full of work and study that you have no time at all for yourself, your family and friends, and your larger life.



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The Distractions of Technology

Multitasking is the term commonly used for being engaged in two or more different activities at the same time, usually referring to activities using devices such as cell phones, smartphones, computers, and so on. Many people claim to be able to do as many as four or five things simultaneously, such as writing an e-mail while responding to an instant message (IM) and reading a tweet, all while watching a video on their computer monitor or talking on the phone. Many people who have grown up with computers consider this kind of multitasking a normal way to get things done, including studying. In reality, the mind can focus only on one thing at any given moment.



Photo by Josh Felise on Unsplash

Even things that don't require much thinking are severely impacted by multitasking, such as driving while talking on a cell phone or texting. An astonishing number of people end up in the emergency room from just trying to walk down the sidewalk while texting, so common is it now to walk into a pole or parked car while multitasking!

The other problem with multitasking is the effect it can have on the attention span—and even on how the brain works. Scientists have shown that in people who constantly shift their attention from one thing to another in short bursts, the brain forms patterns that make it more difficult to keep sustained attention on any one thing. So when you really do need to concentrate for a while on one thing, such as when studying for a big test, it becomes more difficult to do even if you're not multitasking at that time.

Here are some suggestions if distractions are an issue:

- Stay away from multitasking whenever you have something important to do, like studying.

- If it's already a habit for you, don't let it become worse.
- Manipulate your study space to prevent the temptations altogether. Turn your computer off or shut down e-mail and messaging programs if you need the computer for studying.
- Turn your cell phone off. If you just tell yourself not to answer it but still glance at it each time to see who sent or left a message, you're still losing your studying momentum and have to start over again.

For those who are really addicted to technology (you know who you are!), go to the library and don't take your laptop or cell phone. Elsewhere in this chapter on scheduling your study periods, we recommend scheduling breaks as well, usually for a few minutes every hour. If you're really hooked on checking for messages, plan to do that at scheduled times.

What about listening to music while studying? Some don't consider that multitasking, and many students say they can listen to music without it affecting their studying. Studies are inconclusive about the positive or negative effects of music on people's ability to concentrate, probably because so many different factors are involved. Some people can study better with low-volume instrumental music that relaxes them and does not intrude on their thinking, while others can concentrate only in silence. The key thing is to be honest with yourself: if you're actively listening to music while you're studying, then you're likely not studying as well as you could be. It will take you longer and lead to less successful results.

Key Takeaways

- Getting it together includes organizing your space and your time, creating and following a study schedule, and planning for interruptions and distractions.
- Select one or more spaces that you will use for regular study; consider location, availability, furniture, lighting, atmosphere and possible distractions.
- Time management takes planning; create a semester schedule of your important due dates, create a weekly schedule that identifies your class times and study periods as priorities, and finally, use a to-do list to plan out what you will do in each study period.
- When you study in a shared space, you may need to make arrangements with roommates or family to ensure your study time is distraction free.
- Multitasking, particularly with technology, can reduce the effectiveness of your study efforts.

7. Successful students get involved

New college students may not immediately realize that they've entered a whole new world at college, including a world of other people possibly very different from those they have known before. This is a very important dimension of college—almost as important as the learning that goes on inside the classroom. How you deal with the social aspects and diversity of college world has a large impact on your academic success. Enter this new world with an open mind and you'll gain many benefits.

You have many opportunities to get involved in campus life through social activities, clubs, sports and more. There are student led organizations that you should become familiar with on campuses. Most, if not all colleges, will have a student government, student athletics association and student clubs.



Photo by Boxed Water Is Better on Unsplash

Campus Groups

The college social experience also includes organized campus groups and activities. Participating in organized activities requires taking some initiative—you can't be passive and expect these opportunities to come knocking on your door—but is well worthwhile for fully enriching college interactions.

The active pursuit of a stimulating life on campus offers many benefits:

- Organized groups and activities speed your transition into your new life. New students

can be overwhelmed by their studies and every aspect of a new life, and they may be slow to build a new life. Rather than waiting for it to come along on its own, you can immediately begin broadening your social contacts and experiences by joining groups that share your interests.

- Organized groups and activities help you experience a much greater variety of social life than you might otherwise. New students often tend to interact more with other students their own age and with similar backgrounds—this is just natural. But if you simply go with the flow and don't actively reach out, you are much less likely to meet and interact with others from the broader campus diversity: students who are older and may have a perspective you may otherwise miss, upper-level students who have much to share from their years on campus, and students of diverse heritage or culture with whom you might otherwise be slow to interact.
- Organized groups and activities help you gain new skills, whether technical, physical, intellectual, or social. Such skills may find their way into your résumé when you next seek a job or your application for a scholarship or other future educational opportunity. Employers and others like to see well-rounded students with a range of proficiencies and experiences.
- Organized groups and activities are fun and a great way to stay healthy and relieve stress. Exercise and physical activity are essential for health and well-being, and many organized activities offer a good way to keep moving.



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Participating in Groups and Activities

College campuses offer a wide range of clubs, organizations, and other activities open to all students. College administrators view this as a significant benefit and work to promote student involvement in such groups. It's a good time now to check out the possibilities:

- Browse the college and student government Web sites, where you're likely to find links to pages for student clubs and organizations.

- Watch for club fairs, open houses, and similar activities on campus. Talk with the representatives from any group in which you may be interested.
- Look for notices on bulletin boards around campus. Student groups really do want new students to join, so they usually try to post information where you can find it.
- Consider other forms of involvement and roles beyond clubs. Gain leadership experience by running for office in student government or applying for a residence hall support position.
- If your campus doesn't have a group focused on a particular activity you enjoy yourself, think about starting a new club.

Whatever your interests, don't be shy about checking out a club or organization. Take chances and explore. Attending a meeting or gathering is not a commitment—you're just going the first time to see what it's like, and you have no obligation to join. Keep an open mind as you meet and observe other students in the group, especially if you don't feel at first like you fit in: remember that part of the benefit of the experience is to meet others who are not necessarily just like everyone you already know.

Communication Skills

Communication is at the core of almost all social interactions, including those involved in friendships and relationships with your professors. Communication with others has a huge effect on our lives, what we think and feel, and what and how we learn. Communication is, many would say, what makes us human.

Oral communication involves not only speech and listening, of course, but also nonverbal communication: facial expressions, tone of voice, and many other body language signals that affect the messages sent and received. Many experts think that people pay more attention, often unconsciously, to how people say something than to what they are saying. When the nonverbal message is inconsistent with the verbal (spoken) message, just as when the verbal message itself is unclear because of poorly chosen words or vague explanations, then miscommunication may occur.

Miscommunication is at the root of many misunderstandings among people and makes it difficult to build relationships. Remember that communication is a two-way process. Listening skills are critical for most college students simply because many of us may not have learned how to really listen to another person.

Here are some guidelines for how to listen effectively:

- **Talk less to listen more.** Most people naturally like to share their thoughts and feelings, and some people almost seem unable to stop talking long enough to ever listen to another person. Try this: next time you're in a conversation with another student, deliberately try not to speak very much but give the other person a chance to speak fully. You may notice a big difference in how much you gain from the conversation.



Photo by Mimi Thian on Unsplash

- **Ask questions.** To keep the conversational ball rolling, show your interest in the other person by asking them about things they are saying. This helps the other person feel that you are interested in them and helps build the relationship.

- **Watch and respond to the other person's body language.** You'll learn much more about their feelings for what they're saying than if you listen only to their words.

- **Show the other person that you're really listening and that you care.** Make eye contact and respond appropriately with nods and brief comments like "That's interesting!" or "I know what you mean" or "Really?" Be friendly, smile when appropriate, and encourage the person to keep speaking.

- **Give the other person feedback.** Show you understand by saying things like "So you're saying that..." or asking a question that demonstrates you've been following what they're saying and want to know more. As you learn to improve your listening skills, think also about what you are saying yourself and how.

Here are additional guidelines for effective speaking:

- **Be honest, but don't be critical.** Strongly disagreeing may only put the other person on the defensive—an emotion sure to disrupt the hope for good communication. You can disagree, but be respectful to keep the conversation from becoming emotional. Say "I don't know, I think that maybe it's..." instead of "That's crazy! What's really going on is..."

- **Look for common ground.** Make sure that your side of a conversation relates to what the other person is saying and that it focuses on what you have in common. There's almost

no better way to stop a conversation dead in its tracks than to ignore everything the other person has just said and launch into an unrelated story or idea of your own.

- **Avoid sarcasm and irony unless you know the person well.** Sarcasm is easily misunderstood and may be interpreted as an attack on the other person's ideas or statements.

- **Don't try to talk like the other person,** especially if the person is from a different ethnic or cultural background or speaks with an accent or heavy slang. The other person will feel that you are imitating them and maybe even making fun of them. Be yourself and speak naturally.

- **While not imitating the other person, relate to their personality and style of thinking.** We do not speak to our parents or professors the exact same way we speak to our closest friends, nor should we speak to someone we've just met the same way. Show your respect for the other person by keeping the conversation on an appropriate level.

- **Remember that assertive communication is better than passive or aggressive communication.** Assertive in this context means you are honest and direct in stating your ideas and thoughts; you are confident and clear and willing to discuss your ideas while still respecting the thoughts and ideas of others. A passive communicator is reluctant to speak up, seems to agree with everything others say, hesitates to say anything that others might disagree with, and therefore seldom communicates much at all. Passive communication simply is not a real exchange in communication. Aggressive communication, at the other extreme, is often highly critical of the thoughts and ideas of others. This communication style may be sarcastic, emotional, and even insulting. Real communication is not occurring because others are not prompted to respond honestly and openly.

- **Choose your conversations wisely.** Recognize that you don't have to engage in all conversations. Make it your goal to form relationships and engage in interactions that help you learn and grow as a person. College life offers plenty of opportunities for making relationships and interacting with others if you keep open to them, so you needn't try to participate in every social situation around you.



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Balancing Schoolwork and Social Life

If there's one thing true of virtually all college students, it's that you don't have enough time to do everything you want. Once you've developed friendships within the college community and have an active social life, you may feel you don't have enough time for your studies and other activities such as work. For many students, the numerous social opportunities of college become a distraction, and with less attention to one's studies, academic performance can drop. Here are some tips for balancing your social life with your studies:



Photo by Ryan Tauss on Unsplash

Keep working on your time management skills. You can't just "go with the flow" and hope that, after spending time with friends, you have enough time (and energy) left over for studying. Make a study schedule that provides enough time for what you need to do. Study first; socialize after.

Keep working on your study skills. When you have only a limited amount of time for studying, be sure you're using that time as effectively as possible as you read

assignments and prepare for class, organize your notes after class, and prepare for tests.

If you can't resist temptations, reduce them. If you are easily distracted by the opportunity to talk with your roommate, spouse, or family members because you study where you live, then go to the library to study.

Make studying a social experience. If studying keeps you so busy that you feel like you don't have much of a social life, form a study group. You will learn more than you would alone by gaining from the thoughts of others, and you can enjoy interacting with others without falling behind.

Keep your social life from affecting your studying. Simply scheduling study time doesn't mean you'll use it well. If you stayed up late the night before, you may not today be able to concentrate well as you study for that big test. This is another reason for good time management and scheduling your time well, looking ahead.

Get help if you need it. If you're still having difficulty balancing your study time with other activities, talk with your program coordinator or a counsellor. Maybe something else is keeping you from doing your best. Maybe you need some additional study skills or you need to get some extra help from a tutor or campus study center. Remember, we want you to succeed and will try to help those who seek help.

When and How to Say No

For all the benefits of an active social and campus life, too much of any good thing can also cause trouble. If you join too many groups, or if you have limited time because of work and family commitments, you may spend less time with your studies—with negative results.



Photo by Isaiah Rustad on Unsplash

Here are some guidelines for finding a good balance between social life and everything else you need to do:

- **Don't join too many organizations or clubs.** Most advisors suggest that two or three regular activities are the maximum that most students can handle.
- **Work on your time management skills.** Plan ahead for study time when you don't have schedule conflicts. If you have a rich social life, study in the library or places where you won't be tempted by additional social interaction with a roommate, family member, or others passing by.
- **Don't be afraid to say no.** You may be active in a club and have plenty of time for routine activities, but someone may ask you to spend extra time organizing an upcoming event just when you have a major paper deadline coming up. Sometimes you have to remember the main reason you're in college and just say you can't do it because you have to get your work done.
- **If you really can't resolve your time conflicts, seek help.** Talk with your program coordinator or a college counsellor. They'll help you get back on track.

Key Takeaways

- You will have many opportunities to get involved in Campus life; it is up to you to inquire and participate in these social activities, clubs and sports.
- Attending a meeting or gathering isn't a commitment. Feel free to explore. It will help transition you into your new college life, gain new skills, stay healthy and relieve stress.
- Once you've settled in at college, you may not have enough time for activities or work. Keep using your time management and study skills to help balance schoolwork and social life.

8. Successful students take control of their health

This section examines a wide range of topics, from nutrition, exercise, and sleep to substance abuse and risks related to sexual activity. All of these involve personal attitudes and behaviors. Paying attention to your eating, sleeping and exercise habits becomes more vital when attending college because learning is challenging. However, time pressures, schedule changes and new responsibilities can throw students off their previous routines.

Where Are You Now?



Photo by Jason Wong on Unsplash

Consider your present knowledge and attitudes with the following statements. Consider how true these statements are for you:

Yes Unsure No

1. I usually eat well and maintain my weight at an appropriate level.
2. I get enough regular exercise to consider myself healthy.
3. I get enough restful sleep and feel alert throughout the day.
4. My attitudes and habits involving smoking, alcohol, and drugs are beneficial to my health.
5. I am coping in a healthy way with the everyday stresses of being a student.

6. I am generally a happy person.
7. I am comfortable with my sexual values and my knowledge of safe sex practices.
8. I understand how all of these different health factors interrelate and affect my academic success as a student.



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Health and Wellness

Health and wellness are important for everyone—students included. Not only will you do better in school when your health is good, but you’ll be happier as a person. And the habits you develop now will likely persist for years to come. That means that what you’re doing now in terms of personal health will have a huge influence on your health throughout life and can help you avoid many serious diseases. Considerable research has demonstrated that the basic elements of good health—nutrition, exercise, not abusing substances, stress reduction—are important for preventing disease. You’ll live much longer and happier than someone without good habits.

Here are a few of the health problems whose risks can be lowered by healthful habits:

- Cardiovascular issues such as heart attacks and strokes (the numbers one and three causes of death)
- Some cancers
- Diabetes (currently reaching epidemic proportions)
- Lung diseases related to smoking
- Injuries related to substance abuse

Wellness is more than just avoiding disease. Wellness involves feeling good in every respect, in mind and spirit as well as in body.

Good health habits also offer these benefits for your college career:

- More energy
- Better ability to focus on your studies
- Less stress, feeling more resilient and able to handle day-to-day stress
- Less time lost to colds, flu, infections, and other illnesses
- More restful sleep

Eating Well: It's Not So Difficult



Image by Jasmine Lin from Pixabay

The key to a good diet is to eat a varied diet with lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and to minimize fats, sugar, and salt. The exact amounts depend on your calorie requirements and activity levels, but you don't have to count calories or measure and weigh your food to eat well.

The following is from the Health Canada's (2018) Food Guide:

Healthy eating is more than the foods you eat. It is also about where, when, why and how you eat.

Be mindful of your eating habits

- Take time to eat
- Notice when you are hungry and when you are full

Cook more often

- Plan what you eat
- Involve others in planning and preparing meals

Enjoy your food

- Culture and food traditions can be a part of healthy eating
- Eat meals with others

Make it a habit to eat a variety of healthy foods each day.

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods. Choose protein foods that come from plants more often.

- Choose foods with healthy fats instead of saturated fat

Limit highly processed foods. If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts.

- Prepare meals and snacks using ingredients that have little to no added sodium, sugars or saturated fat
- Choose healthier menu options when eating out

Make water your drink of choice

- Replace sugary drinks with water

Use food labels

- Be aware that food marketing can influence your choices

This material can be found at <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/appendix-a-healthy-eating-principles/>

If You Need to Lose Weight

If you need to lose weight, don't try to starve yourself. Gradual steady weight loss is healthier and easier. Try these guidelines:

- Check your body mass index (BMI) to see the normal weight range for your height.
- Set your goals and make a plan you can live with. Start by avoiding snacks and fast foods.
- Try to choose foods that meet the guidelines listed above.

