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Know What to Expect in College

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

A wide range of 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're expected 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

All instructors assign work to be done outside of class. Homework grades, however, 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 great deal of freedom and independence 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're 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 usually 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 Most colleges require that students on probation bring their grades up by the end of the following term, or they are withdrawn from school.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

Expect to do most of your learning on your own. For every hour you spend in class, plan to spend two hours reading, studying, and completing assignments.



Introduction

Successful students are self-disciplined and they work hard. More importantly, these students know how to study and how to learn. They know how to manage their time, how to take good notes, and how to read a textbook. They also know how to memorize information and how to do well on 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 are sure to 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 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 and record each assignment. Also write down the date each assignment is due. When an assignment is completed, check it off. Use your planner to also keep track of test and quiz dates, activities, and appointments.

October 5
✓ Math p. 110 due 10-6
✓ Bio chap. 8 due 10-7
✓ Study for History quiz
✓ Do Eng. paper outline
Meet Jen. at Lib 7 PM

At the beginning of each term, many instructors give their students a course syllabus listing all of the course assignments and their due dates. Whenever you're given a syllabus, copy the assignments into your planner.

Break down assignments. Large assignments are more manageable if you break them 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.

Use three-ring notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because handouts can easily be inserted, 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 can insert class handouts into your notebook as soon as you get them.

Always keep important course information (instructor's email address and office hours, course syllabus, etc.) in the front of your notebook.

Organize and save computer work. 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 colored 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 miss a class or have a question about an assignment, you'll then have someone to contact.



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

Before you go to bed each night, get everything organized for the next day. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, write yourself a note so that you don't forget it.

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.**
- ▶ **Have 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're doing more than you can handle, look for ways to make your life more manageable.

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 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. Set a specific time to get started on your studying and make sure that you won't be interrupted. During your study sessions, don't do anything else. Focus completely on your work. 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 on weeknights.



Look for ways to streamline and combine tasks. Study while you're doing your laundry or get your exercise by jogging to the library. Also look for "chunks of time" that are wasted and figure out how to use this time more effectively.

If you have time between classes, talk to an instructor, run an errand, study, or just relax. The important thing is that you think about and decide how you can best use the time you have available.

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 tasks. Make a daily list of the things you need to do. 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 of the As and rank them in order of importance (1, 2, 3...). Do the same with the Bs and Cs. Now, rewrite your list with the 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 your time. Also, having a list allows you to concentrate on what you need to do, instead of wasting time worrying about how you’re going to get everything done.

Focus on one task at a time. When it’s done, 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

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

Remember, you alone are responsible for managing your time and for keeping up with your assignments.

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 tasks.**

To do well in your classes, you must be healthy and alert. Eat the right foods, get plenty of sleep, and take time to exercise. Also make room in your schedule for fun and relaxation.



STEP FOUR

Be Successful in Class

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

Do every class 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. You'll get more out of your classes, lectures will be easier to follow, and you will be able to understand and participate in class discussions. *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.

Learn how to adapt to different instructors. Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different personalities and teaching styles. At the beginning of each term, learn what each instructor expects with regards to attendance, homework, and class participation.

Sit in the front of the class if possible. Research shows that sitting in the front of the class is directly related to higher grades. It is 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, or overhead. If you can choose your seat, sit in one of the first three rows.

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 closer 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, 3) support the other members of the group, and 4) be open to new ideas.

Be on time to each class. Whenever possible, arrive early for class. You will be more relaxed, and you can use the extra time to look over your notes, talk to classmates, or speak with your instructor.

Students who are late to class miss announcements and introductory remarks. Their tardiness also tells their instructor that being on time to class is not a priority for them.

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. When there's a class discussion, group project, or lab, 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. While most instructors are happy to help you, you must initiate the contact.

Be sure to 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 class 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.**