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Know What to Expect

People usually experience greater success when they know what to expect. At a college or university, expect to find the following:

Talk about the class sizes students can expect to find at your school. Ask students how class size affects learning (less personal attention, more competition, etc.).

What are students likely to find at your school with regards to homework, tests, and grades? How much will this vary with each instructor?

How do students become overwhelmed by the freedom they have at a college or university?

Go over the academic requirements at your school. What are the consequences for low grades?

Discuss how students often underestimate the time they need to spend on their studies.

Varying Class Sizes

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

The need for critical thinking skills

Students 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, test and exam grades make up the majority of the final grade.

The need for personal responsibility

You have a tremendous amount of freedom at a college or university. 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 and universities have academic standards that students must meet in order to stay enrolled. Most colleges and universities put students on academic probation if their grades fall below a certain point. Students who don't bring their grades up by the end of the next semester are withdrawn or transferred to another program.

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, you should plan to spend two hours out of class 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 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 that 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 semester. *If you follow the ten steps in this book, you will achieve your goals!*

Discuss the importance of setting goals.

Encourage students to make a list of their goals at the beginning of each term. (Studies show that people are more likely to achieve goals that have been written down.)

The Ten Steps to Getting Good Grades



STEP ONE

Attend Every Class

If you want to get good grades, 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.*

Make a list of the reasons that students miss class. How many of these are valid?

Emphasize the importance of going to every class.

Remind students that it doesn't matter what they do to be organized, as long as they have a system that works for them.

Before reading this section, ask students to describe the methods they use to keep track of their assignments. How well do these methods work?

Get a planner from your school's bookstore and discuss how to best use it. Encourage students to take their assignment notebook or planner to every class.

Ask for examples of large assignments. As a group, figure out how to break these large assignments down into several smaller assignments. Demonstrate writing these smaller assignments in a planner.



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.

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

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.

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

Use three-ring notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because you can easily insert handouts, 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.

Be sure to keep important course information (e.g., course syllabus, instructor's office hours, e-mail address) 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 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 may 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 desk or study area 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 following day. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, write yourself a note so that you don't forget.

Show how pocket folders or a filing system can be used to keep assignments, papers, and tests organized.

Discuss ways that students can keep track of the grades they receive in each class (e.g., record them on the inside front covers of their class folders, keep them on their computer).

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.

Read the **Step Two Review** aloud.

Ask students to evaluate their organizational skills on a scale of 1-5. Have students come up with two additional things they can do to become better organized.

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

Discuss the meaning of Aristotle's quote.



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."

Discuss the maximum amount of time a full-time student should work at a job.

(Experts recommend no more than 15-20 hours a week.)

Get a large desk or wall calendar and show students how using it can help them "see the big picture" and plan ahead.

Ask students to share how they study best. Encourage students to try a few 90-minute study sessions and report how they work.

Ask students to identify times in their day that could be put to better use.

Talk about how making good choices and decisions can affect a student's academic success.

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. Then try to make some changes.

Be organized. Being organized is a tremendous time saver. When you are 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. Use 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 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, study, run an errand, 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. 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. Having a list also allows you focus on what 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

Ask students to name 8 or 9 things that they might have to do in a day (other than going to class, getting dressed, eating, etc.).

Show how one might prioritize these items using the method described here.

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

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

Discuss how the majority of their time in high school was managed for them, and how they have much more freedom now.

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. Take time to exercise, eat the right foods, and get plenty of sleep.



STEP FOUR

Be Successful in Class

You will get more out of your education and you'll get higher grades if you follow these tips.

Discuss the importance of doing all assigned homework and of keeping up with assignments.

Some instructors prefer lecturing, while others encourage classroom discussion. Which style do your students prefer? What kinds of differences do your students see with regards to their instructors?

Ask students to try sitting in different seats in their classes. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of seating locations.

Discuss why business and industry are looking for people who can work effectively in a group, or as part of a team.

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. You'll get more out of your classes, lectures will be easier to follow, and you'll be better 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, teaching styles, and expectations. 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 whenever possible. Research shows that sitting in the front of the class is directly related to higher grades. It's easier to pay attention and stay involved, and there are fewer distractions. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, TV, or overhead. 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 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 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 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 his/her class is not a priority.

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 will be 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.

Ask students if they ever get irritated when friends or family show up late.

Compare this to an instructor dealing with students who come late to class.

Encourage students to get to know their instructors and to ask for help whenever they need it.

Have students share other ways to improve the classroom experience.

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.