- Stay active and try to exercise frequently.
- Keep a daily food journal and write down what you eat. Simply writing it down helps people.
- Be more aware of your habits, and more motivated to eat better.
- Visit Health Services on campus and ask for more information about weight loss programs.

Remember, no single plan works for everyone.

Tips for Success: Nutrition

- Eat a variety of foods every day.
- Take a multivitamin every day.
- Take an apple or banana with you for a snack in case you get hungry between meals.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Avoid high-sugar foods. After the rush comes a crash that can make you drowsy, and you'll have trouble paying attention in class. Watch out for sugary cereals—try other types with less sugar and more fiber.
- If you have a soft drink habit, experiment with flavored seltzer and other zero- or low-calorie drinks.
- Eat when you're hungry, not when you're bored or just because others are eating.
- If you find yourself in a fast food restaurant, try a salad.
- Watch portion sizes and never “supersize it”!

Exercise

Does Exercise Really Matter?

Exercise is good for both body and mind. Indeed, physical activity is almost essential for good health and student success.

The physical benefits of regular exercise include the following:

- Improved fitness for the whole body, not just the muscles
- Greater cardiovascular fitness and reduced disease risk
- Increased physical endurance
- Stronger immune system, providing more resistance to disease
- Lower cholesterol levels, reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease
- Lowered risk of developing diabetes
- Weight maintenance or loss



Photo by Trust “Tru” Katsande on Unsplash

Perhaps more important to students are the mental and psychological benefits:

- Stress reduction
- Improved mood, with less anxiety and depression
- Improved ability to focus mentally
- Better sleep
- Feeling better about oneself

For all of these reasons, it’s important for college students to regularly exercise or engage in physical activity. Like good nutrition and getting enough sleep, exercise is a key habit that contributes to overall wellness that promotes college success.

How Much Exercise and What Kind?

With aerobic exercise, your heart and lungs are working hard enough to improve your cardiovascular fitness. This generally means moving fast enough to increase your heart rate and breathing. For health and stress-reducing benefits, try to exercise at least three days a week for at least twenty to thirty minutes at a time. If you really enjoy exercise and are motivated, you may exercise as often as six days a week, but take at least one day of rest. When you’re first starting out, or if you’ve been inactive for a while, take it gradually, and let your body adjust between sessions. But the old expression “No pain, no gain” is not true, regardless of what some past gym teacher may have said! If you feel pain in any activity, stop or cut back.

The way to build up strength and endurance is through a plan that is consistent and

gradual. For exercise to have aerobic benefits, try to keep your heart rate in the target heart rate zone for at least twenty to thirty minutes. The target heart rate is 60 percent to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate, which can be calculated as 220 minus your age. For example, if you are 24 years old, your maximum heart rate is calculated as 196, and your target heart rate is 118 to 166 beats per minute. If you are just starting an exercise program, stay at the lower end of this range and gradually work up over a few weeks.

Enjoy It!



Photo by Matthew LeJune on Unsplash

Most important, find a type of exercise or activity that you enjoy—or else you won't stick with it. This can be as simple and easy as a brisk walk or slow jog through a park or across campus. Swimming is excellent exercise, but so is dancing. Think about what you like to do and explore activities that provide exercise while you're having fun.

Do whatever you need to make your chosen activity enjoyable. Many people listen to music and some even read when using workout equipment. Try different activities to prevent boredom. You also gain by taking the stairs instead of elevators, walking farther across campus instead of parking as close to your destination as you can get, and so on. Exercise with a friend is more enjoyable, including jogging or biking together.

You may stay more motivated using exercise equipment. An inexpensive pedometer can track your progress walking or jogging, or a bike computer can monitor your speed and time. A heart rate monitor makes it easy to stay in your target zone; many models also calculate calories burned. Some devices can input your exercise into your computer to track your progress and make a chart of your improvements.

The biggest obstacle to getting enough exercise, many students say, is a lack of time. Actually, we all have the time, if we manage it well. Build exercise into your weekly schedule on selected days. Eventually you'll find that regular exercise actually saves you time because you're sleeping better and concentrating better. Time you used to fritter away is now used for activity that provides many benefits.

Campus Activities Can Help

Colleges have resources to make exercise easier and more enjoyable for our students. Take a look around and think about what you might enjoy. Campus fitness centers may offer exercise equipment. There may be regularly scheduled aerobic or spin classes. You don't have to be an athlete to enjoy casual sports such as playing tennis or shooting hoops with a friend. If you like more organized team sports, try intramural sports.

Sleep

Like good nutrition and exercise, adequate sleep is crucial for wellness and success. Sleep is particularly important for students because there seem to be so many time pressures—to attend class, study, maintain a social life, and perhaps work—that most college students have difficulty getting enough. Yet sleep is critical for concentrating well.

The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep

You may not realize the benefits of sleep, or the problems associated with being sleep deprived, because most likely you've had the same sleep habits for a long time. Or maybe you know you're getting less sleep now, but with all the changes in your life, how can you tell if some of your stress or problems studying are related to not enough sleep?

It is recommended by The National Sleep Foundation that young adults get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night. Lack of sleep can contribute to difficulty in learning as it may cause impaired cognitive functioning, impaired alertness and lead to longer term health difficulties. We may take sleep for granted and never really think about what helps us get a good nights' rest. Sleep hygiene is one way to help a student towards getting restorative, quality sleep.

On the positive side, a healthy amount of sleep has the following benefits:

- Improves your mood during the day
- Improves your memory and learning abilities
- Gives you more energy
- Strengthens your immune system
- Promotes wellness of body, mind, and spirit



Photo by Kate Stone Matheson on Unsplash

In contrast, not getting enough sleep over time can lead to a wide range of health issues and student problems.

Sleep deprivation can have the following consequences:

- Affects mental health and contributes to stress and feelings of anxiety, depression, and general unhappiness
- Causes sleepiness, difficulty paying attention in class, and ineffective studying
- Weakens the immune system, making it more likely to catch colds and other infections
- Increases the risk of accidents (such as while driving)
- Contributes to weight gain

How much Sleep is enough?

College students are the most sleep-deprived population group in the country. With so much to do, who has time for sleep?

Most people need seven to nine hours of sleep a night, and the average is around eight. Some say they need much less than that, but often their behavior during the day shows they are actually sleep deprived. Some genuinely need only about six hours a night. New research indicates there may be a “sleep gene” that determines how much sleep a person needs. So how much sleep do you actually need?

There is no simple answer, in part because the quality of sleep is just as important as the number of hours a person sleeps. Sleeping fitfully for nine hours and waking during the night is usually worse than seven or eight hours of good sleep, so you can't simply count the hours. Do you usually feel rested and alert all day long? Do you rise from bed easily in the morning without struggling with the alarm clock? Do you have no trouble paying attention to your

professors and never feel sleepy in a lecture class? Are you not continually driven to drink more coffee or caffeine-heavy “power drinks” to stay attentive? Are you able to get through work without feeling exhausted? If you answered yes to all of these, you likely are in that 10 percent to 15 percent of college students who consistently get enough sleep.

How to Get More and Better Sleep

You have to allow yourself enough time for a good night’s sleep. Using time management strategies and schedule at least eight hours for sleeping every night. If you still don’t feel alert and energetic during the day, try increasing this to nine hours. Keep a sleep journal, and within a couple weeks you’ll know how much sleep you need and will be on the road to making new habits to ensure you get it.

Myths about Sleep

- Having a drink or two helps me get to sleep better. False: Although you may seem to fall asleep more quickly, alcohol makes sleep less restful, and you’re more likely to awake in the night.
- Exercise before bedtime is good for sleeping. False: Exercise wakes up your body, and it may be some time before you unwind and relax. Exercise earlier in the day, however, is beneficial for sleep.
- It helps to fall asleep after watching television or surfing the Web in bed. False: Rather than helping you unwind, these activities can engage your mind and make it more difficult to get to sleep.

Facts about Sleep

- Avoid nicotine, which can keep you awake—yet another reason to stop smoking.
- Avoid caffeine for six to eight hours before bed. Caffeine remains in the body for three to five hours on the average, much longer for some people. Remember that many soft drinks contain caffeine.
- Don’t eat in the two to three hours before bed. Avoid alcohol before bedtime.
- Don’t nap during the day. Napping is the least productive form of rest and often makes you less alert. It may also prevent you from getting a good night’s sleep.
- Exercise earlier in the day (at least several hours before bedtime).

- Try to get to bed and wake about the same time every day—your body likes a routine.
- Make sure the environment is conducive to sleep: dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
- Use your bed only for sleeping, not for studying, watching television, or other activities. Going to bed will become associated with going to sleep.
- Establish a presleep winding-down routine, such as taking a hot bath, listening to soothing music, or reading (not a textbook). If you can't fall asleep after ten to fifteen minutes in bed, it's better to get up and do something else rather than lie there fitfully for hours. Do something you find restful (or boring). Read, or listen to a recorded book. Go back to bed when you're sleepy.

If you frequently cannot get to sleep or are often awake for a long time during the night, you may be suffering from insomnia, a medical condition. Resist the temptation to try over-the-counter sleep aids. If you have tried the tips listed here and still cannot sleep, talk with your health-care provider or visit the student health clinic. Many remedies are available for those with a true sleep problem.



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Substance Use and Abuse

Substances, any kind of drug, have effects on the body and mind. People use these substances for their effects. But many substances have negative effects, including being physically or psychologically addictive. What is important with any substance is to be aware of its effects on your health and on your life as a student, and to make smart choices. Use of any substance to the extent that it has negative effects is generally considered abuse.

Smoking and Tobacco: Why Start, and Why Is It So Hard to Stop?

Smoking is harmful to one's health. It causes cancer and lung and heart disease. Most adult smokers continue smoking not because they really think it won't harm them but because it's very difficult to stop.



Photo by Thanasis on Unsplash

Tips for Stopping Smoking

Stopping isn't easy. Many ex-smokers say it was the hardest thing they ever did. You know it's worth the effort. And it's easier if you think it through and make a good plan. There's lots of help available. Before you quit, the US National Cancer Institute suggests you **START** with these five important steps:

1. **S** = Set a quit date.
2. **T** = Tell family, friends, and coworkers that you plan to quit.
3. **A** = Anticipate and plan for the challenges you'll face while quitting.
4. **R** = Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your home, car, and work.
5. **T** = Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit.

If You Feel You Need Help

For more information and support to stop smoking, Leave the Pack Behind is available on campus or visit their website at <https://www.leavethepackbehind.org>

What's the Big Deal about Alcohol?

Of all the issues that can affect a student's health and success in college, drinking causes more problems than anything else. When you drink too much, your judgment is impaired and you may behave in risky ways. Your health may be affected. Your studies likely are

affected. Most college students report drinking at least some alcohol at some time, and even those who do not drink are often affected by others who do. College students experience injury and even death due to alcohol-related unintentional accidents; may be involved in alcohol-related physical assault, sexual assault or date rape, and may develop health issues including alcohol abuse and dependency problems. College students report academic consequences of their drinking, including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.

So why is drinking so popular if it causes so many problems? You probably already know the answer to that: most college students say they have more fun when drinking. They're not going to stop drinking just because someone lectures them about it.

Like everything else that affects your health and happiness, eating, exercise, use of other substances, drinking is a matter of personal choice. Like most decisions we all face, there are trade-offs. The most that



Photo by Thomas Picauly on Unsplash

anyone can reasonably ask of you is to be smart in your decisions. That means understanding the effects of alcohol and deciding to take control.

How Much Alcohol Is Too Much?

There's no magic number for how many drinks a person can have and how often. If you're of legal drinking age, you may not experience any problems if you have one or two drinks from time to time. Moderate drinking is not more than two drinks per day for men or one per day for women. More than that is heavy drinking.

Did you know that one night of heavy drinking can affect how well you think for two or three weeks afterward? This can really affect how well you perform as a student.

If You Feel You Need Help

Visit the student health center or talk with your college counsellor. They understand how you feel and have a lot of experience with students feeling the same way. They can help.

Prescription and Illegal Drugs

People use drugs for the same reasons people use alcohol. They say they enjoy getting high. They may say a drug helps them relax or unwind, have fun, enjoy the company of others, or escape the pressures of being a student.

While alcohol is a legal drug for those above the drinking age, most other drugs, including the use of many prescription drugs not prescribed for the person taking them, are illegal. They usually involve more serious legal consequences if the user is caught. Some people may feel there's safety in numbers: if a lot of people are using a drug, or drinking, then how can it be too bad? But other drugs carry the same risks as alcohol for health problems, a risk of death or injury, and a serious impact on your ability to do well as a student.

Good decisions also involve being honest with oneself. Why do I use (or am thinking about using) this drug? Am I trying to escape some aspect of my life (stress, a bad job, a boring class)? Could the effects of using this drug be worse than what I'm trying to escape?

If You Feel You Need Help

If you have questions or concerns related to drug use, your doctor or student health center can help.



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Sexual Health



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Sexuality is normal, natural human drive. As an adult, your sexuality is your own business. Like other dimensions of health, however, your sexual health depends on understanding many factors involving sexuality and your own values. Your choices and behavior may have consequences. Learning about sexuality and thinking through your values will help you make responsible decisions.

Sexual Values and Decisions

It's often difficult to talk about sexuality and sex. Not only is it a very private matter for most people, but the words themselves are often used loosely, resulting in misunderstandings. Surveys have shown, for example, that about three-fourths of college students say they are “sexually active”—but survey questions rarely specify exactly what that phrase means. To some, sexual activity includes passionate kissing and fondling, while to others the phrase means sexual intercourse. Manual and oral sexual stimulation may or may not be included in an individual's own definition of being sexually active.

We should therefore begin by defining these terms. First, sexuality is not the same as sex. Human sexuality is a general term for how people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. Since all people are sexual beings, everyone has a dimension of human sexuality regardless of their behavior. Someone who practices complete abstinence from sexual behavior still has the human dimension of sexuality.

Sexuality involves gender identity, or how we see ourselves in terms of maleness and femaleness, as prominently one or the other, or a combination of both or as neither, as well as sexual orientation, which refers to the gender qualities of those to whom we are attracted. The phrase sexual activity is usually used to refer to behaviors between two (or more) people involving the genitals—but the term may also refer to solo practices such as masturbation or to partner activities that are sexually stimulating but may not involve the genitals. For the purposes of this chapter, with its focus on personal health, the term sexual activity refers to any behavior that carries a risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease. This includes vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse. The term sexual intercourse will be used to refer to vaginal intercourse, which also carries the risk of unwanted pregnancy. We'll avoid the most confusing term, sex, which in strict biological terms refers to reproduction but is used loosely to refer to many different behaviors.

There is a stereotype that sexual activity is very prominent among college students. One survey found that most college students think that other students have had an average of three sexual partners in the past year, yet 80 percent of those answering said that they themselves had zero or one sexual partner. In other words, college students as a whole are not engaging in sexual activity nearly as much as they think they are. Another study revealed that about 20 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old college students had never been sexually active and about half had not been during the preceding month. In sum, some college students are sexually active and some are not. Misperceptions of what others are doing may lead to unrealistic expectations or feelings. What's important, however, is to be aware of your own values and to make responsible decisions that protect your sexual health.

Information and preparation are the focus of this section of the chapter. People who engage in sexual activity in the heat of the moment—often under the influence of alcohol—without having protection and information for making good decisions are at risk for disease, unwanted pregnancy, or abuse. Almost all college students know the importance of protection against sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy. So why then do these problems occur so often? Part of the answer is that we don't always do the right thing even when we know it—especially in the heat of the moment, particularly when drinking or using drugs.

What's "Safe Sex"?

It has been said that no sexual activity is safe because there is always some risk, even if very small, of protections failing. The phrase "safer sex" better describes actions one can take to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.



Photo by Zackary Drucker as part of Broadly's Gender Spectrum Collection.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

About two dozen different diseases can be transmitted through sexual activity. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) range from infections that can be easily treated with medications to diseases that may have permanent health effects to HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the cause of AIDS. Despite decades of public education campaigns and easy access to protection, STIs still affect many millions of people every year. Often a person feels no symptoms at first and does not realize he or she has the infection and thus passes it on unknowingly. Or a person may not use protection because of simple denial: "It can't happen to me." Although there are some differences, in most cases sexual transmission involves an exchange of body fluids between two people: semen, vaginal fluids, or blood (or other body fluids containing blood). Because of this similarity, the same precautions to prevent the transmission of HIV will prevent the transmission of other STIs as well.

