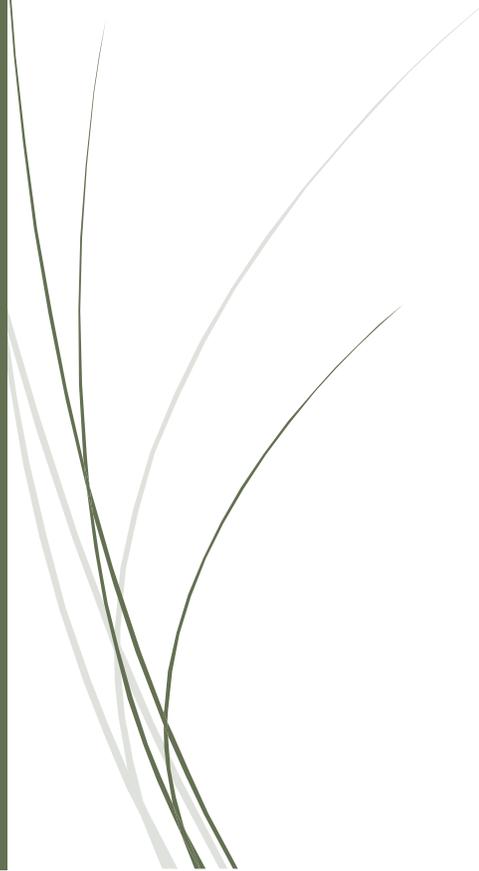




Strategies for Success

A Student Guide to Getting the Most Out of
Higher Education



Bruce M. Mackh, PhD
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Author's Note

This student guide grew from my personal experiences as a student and as the parent of college students, grounded in my work as a faculty member, academic administrator, and scholar of teaching and learning.

My goal is to empower you to make the most of your college experience by sharing strategies for success that will help you avoid common pitfalls and navigate around the obstacles that can subvert your aspirations.

Please consider this guide in the same spirit that you would a friendly conversation with an adult mentor who has your best interests at heart. Even if you only act upon some of the advice in the following pages, I believe you'll enhance your college experience and be more successful academically.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Mackh', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bruce M. Mackh, PhD

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Strategies for Success:

A Student Guide to Getting the Most out of Higher Education

It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.

~Leonardo da Vinci¹

The great Leonardo da Vinci made an astute observation in the quote above – people who take charge of their lives can achieve so much more than those who sit back and allow things to happen to them. Most students start college expecting to be passive recipients of knowledge, much like they were throughout their whole K-12 career. College, though, requires a completely different approach if we're truly going to maximize our time and energy, financial investment, social connections, and academic experience. This guide is designed to help you acquire the new skills you'll need if you want to have the best possible collegiate experience.

Design Your Own User Experience

“User Experience Design,” or UX, is a branch of design that focuses on the interface between a product and the user. We especially see this with technological products and firms, but the creators of anything from a toothbrush to a video game system must still pay attention to each facet of the user experience if they hope their product will be successful.

Key considerations in UX design are:

1. Useful: does the product serve a purpose?
2. Usable: can users effectively and efficiently use the product for themselves?
3. Findable: can the user find the product in order to purchase it?
4. Credible: does the user believe that the product will do what it's advertised to do?
5. Desirable: does the product inspire the user to want to purchase it?
6. Accessible: can persons with disabilities use the product?
7. Valuable: does the product deliver value to the person who purchases it and the company that produces it?²

Few institutions of higher education focus on creating a user experience for students. Their systems and procedures aren't always designed to work well together, and they sometimes don't have students' needs in mind, either. That's why it's up to you to create your own user experience that helps you make the most of your studies.

Let's look at those seven questions again, recasting them from the perspective of a student who wants to take a deliberate approach to their college experience.

1. Useful: how will this ____ (course, assignment, experience) be useful to me personally?

Everything you encounter in higher education – every course, assignment, activity, experience, or requirement – has a purpose. Sometimes you'll be told what that purpose is, but other times your instructors will either assume you understand why they're asking you to do something, or they won't think it's important to tell you. That means you'll have to discover the purpose for yourself. When you understand why you're doing something, you're better able to learn from that experience.

2. Usable: how can I use the materials and supports available to maximize my own learning?

Instructors provide materials and support in their classrooms. Institutions also provide support systems for students. The trick is to know what these supports are, understand how they work, and then apply them to your own purposes.

3. Findable: where can I find the materials, information, or help that I need?

Clearly, we can't use something if we can't find it. Understanding the support systems that are available through the institution and knowing where the things we need are located in our physical or virtual environments, are necessary to our success.

