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# Know What to Expect in College

*In most instances, people experience greater success when they know what to expect. In college, expect to find the following:*

## **Varying class sizes.**

Class sizes vary, depending on the college and the course. While most classes have fewer than 30 students, college classes can have anywhere from 15 to 200+ students.

## **The need for critical thinking skills.**

College students do a lot of reading, and they are expected to be able to understand and remember what they read. Students are also expected to be able to draw conclusions, form opinions, and evaluate ideas.

## **More emphasis on tests and less busywork.**

While all instructors assign work to be done outside of class, homework grades often account for only a small portion of a student's final grade. In many cases, the midterm, a research paper, and/or the final exam will make up the majority of a student's final grade.

## **The need for personal responsibility.**

You have a tremendous amount of freedom in college. No one monitors your progress, no one checks to see if you are going to class, and no one knows whether or not you are doing your assignments. You are responsible for your own academic progress.

## **Consequences for low grades.**

All colleges have academic standards that students must meet in order to stay enrolled. Students who let their grades fall below a certain point are generally put on academic probation. Most colleges require that students on probation bring their grades up by the end of the following term, or they are withdrawn from school.

## **Less time in class and more independent study.**

In college, you are expected to do most of your learning on your own. For every hour you spend in class, you should plan to spend 2 to 3 hours out of class reading, studying, and completing assignments.

# Introduction

Students who are successful in college are self-disciplined and they work hard. More importantly, these students know how to learn. They understand how important it is to be organized, and they know how to manage their time. They know how to study, how to take good notes, and how to read a textbook. They also know how to memorize information and take tests. *This book will show you how to do all of these things and more.*

Before you read any further, make a list of the courses you're currently taking. Then write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course. Think of these grades as your academic goals for the term. If you follow the ten steps in this book, you will achieve your goals!

## The Ten Steps to Getting Good Grades in College



### STEP ONE

## Attend Every Class

*If you want to get good grades in college, you must attend every class - not almost every class.*

The importance of regular class attendance cannot be overemphasized. When you miss classes, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, homework explanations, and assignments. Without meaning to, you may also miss quizzes and even tests.

It can be tempting to cut a class now and then, particularly when you have an instructor who doesn't seem to care, or even notice, whether or not you're there. Don't kid yourself into thinking that missing a class won't make a difference, or that missing a class is okay as long as you get copies of the notes. Getting copies of someone's notes is not the same as being in class, and it's often more of a hassle. *You cannot make up what you miss, and you cannot get it from someone else.*



## STEP TWO

# Be Organized

*This section will give you several ideas on how to be organized. You, of course, must determine what works best for you.*

**Use a student planner.** Take a student planner with you to every class. Record each assignment under the date it's assigned, and write down the date it's due. When an assignment is completed, check it off. Also use your planner to keep track of test and quiz dates, appointments, etc.

STUDENT PLANNER	OCT. 5
✓	Math p. 110 due 10-6
✓	Bio chap. 8 due 10-7
✓	Study for History quiz
✓	Do Eng. paper outline

**Break down assignments.** Break your large assignments down into smaller parts. For example, if a research paper is assigned on Jan. 8 and it's due Jan. 21, you could give yourself these smaller assignments:

Jan 9 - Do Research

Jan. 15 - Write rough draft

Jan. 11 - Do Outline

Jan. 17 - Revise and rewrite

Writing these smaller assignments in your planner will ensure that you do your big assignments over a period of time, not at the last minute.

Many instructors give their students a syllabus listing all of the course assignments and their due dates. Whenever you're given a syllabus, immediately copy the assignments into your planner.

**Use three-ring notebooks for class notes.** You can easily insert handouts into a three-ring notebook, and if you do miss a class, you can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong. If you purchase a 3-hole punch and keep it in your notebook, you'll be able to insert handouts into your notebook as soon as you get them.

Keep all important course information (instructor's office hours, course syllabus, etc.) in the front of your notebook.

**Organize and save computer work.** Most of your papers and projects will be done on a computer. Make sure that you save your work often and that you have back-up copies of important files.

**Keep returned papers, quizzes, and tests.** Have a different color pocket folder for each class, and keep all returned papers, quizzes, and tests in these folders. Old tests can help you study for future tests, and they'll come in handy if there's ever a question about your grade.

In each folder, also keep a record of your grades for that course. Keeping a record of your grades eliminates surprises at the end of the term. If you are ever unsure as to how you're doing in a class, talk to your instructor.

**Have phone numbers for classmates.** Make sure that you have a phone number or e-mail address for at least one person in each class. If you have a question about an assignment or an upcoming test, or if you miss a class, you'll then have someone to contact.

**Maintain a neat and organized study area.** Set up a desk or study area with everything you need (paper, pens, pencils, calculator, thesaurus, etc.). Keep this area neat and organized.

Before you go to bed each night, get out everything you'll need for the following day (books, papers, etc.), and put everything else back in its place. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, write yourself a note so that you don't forget.

#### STEP TWO REVIEW

### **Be Organized**

- Use a student planner.
- Break down assignments.
- Use three-ring notebooks for class notes.
- Organize and save computer work.
- Keep returned papers, quizzes, and tests.
- Get phone numbers for classmates.
- Maintain a neat and organized study area.

*“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Aristotle*



## STEP THREE

# Manage Your Time Well

*With good time management, you have more free time, less stress, and a feeling that you're "in control."*

**Don't overextend yourself.** The first step in time management is to look at your life to make sure that you're not overextended. If you feel that you are doing more than you can handle, look for ways to make your life more manageable, and try to make some changes.