Although many of these diseases may not cause dramatic symptoms, always see a health-care provider if you have the slightest suspicion of having acquired an STI. Not only should you receive treatment as soon as possible to prevent the risk of serious health problems, but you are also obligated to help not pass it on to others.

The following are guidelines to protect yourself against STIs if you are sexually active:

- Know that only abstinence is 100 percent safe. Protective devices can fail even when used correctly, although the risk is small. Understand the risks of not always using protection.
- Talk with your partner in advance about your sexual histories and health. Agree that regardless of how sure you both are about not having an STI, you will use protection because you cannot be certain even if you have no symptoms.

- Avoid sexual activity with casual acquaintances whose sexual history you do not know and with whom you have not talked about health issues. Sexual activity is safest with a single partner in a long-term relationship.
- Use a latex condom for all sexual activity. A male condom is about 98 percent effective when used correctly, and a female condom about 95 percent effective when used correctly. With both, incorrect use increases the risk. If you are unsure how to use a condom correctly and safely, do some private online reading.
- If you are sexually active with multiple partners, see your health-care provider twice a year for an STI screening even if you are not experiencing symptoms.

Preventing Unwanted Pregnancy



Photo by Crew on Unsplash

Heterosexual couples who engage in vaginal intercourse are also at risk for an unwanted pregnancy. There are lots of myths about how a woman can't get pregnant at a certain time in her menstrual cycle or under other conditions, but in fact, there's a risk of pregnancy after vaginal intercourse at any time. All couples should talk about protection before reaching the stage of having intercourse and take appropriate steps. While a male condom is about 98 percent effective,

that 2 percent failure rate could lead to tens of thousands of unintended pregnancies among college students. When not used correctly, condoms are only 85 percent effective.

In addition, a couple that has been healthy and monogamous in their relationship for a long time may be less faithful in their use of condoms if the threat of STIs seems diminished. Other methods of birth control should also therefore be considered. With the exception of the male vasectomy, at present most other methods are used by the woman. They include intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants, injected or oral contraceptives (the "pill"), hormone patches, vaginal rings, diaphragms, cervical caps, and sponges. Each has certain advantages and disadvantages.

Birth control methods vary widely in effectiveness as well as potential side effects. This is therefore a very personal decision. In addition, two methods can be used together, such as a condom along with a diaphragm or spermicide, which increases the effectiveness. (Note

that a male and female condom should not be used together, however, because of the risk of either or both tearing because of friction between them.) Because this is such an important issue, you should talk it over with your health-care provider, or a professional at your student health center.

In cases of unprotected vaginal intercourse, or if a condom tears, emergency contraception is an option for up to five days after intercourse. Sometimes called the “morning after pill” or “plan B,” emergency contraception is an oral hormone that prevents pregnancy from occurring. It is not an “abortion pill.”

Sexual Assault and Date Rape

Sexual assault is a serious problem in Canada generally and among college students in particular. In Canada, one-in-five women will be sexually assaulted.

Sexual assault is any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. Although rape has no specific provision in Canada’s Criminal Code [5], rape is usually more narrowly defined as “unlawful sexual intercourse or any other sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part, or foreign object, without the consent of the victim. Both are significant problems among college students.



Photo by Mihai Surdu on Unsplash

Although men can also be victims of sexual assault and rape, the problem usually involves women. Men must also understand what is involved in sexual assault and help build greater awareness of the problem and how to prevent it.

Sexual assault is so common in our society in part because many people believe in myths about certain kinds of male-female interaction. Common myths include “It’s not really rape if the woman was flirting first” and “It’s not rape unless the woman is seriously injured.” Both statements are not legally correct. Another myth or source of confusion is the idea that “Saying no is just playing hard to get, not really no.” Men who really believe these myths may not think that they are committing assault, especially if their judgment is impaired by alcohol. Other perpetrators of sexual assault and rape, however, know exactly what they’re doing and in fact may plan to overcome their victim by using alcohol or a date rape drug.

Many college administrators and educators have worked very hard to promote better awareness of sexual assault and to help students learn how to protect themselves. Yet colleges cannot prevent things that happen at parties and behind closed doors. Students must understand how to protect themselves.

Perpetrators of sexual assault fall into three categories:

- Strangers
- Acquaintances
- Dating partners

Among college students, assault by a stranger is the least common because campus security departments take many measures to help keep students safe on campus.

Nonetheless, use common sense to avoid situations where you might be alone in a vulnerable place: Walk with a friend if you must pass through a quiet place after dark. Don't open your door to a stranger. Don't take chances.

Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances or date partners. Typically, an acquaintance assault begins at a party. Typically, both the man and the woman are drinking—although assault can happen to sober victims as well. The interaction may begin innocently, perhaps with dancing or flirting. The perpetrator may misinterpret the victim's behavior as a willingness to share sexual activity, or a perpetrator intent on sexual activity may simply pick out a likely target. Either way, the situation may gradually or suddenly change and lead to sexual assault.

Prevention of acquaintance rape begins with the awareness of its likelihood and then taking deliberate steps to ensure you stay safe at and after the party:

- Go with a friend and don't let someone separate you from your friend.
- Agree to stick together and help each other if it looks like things are getting out of hand. If your friend has too much to drink, don't leave her or him alone.
- Plan to leave together and stick to the plan. Be especially alert if you become separated from your friend, even if you are only going off alone to look for the bathroom. You may be followed.
- Be cautious if someone is pressuring you to drink heavily.
- Trust your instincts if someone seems to be coming on too aggressively.
- Get back to your friends. Know where you are and have a plan to get home if you have to leave abruptly.

These preventions can work well at a party or in other social situations, but they don't apply to most dating situations when you are alone with another person. About half of sexual

assaults on college students are date rape. An assault may occur after the first date, when you feel you know the person better and perhaps are not concerned about the risk. This may actually make you more vulnerable, however.

Until you really get to know the person well and have a trusting relationship, follow these guidelines to lower the risk of sexual assault:

- Make it clear that you have limits on sexual activity. If there is any question that your date may not understand your limits, talk about your values and limits.
- If your date initiates unwanted sexual activity of any sort, do not resist passively. The other may misinterpret passive behavior as consent.
- Be careful if your date is drinking heavily or using drugs. Avoid drinking yourself, or drink very moderately.
- Stay in public places where there are other people. Do not invite your date to your home before your relationship is well established.
- Trust your instincts if your date seems to be coming on too strong. End the date if necessary.

If you are sexually assaulted, always talk to someone. Contact your college counselling department for support services and other resources or contact Student Health Services. Even if you do not report the assault to law enforcement, it's important to talk through your feelings and seek help if needed to prevent an emotional crisis.

Date Rape Drugs

In addition to alcohol, sexual predators use certain commonly available drugs to sedate women for sexual assault. They are odorless and tasteless and may be added to a punch bowl or slipped into your drink when you're not looking. These drugs include the sedatives GHB, sometimes called "liquid ecstasy," and Rohypnol, also called "roofies." Both cause sedation in small doses but can have serious medical effects in larger doses. Date rape drugs are typically used at parties.

Use the following tips to protect yourself against date rape drugs:

- Don't put your drink down where someone else may get to it. If your drink is out of your sight for even a moment, don't finish it.
- Never accept an open drink. Don't accept a mixed drink that you did not see mixed from pure ingredients.

- Never drink anything from a punch bowl, even if it's nonalcoholic. You can't know what may have been added into the punch.
- If you experience unexpected physical symptoms that may be the result of something you drank or ate, get to an emergency room and ask to be tested.



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/studyprocaff/?p=37>

Key Takeaways

- Maintaining a health lifestyle that includes eating well, exercise, and proper sleep. A healthy lifestyle reduces stress, improves mood, and increases your capacity to learn.
- Be aware of the effects substances have on your health and student life. Substance use is a personal choice and like most choices, there are trade-offs. These trade-offs can unintentionally affect you and others.
- Every college has policies on Respect and Sexual Assault and provides sexual health resources and services. All students must understand how to protect their sexual health. Thinking about choices, behavior and values helps with responsible decision making.

9. Successful students practice mental wellness



Photo by MARK ADRIANE on Unsplash

Wellness is more than just avoiding disease. Wellness involves feeling good in every respect, in mind and spirit as well as in body. Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health—and maybe more so. If you're unhappy much of the time, you will not do as well as in college—or life—as you can if you're happy. You will feel more stress, and your health will suffer. Still, most of us are neither happy nor unhappy all the time. Life is constantly changing, and our emotions change with it. But sometimes we experience more negative emotions than normally, and our emotional health may suffer. Emotional balance is an essential element of wellness—and for succeeding in college. Emotional balance doesn't mean that you never experience a negative emotion, because these emotions are usually natural and normal. Emotional balance means we balance the negative with the positive, that we can be generally happy even if

we're saddened by some things. Emotional balance starts with being aware of our emotions and understanding them.

Everyone knows about stress, but not everyone knows how to control it. Stress is the great enemy of college success. But once you've learned how to reduce it where you can and cope with unavoidable stress, you'll be well on the road to becoming the best student you can be. We all live with occasional stress. Since college students often feel even more stress than most people, it's important to understand it and learn ways to deal with it so that it doesn't disrupt your life.

Emotional Health

Emotions Can Be Problematic

When is an emotion problematic? Is it bad to feel anxious about a big test coming up or to feel sad after breaking up a romantic relationship?

It is normal to experience negative emotions. College students face so many demands and stressful situations that many naturally report often feeling anxious, depressed, or lonely. These emotions become problematic only when they persist and begin to affect your life in negative ways. That's when it's time to work on your emotional health, just as you'd work on your physical health when illness strikes.

Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most common emotions college students experience, often as a result of the demands of college, work, and family and friends. It's difficult to juggle everything, and you may end up feeling not in control, stressed, and anxious. Anxiety typically results from stress. Some anxiety is often a good thing if it leads to studying for a test, focusing on a problem that needs to be resolved, better management your time and money, and so on. But if anxiety disrupts your focus and makes you freeze up rather than take action, then it may become problematic. Using stress-reduction techniques often helps reduce anxiety to a manageable level.

Anxiety is easier to deal with when you know its cause. Then you can take steps to gain control over the part of your life causing the anxiety. But anxiety can become excessive and lead to a dread of everyday situations.

There are five types of more serious anxiety:

1. Generalized anxiety disorder is characterized by chronic anxiety, exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is little or nothing to provoke it.
2. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions), repetitive behaviors (compulsions), or both.
3. Panic disorder is characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms.
4. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after exposure to a terrifying event

or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened.

5. Social phobia (or social anxiety disorder) is a persistent, intense, and chronic fear of being watched and judged by others and being embarrassed or humiliated by one's own actions.

These five types of anxiety go beyond the normal anxiety everyone feels at some times. If you feel your anxiety is like any of these, see your health-care provider. Effective treatments are available to help you regain control.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a normal feeling that most people experience at some time. College students away from home for the first time are likely to feel lonely at first. Older students may also feel lonely if they no longer see their old friends. International students may also feel lonely. Loneliness involves not feeling connected with others. One person may need only one friend to not feel lonely; others need to feel more connected with a group. There's no set pattern for feeling lonely.



Photo by Francisco Gonzalez on Unsplash

If you are feeling lonely, there are many things you can do to meet others and feel connected. Don't sit alone in your room bemoaning the absence of friends. That will only cause more stress and emotional distress. You will likely start making new friends through going to classes, working, studying, and living in the community. But you can jump-start that process by taking active steps such as these:

- Realize you don't have to be physically with friends in order to stay connected. Many students use social Web sites to stay connected with friends at other colleges or in other locations. Telephone calls, instant messaging, and e-mail work for many.
- Understand that you're not alone in feeling lonely. Many others like you are just waiting for the opportunity to connect, and you will meet them and form new friendships fast once you start reaching out.
- Become involved in campus opportunities to meet others. Every college has a wide range of clubs for students with different interests. If you're not the "joiner" type, look for

individuals in your classes with whom you think you may have something in common and ask them if they'd like to study for a test together or work together on a class project.

- Remember that loneliness is a temporary thing—it's only a matter of time until you make new friends. If your loneliness persists and you seem unable to make friends, then it's a good idea to talk with one of the college counsellors. They can help.

Depression

Depression, like anxiety and loneliness, is commonly experienced by college students. It may be a mild sadness resulting from specific circumstances or be intense feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Many people feel depressed from time to time because of common situations:

- Feeling overwhelmed by pressures to study, work, and meet other obligations
- Not having enough time (or money) to do the things you want to do
- Experiencing problems in a relationship, friendship, or work situation
- Feeling overweight, unhealthy, or not in control of oneself
- Feeling that your new life as a student lacks some of the positive dimensions of your former life
- Not having enough excitement in your life

Depression, like stress, can lead to unhealthy consequences such as poor sleep, overeating or loss of appetite, substance abuse, relationship problems, or withdrawal from activities that formerly brought joy. For most people, depression is a temporary state. But severe depression can have crippling effects.

Not everyone experiences the same symptoms, but the following are most common:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Insomnia, early morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss

- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems

If you have feelings like this that last for weeks at a time and affect your daily life, your depression is more severe than “normal,” temporary depression. It’s time to see your health-care provider and get treatment as you would for any other illness.



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Stress



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We all live with occasional stress. Since college students often feel even more stress than most people, it’s important to understand it and learn ways to deal with it so that it doesn’t disrupt your life. Stress is a natural response of the body and mind to a demand or challenge. The thing that causes stress, called a stressor, captures our attention and causes a physical and emotional reaction. Stressors include physical threats, such as a car we suddenly see

coming at us too fast, and the stress reaction likely includes jumping out of the way—with our heart beating fast and other physical changes. Most of our stressors are not physical threats but situations or events like an upcoming test or an emotional break-up. Stressors also include long-lasting emotional and mental concerns such as worries about money or finding a job.

What Causes Stress?

Not all stressors are bad things. Exciting, positive things also cause a type of stress, called eustress. Falling in love, getting an unexpected sum of money, acing an exam you'd worried about—all of these are positive things that affect the body and mind in ways similar to negative stress: you can't help thinking about it, you may lose your appetite and lie awake at night, and your routine life may be momentarily disrupted. But the kind of stress that causes most trouble results from negative stressors.

Life events that usually cause significant stress include the following:

- Serious illness or injury
- Serious illness, injury, or death of a family member or loved one
- Losing a job or sudden financial catastrophe
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Divorce or ending a long-term relationship (including parents' divorce)
- Being arrested or convicted of a crime
- Being put on academic probation or suspended

Life events like these usually cause a lot of stress that may begin suddenly and disrupt one's life in many ways. Fortunately, these stressors do not occur every day and eventually end—though they can be very severe and disruptive when experienced. Some major life stresses, such as having a parent or family member with a serious illness, can last a long time and may require professional help to cope with them.

Everyday kinds of stressors are far more common but can add up and produce as much stress as a major life event:

- Anxiety about not having enough time for classes, job, studies, and social life
- Worries about grades, an upcoming test, or an assignment
- Money concerns
- Conflict with a roommate, someone at work, or family member

- Anxiety or doubts about one’s future or difficulty choosing a major or career
- Frequent colds, allergy attacks, other continuing health issues
- Concerns about one’s appearance, weight, eating habits, and so on.
- Relationship tensions, poor social life, loneliness
- Time-consuming hassles such as a broken-down car or the need to find a new apartment

Thought Exercise

Take a moment and reflect on the list above. How many of these stressors have you experienced in the last month? The last year? What additional things cause stress?

How many stressors have you thought of? There is no magic number of stressors that an “average” or “normal” college student experiences—because everyone is unique. In addition, stressors come and go: the stress caused by a midterm exam tomorrow morning may be gone by noon, replaced by feeling good about how you did. Still, most college students are likely to experience about half the items on this list. But it’s not the number of stressors that counts. You might have only one item on that list—but it could produce so much stress for you that you’re just as stressed out as someone else who has all of them. The point of this thought exercise is to start by understanding what causes your own stress as a base for learning what to do about it.

What’s Wrong with Stress?