4. Credible: does this _____ (information, activity, requirement, etc.) make sense to me?

Critical thinking is an essential life skill. This works in two directions. First, we turn our critique on our own understanding, asking, "Does this make sense?" If the answer is "no," then we need to take action until the answer turns to "yes." Second, we turn our critique outwards to the topic we're examining. Developing the skill of thinking critically about what we're learning rather than accepting every word the instructor utters as unassailable truth is the key to wisdom. Both types of critique are founded on the exact same principle: ask questions until you achieve understanding.

5. Desirable: does my learning experience inspire me? Do I see how my learning will help me build a career after I graduate?

In everything we do as students, we need to keep the big picture in mind. Learning about Sparta and Athens in World History 101 doesn't exist in isolation – it informs your understanding of how Western civilization grew and developed to become what it is today. Then that knowledge informs your future career since it will occur within a society governed by principles developed in ancient Greece. Some instructors will help you to make these connections, but others leave that task up to you. Inspiration and motivation can only come from within ourselves. That's easy when your instructor is dynamic and engaging but harder if you're not intrinsically motivated by the course content. Your challenge is to find something of value in each class period or educational experience that keeps you engaged in learning and motivated to succeed?

6. Accessible: how can I manage the problems I'm having as a student?

About 20% of the general population has some form of disability, and most of us have areas where we're not as strong or skillful as we'd like to be. For instance, maybe your vision and hearing are perfectly normal, but you have trouble understanding what you read. When we apply UX design to our own learning, we think about how we can strategically adapt

processes, materials, or systems to shore up these areas of weakness. The same technologies that assist visually impaired students can allow you to hear a text read aloud as you read along with the narration. When you see and hear the words at the same time, it increases your comprehension.

7. Valuable: how will the education I'm receiving allow me to meet my goals?

Most students want to earn a degree because it allows them to pursue a career in a particular field. Instructors, on the other hand, don't always help students connect what they're learning in the classroom to their professional aspirations. Finding the value of your learning helps you to persevere when you don't feel engaged in a course, allowing the knowledge that your education is worthwhile overall to sustain your motivation through activities and requirements that may not seem to be of value to you in the present moment.

These questions will undergird the strategies presented in this guide, helping you prepare to make the most out of your collegiate experience. The guide's design also addresses the six areas where students are most likely to encounter problems so that they can be prepared to overcome challenges successfully.

- **Academic:** the skills and competencies needed to be academically successful in higher education are much different than those most students needed in high school. Basic tasks like reading, writing, and studying require a more sophisticated skill set than you've probably used before.
- **Financial:** there's no doubt that tuition, fees, room and board, books, and all of the associated costs of higher education are very expensive. Finding ways to manage the financial burden of higher education is important to your success now and in the future.
- **Institutional:** whether you attend a huge Research I university or a small private college, institutional systems, policies, and procedures can present daunting challenges for most students. Learning how to navigate these efficiently can help you get the most out of them and find the help you need.
- **Instructional:** every student's educational experience is shaped by what happens in the classroom: the instructor's teaching style and methods, required readings, discussions, assignments, and learning activities all have value, but students need to know how to work with these elements to meet the course objectives.
- **Social:** human beings are fundamentally social. The better students become at establishing personal relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, the higher the quality of their educational experience will be.
- **Personal:** students' academic engagement does not exist in isolation from their personal lives. And, because students are expected to do much of their learning outside of the classroom through reading, writing, or completing assignments independently, our personal lives can most definitely interfere with our success. Learning effective study skills, managing our time wisely, and creating efficient organizational systems allow students to prevent many problems that can derail their collegiate experience.

How can we correlate these factors? The chart below suggests what a successful student's experience would look like.