**Be organized.** Being organized is a tremendous time saver. When you're organized, you know what you have to do, and you have the information and the materials you need. To help you stay organized, use a planner to keep track of your daily assignments, and a large wall calendar to record major events, project deadlines, vacations, etc.

**Schedule 90-minute study sessions.** During your study sessions, don't do anything else. Focus completely on your work.

Set a specific time to get started on your studying, and make sure that you're not interrupted. If you can stay focused for 90 minutes, you'll be able to get a great deal accomplished.

**Make efficient use of your time.** Consciously make choices about how to use your time. For example, you could decide to limit yourself to one hour of TV or socializing on weeknights.

Look for ways to streamline and combine tasks. Study while you're doing your laundry. Get your exercise by jogging to the library. Also look for "chunks of time" that are wasted, and then figure out how to use this time more efficiently. Use the time between classes to talk to an instructor, study, or run an errand. If you need the time to relax, that's fine. The important thing is that you think about and decide how you can best use your time.

**Learn to say no.** In college, there's so much to do and so much going on that it's easy to get "sidetracked." It's also easy to tell yourself that you'll have time to study later. Know what you need to do, and don't let anything get in the way of your schoolwork.

**Make “to do lists” and prioritize items.** Make a list of everything you need to do. Then rate each item as an A (must do today), B (should do today), or C (would like to do today, but it can wait). Then, take all the As and rank them in the order of importance (1, 2, 3, etc.). Do the same with the Bs and the Cs. Now, rewrite your list with your As at the top (in the order of importance), followed by the Bs and the Cs.

Listing and prioritizing your tasks only takes a few minutes, and it’s a great way to organize and manage your time. Having a list also helps you focus on the things you need to do, instead of wasting time worrying about how you’re going to get everything done.

When you accomplish a task, cross it off your list. At the end of the day, take the tasks that didn’t get done and put them on the next day’s list.

	Wed
A	1 Study for hist test 2 Turn in lab report 3 Finish Eng. assignment
B	1 Do psych outline 2 Call Jenny
C	1 Do laundry 2 Go to computer lab 3 Get haircut

*In college, you alone are responsible for planning your day and managing your time. One of the biggest mistakes college students make is thinking that they have “lots of time” to get things done. In college, you cannot wait until the last minute to do your assignments or to study for tests. It just doesn’t work.*

### STEP THREE REVIEW

## Manage Your Time Well

- Don’t overextend yourself.
- Be organized.
- Schedule 90-minute study sessions.
- Make efficient use of your time.
- Learn to say no.
- Make “to do lists” and prioritize items.

*To succeed in college, you must be healthy and alert. Take time to exercise, eat the right foods, and get plenty of sleep.*



## STEP FOUR

# Be Successful in Class

*You'll enjoy college more and you'll get higher grades if you follow these tips.*

**Do every assignment.** Don't think of homework as something you should do. *Think of homework as something you must do.* Complete every assignment, regardless of how much it counts towards your final grade. Your instructor expects you to know the assigned material, and you can expect to be tested on it.

Do your homework on a regular basis so that you don't get behind. *Once you get behind, it can be very difficult to get caught up.* Having your assignments done before you go to class also enables you to get more out of your classes. Lectures are easier to follow, and you're better able to understand and participate in the class discussions.

**Learn how to adapt to different instructors.** Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different personalities, teaching styles, and expectations. Approach each class with a positive attitude.

At the beginning of each term, learn what each instructor expects with regards to homework, attendance, etc.

**Sit in the front of the class whenever possible.** Research shows that sitting in the front of the class is directly related to higher grades. It's easier to pay attention, easier to hear the instructor, and there are fewer distractions. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, television, overhead, etc. If you can choose your seat, sit up front.

If you've been assigned a seat in the back of the classroom, ask your instructor if it would be possible for you to move to the front.

**Be a good group member.** Knowing how to work well in a group is very important. Whether you're working on a class project, working at a job, or involved in an extracurricular activity, you need to be able to work and get along with the other members of the group.

When you're involved in a group project 1) do your share of the work and do it well; 2) have a positive attitude and support the other members of the group; and 3) be open to new ideas.

**Be on time to each class.** Whenever possible, arrive early for class. You'll be more relaxed, and you can use the time to look over your notes, talk to classmates, or speak with your instructor. When you are late to a class, you miss announcements and introductory remarks. Your tardiness also tells your instructor that being on time to his/her class is not a priority for you.

During the last 5-10 minutes of class, instructors often summarize the lecture or discuss assignments. It is, therefore, important not to leave class early. If you're in a small class and you must leave early, let your instructor know before the class begins.

**Participate in class.** Whenever there are discussions, group projects, or labs, be an active participant. The class will be more enjoyable, and you'll learn more. When you participate, you also show your instructor that you know the material and that you're interested in the class.

**Communicate with your instructors.** Most instructors will give you their office hours, phone number, and e-mail address at the beginning of the term. Don't hesitate to contact an instructor whenever you have a question, concern, or problem. For example, if you have a paper to write and you're having a difficult time determining how to approach the subject, talk to your instructor. While most instructors will be happy to help you, you must initiate the contact. You should, of course, respect your instructors' privacy and personal time. Talk to your instructors after class, see them during office hours, or use e-mail.

#### STEP FOUR REVIEW

### **Be Successful in Class**

- **Do every assignment.**
- **Learn how to adapt to different instructors.**
- **Sit in the front of the class whenever possible.**
- **Be a good group member.**
- **Be on time to each class.**
- **Participate in class.**
- **Communicate with your instructors.**