Physically, stress prepares us for action: the classic “fight-or-flight” reaction when confronted with a danger. Our heart is pumping fast, and we’re breathing faster to supply the muscles with energy to fight or flee. Many physical effects in the body prepare us for whatever actions we may need to take to survive a threat. But what about nonphysical stressors, like worrying about grades? Are there any positive effects there? Imagine what life would feel like if you never had worries, never felt any stress at all. If you never worried about grades or doing well on a test, how much studying would you do for it? If you never thought at all about money, would you make any effort to save it or make it? Obviously, stress can be a good thing when it motivates us to do something, whether it’s study, work, resolving a conflict with another, and so on. So it’s not stress itself that’s negative—it’s unresolved or persistent stress that starts to have unhealthy effects.

Chronic (long-term) stress is associated with many physical changes and illnesses, including the following:

- Weakened immune system, making you more likely to catch a cold and to suffer from any illness longer
- More frequent digestive system problems, including constipation or diarrhea, ulcers, and indigestion
- Elevated blood pressure
- Increased risk of diabetes
- Muscle and back pain
- More frequent headaches, fatigue, and insomnia
- Greater risk of heart attack and other cardiovascular problems over the long term



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Chronic or acute (intense short-term) stress also affects our minds and emotions in many ways:

- Difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating
- Poor memory
- More frequent negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, frustration, powerlessness, resentment, or nervousness—and a general negative outlook on life
- Greater difficulty dealing with others because of irritability, anger, or avoidance

No wonder we view stress as such a negative thing! As much as we'd like to eliminate all stressors, however, it just can't happen. Too many things in the real world cause stress and always will.

Unhealthy Responses to Stress

Since many stressors are unavoidable, the question is what to do about the resulting stress. A person can try to ignore or deny stress for a while, but then it keeps building and starts causing all those problems. So we have to do something. Consider first what you have typically done in the past when you felt most stressed. Here are a few examples of how college students have responded to stress.

1. Drinking alcohol
2. Drinking lots of coffee
3. Sleeping a lot
4. Eating too much
5. Eating too little
6. Smoking or drugs
7. Having arguments
8. Sitting around depressed
9. Watching television or surfing the Web
10. Complaining to friends
11. Exercising, jogging, biking
12. Practicing yoga or tai chi
13. Meditating
14. Using relaxation techniques
15. Talking with an professor or counsellor

What's wrong with the first ten stress-reduction behaviors listed first? Why not watch television or get a lot of sleep when you're feeling stressed, if that makes you feel better?

While it may feel better temporarily to escape feelings of stress in those ways, ultimately they may cause more stress themselves. If you're worried about grades and being too busy to study as much as you need to, then letting an hour or two slip by watching television will make you even more worried later because then you have even less time. Eating too much may make you sluggish and less able to focus, and if you're trying to lose weight, you'll now feel just that much more stressed by what you've done. Alcohol, caffeine, smoking, and drugs all generally increase one's stress over time. Complaining to friends? Over time, your friends will tire of hearing it or tire of arguing with you because a complaining person isn't much fun to be around. So eventually you may find yourself even more alone and stressed.

Yet there is a bright side: there are lots of very positive ways to cope with stress that will also improve your health, make it easier to concentrate on your studies, and make you a happier person overall. The last five items on our list are more positive ways to cope.

Coping with Stress

Think about your list of stressors. For each, consider whether it is external (like bad job hours or not having enough money) or internal, originating in your attitudes and thoughts.



Photo by whoislimos on Unsplash

You may be able to eliminate many external stressors. Talk to your boss about changing your work hours. If you have money problems, work on a budget you can live with, look for a new job, or reduce your expenses by finding a cheaper apartment, selling your car, and using public transportation.

What about other external stressors? Taking so many classes that you don't have the time to study for all of them? Keep working on your time management skills.

Schedule your days carefully and stick to the schedule. Take fewer classes next term if necessary. What else can you do to eliminate external stressors? Change apartments, get a new roommate, find better child care – consider all your options. And don't hesitate to talk things over with one of our counsellors, who may offer other solutions.

Internal stressors, however, are often not easily resolved. We can't make all stressors go away, but we can learn how to cope so that we don't feel so stressed out most of the time. We can take control of our lives. We can find healthy coping strategies.

All the topics in this section involve stress one way or another. Many of the healthy habits that contribute to our wellness and happiness also reduce stress and minimize its effects.

Get Some Exercise

Exercise, especially aerobic exercise, is a great way to help reduce stress. Exercise increases the production of certain hormones, which leads to a better mood and helps counter depression and anxiety. Exercise helps you feel more energetic and focused so that you are more productive in your work and studies and thus less likely to feel stressed. Regular exercise also helps you sleep better, which further reduces stress.

Get More Sleep

When sleep deprived, you feel more stress and are less able to concentrate on your work or studies. Many people drink more coffee or other caffeinated beverages when feeling sleepy, and caffeine contributes further to stress-related emotions such as anxiety and nervousness.

Manage Your Money

Worrying about money is one of the leading causes of stress.

Adjust Your Attitude

You know the saying about the optimist who sees the glass as half full and the pessimist who sees the same glass as half empty. Guess which one feels more stress? Much of the

stress you feel may be rooted in your attitudes toward school, your work—your whole life. If you don't feel good about these things, how do you change?

To begin with, you really need to think about yourself. What makes you happy? Are you expecting your college career to be perfect and always exciting, with never a dull class or reading assignment? Or can you be happy that you are in fact succeeding in college and foresee a great life and career ahead? Maybe you just need to take a fun elective course to balance that “serious” course that you're not enjoying so much. Maybe you just need to play an intramural sport to feel as good as you did playing in high school. Maybe you just need to take a brisk walk every morning to feel more alert and stimulated. Maybe listening to some great music on the way to work will brighten your day. Maybe calling up a friend to study together for that big test will make studying more fun. No one answer works for everyone—you have to look at your life, be honest with yourself about what affects your daily attitude, and then look for ways to make changes. The good news is that although old negative habits can be hard to break, once you've turned positive changes into new habits, they will last into a brighter future.

Learn a Relaxation Technique

Different relaxation techniques can be used to help minimize stress. Following are a few tried-and-tested ways to relax when stress seems overwhelming. You can learn most of these through books, online exercises, CDs or MP3s, and DVDs available at your library or student services offices. Practicing one of them can have dramatic effects.

- **Deep breathing.** Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, filling your lungs completely. Exhale slowly and smoothly through your mouth. Concentrate on your breathing and feel your chest expanding and relaxing. After five to ten minutes, you will feel more relaxed and focused.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** With this technique, you slowly tense and then relax the body's major muscle groups. The sensations and mental concentration produce a calming state.
- **Meditation.** Taking many forms, meditation may involve focusing on your breathing, a specific visual image, or a certain thought, while clearing the mind of negative energy. Many podcasts are available to help you find a form of meditation that works best for you.



Photo by Le Minh Phuong on Unsplash

- **Yoga or tai chi.** Yoga, tai chi, and other exercises that focus on body position and slow, gradual movements are popular techniques for relaxation and stress reduction. You can learn these techniques through a class, online or from a DVD.
- **Music and relaxation CDs and MP3s.** Many different relaxation techniques have been developed for audio training. Simply play the recording and relax as you are guided through the techniques.
- **Massage.** Regular massages are a way to relax both body and mind. If you can't afford a weekly massage but enjoy its effects, a local massage therapy school may offer more affordable massage from students and beginning practitioners.

Get Counselling

If stress is seriously disrupting your studies or your life regardless of what you do to try to reduce it, you may need help. There's no shame in admitting that you need help, and college counsellors and health professionals are there to help.

Tips for Success: Stress

- Pay attention to, rather than ignore, things that cause you stress and change what you can.
- Accept what you can't change and resolve to make new habits that will help you cope.
- Get regular exercise and enough sleep.
- Evaluate your priorities, work on managing your time, and schedule restful activities in your daily life. Students who feel in control of their lives report feeling much less stress than those who feel that circumstances control them.
- Slow down and focus on one thing at a time—don't check for e-mail or text messages every few minutes! Know when to say no to distractions.
- Break old habits involving caffeine, alcohol, and other substances.
- Remember your long-range goals and don't obsess over short-term difficulties.
- Make time to enjoy being with friends.
- Explore new activities and hobbies that you enjoy.
- Find a relaxation technique that works for you and practice regularly.
- Get help if you're having a hard time coping with emotional stress.



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Good2Talk is a free, confidential helpline providing professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and well-being to post-secondary students in Ontario, 24/7/365.

If you are dealing with anxiety, depression, loneliness or stress, talking with a professional about it can help. The Good2Talk professionals are available day and night to talk to you whenever you need to. They can also help you with referrals to local resources and professionals for further support which can be helpful if you are studying away from home.

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Key Takeaways

- Emotional balance starts with being aware of your emotions and understanding them, balancing the negative with the positive.
- Anxiety and Depression are common emotions we all feel at one time or another, if you are experiencing serious anxiety or depression, seek help from your healthcare professional or a college counsellor just like you would for any other illness.
- Loneliness is a normal feeling college students can experience in a new education setting. Getting involved in the college community, staying in touch with friends and family, and study

with classmates are excellent coping strategies. If you are having difficulty making new friends or dealing with loneliness, see a college counsellor for assistance.

- Stress is a natural response to a demand or challenge. Stress can be good if it motivates you to action. Chronic or acute stress can cause unhealthy responses. Learning to cope with stress in a positive way can maintain and improve your health emotionally and physically.

10. Successful students understand their finances

If you're a new college student you may not yet have money problems or issues—but most college students soon do. It doesn't matter whether you're a “traditional” college student enrolled in college just after high school or a “nontraditional” student returning to school.

Younger students are likely to confront money issues for several reasons:

- If you are living away from home for the first time, you may have less experience setting and sticking to a budget and handling money in general.
- Because you need more time for studying and other aspects of college life, you may have less time to work and make money.
- Even if you receive financial support from your family, your funds are not unlimited, and you'll need to learn to live within a budget.



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You will have many new expenses including tuition and fees, room and board or housing and food bills, books and supplies, and so on. Nontraditional students who have worked or started a family before attending college may have already learned to manage their money well but usually still confront some financial issues:

- Because you need more time for studying and college, you likely have less time to work and make money.
- You will have many new expenses including tuition and fees, books and supplies, and so on.
- You are more likely to have to juggle a budget that may include a family, mortgage, and other established expenses.

Almost everyone eventually has money issues at college, and they can impact your academic success. Money problems are stressful and can keep you from concentrating on your

studies. Spending too much may lead you to work more hours than you might otherwise, giving you less time to study. Or you might take fewer classes and thus spend more years in college than needed. Worse yet, money problems cause many students to drop out of college entirely. But it doesn't have to be this hard. Like other skills, financial skills can be learned, and they have lifelong value.

This section will help you:

- set financial goals
- consider jobs and making money
- learn how to spend less and manage a budget
- avoid credit card debt
- determine how best to finance your college expenses

Setting your Financial goals and Budget

It's expensive to go to college. College tuition has risen for decades at virtually all schools, and very few students are fortunate enough to not have to be concerned with this reality. Still, there are things you can do to help control costs and manage your finances while in college. Begin by thinking about your financial goals.

What Are Your Financial Goals?

Whatever it is you plan to do in your future, whether work or other activities, your financial goals in the present should be realistic to enable you to fulfill your plan.

Taking control of your personal finances begins with thinking about your goals and deciding what really matters to you. Here are some things to think about:

- Is it important for you to graduate from college with minimal debt?
- What are your priorities for summers and other "free time"? Working to earn money?
Taking nonpaying internships or volunteering to gain experience in your field?
Enjoying social activities and time with friends?
- How important is it to you to live in a nice place, or drive a nice car, or wear nice clothes, or eat in nice restaurants? How important in comparison to your educational

goals?

There are no easy answers to such questions. Most people would like enough money to have and do what they want, low enough expenses that they don't have to work too much to stay on budget, and enough financial freedom to choose activities without being swayed by financial concerns. Few college students live in that world, however. Since you will have to make choices, it's important first to think about what really matters to you—and what you're willing to sacrifice for a while in order to reach your goals.

Make More or Spend Less?

That often becomes an issue for college students. You begin by setting up a realistic budget and sticking to it. A budget is simply the best way to balance the money that comes in with the money that goes out. For most college students, the only way to increase the “money coming in” side of the budget is to work. Even with financial support from your family, financial aid from the college, your savings from past jobs, and the like, you will still need to work if all your resources do not equal the “money going out” side of the budget. The major theme of this chapter is avoiding debt except when absolutely necessary to finance your education. Why is that so important? Simply because money problems and debt cause more people to drop out of college than any other single factor. This chapter includes discussion of how students can earn money while in college and the benefits of working. But working too much can have a negative impact by taking up time you might need for studying. It's crucial, therefore, whenever you think about your own financial situation and the need to work, to also think about how much you need to work—and consider whether you would be happier spending less if that meant you could work less and enjoy your college life and studies more. As we'll see later, students often spend more than they actually need to and are often happier once they learn to spend less.

The College Budget

More people get into financial trouble because they're spending too much than because they're making (or receiving) too little.

Here's a good place to start:

- Having money or not having money doesn't define who you are. Your real friends will think no less of you if you make your own lunch and eat it between classes or take the bus to campus rather than drive a new car. You are valued more by others for who you are as a person, not for what things you have.
- You don't have to spend as much as your friends to be one of the group. Some people always have more money than others and spend more. Resist any feeling that your friends who are big spenders are the norm. Don't feel you have to go along with whatever expensive activities they propose just so you fit in.
- A positive attitude leads to success. Learn to relax and not get stressed out about money. If you need to make changes in how you spend money, view this as an exciting accomplishment, not a depressing fact. Feel good about staying on a budget and being smart about how you spend your money.
- Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Most students have financial problems, and they don't just go away by waving a magic wand of good intentions. If your budget reveals you don't have enough money even while working and carefully controlling your spending, you may still need a student loan or larger changes in your lifestyle to get by. That's OK—there are ways to deal with that. But if you unrealistically set your sights so high about spending less and saving a lot, you may become depressed or discouraged if you don't meet your goals. Before you can make an effective budget, you need to look at what you're spending money on now and consider what's essential and what's optional.

Essential costs are the big things:

- Room and board or rent/mortgage, utilities, and groceries
- College tuition, fees, textbooks, supplies
- Transportation
- Insurance (health insurance, car insurance, etc.)
- Dependent care if needed
- Essential personal items (some clothing, hygiene items, etc.)



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These things are sometimes called fixed costs, but that term can be misleading. If you have

the option to move to a less expensive apartment that is smaller or a few blocks farther away, you can partly control that cost, so it's not really "fixed." Still, for most people, the real savings come from spending less on optional things. Most people spend by habit, not really thinking about where their money goes or how quickly their spending adds up. If you knew you were spending more than a thousand dollars a year on coffee you buy every day between classes, would that make you think twice? Or another thousand on fast food lunches rather than taking a couple minutes in the morning to make your lunch? When people actually start paying attention to where their money goes, most are shocked to see how the totals grow. If you can save a few thousand dollars a year by cutting back on just the little things, how far would that go to making you feel much better about your finances?

Following are some general principles for learning to spend less.

- Be aware of what you're spending. Carry a small notebook and write down everything—everything— you spend for a month. You'll see your habits and be able to make a better budget to take control.
- Look for alternatives. If you buy a lot of bottled water, for example, you may feel healthier than people who drink soft drinks or coffee, but you may be spending hundreds of dollars a year on something that is virtually free! Carry your own refillable water bottle and save the money.
- Plan ahead to avoid impulse spending. If you have a healthy snack in your backpack, it's much easier to not put a dollar in a vending machine when you're hungry on the way to class. Make a list before going grocery shopping and stick to it. Shopping without a list usually results in buying all sorts of unneeded (and expensive) things that catch your eye in the store.
- Be smart. Shop around, compare prices, and buy in bulk. Stopping to think a minute before spending is often all it takes.

Managing a Budget

Budgeting involves analyzing your income and expenses so you can see where your money is going and making adjustments when needed to avoid debt. At first budgeting can seem complex or time consuming, but once you've gone through the basics, you'll find it easy and a very valuable tool for controlling your personal finances. Why create and manage a budget? Going to college changes your financial situation. There are many new expenses, and you likely don't know yet how your spending needs and habits will work out over the long term. Without a budget, it's just human nature to spend more than you have coming

in, as evidenced by the fact that most North Americans today are in debt. Debt is a major reason many students drop out of college. So it's worth it to go to the trouble to create and manage a budget.

