



Peru State College
CATS: Center for Achievement and Transition Services

Tips for Academic Success

Being a college student is a different kind of challenge than you faced in high school. Sure, you're still going to class, taking exams, writing papers, and working on projects, but now your academic workload has increased, the work you produce is expected to be at a higher level of thinking, and you have less time to learn and master the concepts. But perhaps the biggest difference between high school and college is that most of your work has to be done outside of class.

The good news is that you're capable of succeeding in college; you wouldn't be here if you weren't. You've demonstrated that you can excel academically. But that doesn't mean that you couldn't use a little advice or help every now and then. Below are some basic tips to help you navigate the challenges of college and find academic success.

Go to Class!

This tip might be self-evident; if it's not, make it a rule to live by. Some of your classes might not have attendance policies. Some may have attendance policies that allow you to miss up to three classes with no penalty. That doesn't mean you can treat attendance as "optional." Every time you miss a class, you miss out on a learning opportunity and you lose the chance to take your own notes. Finding out what happened and getting notes from a classmate is not the same as attending class yourself. Missing classes is the NUMBER ONE reason students fail or do poorly in college. Unless you have a deadly contagious disease, go to class—every time, on time.

Prepare for, Participate in, and Review Each Class

It is recommended in higher education that you spend two to three hours studying outside of class for each hour that you spend in class. Some students do more; some do less. For difficult classes, you might need to put in more study time. And for easier classes, you might get away with doing a little less. You might devote more study time to classes in your major than non-major classes. Regardless, you should prepare for, participate in, and review for each class, at a minimum. Prepare by completing any assignments or previewing what's scheduled to be covered in class time. Also, participate in class activities or discussions. Finally, review your notes or what was covered in class after. Actively preparing, participating and reviewing will help you retain what you've learned and save time when studying for exams.

Sit Up Front

Several studies have shown that sitting in the front of the class improves grades. If you sit up front, you can see and hear better, and are freer from distractions. Sitting up front also gives you a better chance to get to know your professors (see next tip). Lastly, the most engaged students routinely sit up front, so you're more likely to be surrounded by students who are focused on achieving. Get to know them. Become friends with them. Talk about the class with them before and after it begins. Ask them questions. Start study groups with them. This is especially important for students who are easily distracted.

Build Relationships with Faculty

Get to know your instructors. They are your single best resource for success in your classes. They're experts in their field of study and they know what it takes to be successful in their classes—better than anyone else! Faculty can also be a good resource for references and letters of recommendation when you apply for scholarships or grants, or when you apply for jobs, graduate schools and organizations. The better they know you, the better they can testify to your skills, work ethic, passion, drive and whatever else makes you awesome. And though faculty can be intimidating, they're more likely to complain when students don't ask questions or contribute to discussions in class or come to office hours than when they do.

Beat Procrastination

Procrastinating can affect your grades and create unhealthy stress. Students procrastinate for a variety of reasons: "The task is hard." "It's more fun to do something else." "I'm so overwhelmed by all the work I have to do that I don't know where to start." "I don't know what I'm supposed to do." "I work best under pressure." Figuring out why you're procrastinating can help you avoid or reduce it. Increasing your awareness of how you work best can show you what steps to take. In general, though, the best way to avoid procrastination is to stay on top of your work, set reasonable goals, break long or difficult tasks into shorter, more manageable ones, work in chunks of time and reward yourself with breaks, and keep your thoughts positive (instead of "I should have . . .," say "I am going to . . .").

Know Your Mind and Body

When you get to college, you are likely to enjoy a level of independence beyond what you've experienced before. You are free to determine when, where, and how you study. Be mindful of the natural peaks and valleys of your alertness and energy levels throughout the day. Study when you are at your peaks. Schedule breaks, workouts or other leisure activities in your valleys.

Break Up Big Projects into Smaller Tasks and Schedule Backward from Due Dates

Major projects can seem daunting when they are first assigned. To avoid feeling overwhelmed, make a list of every step needed to complete the project. Working backward from the due date, assign each step its own deadline. Completing projects in small steps is more manageable than conceiving of the project as something that has to be done all at once. You'll produce better work if you schedule time away from the project and return to it fresh and energized. And you'll have less stress!

Sleep Well, Eat Healthy, and Exercise

Performing at your intellectual best requires that you take care of yourself mentally and physically. You have a lot of work to do, but there are always events taking place on or around campus that you want to participate in. Soak in all that college has to offer, but don't neglect your health to do so. It's easy to fall into a pattern of staying up late, being lazy, and eating junk food. Make sure that you reserve enough time to sleep, exercise, and eat well. The health of your brain depends on the health of your body.

Be Purposeful

If you don't know why you are reading, studying, reviewing, or problem-solving, you are merely looking over information on a superficial level. In order to truly expand your knowledge of course materials, how to apply that knowledge, and the larger conceptual connections learning will make available to you, develop clear and focused learning objectives for your study, reading, or reviewing sessions. As you begin, ask yourself, "At the end of this activity, I will be able to . . .". In order to create effective learning objectives, focus on the way your study activity fits into the larger themes or goals of the course. Consider how it will help you study for exams or complete projects or contribute to your ability to achieve the learning outcomes of the course.



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