

Tips to be Successful in Class

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Intended Audience: College Students and Continuing Education Students



Each time we enroll in a new collegiate level course, it is a chance to start anew in terms of our study habits and strategies to learn information. Many students earn satisfactory grades in high school with little or no study, and this lack of study skills catches up with them when they are challenged in college courses.

- ❖ **Read the syllabus thoroughly and see how your grade will be calculated** – often in a college setting, your final grade may involve very few assignments (perhaps even just the midterm exam and the final exam). If this is the case, just one poor grade may prevent you from being able to pass the course with an ‘A.’ Do not assume there will be make-up assignments or extra credit.
- ❖ **Attend class** – You have likely invested real dollars into your tuition, books, materials etc. While you may see others who skip class, do not fall into this crowd. Some professors may not take attendance, or they may have a certain number of classes you can miss before it affects your grade. Do not regard those situations as opportunities to skip without consequence. Missing class means you will be losing out on instruction and wasting your own investment (or dollars of those who are providing your scholarship), and it prevents your instructor from being flexible in the future.
- ❖ **Do not assume all the learning will take place “in class”** – Read the text and other materials prior to the lecture. This helps clarify your understanding of the concepts, rather than be introduced to them from the professor. You will be able to confidently ask questions during the lecture. Furthermore, being able to learn independently is a life skill you will want to have when you are no longer taking formal classes.
- ❖ **Ask questions** – Asking questions engages you in the learning process. Ask questions in class, after class, and during office hours. It is smart to have a list of questions or topics to discuss during office hours ahead of time. This also shows your professor that you are interested in learning. Motivated students ask questions.
- ❖ **Approach the subject as if you had to teach it soon** – When you teach course content, you do not just need to simply understand it; You need to understand the material inside and out. You need to be able to answer all kinds of questions including hypothetical situations. If you can teach what you have just learned to two other people, it will be great practice in making sure you know the material yourself.
- ❖ **Take notes** – Very few people truly have photographic memories. This is also a time in your life when you are going to be receiving LOTS of information, perhaps more than ever before. Do not trust your memory alone. Take notes. The act of writing activates your prefrontal cortex and helps process what you are learning.

- ❖ **Schedule time each week specifically devoted to each class** – Set aside a certain amount of time each week specifically devoted to each class you are taking. If no assignment is coming up, ask yourself, “What is at least one thing that is important, but not urgent, that I can achieve to better myself for this course?” Maintaining this type of schedule will reduce overall stress, and it will likely prevent you from procrastination and cramming.
- ❖ **Make achievable promises to yourself, and then KEEP them** – College courses can be intimidating. You need to have confidence in yourself that you can succeed. Start by making one simple promise to yourself. It might have to do with the course, it might not. It could be as simple as, “I am going to get out of bed at 7 a.m. three days out of this week.” When you keep promises to yourself, it helps build your personal integrity. If you do not think you can keep a promise, DON’T MAKE IT! Start simpler.
- ❖ **Study/Practice before your exams** – It is not smart to simply look over the material quickly and rely on that as proper preparation for exams. If there are example questions, do them over and over until you can complete them without having to look at the text or notes. If there are no practice exams, create your own study guide as you are learning the material by writing out possible questions in a notebook, putting the answers in the margins.
- ❖ **Take advantage of study resources and aid provided by your school** – Research shows that ‘at risk’ students perform better when taking advantage of tutoring or other study resources. Research also shows that the majority of these students do not make use of these resources unless they are required to do so. Do not fall into this trap. Furthermore, learning centers, study-groups, and office hours are not created solely for students who are failing a course. All students can benefit from these opportunities to solidify the study of course content.
- ❖ **Invest real time when taking an online course** – Online courses require more discipline and more responsibility from the student. The computer is not teaching you. On the other end of your screen, is an experienced professor who is planning, grading, and actively involved in the teaching of the subject. Read all content slowly and carefully. It may be helpful to print out the material so you are not reading off the computer screen all of the time. Since you often have more control over the pacing of the course, there might be temptation to skim through the required readings. Your professor will likely not be skimming through your grades! More importantly, if you abbreviate your study in an online course, you will not learn the course material well, and this will be a huge burden if the course is part of your core major.