Managing a budget involves three steps:

1. Listing all your sources of income on a monthly basis.
2. Calculating all your expenditures on a monthly basis.
3. Making adjustments in your budget (and lifestyle if needed) to ensure the money isn't going out faster than it's coming in.

Balancing Your Budget

Now comes the moment of truth: compare your total monthly incoming with your total monthly outgoing.

How balanced is your budget at this point? Remember that you estimated some of your expenditures. You can't know for sure until you actually track your expenses for at least a month and have real numbers to work with. What if your spending total is higher than your income total? The first step is to make your budget work on paper. Go back through

your expenditure list and see where you can cut. Remember, college students shouldn't try to live like working professionals. Maybe you are used to a nice haircut every month or two—but maybe you can go to a cheaper place or cut it yourself. There are dozens of ways to spend less, as suggested earlier.

The essential first step is to make your budget balance on paper. Then your job is to live within the budget. It's normal to have to make adjustments at first. Just be sure to keep the overall budget balanced as you make adjustments. For example, if you find you must spend more for textbooks, you may decide you can spend less on eating out—and subtract the amount from that category that you add to the textbook category. Get in the habit of thinking this way instead of reaching for a credit card when you don't have enough in your budget for something you want or need. Don't be surprised if it takes several months to make the budget process work. Be flexible, but stay committed to the process and don't give up



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because it feels like too much work to keep track of your money. Without a budget, you may have difficulty reaching your larger goal: taking control of your life while in college.

What If Your Budget Doesn't Work?

Your budget may be unbalanced by a small amount that you can correct by reducing spending, or it may have a serious imbalance. If your best efforts fail to cut your expenditures to match your income, you may have a more serious problem, unless you plan in advance to manage this with student loans or other funds. First, think about how this situation occurred. When you decided to go to college, how did you plan to finance it? Were you off in your calculations of what it would cost, or did you just hope for the best? Are you still committed to finding a way to continue in college?

If you are motivated to reach your college goal, good! Now look closely at your budget to determine what's needed. If you can't solve the budget shortfall by cutting back on "optional" expenses, then you need more dramatic changes. Are you paying a high rent because your apartment is spacious or near campus? Can you move a little farther away and get by temporarily in a smaller place, if the difference in rent makes a big difference in your overall finances? If you're spending a lot on your car, can you sell it and get by with public transportation for a year or two? Play with the numbers for such items in your budget and see how you can cut expenses to stay in college without getting deeply in debt.

If you worry you won't be as happy if you change your lifestyle, remember that money problems are a key source of stress for many college students and that stress affects your happiness as well as how well you do in college. It's worth the effort to work on your budget and prevent this stress. If all else fails, see financial aid at the college. Don't wait until you're in real financial trouble before talking to someone who may be able to offer help.

What If You Get in Financial Trouble?

People often don't admit to themselves that they have a problem until it becomes unmanageable. We human beings are very good at rationalizing and making excuses to ourselves! Here are some warning signs of sliding into financial trouble: For two or three months in a row, your budget is unbalanced because you're spending more than you are bringing in. You've begun using your savings for routine expenses you should be able to handle with your regular budget. You've missed a deadline for a bill or are taking credit card

cash advances or overdrawing your checking account. You have a big balance on your credit card and have paid only the required minimum payment for the last two months. You have nothing in the bank in case of an emergency need. You don't even know how much total debt you have. You're trying to cut expenses by eliminating something important, such as dropping health insurance or not buying required textbooks.

If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, first acknowledge the problem. It's not going to solve itself—you need to take active steps before it gets worse and affects your college career. Second, if you just cannot budget your balance, admit that you need help. There's no shame in that. Start with your college counsellor or the financial aid office; if they can't help you directly, they can refer you to someone who can. Take your budget and other financial records with you so that they can see what's really involved. Remember that they're there to help—their goal is to ensure you succeed in college.

Saving for the Future

If you're having problems just getting by on your budget, it may seem pointless to even think about saving for the future. Still, if you can possibly put aside some money every month into a savings plan, it's worth the effort: An emergency or unexpected situation may occur suddenly. Having the savings to cope with it is much less stressful than having to find a loan or run up your credit cards. Saving is a good habit to develop.

Working While in College

Most college students work while in school. Whether you work summers only or part time or full time all year, work can have both benefits and drawbacks. The difference may result as much from the type of job you work as from the number of hours you work.

A Job Can Help or Hurt

In addition to helping pay the bills, a job or internship while in school has other benefits:

- Experience for your résumé
- Contacts for your later job search network
- Employment references for your résumé

Here are some factors to consider as you look for a job:

- What kinds of people will you be interacting with? Other students, professors, researchers? Interacting with others in the world of college can broaden your college experience, help motivate you to study, and help you feel part of a shared experience. You may work with or meet people who in the future can refer you to employers in your field. On the other hand, working in a business far from campus, for example, may offer a steady paycheck but can separate you from the academic community and detract from a positive college experience.
- Is the job flexible enough to meet a college student's needs? Will you be able to change your work hours during final exam week or when a special project is due? A rigid work schedule may cause difficulty at times when you really need to focus on your classes.
- What will you be able to say about your work in your future résumé? Does it involve any skills—including people skills or financial or managerial responsibilities—that your employer can someday praise you for? Will working this job help you get a different, better job next year? These factors can make a job ideal for college students, but in the real world many students will have to work less than-ideal jobs. Working at a fast food restaurant or overnight shipping company may not seem very glamorous or offer the benefits described previously, but it may be the only job available at present. Don't despair—things can always change. Make the money you need to get by in college but don't become complacent and stop looking for more meaningful work. Keep your eyes and ears open for other possibilities. Visit the campus student employment office frequently (or check online) for new postings. Talk to other students. At the same time, even with a dull job, do your best and keep a good attitude. Remember that your boss

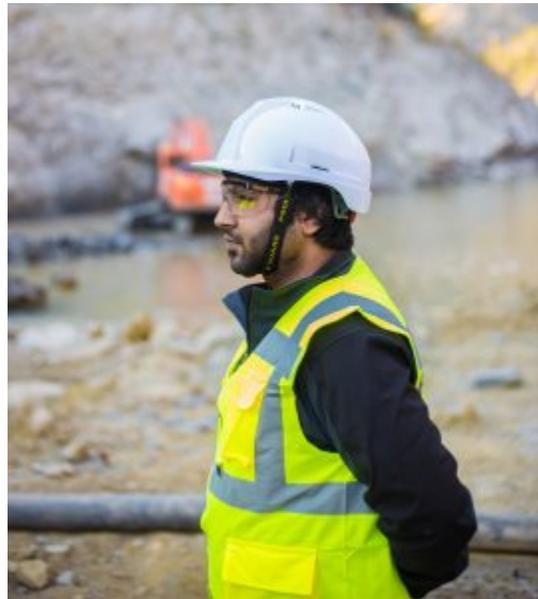


Photo by Ahsan S. on Unsplash

or supervisor may someday be a work reference who can help (or hurt) your chances of getting a job you really want.

Student Jobs

The number of hours college students work per week varies considerably, from five to ten hours a week to full time and everywhere in between. Before deciding how much you need to work, first make a detailed budget as described earlier. Your goal should be to make as much as you need, and hopefully a little more to save, but first you need to know your true need. Remember your goals in college and stay focused on your education. Cut back on your optional spending so that you don't have to work so many hours that your studies are impacted.

Balancing the Job You Have with Your Ideal Job

A growing percentage of students are working full time when they return to school, and many continue in the same jobs. If you're in this situation, you know that balancing work and college is one of the most difficult things you've ever done. You're used to working—but not used to finding time for class and studying at the same time. You likely feel harried and frustrated at times, and you may even start to wonder if you're cut out for college. The time may come when you start thinking about dropping classes or leaving college altogether. It may be hard to stay motivated. If you start feeling this way, focus on your big goals and don't let the day-to-day time stresses get you down. As difficult as it may be, try to keep your priorities, and remember that while you face temporary difficulties now, a college degree is forever.

- Acknowledge that sacrifice and compromise may be needed.
- Reduce your expenses, if you can, so you can cut back on the number of hours you work. This may mean temporarily giving up some things you enjoy in order to reach your goals.
- If you cannot cut your expenses and work hours and simply do not have the time to do well in your classes, you may have to cut back on how many classes you take per term. Try everything else first, but know that it's better to succeed a little at a time than to push too hard and risk not succeeding. If you do have to cut back, keep a positive

attitude: you're still working toward your future ideal. If you ever feel the temptation to quit, see your college counsellor to explore all your options.



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Credit Cards

Credit cards are such a big issue because they are easy to get, easy to use—and for many people, easy to accumulate debt.

Credit cards do have legitimate purposes:

- In an emergency, you may need funds you cannot obtain otherwise.
- You generally need a credit card for travel, for hotels, and other needs.
- Often it's less expensive to make significant purchases online, and to do that you usually need a credit card. (Many ATM debit cards also function like a credit card for online purchases.)
- If you are young, responsible use of a credit card is a good way to start building a credit rating—but only if you use the credit card responsibly and always make sufficient payments on time.



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Your first goal with a credit card is to understand what you're getting into and how you are charged. Read the fine print on your monthly statements. You should understand about rate increases and know what happens if you miss a payment, pay less than the minimum, or pay late.

Setting Limits

All credit cards come with a limit, the maximum total amount you can charge, but this is not the same as the limit you should set for how you use the card based on your budget. If you bought something that cost \$400, for example, would your monthly budget let you pay it off when the bill comes? If it will take you two or three months to have that much available in your budget, are you also including the interest you'll be paying? What if an unexpected need then arises and you need to charge more? Set your personal use limit by calculating how much your budget allows you to charge. If you are using the card just for convenience, such as to pay for meals or regular purchases, be sure you have enough in those categories in your budget left at the end of the month to make the payment. If tempted to buy a significant item with your credit card, do the calculations in advance.

Avoiding Debt

If your credit card debt is not limited by your age, that balance can surely rise.

Following are tips that will help you avoid slipping into credit card debt:

- Pay with cash when you can. Use your budget as a guide for how much cash to carry with you. A good way is to plan how much you'll need for a week (lunches, parking meters, snacks or drinks between classes) and start the week with that amount from an ATM. Carrying that exact amount helps you stay informed of how you're doing on your budget and keeps you from "accidentally" spending too much on a whim.
- When possible, use a debit card instead of a credit card. A debit card is taken just like a credit card in most places, so you can use it instead of cash, but remember that a purchase is subtracted immediately from your account. Don't risk overdraft fees by using a debit card when you don't have the balance to back it up.
- Record a debit card purchase in your checkbook register as soon as possible.
- Make it a priority to pay your balance in full every month. If you can't pay it all, pay as much as you can—and then remember that balance will still be there, so try not to use the card at all during the next month.
- Don't get cash advances on your credit card. With most cards, you begin paying interest from that moment forward—so there will still be an interest charge even if you pay the bill in full at the end of the month. Cash advance interest rates are

often considerably higher than purchase rates.

- Don't use more than one credit card. Multiple cards make it too easy to misuse them and lose track of your total debt.
- Get and keep receipts for all credit card purchases. Don't throw them away because you'll see the charges on your monthly statement.
- Write the amounts down in your spending budget. You also need the receipts in case your monthly statement has an error.

Stop carrying your credit card. If you don't have enough willpower to avoid spontaneous purchases, be honest with yourself. Don't carry the card at all—after all, the chances of having an emergency need for it are likely to be very small. Having to go home to get the card also gives you a chance to consider whether you really need whatever it is that you were about to buy.



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Identity Security

Identity theft is a serious and growing problem. Identity theft is someone else's use of your personal information—usually financial information—to make an illegal gain. A criminal who has your credit card number or bank account information may be able to make purchases or transfer funds from your accounts.

Someone with the right information about you, such as your social security number along with birth date and other data, can even pretend to be you and open new credit accounts that you don't know about—until the bank or collection agency tries to recover amounts from you. Although innocent, you would spend a lot of time and effort dealing with the problem.

Follow these guidelines to prevent identity theft:

- Never put in the trash any document with personal or financial information (e.g., your

social insurance number, credit card number). Shred it first.

- Carefully review bank statements, credit card bills, and the like when you receive them. If the balance seems incorrect or you do not recognize charges, contact the bank or credit card company immediately.
- Never give your social insurance number, credit card number, or other sensitive data when requested by telephone or e-mail. Many schemes are used to try to trick people to reveal this information, but legitimate companies do not make such requests.
- Do not use online banking or make online purchases with a credit card using a public computer or an unsecured Wi-Fi connection. Your data can be picked up by others lurking within the Wi-Fi signal range.

Key Takeaways

- Most college students encounter money issues in their academic life. Regardless if they are just out of school, or a “nontraditional” mature student.
- Balancing a budget is a key asset to develop in life. Understand the costs that are involved with college, and have a plan to deal with it.
- You are valued more by others for who you are as a person; not for your bank balance. Acknowledge that sacrifice and compromises might be needed and people will respect you no less for the choice.

PART II

AND #II SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS LEARN INDEPENDENTLY



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Successful students understand that doing well in college requires using all the learning strategies that they have used in the past and finding new strategies to adapt to new course demands. The most important difference between high school learning and college learning is that we expect you to take full responsibility for your learning. At college, you will find that there is less guidance than you may have experienced in the past. Professors may not remind you as often of upcoming tests and assignments because, as this is an adult learning environment, you are responsible for keeping track using your course outline and syllabus. You are expected to take initiative and approach your professor if you have questions. We use progressive assessment to test your knowledge and skills throughout the semester. This means focusing only on exams will not lead to success. Successful students use every quiz and assignment to demonstrate their learning. Professors will highlight important concepts in your course material but usually will not present everything you need to learn in depth.

This is why we say successful student learn independently using a four step cycle of Preparing, Absorbing, Capturing and Reviewing. In this module, we will review this cycle and explore some of the learning skills that can help you. For example, improving your reading skills will help you manage your textbook and other assigned readings. Even if your professor does not talk about the textbook in class, you are still expected to read it and learn from it. Reading the chapter before class is one way to prepare. Actively attending and

participating in classes is part of the absorbing step. Better notetaking skills will help you get the most of your class and be a guide for your independent learning. This is part of the capturing step. Improving your written communication skills will help with assignment and tests and many assignments will involve authentic work related writing which prepares you for your field. We have sections for you on studying, part of the reviewing step as well as test taking and group work.

Our recommendation is that you scan all the sections. You may already have skills in some or even all of these areas. Confirming this can give you more confidence as you begin your study. If there are areas you can improve, the sections will give you an idea of strategies you can try. You may find out that you're not as skilled as you need to be in test taking... yet! Trying a new approach is often all you need to do to get there.

Key Takeaways

- At the college level, you must take full responsibility for your learning.
- Although every student arrives at college with a variety of learning and study skills, you may need new strategies to succeed at this advance level of education.

II. Learning

The Learning Cycle

Four Steps to Learning

Adult learning is different from learning in primary and secondary school. In college, most of the responsibility for learning falls on the student. You're free to fail – or succeed – as you choose. This applies as well to how well you learn. Learning an academic subject means really understanding it, being able to think about it in meaningful ways and to apply that understanding in new situations. This is very different from simply memorizing something and repeating it back on a test.

Academic learning occurs most effectively in a cycle of four steps:

1. Prepare
2. Absorb
3. Capture
4. Review

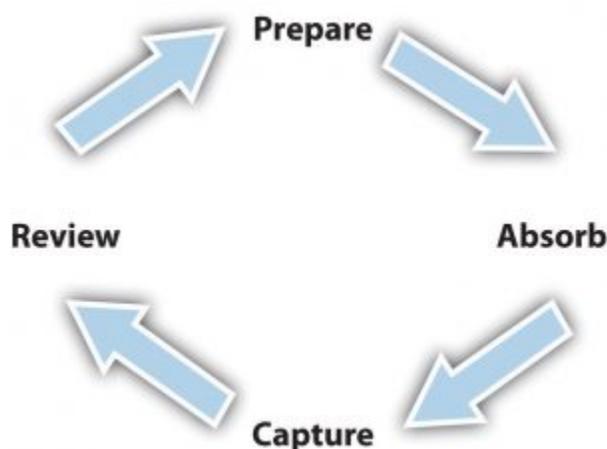


Figure from *College Success*, University of Minnesota, 2015, CC BY-NC-SA

Prepare

Preparing to learn is the first step for learning. Partly, you are putting yourself in the right mind-set to learn.

