

Suggestions For Success in College

1. The most important skill you can learn in college is that of an efficient self-motivated work habit.
2. Consider your course work as a job. If you want an A, study about 3 hours out of class for every hour of lecture, for a B, 2 hours of study per hour of lecture and a C about 1 hour of study per hour of lecture. If you study less than that you probably will not pass the course. This means if you want all A's and have 16 units you should work 16 hours (lecture/lab) + 18 hours (study) = 64 hours or about 1 ½ work weeks! If you are working a real job for money you have to add that into the total (20 hours work + 60 hours school = 80 hours = 2 full time jobs!!!). It's not likely you will do well at either school or work with such a load. Be realistic about how much you can do responsibly. Approach school as you would a job.
3. Try to develop an intellectual curiosity about your courses.
4. Schedule your study hours in advance each week. Pick a spot that you can work well in, without distractions, 9.e. your own little corner in the library. Study in a sitting-up position with a pencil in hand and jot down key points as you study. Take a 10 minute break every hour; get up, walk around, get a drink, but get back to work in 10 minutes. Do not talk in unrelated conversation during your study periods.
5. Summarize the key points and concepts on a small card or single sheet of paper and carry them with you for mental review when you have a free 5-10 minutes. A lot of time is wasted just standing around or waiting in lines.
6. Try and review some of each course material every day.
7. Stay flexible. If something comes up and you have to miss a session, just begin anew the next day. Don't fall into the trap of self-criticism. Just tell yourself you'll do the best you can from that point on.
8. Read material in relation to the desired goal.
 - a. Skimming
 1. to determine if a book has relevant information
 2. to determine an author's method of organization
 3. to get an overview of the topics covered. (It's a good idea to skim any required problems as well to see what is being emphasized by the instructor.)
 - b. Rapid Reading
 1. to pick out the principal points
 2. when reading familiar material to refresh or review material
 3. to find an answer to a specific question
 - c. Average Reading
 1. to obtain a fairly complete understanding of the topic
 2. to make an outline
 3. to summarize the chapter
 4. to collect information for a theme or report
 - d. Heavy Reading (may go very slowly)
 1. to evaluate or criticize the material
 2. to read difficult, technical or unfamiliar material
 3. to discover the method of solving a problem
9. Use the table of contents and chapter heading and divisions to size up the topic in advance. Focus on highlighted terms and pay attention to topic sentences of paragraphs. If a short summary section is present, read it quickly, but completely. Textbooks are not mystery novels. You don't have to wait until the last page for the conclusion.
10. When you come across unfamiliar terms resolve their meaning in your mind. If you don't, everything from that point on may fail to mean anything. The material will become frustrating and you will ultimately stop. It is better to cover less and know what you've done than to flip through all of the pages and not understand much.

11. Slow down and read the words out loud if you are really getting stuck. Use a dictionary, or the glossary of the text or the index to find another listing of the topic. Use the library to find a related text. It is said the difference between a student and a professor is the student reads one book and the professor reads several.
12. Do not skip tables and figures and graphs. When they are presented in the text, focus on them and mentally work through the entire item to make sure you understand it. These items often have lots of information condensed in a small and are good for review later.
13. After you've read the material and studied it, stop and think, in your own mind, about what it means. Try and think of related examples or experiences from your own life. Talk about the material to a friend or relative. Make up your own questions and answer them.
14. If you learn the material well the first time through you can relearn it much quicker the second and third times around.
15. You can improve your memory with exercise and focused techniques.
 - a. Be explicit about what you are trying to learn. Write it out!
 - b. Learning principles is more important than learning solutions.
 - c. Study with the intent of remembering.
 - d. Outline the facts to word or phrase points, then use these as mental exercise tools in quick review sessions.
 - e. Try and visualize what you've learned without any "crutch" device.
 - f. Use short, concentrated sessions rather than long, unfocused efforts which just waste your time.
 - g. Flash cards are helpful because they are very portable. You can use them waiting in the checkout line at the store or other places. If you do lots of driving, you might try taping key points and listen to them while in your car or fixing dinner. Give yourself a pause after each question or statement to think or answer...and then record your answer to check yourself.
16. Increase your ability to concentrate. You can learn to direct, focus and control your attention by improving your study habits.
 - a. Remove little distractions before studying (make a phone call, write a letter, etc.)
 - b. Focus on a single small step at a time if the task seems overwhelming. The entire journey is accomplished one step at a time.
 - c. Emotional problems and commitments are important and you should make time for these as well (i.e. husband, wife, children, girlfriend, boyfriend...) but when you are studying try to focus on that task only.
 - d. Try to avoid distractions while studying (talking, noise, anxieties, a non-related magazine or novel, etc.)
 - e. Define your goal for your study session and make it reasonable (i.e. not "I'm going to learn chemistry in the next two hours.")
 - f. Order your tasks in your estimate of their priorities and work continuously even if you don't seem to be making progress. Just beginning to work, to read, or to write may get your mental muscle working.
 - g. Just do one thing at a time!
 - h. If you are really stuck, write down your main questions and bring them to an office hour with your instructor, or discuss them with a class mate, then change to a new task. It sometimes helps to reduce the topic from a chapter to a section to a paragraph to a sentence to a word to get back on track.
17. When preparing for class, study the material before lecture. You will probably not understand everything but you will be more familiar with the key points when discussed in lecture.
 - a. Sit close to the front to remove the temptation of distractions.
 - b. Don't try to write down every word. Focus on key points and concepts and fill in the details from your studying. Listen and interact in the lecture.
 - c. Organize your notes. Good students structure their notes, making an easily visualized hierarchy which is not too crowded. (Paper is cheap!)
 - d. If you miss a point, leave a space and fill it in later from the text, the professor or a classmate.

- e. Review your notes carefully within one day.
- f. You might leave 1/3 (vertical) of each note page blank to fill in later with any extra details you want to add.
- g. Use a loose-leaf notebook so you can make exchanges, switches and divisions more easily.
- h. Studies show that it is better to outline the material than to underline it.

18. Preparing for Exams

- a. Good, honest preparation is the best approach to develop a confident feeling toward taking exams (...and minimize anxiety).
- b. Get a good night's sleep and eat a good diet.
- c. If you are the nervous type, just take 3 deep breaths and tell yourself you've prepared the best you can and accept your efforts.
- d. Try and understand the exam format before the exam if that is possible.
- e. Evaluate your exam skills after each exam for possible areas of improvement. Perhaps the counseling center can give you some suggestions and hints for taking exams.
- f. Study occasionally under exam, pressure, timed conditions to prepare yourself. Athletes usually devote some practice to "game-simulated" conditions.

19. The University environment has many pressures built into it. Expectations are high and the workload is demanding. It is often a time of intense social interactions, self-questioning and growth. Try and keep all of these in perspective. Ask yourself – "How will I feel about this when I am 45?" (Hard to do when you've never been there. Ask yourself now, how you feel about something that happened 10 years ago.) Maintain balance in your life. We all need good nutrition, exercise, regular sleep and a life philosophy that encompasses a bigger picture than our individual being.

Use these suggestions early in your college career. Pick out a few that seem helpful for you and make them into new habits. (It's said that if you do something for 3-4 weeks, it will become a habit.) I hope you find something here that helps you have a more enjoyable experience.