	Academic	Financial	Institutional	Instructional	Social	Personal
Useful	The content of my courses supports my career goals	Financial aid and student accounts services are useful	The institution provides systems and processes that are useful.	The instruction I receive in class is useful.	Opportunities for social interaction in my courses help to support my learning.	My study habits and personal skills are useful in my studies.
Usable	The content of courses is applicable and relevant.	I can access financial aid and student accounts information and services.	I can use institutional resources to support my educational attainment.	I can use the instruction I receive along with all associated materials or activities.	I can recognize opportunities to build relationships in and out of my classes.	I can use good study habits and personal skills to help me succeed in my courses.
Findable	Course materials are easy to locate.	I can find the financial information I need.	I can find the institutional offices and services that I need.	The instructor is easy to find/contact when I have questions or problems.	I can find co-curricular groups that I want to join, and I can find friends on campus.	I can find all of the items or information I need to meet my instructor's expectations.
Credible	The purpose of the learning activities in the course is clear to me.	I am confident that I have been provided with accurate financial information.	I believe that the institution's systems and processes will help me to earn my degree.	I believe that my instructor is an authority figure in this academic discipline and is providing a high-quality educational experience.	I can see that my social network will enhance my educational experience and future career.	I understand the connection between academic success and having good study habits and personal skills.
Desirable	I'm excited to learn in this class.	I think that I've found the best solutions to funding my education.	I use the services at my institution because they meet my needs.	I enjoy taking classes with this professor and/or in this academic field.	I definitely want to join co-curricular groups and organizations on campus.	I want to develop good study habits and personal skills so that I can be more successful.
Accessible	I don't have any problems with learning in this class.	I can work with financial aid and student accounts to solve my financial issues	The systems and services at my institution are easy to access and work well.	I have not experienced any problems with my learning in this class.	It's easy to join co-curricular groups and organizations.	I can access the skills I need to succeed in my classes.
Valuable	I can see the value of what I'm learning	I believe the cost of my education will be worthwhile	The systems and services at my institution are valuable.	I know that this class will be valuable to my career.	The social relationships I've formed are personally valuable.	The value of good study skills and personal habits is evident.

Bringing all of these ideas together, we can organize our success strategies into seven action steps:

1. Map the terrain
2. Learn the rules
3. Read a textbook
4. Take notes
5. Study smarter
6. Build your network
7. Get involved on campus

Now that we understand the “why” behind the journey we’re about to undertake together and have an idea of our destination let’s get started!

Strategy 1: Map the Terrain

Savvy travelers do some research before they visit a new locale. They study maps, plan the activities they'll want to do, and investigate the sights they plan to see. Higher education is like a trip that lasts for years. Students need to start their studies well before they step foot on campus by learning about the institution itself.

If you'll be attending classes on campus, your first step is to learn your way around.

- Most institutions provide a campus map on their main website. Take the time to look at it closely and learn how the campus is organized. Bookmark the map on your phone so that you can refer to it easily when it's needed.
- If you'll live in student housing, where is it in relation to the buildings where most of your classes will be held? Can you walk to class, or will you need to take campus transportation?
- If you're going to commute to campus, where is the parking area located?
 - Will your vehicle be accessible during the day, or will you need to make sure you carry everything you need with you all day long?
 - Will you need to purchase a parking permit? If so, where can you do this, and how much will it cost?
- Take the time to go outdoors and walk around the campus. Plan for how long it will take you to get from one class to another and what route will be fastest if your classes are scheduled back-to-back.
- Stop by the administrative offices that you're most likely to visit frequently: financial aid, student accounts, academic advising, and the registrar.
 - Find their hours of operation, main phone number, and web address.
 - Make an appointment to speak to someone in academic advising and discuss your schedule to ensure that the courses you've planned to take align with your goals.

Whether they attend classes on campus or online, all students will need to use the institution's website frequently.

- Read every single main page on the institution's website.
 - The "About" page usually presents a lot of interesting information about the institution's history, traditions, achievements, famous alumni, and student demographics. You're part of this community now, so it's good to know more about it.
 - The "Academics" section gives you an overview of each department, college, or school. Even if you're not going to take courses in many of those units, it's good to know what they are.
 - The "Administration" pages tell you about the institution's leaders, and it often links to the offices you'll need to interact with, such as the registrar.
 - The "Student Life" section will give you important information about topics such as housing, dining, clubs and student organizations, and events. It also usually includes information about things to do in the community surrounding the campus. If you live in

campus housing, pay special attention to this section since you need to know the rules you'll have to follow.

- Bookmark the pages that you'll use most often. These could include:
 - Student log-in
 - Email
 - Tech support
 - Course catalog

If you're taking classes online, your "campus" exists in two places: the institution's website and the Learning Management System (LMS) where the classes take place.