Absorb

Absorbing refers to the actual taking in of new ideas, information, or experiences. This happens at the moment a student listens to a class lecture or reads a textbook.

Capture

Capturing refers to taking notes and other forms of documentation. Just hearing something once is seldom enough. You have to go back over the material again, sometimes several times again, thinking about it and seeing how it all fits together.

Review

The step of reviewing your class notes and other materials is the next step for solidifying your learning and reaching a real understanding of the topic. Reviewing is also the step in which you discover whether you really understand the material.

Reviewing is also a way to prepare for new information and ideas. That's why this is a learning cycle: the end of the process loops back to the beginning as you prepare for additional learning.

Using your Memory



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In your early and high school education, memorization was a key aspect of learning. You memorized multiplication tables, the names of the provinces, and vocabulary words. Memorized facts ensured your success on multiple-choice questions. In college, however, most of your work is focused on understanding the material in depth. Understanding themes and ideas and being able to think critically about them is really the key to your success in college learning. Although memorization is not the primary key to success, having a good memory is important to capture ideas in your mind, and it helps tremendously in certain subjects like sciences and foreign languages.

How Memory Works

Memory is the process of storing and retrieving information. There are two types of memory: short-term or active memory and long-term or passive memory.

Short-term Memory

Short-term or active memory is made up of the information we are processing at any given time. Short-term memory involves information being captured at the moment as well as from information retrieved from our passive memory for doing complex mental tasks, such as thinking critically and drawing conclusions. But short-term memory is limited and suffers from the passing of time and lack of use. We begin to forget data within thirty seconds of not using it, and interruptions, such as phone calls or distractions, require us to rebuild the short term memory structure—to get “back on task.” To keep information in our memory, we must either use it or place it into our long-term memory (much like saving a document on your computer).

Long-term Memory

Long-term memory is made up the information you know. How we save information to our long-term memory has a lot to do with our ability to retrieve it when we need it at a later date. Our mind “saves” information by creating a complex series of links to the data. The stronger the links, the easier it is to recall. You can strengthen these links by using the following strategies. You should note how closely they are tied to good listening and notetaking strategies.

Tips for moving information from short-term to long-term memory

- Make a deliberate decision to remember the specific data. “I need to remember Richard’s name” creates stronger links than just wishing you had a better memory for names.

- Link the information to your everyday life. Ask yourself, “Why is it important that I remember this material?”—and answer it.
- Link the information to other information you already have “stored,” especially the key themes of the course, and you will recall the data more easily. Ask yourself how this is related to other information you have. Look for ways to tie items together.
- Mentally group similar individual items into “buckets.” By doing this, you are creating links, for example, among terms to be memorized.
- Use visual imagery. Picture the concept vividly in your mind. Make those images big, bold, and colorful—even silly!
- Break information down into manageable “chunks.”
- Work from general information to the specific. People usually learn best when they get the big picture first, and then look at the details.
- Eliminate distractions.
- Test your memory often. Try to write down everything you know about a specific subject, from memory. Then go back and check your notes and textbook to see how you did.



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Key Takeaways

- Learning at college goes beyond the memorization of facts; you are required to understand your subject materials so that you can think about it in meaningful ways and apply it to new situations.
- The academic learning cycle of preparing, absorbing, capturing and reviewing can help you better understand and use the information and skills presented in your courses.
- Short-term memory holds a limited amount of information that you process at one time, but it is temporary; long-term memory stores information by creating complex linkages that helps you recall important information at a later time. Moving information from short-term to long-term

memory takes deliberate action on your part.

12. Reading

Active reading is a planned, deliberate set of strategies to engage with text-based materials with the purpose of increasing your understanding. This is a key skill you need to master for college. Along with listening, it is the primary method for absorbing new ideas and information in college. But active reading also applies to and facilitates the other steps of the learning cycle; it is critical for preparing, capturing, and reviewing, too.

In college, most professors do not spend much time reviewing the reading assignment in class. Rather, they expect that you have done the reading assignment before coming to class and understand the material. The class lecture or discussion is often based on that expectation. Tests, too, are based on that expectation. This is why active reading is so important, it's up to you to do the reading and comprehend what you read.

Note: It may not always be clear on an professor's syllabus, but the corresponding textbook chapter for the topics listed for that week should be read before coming to class.

How Do You Read to Learn?

The four steps of active reading are almost identical to the four phases of the learning cycle—and that is no coincidence! Active reading is learning through reading the written word, so the learning cycle naturally applies.

Active reading involves these steps:

1. Preparing
2. Reading
3. Capturing the key ideas
4. Reviewing

Let's take a look at how to use each step when reading.

Preparing to Read

Your textbook as a whole – Start by thinking about why your professor has chosen this text. Look at the table of contents; how does it compare with the course syllabus?

Your chapter as a whole – Explore the chapter by scanning the pages of the chapter to get a sense of what the chapter is about. Look at the headings, illustrations and tables. Read the introduction and summary. Understanding the big picture of the chapter will help you add the details when doing close reading.

Give yourself direction by creating a purpose or quest for your reading. This will help you become more actively engaged in your reading. Create questions to find the answers to in your reading using the headings of each section. You may also have learning objectives listed at the front of each chapter which could be turned into questions or you may have chapter review questions prepared for you at the end of the chapter.

Reading

Take the first question you have prepared and think about what you already know about this question. Jot the question down on paper. Begin to read the chapter and stop when you have found the answer.

Write down the answer in short form. Leave some space for additional notes you may want to add later and add the next question. Continue reading this way until you are done the chapter or are done studying for this session.

Capturing the key ideas

Before you put away your textbook and notes at the end of a reading session, go back through the questions you answered and pull out key ideas and words. You can highlight these, jot them in the space you left below your answer or note them in the margins.

Reviewing what you read

For each question, cover up the answer and key ideas you have written. Can you still answer the question? Check your mental review against what you have written.

Additional Reading Tips:

The four steps to active reading provide a proven approach to effective learning from texts. Following are some tips you can use to enhance your reading even further:

- Pace yourself. Figure out how much time you have to complete the reading assignment. Divide the assignment into smaller blocks rather than trying to read the entire assignment in one sitting.
- Schedule your reading. Set aside blocks of time, preferably at the time of the day when you are most alert, to do your reading assignments.
- Read your most difficult assignments early in your reading time, when you are freshest.
- Get yourself in the right space. Choose to read in a quiet, well-lit space. Your chair should be comfortable but provide good support.
- Avoid distractions. Active reading takes place in your short-term memory. Every time you move from task to task, you have to “reboot” your short-term memory and you lose the continuity of active reading.
- Avoid reading fatigue. Work for about fifty minutes, and then give yourself a break for five to ten minutes. Put down the book, walk around, get a snack, stretch, or do some deep knee bends. Short physical activity will do wonders to help you feel refreshed.
- Make your reading interesting. Try connecting the material you are reading with your class lectures or with other chapters. Ask yourself where you disagree with the author. Approach finding answers to your questions like an investigative reporter. Carry on a mental conversation with the author.



Photo by Sharon McCutcheon on Unsplash



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Key Takeaways

- You are expected to keep up with your chapter and other readings independently. While your professor may not remind you, the expectation is that you will have read and understood the chapter material for the topics listed in the course outline for that week BEFORE class begins.
- Active reading is a process of preparing, reading, capturing key ideas and reviewing.
- To prepare, scan the chapter to find out what the chapter is about. Give yourself direction by creating questions. Write down your first question and read until you find the answer. Write down your answer, leave some space and move on to the next question. Repeat. At the end of your reading session, go back and pull out key ideas and words to add in the spaces between questions. Review by mentally answering the questions and check yourself against your reading notes.

13. Notetaking

Effective notetaking is important because it:

- supports your listening efforts,
- allows you to test your understanding of the material,
- helps you remember the material better when you write key ideas down,
- gives you a sense of what the professor thinks is important,
- creates your “ultimate study guide.”



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There are various forms of taking notes, and which one you choose depends on both your personal style and the professor’s approach to the material. Each can be used in a notebook, index cards, or in a digital form on your laptop. No specific type is good for all students and all situations, so we recommend that you develop your own style, but you should also be ready to modify it to fit the needs of a specific class or professor. To be effective, all of these methods require you to listen actively and to think; merely jotting down words the professor is saying will be of little use to you.

Styles of Notetaking

Lists

Lists are a sequential notation of ideas as they are presented. Lists may be short phrases or complete paragraphs describing ideas in more detail. This method is what most students use as a fallback if they haven’t learned other methods. This method typically requires a lot of writing, and you may find that you are not keeping up with the professor. It is not easy for students to prioritize ideas in this method.

The list method is usually not the best choice because it is focused exclusively on

capturing as much of what the professor says as possible, not on processing the information. Most students who have not learned effective study skills use this method, because it's easy to think that this is what notetaking is all about.

Outlines

The outline method places most important ideas along the left margin, which are numbered with roman numerals. Supporting ideas to these main concepts are indented and are noted with capital letters. Under each of these ideas, further detail can be added, designated with an Arabic number, a lowercase letter, and so forth. A good method to use when material presented by the professor is well organized. Easy to use when taking notes on your computer. The advantage of the outline method is that it allows you to prioritize the material.

At first you may have trouble identifying when the professor moves from one idea to another. This takes practice and experience with each professor, so don't give up! In the early stages, you should use your syllabus to determine what key ideas the professor plans to present. Your reading assignments before class can also give you guidance in identifying the key ideas. After class be sure to review your notes and then summarize the class in one or two short paragraphs using your own words. This summary will significantly affect your recall and will help you prepare for the next class.

Concept Maps

When designing a concept map, place a central idea in the center of the page and then add lines and new circles in the page for new ideas. Use arrows and lines to connect the various ideas. Great method to show relationships among ideas. Also good if the professor tends to hop from one idea to another and back.

This is a very graphic method of notetaking that is especially good at capturing the relationships among ideas. Concept maps harness your visual sense to understand complex



Image by TeroVesalainen from Pixabay

material “at a glance.” They also give you the flexibility to move from one idea to another and back easily so they are helpful if your professor moves freely through the material.

To develop a concept map, start by using your syllabus to rank the ideas you will listen to by level of detail, from high-level or abstract ideas to detailed facts. Select an overriding idea from the professor’s lecture and place it in a circle in the middle of the page. Then create branches off that circle to record the more detailed information, creating additional limbs as you need them. Arrange the branches with others that interrelate closely. When a new high-level idea is presented, create a new circle with its own branches. Link together circles or concepts that are related. Use arrows and symbols to capture the relationship between the ideas. For example, an arrow may be used to illustrate cause or effect, a double-pointed arrow to illustrate dependence, or a dotted arrow to illustrate impact or effect. As with all notetaking methods, you should summarize the chart in one or two paragraphs of your own words after class.

Cornell Method

The Cornell method uses a two-column approach. The left column takes up no more than a third of the page and is often referred to as the “cue” or “recall” column. The right column (about two-thirds of the page) is used for taking notes using any of the methods described above or a combination of them.

After class or completing the reading, review your notes and write the key ideas and concepts or questions in the left column. You may also include a summary box at the bottom of the page, in which to write a summary of the class or reading in your own words. The Cornell method can include any of the methods above and provides a useful format for calling out key concepts, prioritizing ideas, and organizing review work. Most colleges recommend using some form of the Cornell method.

General Tips on Notetaking

Regardless of what notetaking method you choose, there are some notetaking habits you should get into for all circumstances and all courses:

1. Be prepared. Make sure you have the tools you need to do the job.
2. Write on only one side of the paper. This will allow you to integrate your reading notes

with your class notes.

3. Label, number, and date all notes at the top of each page. This will help you keep organized.
4. When using a laptop, position it such that you can see the professor and white board right over your screen. This will keep the professor in your field of vision even if you have to glance at your screen or keyboard from time to time. Make sure your focus remains with the professor and not on your laptop.
5. Don't try to capture everything that is said. Listen for the big ideas and write them down. Make sure you can recognize the professor's emphasis cues and write down all ideas and keywords the professor emphasizes.
6. Copy anything the professor writes on the board. It's likely to be important.
7. Leave space between ideas. This allows you to add additional notes later.
8. Use signals and abbreviations. Which ones you use is up to you, but be consistent so you will know exactly what you mean by "att." when you review your notes.
9. Review your notes as soon after class as possible, the same day is best. This is the secret to making your notes work! Review the notes to call out the key ideas and organize facts. Fill in any gaps in your notes and clean up or redraw hastily drawn diagrams.
10. Write a summary of the main ideas of the class in your own words. This process is a great aid to recall.



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Key Takeaways

- Taking notes is more than creating a record of what a professor said in class, it supports active listening, aids in remembering, gives clues to important concepts as well as tests your

understanding of the materials and creates a study guide.

- Lists, outlines, concept maps and the Cornell method are ways to take notes; the later three are preferred because they provide opportunities to prioritize and organize the materials.
- It is vital to return to your notes after class to review, make corrections, fill in gaps and call out key ideas.

14. Writing



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Writing is one of the key skills all successful students must acquire. In college courses, writing is how ideas are exchanged, from scholars to students and from students back to scholars. While the grade in some courses may be based mostly on class participation, oral reports, or multiple choice exams, writing is by far the single most important form of instruction and assessment. Professors expect you to learn by writing, and they will grade you on the basis of your writing.

As a form of communication, writing is different from oral communication in several ways. Professors expect writing to be well thought out and organized and to explain ideas fully.

In oral communication, the listener can ask for clarification, but in written work, everything must be clear within the writing itself.

Our goal here is to introduce some important writing principles, if you're not yet familiar with them, or to remind you of things you may have already learned in a writing course. As with all advice, always pay the most attention to what your professor says – the terms of a specific assignment may overrule a tip given here!

Academic writing refers to writing produced in a college environment. Often this is writing that responds to other writing – to the ideas or controversies that you'll read about. While this definition sounds simple, academic writing may be very different from other types of writing you have done in the past. Often college students begin to understand what academic writing really means only after they receive negative feedback on their work.

The Writing Process

Writing professors distinguish between process and product. The expectations described here all involve the “product” you turn in on the due date. Although you should keep in mind what your product will look like, writing is more involved with how you get to that goal. “Process” concerns how you work to actually write a paper.

What do you actually do to get started? How do you organize your ideas? Why do you make changes along the way as you write? Thinking of writing as a process is important because writing is actually a complex activity. Even professional writers rarely sit down at a keyboard and write out an article beginning to end without stopping along the way to revise portions they have drafted, to move ideas around, or to revise their opening and thesis. Professionals and students alike often say they only realized what they wanted to say after they started to write. This is why many professors see writing as a way to learn. Many writing professors ask you to submit a draft for review before submitting a final paper.

How Can I Make the Process Work for Me?

No single set of steps automatically works best for everyone when writing a paper, but writers have found a number of steps helpful. Your job is to try out ways that your professor suggests and discover what works for you. As you'll see in the following list, the process starts before you write a word.

Generally there are three stages in the writing process:

1. Preparing before drafting, sometimes called prewriting
2. Writing the draft
3. Revising and editing

Involved in these three stages are a number of separate tasks—and that’s where you need to figure out what works best for you.

Preparing

Before you begin writing:

- Understand the requirements of the assignment.
- Conduct your research.
- Brainstorm ideas for your assignment based on the requirements, your course materials and your research.
- Outline your paper structure and note where your research will help to develop your ideas.



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Writing the draft

Title the paper to identify your topic. This may sound obvious, but it needs to be said. Some students think of a paper as an exercise and write something like “Assignment 2: History 101” on the title page. Such a title gives no idea about how you are approaching the assignment or your topic. Your title should prepare your reader for what your paper is about or what you will argue.

In your introduction, define your topic and establish your approach or sense of purpose. Think of your introduction as an extension of your title. Professors, like all readers, appreciate feeling oriented by a clear opening.

Build from a thesis or a clearly stated sense of purpose. Many college assignments require

you to make some form of an argument. To do that, you generally start with a statement that needs to be supported and build from there. Your thesis is that statement; it is a guiding assertion for the paper. Be clear in your own mind of the difference between your topic and your thesis. The topic is what your paper is about; the thesis is what you argue about the topic. Some assignments do not require an explicit argument and thesis, but even then you should make clear at the beginning your main emphasis, your purpose, or your most important idea.

Develop ideas patiently. You might, like many students, worry about boring your reader with too much detail or information. But college professors will not be bored by carefully explained ideas, well-selected examples, and relevant details.

Integrate, do not just plug in relevant quotations, graphs, and illustrations. Remember that a quotation, graph, or illustration does not make a point for you. You make the point first and then use such material to help back it up. Make sure the reader understands why you are using it and how it fits in at that place in your paper.

Document your sources appropriately. If your paper involves research of any kind, indicate clearly the use you make of outside sources. If you have used those sources well, there is no reason to hide them. Careful research and the thoughtful application of the ideas and evidence of others is part of what college professors value.

Revising and Editing

Revising

Revising suggests seeing again in a new light generated by all the thought that went into the first draft. Revising a draft usually involves significant changes including the following:

- Making organizational changes like the reordering of paragraphs (don't forget that new transitions will be needed when you move paragraphs)
- Clarifying the thesis or adjustments between the thesis and supporting points that follow
- Cutting material that is unnecessary or irrelevant
- Adding new points to strengthen or clarify the presentation

Editing

Correcting a sentence early on may not be the best use of your time since you may cut the sentence entirely. Editing and proofreading are focused, late-stage activities for style and correctness. They are important final parts of the writing process, but they should not be confused with revision itself. Editing and proofreading a draft involve these steps:

- Careful spell-checking. This includes checking the spelling of names.
- Attention to sentence-level issues. Be especially attentive to sentence boundaries, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and pronoun referents.
- You can also attend, at this stage, to matters of style.

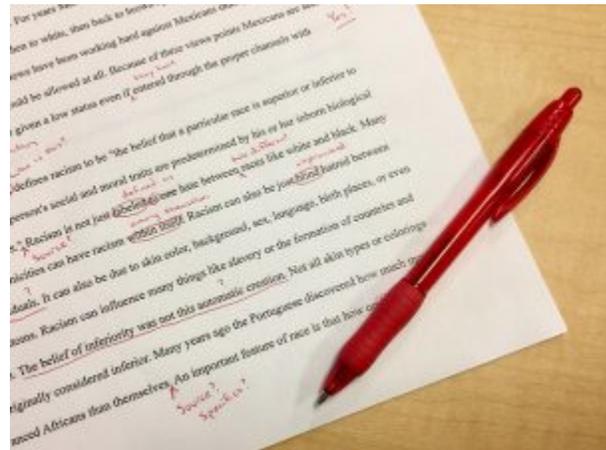


Image by Anne Karakash from Pixabay

Remember to get started on a writing assignment early so that you complete the first draft well before the due date, allowing you needed time for genuine revision and careful editing.

Understanding Your First Assignment

When you first get a writing assignment, pay attention first to keywords for how to approach the writing. These will also suggest how you may structure and develop your paper.

Assignment Terms

Look for terms like these in the assignment:

Summarize. To restate in your own words the main point or points of another's work.

Define. To describe, explore, or characterize a keyword, idea, or phenomenon.

Classify. To group individual items by their shared characteristics, separate from other groups of items.

Compare/contrast. To explore significant likenesses and differences between two or more subjects.

Analyze. To break something, a phenomenon, or an idea into its parts and explain how those parts fit or work together.

Argue. To state a claim and support it with reasons and evidence.

Synthesize. To pull together varied pieces or ideas from two or more sources.

Assignment Questions

Sometimes the keywords listed don't actually appear in the written assignment, but they are usually implied by the questions given in the assignment. What, why and how are common question words that require a certain kind of response. Look back at the keywords listed and think about which approaches relate to what, why, and how questions.

What questions usually prompt the writing of summaries, definitions, classifications, and sometimes compare-and-contrast essays.

Why and how questions typically prompt analysis, argument, and synthesis essays.

Successful academic writing starts with recognizing what the professor is requesting, or what you are required to do. So pay close attention to the assignment. Sometimes the essential information about an assignment is conveyed through class discussions, however, so be sure to listen for the keywords that will help you understand what the professor expects. If you feel the assignment does not give you a sense of direction, seek clarification. Ask questions that will lead to helpful answers.

Outlines and Marking Schemes

Some professors will include an outline of different sections that they expect to see in your paper along with marks for each section. It is important to ensure you cover each section with sufficient detail to provide material to achieve the marks.

Pay attention to the areas with the most marks and devote more space in your paper to those areas. If your discussion section is worth 20 marks and your conclusion is worth 5 marks, the amount of space for your conclusion should be much less.

Plagiarism—and How to Avoid It

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of material from a source. At the most obvious level, plagiarism involves using someone else’s words and ideas as if they were your own. There’s not much to say about copying another person’s work: it’s cheating, pure and simple. But plagiarism is not always so simple. Notice that our definition of plagiarism involves “words and ideas.” Let’s break that down a little further.

Words. Copying the words of another is clearly wrong. If you use another’s words, those words must be in quotation marks, and you must tell your reader where those words came from. But it is not enough to make a few surface changes in wording. You can’t just change some words and call the material yours; close, extended paraphrase is not acceptable.



*Photo by George Kourounis on Unsplash
This street artist took the time to give credit to the author of this quote.*

Ideas. Ideas are also a form of intellectual property. When you are summarizing an original idea, that is, stating the main idea in compressed form in language that does not come from the original, it could still be seen as plagiarism if the source is not cited.

This probably makes you wonder if you can write anything without citing a source. To help you sort out what ideas need to be cited and what not, think about these principles:

Common knowledge. There is no need to cite common knowledge. Common knowledge does not mean knowledge everyone has. It means knowledge that everyone can easily access. If the information or idea can be found in multiple sources and the information or idea remains constant from source to source, it can be considered common knowledge.

Distinct contributions. One does need to cite ideas that are distinct contributions. A

distinct contribution need not be a discovery from the work of one person. It need only be an insight that is not commonly expressed and not universally agreed upon.

Disputable figures. Always remember that numbers are only as good as the sources they come from. If you use numbers like attendance figures, unemployment rates, or demographic profiles or any statistics at all, always cite your source of those numbers.

Forms of Citation

You should generally check with your professors about their preferred form of citation when you write papers for courses. No one standard is used in all academic papers. You can learn about the three major forms or styles used in most any college writing handbook and on many Web sites for college writers:

- The Modern Language Association (MLA) system of citation is widely used but is most commonly adopted in humanities courses, particularly literature courses.
- The American Psychological Association (APA) system of citation is most common in the social sciences.
- The Chicago Manual of Style is widely used but perhaps most commonly in history courses.



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Key Takeaways

- Academic writing through written assignments is one way that professors use to help you learn course concepts and check your understanding of course concepts.
- The final assignment you turn in is the product, however, this chapter is interested in the process of writing that includes three major steps: preparing, writing the draft, and revising and editing.
- Preparing before you write includes understanding your assignment, researching, brainstorming and outlining.
- Writing the draft starts with a good title, then developing a purpose or thesis, developing ideas,

and integrating ideas from your course materials and research.

- Revising is making changes to the organization, logic or details to strengthen your work while editing is paying final attention to spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentences and style.
- Before you begin an assignment, understand what product the assignment is asking you to produce and use outlines and marking schemes to ensure you give specific areas of your assignment appropriate space.
- Plagiarism is representing another's words or ideas as your own. This can include blatant copying or using resources without proper citation. Avoid this when incorporating research into your writing.

15. Studying

Learning From Past Tests



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While it may seem strange to talk about how to learn from past tests before other topics about tests, it is important that students use test results to their greatest benefit. Some of your most important learning begins when your graded test paper is returned to you. Your first reaction, of course, is to see what grade you received and how you did compared with your classmates. This is a natural reaction. However, when students don't achieve the results on tests and exams that they would like, it is tempting to just try

to do better next time and forget about it.

Reviewing your test and examining the questions you got wrong can help you determine what you need to change – the problem could lay in the way you take tests, study for tests or even how well you read and understand test questions. Based on your analysis of your test, identify the kind of corrective steps you should take to improve your learning and test performance. Implement those steps as you begin your preparation for your next test. If you don't learn from your mistakes, you are doomed to repeat them; if you don't learn from your successes, it will be harder to repeat them.

How to use past tests to improve your future results

Three step process

Step 1: Evaluating your test results

- When you receive your test back, sit quietly and take a close look at it.
- What questions did you get wrong? What kind of mistakes were they? Do you see a pattern?
- What questions did you get right? What were your strengths? What can you learn from the professor's comments?
- Now think of the way in which you prepared for the exam. Were you prepared for the exam? Did you study the right material? What surprised you?
- Did you read the entire test before starting? Did your time allocation work well, or were you short of time on certain parts of the exam?

Step 2: Correcting Your Mistakes

The second step in making your test work for you is to correct your wrong answers. The last time you wrote the information (when you took the test), you created a link to wrong information in your memory, so that must be corrected.

- For multiple-choice questions, write out the question stem with the correct answer to form a single correct sentence or phrase.
- For true-or-false questions, write the full statement if it is true; if it is false, reword it in such a way that it is true (such as by inserting the word "not"). Then write the new statement.
- For math and science questions involving calculations, redo the entire solution with the calculations written out fully.
- You need not rewrite an entire essay question if you did not do well, but you should create a new outline for what would be a correct answer. Make sure you incorporate any ideas triggered by your professor's comments.
- When you have rewritten all your answers, read them all out loud before incorporating

your new answers in your notes.

Step 3: Integrating Your Test into Your Study Guide

Your corrected quizzes and midterm exams are an important study tool for final exams. Make sure you file them with your notes for the study unit. Take the time to annotate your notes based on the quizzes, test or exam. Pay particular attention to any gaps in your notes on topics that appeared in the quiz or exam. Research those points in your text or online and complete your notes. Review your tests throughout the term (not just before the final) to be sure you cement the course material into your memory. When you prepare for the final exam, start by reviewing your quizzes and other tests to predict the kinds of questions the professor may ask on the final. This will help focus your final studying when you have a large amount of coursework to cover.

Exam Errors and How to Correct Them

Preparation / Content Errors

- Incorporate weekly review sessions.
- Practice predicting possible questions.
- Go to all classes, labs, and review sessions.

Focus Errors or Carelessness

- Read the entire test before starting.
- Slow down during the test.
- Read carefully and think before answering.
- Check your work.

If You Don't Get Your Test Back

If your professor chooses not to return tests to students, make an appointment to see the professor soon after the test to review it and your performance. Take notes on what you had trouble with and the expected answers. Add these notes into your study guide. Make sure you don't lose out on the opportunity to learn from your results.



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Effective Studying

Effective studying is an ongoing process of reviewing course material. The first and most important thing you should know is that studying is not something you do a few days before an exam. To be effective, studying is something you do as part of an ongoing learning process, throughout the duration of the term.



Image by Wokandapix from Pixabay

Studying Every Day

Studying begins after each class or assignment when you review your notes. Each study session should involve three steps:

- Gather your learning materials. Take time to merge your class notes with your reading notes. How do they complement each other? Stop and think. What do the notes tell you about your material? What aspects of the material are you unsure about? Do you

need to reread a part of your text? Write down any questions you have for your professor and pay a visit during office hours. It is better to clear up any misconceptions and get your questions answered soon after you are exposed to the material, rather than to wait, for two reasons: (1) the question or doubt is fresh in your mind and you won't forget about it and (2) professors usually build their lessons on material already presented. If you don't take these steps now, you are setting yourself up for problems later in the course.

- Apply or visualize. What does this material mean to you? How will you use this new knowledge? Try to find a way to apply it in your own life or thoughts. If you can't use the knowledge right away, visualize yourself using the knowledge to solve a problem or visualize yourself teaching the material to other students.
- Cement your knowledge. If you use the two-column notetaking method, cover up the right side of your notes with a piece of paper, leaving the questions in the left column exposed. Test yourself by trying to answer your questions without referring to your notes. How did you do? If you are unsure about anything, look up the answer and write it down right away. Don't let a wrong answer be the last thing you wrote on a subject, because you will most likely continue to remember the wrong answer.

Studying in Course Units

At the end of each unit, or at least every two weeks or so, use your notes and textbook to write an outline or summary of the material in your own words. (Remember the paragraphs you wrote to summarize each class or reading? They'll be very helpful to you here.) After you have written the summary or outline, go back and reread your outline from the prior unit followed by the one you just wrote. Does the new one build on the earlier one? Do you feel confident you understand the material?

Studying before the Exam

At least a week before a major exam, ask yourself these questions:

- What has the professor said about what is included on the exam?
- Has the professor said anything about what types of questions will be included?
- If you were the professor, what questions would you ask on an exam?

Challenge yourself to come up with some really tough open-ended questions. Think about how you might answer them. Be sure to go to any review sessions the professor holds.

Now go back and review your outlines. Do they cover what the professor has suggested might be on the exam? After reviewing your outlines, reread the sections of your notes that are most closely associated with expected exam questions. Pay special attention to those items the professor emphasized during class.

More Tips for Success

- Schedule a consistent study-review time for each course at least once a week, in addition to your class and assignment time. Keep to that schedule as rigorously as you do your class schedule. Use your study time to go through the steps outlined earlier; this is not meant to be a substitute for your assignment time.
- Get yourself in the right space. Choose to study in a quiet, well-lit space. Your chair should be comfortable but provide good support. Remember that libraries were designed for reading and should be your first option.
- Minimize distractions. Turn off your cell phone and get away from social media, television, other nearby activities, and chatty friends or roommates. All of these can cut into the effectiveness of your study efforts. Multitasking and studying don't mix.
- If you will be studying for a long time, take short breaks at least once an hour. Get up, stretch, breathe deeply, and then get back to work. (If you keep up with your daily assignments and schedule weekly review sessions for yourself—and keep them—there should be almost no need for long study sessions.)

Group Studying

Study groups are a great idea—as long as they are thoughtfully managed. A study group can give you new perspectives on course material and help you fill in gaps in your notes. Discussing course content will sharpen your critical thinking related to the subject, and being part of a group to which you are accountable will help you study consistently. In a study group, you will end up “teaching” each other the material, which is the strongest way to retain new material. But remember, being in a group working together doesn't mean there will be less work for you as an individual; your work will just be much more effective.

Picking Group Members

- Think small. Limit your study group to no more than three or four people. A larger group would limit each student's participation and make scheduling of regular study sessions a real problem.
- Go for quality. Look for students who are doing well in the course, who ask questions, and who participate in class discussions. Don't make friendship the primary consideration for who should be in your group. Meet up with your friends instead during "social time"—study time is all about learning.
- Look for complementary skills and learning strengths. Complementary skills make for a good study group because your weaknesses will be countered by another student's strengths. When a subject requires a combination of various skills, strengths in each of those skills is helpful (e.g., a group with one student who is really good at physics and another at math would be perfect for an engineering technology course). Finally, a variety of learning strengths is helpful because each of you pick up differing signals and emphases from the professor that you can share with each other, so you will not likely miss important points.

Meet regularly. When you first set up a study group, agree to a regular meeting schedule and stick to it. Moving study session times around can result in nonparticipation, lack of preparation, and eventually the collapse of the study group.

How to conduct a group study session

1. Assign a moderator, and rotate the role of moderator or discussion leader. This helps ensure "ownership" of the group is spread equally across all members and ensures active participation and careful preparation.
2. Define an agenda and objectives. Give your study sessions focus so that you don't get sidetracked. Based on requests and comments from the group, the moderator should develop the agenda and start each session by summarizing what the group expects to cover and then keep the group to task.



Photo by Jacek Dylag on Unsplash

3. Assign follow-up work. If there is any work that needs to be done between meetings, make sure that all team members know specifically what is expected of them and agree to do the work.
4. Include some of the following items on your agenda:
 - Review and discuss class and assignment notes since your last meeting.
 - Discuss assigned readings.
 - Quiz each other on class material.
 - “Reteach” aspects of the material team participants are unsure of.
 - Brainstorm possible test questions and responses.
 - Review quiz and test results and correct misunderstandings.
 - Critique each other’s ideas for paper themes and approaches.
 - Define questions to ask the professor.



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Key Takeaways

- Review your past tests to learn from your mistakes. Evaluate your results and consider why you got answers right or wrong; think about how you studied for this test and what you might need to change about your study habits; and finally, judge whether you managed your test-taking tasks well. Next, correct your mistakes and write out the correct answers. Finally, make your past tests part of your study notes and make adjustments to how you study or take tests to prevent making similar mistakes in the future.
- Frequent study is more effective than just studying before a test or exam. Study every day merging your class and reading notes, and creating questions for your professor on areas of confusion.
- Apply or visualize the material to make it more meaningful and cement your knowledge by testing yourself.

- Study in course units by using notes and text to create summaries or outlines of the material.
- A least a week before a major test or exam, gather what you know about what the test will cover, review your summaries and outlines and come up with likely test questions to use to test yourself. You may need to go back to review sections of notes based on expected test questions.
- Group study that is well managed can be an effective way to deepen your learning and understanding. Pick quality group members, meet regularly, assign a rotating moderator, set up an agenda and assign follow up work for group members.

16. Tests

Tested at every turn! Testing is a part of life. They alone are not good measurements about how smart or gifted you are—they show only how much you know or can do at that moment. We can learn from how we have performed, and we can think about how to apply what we have learned to do even better next time. We can have fun measuring our progress. Many of our daily activities are measurements of progress toward mastery of skills or knowledge. We welcome these opportunities as both work and fun. But when these opportunities are part of our academic life, we often dread them and rarely feel any sense of fun.

In reality, however, academic tests are similar to real-life tests in the following ways:

- They help us measure our progress toward mastery of a particular skill.
- They are not a representation of how smart, talented, or skilled we are but rather are a measurement only of what we know about a specific subject at a specific point in time.
- They are extraordinary learning opportunities.



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Academic tests in college may be different from those you took in other school settings. College professors expect to see much more of you in an exam: your thoughts, your interpretations, your thinking process, your conclusions. This is why you need to modify your study habits and your strategies for taking test in college.

Types of Tests

Strategies for different types of tests: each type has its own peculiar strategies:

Paper tests

Paper tests are still a very common type of test, requiring students to write answers on the test pages or in a separate test booklet. They are typically used for in-class tests. Neatness and good grammar count, even if it's not an English test. Remember that the professor will be reading dozens of test papers and will not likely spend much time trying to figure out your hieroglyphics, arrows, and cross-outs.

Open-book tests

Open-book tests allow the student to consult their notes, textbook, or both while taking the test. Professors often give this type of test when they are more interested in seeing your thoughts and critical thinking than your memory power. Be prepared to expose and defend your own viewpoints. When preparing, know where key material is present in your book and notes. Create an index for your notes and use sticky notes to flag key pages of your textbook before the test. Be careful when copying information or formulas to your test answers, because nothing looks worse in an open-book test than misusing the material at your disposal.

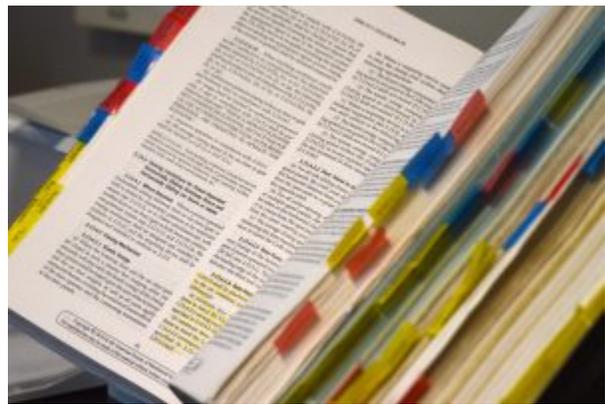


Photo by Russ Ward on Unsplash

Take-home tests

Take-home tests are like open-book tests except you have the luxury of time on your side. Make sure you submit the test on time. Know what the professor's expectations are about the content of your answers. The professor will likely expect more detail and more complete work because you are not under a strict time limit and because you have access to reference materials. Be clear about when the test is due. Some professors will ask you to e-mail your test to them by a specific time. Also, find out if the professor allows or expects you to collaborate with classmates. Be sure to type your test and don't forget to spellcheck!

Online tests

Online tests are most commonly used for formative assessments, although they are starting to find their way into high-stakes tests, particularly in large lecture classes that fulfill a graduation requirement. The main advantage of online tests is that they can be computer graded, providing fast feedback to the student and allowing the professor to grade hundreds of tests easily. Since these tests are computer graded, be aware that the professor's judgment is not involved in the grading. Your answers will be either right or wrong; there is no room for partially correct responses. With online tests, be sure you understand the testing software. Are there practice questions? If so, make sure you use them. Find out if you will be allowed to move freely between test sections to go back and check your work or to complete questions you might have skipped. Some testing software does not allow you to return to sections once they are "submitted." Unless your test needs to be taken at a specific time, don't wait until the last minute to take the test. Should you have technical problems, you want to have time to resolve the issues. To avoid any conflicts with the testing software, close all other software applications before beginning the testing software.



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/studyprocaff/?p=77>

The Secrets of the Q and A's

You can gain even more confidence in your test-taking abilities by understanding the different kinds of questions a professor may ask and applying the following proven strategies for answering them. Most professors will likely use various conventional types of questions. Here are some tips for handling the most common types.

Multiple-Choice Questions

Read the instructions carefully to determine if there may be more than one right answer. If there are multiple right answers, does the professor expect you to choose just one, or do you need to mark all correct options?

1. Read each question carefully and try to answer it in your head before reading the answer options. Then consider all the options.
2. Eliminate first the options that are clearly incorrect.
3. Read the questions and one of the options as a sentence and turn it into a True/False question.
4. Look for clue words that hint that certain option answers might be correct or incorrect.
5. Ensure the option you choose best matches what the question is asking.

True-or-False Questions

Answer the questions that are obvious to you first. Then go back to statements that require more thought. If the question is stated in the positive, restate it to yourself in the negative by adding the word “not” or “never.” Does the new statement sound truer or more false?

Short Answer Questions

Short answer questions are designed for you to recall and provide some very specific information: When you read the question, ask yourself what exactly the professor wants to know. Keep your answers short and specific.

Essay Questions

Essay questions are used by professors to evaluate your thinking and reasoning applied to

the material covered in a course. Good essay answers are based on your thoughts, supported by examples from classes and reading assignments.

- Careful planning is critical to answering essay questions effectively. Note how many essay questions you have to answer and how difficult each question seems. Then allocate your time accordingly.
- Read the question carefully and underline or circle keywords. Watch for words that describe the professor's expectations for your response.
- If time allows, organize your thoughts by creating a quick outline for your essay. This helps ensure that you don't leave out key points, and if you run out of time, it may pick up a few points for your grade. Jot down specific information you might want to use, such as names, dates, and places.
- Introduce your essay answer, but get right to the point. Remember that the professor will be grading dozens of papers and avoid "filler" text that does not add value to your answer.
- Write in direct and concise statements.
- Write neatly and watch your grammar and spelling. Allow time to proofread your essay. You want your professor to want to read your essay, not dread it. Remember that grading essays is largely subjective, and a favorable impression can lead to more favorable grading.
- Be sure to answer all parts of the question. Essay questions often have more than one part. Remember, too, that essay questions often have multiple acceptable answers.

Strategies for Math Tests

Math tests require some special strategies because they are often problem based rather than question based.

Do the following before the test:

- Attend all classes and complete all assignments. Pay special attention to working on all assigned problems. After reviewing problems in class, take careful notes about what you did incorrectly. Repeat the problem and do a similar one as soon as possible. It is

important that the last solution to a problem in your mind is a correct solution.

- Think about how each problem solution might be applied in a real-world situation. This helps make even the most complex solutions relevant and easier to learn.
- In your study group, take turns presenting solutions to problems and observing and correcting everyone's work.
- If you are having difficulty with a concept, get help right away. Remember that math especially builds new material on previous material, so if you are having trouble with a concept now, you are likely to have trouble going forward. Make an appointment with your professor. Don't be shy about asking for a tutor—tutoring is not just for students needing remedial help; many successful students seek them out, too.



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Do the following during the test:

Review the entire test before you start and work the problems you feel most confident with first.

Approach each problem following three distinct steps:

1. Read the problem through twice: the first time to get the full concept of the question, and the second time to draw out pertinent information. After you read through the problem the first time, ask yourself, “What is this problem about?” and “What is the answer likely to look like?” The second time through, consider these questions: “What facts do I have available?” “What do I know?” “What measurable units must the answer be in?” Think about the operations and formulas you will need to use. Try to estimate a ballpark answer.
2. Compute your answer. First, eliminate as many unknowns as possible. You may need to use a separate formula for each unknown. Use algebraic formulas as far as you can before plugging in actual numbers; that will make it easier to cancel and combine factors. Remember that you may need two or more tries before you come up with the answer.
3. Check your work. Start by comparing your actual answer to the estimate you made

when you first read the problem. Does your final answer sound likely? Check your arithmetic by opposite operations: use multiplication to check division and addition to check subtraction, and so on. You should consider using these three steps whenever you are working with any math problems, not just when you get problems on tests.

Strategies for Science Tests

Science tests also are often problem based, but they also generally use the scientific method. This is why science tests may require some specific strategies.

- Before the test, review your lab notes as well as your class notes and assignments. Many test questions build upon lab experience, so pay close attention to your notes, assignments, and labs. Practice describing the experimental process.
- Read the question carefully. What does the professor expect you to do? Prove a hypothesis? Describe an experiment? Summarize research? Underline the words that state the objective of the question.
- Look carefully at all the diagrams given with the question. What do they illustrate? Why are they included with the question? Are there elements on the diagram you are expected to label?
- Many science questions are based on the scientific method and experimental model. When you read the test question, identify the hypothesis the problem is proposing; be prepared to describe an experimental structure to prove a hypothesis. When you check your work, make sure the hypothesis, experimental steps, and a summary of results (or expected results) are clear. Some of these elements may be part of the question, while others you may need to provide in your answer.

Test Anxiety

Thought Activity: Testing Your Test Anxiety

Consider the following statements as if they were True/False Questions. There are no wrong answers.

- T F I have a hard time starting to study for an exam.
- T F When studying for an exam, I feel desperate or lost.
- T F When studying for an exam, I often feel bored and tired.
- T F I don't sleep well the night before an exam.
- T F My appetite changes the day of the exam. (I'm not hungry and skip meals or I overeat—especially high-sugar items like candy or ice cream.)
- T F When taking an exam, I am often confused or suffer mental blocks.
- T F When taking an exam, I feel panicky and my palms get sweaty.
- T F I'm usually in a bad mood after taking an exam.
- T F I usually score lower on exams than on papers, assignments, and projects.
- T F After an exam, I can remember things I couldn't recall during the exam.

If you answered true to any of the statements in the table above, you have suffered some of the symptoms of test anxiety. Most of us have experienced this.

It is normal to feel stress before an exam, and in fact, that may be a good thing. Stress motivates you to study and review, generates adrenaline to help sharpen your reflexes and focus while taking the exam, and may even help you remember some of the material you need. But suffering too many stress symptoms or suffering any of them severely will impede your ability to show what you have learned. Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which a person feels distress before, during, or after a test or exam to the point where stress causes poor performance. Anxiety during a test interferes with your ability to recall knowledge from memory as well as your ability to use higher-level thinking skills effectively.



Photo by Lacie Slezak on Unsplash

There are steps you should take if you find that stress is getting in your way:

- Be prepared. A primary cause of test anxiety is not knowing the material. If you take good class and reading notes and review them regularly, this stressor should be greatly reduced if not eliminated. You should be confident going into your exam (but not overconfident).
 - Make sure you eat well and get a good night's sleep before the exam. Hunger, poor eating habits, energy drinks, and lack of sleep all contribute to test anxiety.
 - Bounce bad vibes. Your own negative thoughts – “I’ll never pass this exam” or “I can’t figure this out, I must be really stupid!” – may move you into spiraling stress cycle that in itself causes enough anxiety to block your best efforts. When you feel you are brewing a storm of negative thoughts, stop what you are doing and clear your mind. Once your mind is clear, repeat a reasonable affirmation to yourself – “I know this stuff” – before continuing your work.
 - It’s all about you! Don’t waste your time comparing yourself to other students in the class, especially during the exam. Keep focused on your own work and your own plan. Exams are not a race, so it doesn’t matter who turns in their paper first.
 - Chill! You perform best when you are relaxed, so learn some relaxation exercises you can use during an exam. Before you begin your work, take a moment to listen to your body. Which muscles are tense? Move them slowly to relax them. Tense them and relax them. Exhale, then continue to exhale for a few more seconds until you feel that your lungs are empty. Inhale slowly through your nose and feel your rib cage expand as you do. This will help oxygenate your blood and reenergize your mind.

Test Taking Tips

Before the test:

1. Learn as much as you can about the test.
2. Try to foresee the questions likely to be on the test.
3. Don’t be tempted to stay up late cramming.
4. The night before, get some exercise, watch what you eat and get a good nights rest.
5. Get to the test site early with all your tools

During the test:

1. When you receive your test, scan the entire test first. Evaluate the importance of each section. Then create a time allocation plan.
2. Write it down. Take a couple minutes to write down key facts, dates, principles, statistics, and formulas on a piece of scratch paper or in the margin of the test paper.
3. Read the directions carefully.
4. Do the easy questions first.
5. Keep an eye on the time. Keep as close to your plan as possible.
6. Check your work. Ensuring that you have complete answers according to the directions; then look for other common mistakes.

Key Takeaways

- Tests help use measure your progress but are not representations of how smart, talented or skilled you are; rather, they measure what you know as a specific point in time.
- Paper, open book, take-home and online tests require different study techniques to help you prepare.
- Multiple choice, true-or-false, short answer and essay questions are common types of questions you will encounter and each can be tackled differently using proven strategies.
- Math and science tests are problem based and require unique preparation.
- Test Anxiety can interfere with your ability to recall knowledge as well as use higher level thinking skills. Simple strategies such as being prepared, eating and sleeping well before the test, re-framing negative thoughts, and not paying attention to others can help. Often, relaxation techniques can help you minimized the effects of test anxiety. For significant test anxiety, visit a college counsellor for additional strategies.

17. Group Work

Group work is a common practice at college. Learning to work well in a group is a skill you can take forward into your career where it is routine to accomplish tasks as part of a team.

Be a good citizen. This is the most important point of all. If you are assigned a group project, you should want to be an active part of the group's work. Never try to ride on the skills of others or let others do more than their fair share.



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Effective Brainstorming in a Group

Brainstorming is a process of generating ideas for solutions in a group. This method is very

effective because ideas from one person will trigger additional ideas from another. The following guidelines make for an effective brainstorming session:

- Decide who should moderate the session. That person may participate, but his main role is to keep the discussion flowing.
- Define the problem to be discussed and the time you will allow to consider it.
- Write all ideas down on a board or flip chart for all participants to see.
- Encourage everyone to speak.
- Do not allow criticism of ideas. All ideas are good during a brainstorm. Suspend disbelief until after the session. Remember a wildly impossible idea may trigger a creative and feasible solution to a problem.

Group Writing Projects

College professors sometimes assign group writing projects. The terms of these assignments vary greatly. Sometimes the professors specifies roles for each member of the group, but often it's part of the group's tasks to define everyone's role.

Follow these guidelines:

- Get off to an early start and meet regularly through the process.
 - Sort out your roles as soon as you can. You might divide the work in sections and then meet to pull those sections together. But you might also think more in terms of the specific strengths and interests each of you bring to the project. You might also assign tasks that relate to the stages of the writing process. Remember that whatever you do, you cannot likely keep each person's work separate from the work of others. There will be and probably should be significant overlap if you are to eventually pull together a successful project.
 - Don't let any lack of confidence you may feel as a writer keep you from doing your share. One of the great things about a group project is that you can learn from others. Another great thing is that you will teach more about your own strengths that others value.
 - Complete a draft early so that you can collectively review, revise, and finally edit together.

Key Takeaways

- Being part of a team is common in today's workplace, group work let's you practice your teamwork skills; be a good teammate and do your fair share of the work.
- Brainstorming as a group can bring out new ideas and better solutions.
- Group writing projects takes some planning and organization as well as final attention to bring everyone's contribution together.

Authors

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