- Nearly all LMS providers offer tutorials that teach you how to find your way around the site and how to do tasks like making a discussion board post, submitting an assignment, or sending a message to your instructor. ***Don't skip these tutorials!*** Admittedly, they're not very entertaining, but online students commonly trip themselves up when they can't find what they're looking for in the online classroom.
- Tech support is going to be important any time you're working in a digital environment. Find this area of the site and back up the email address and phone number to a document saved on your computer's desktop so you can find it easily. That way, you'll be able to contact them even if the site is down.
- Look for the support systems built-in to the LMS. Some institutions have links to live online tutoring, a section of instructional videos, or links to external content providers like Lynda.com or Khan Academy that can help you with your studies.
- Your access to online classrooms will depend on the LMS your institution uses. Some allow students to look over the course months ahead of time. Others only allow students to log in the day the course begins.
 - Once you can enter the classroom, read every page carefully!
 - Find out where you submit assignments.
 - Look over the discussion board and read the instructions posted there.
 - Read all of the information about your instructor, the course, and any announcements that are posted already.
 - Download the course syllabus and save it where you can find it quickly.
 - Download the course calendar, if available.
 - Find the information about materials and equipment required for the course, including textbooks. If you don't have one or more of these items, get them as quickly as possible. If you cannot get something important to the course, email the instructor and ask if you can discuss alternatives.
- The two most important tools for online learning are your computer and your internet connection. If something goes wrong with either of these things, you've got a big problem unless you've created a contingency plan. It's much better to make a plan you never use than to be taken by surprise at 11:00 p.m. when your big paper is due at midnight!

- Computer problem: do you have access to a computer that you can use if your own computer breaks? Public libraries usually have computers available for patrons. You might also have a friend or relative who would let you borrow a computer.
- Internet problem: if your home internet stops working, where else could you go to work online? McDonald's, Starbucks, and many other restaurants or coffee shops offer free wifi. Public libraries offer free wifi, too, and this might even extend into the parking lot so that you can use it after hours.

If you use these strategies for mapping the terrain of your physical or virtual campus, you'll be prepared for a more successful student experience.

SUCCESS CHECK:

1. Are you familiar with the physical campus of the institution you'll attend?
2. Can you find the buildings where your classes will be held?
3. Can you find the offices you'll need to visit?
4. Do you know your way around the institution's website?
5. Do you know where everything is in the LMS?

Strategy 2: Learn the Rules

Travelers need to become familiar with the legal regulations and social norms of the places they'll visit. It would be a huge mistake to drive on the right side of the road in London or wear your shoes inside a restaurant in Tokyo, for instance. Colleges and universities, too, have many rules. When we know what those rules are and how to follow them, we're able to avoid problems that can damage our academic record or tarnish our collegiate experience.

Institutional Policies

Institutions' rules, policies, and deadlines can cause you a lot of trouble if you don't adhere to them.

- Registration and Enrollment
 - How do you register for classes?
 - When does registration open for each term? When does it end?
 - When can you drop a course for a full refund? A partial refund?
 - What rules apply to the grade for a dropped course?
 - Can you re-take a failed course? If so, will both courses' grades appear on your transcript?
- Student Accounts and Financial Aid
 - What due dates, deadlines, and policies apply to your student account?
 - What services are offered through the student accounts office? (i.e., withdrawing money against your excess financial aid, cashing personal checks, receiving a voucher for the campus bookstore)
 - Will an outstanding balance due on your student account prevent you from registering for the next semester?
 - If you have renewable scholarships or grants, what are the procedures for reapplication for those funds? What are the criteria for eligibility, and do you still meet these requirements?
- Computer labs, fitness centers, common areas, dining facilities, and other public spaces
 - What are the hours of operation?
 - What are the policies for non-student guests?
 - What are the expectations for behavior in these public spaces?
 - What items are allowed? Disallowed?
 - What is the penalty for violation of the rules?
- Residence Life
 - Read all the information about student housing on the institution's website.
 - Look carefully at everything you receive in the mail and complete all of the forms and documentation needed.
 - If certain items are prohibited, *don't bring them*. For instance, many dorms disallow kitchen appliances except for small refrigerators. If you're caught with a personal microwave because you accidentally burned your midnight popcorn, you can face losing your housing altogether.

- Know and observe the rules for common areas, quiet hours, visitors, and so on.
- Don't violate policies about modifying the room or the furniture in it. (i.e., hanging pictures, bunking the beds, replacing window coverings, etc.)
- Be mindful of your keys and ID card and know what to do if you lose or misplace them.

Academic Honesty

The phrase "academic honesty" refers to all matters of plagiarism, copyright infringement, and cheating. Violating this policy could ruin your academic career, even if your error was accidental.

- What is the definition of "academic honesty" used by the institution you attend?
- What is the procedure for faculty members who suspect a student of academic dishonesty?
- Who is responsible for enforcing the policy?
- Examples of violations might include:
 - Cheating on an exam.
 - Submitting an assignment you purchased from another student or an online vendor.
 - Submitting a paper you've already submitted for another course without openly acknowledging the re-submission.
 - Failing to use correct citations on an assignment
 - Media piracy (illegal music downloads, for instance)
 - Copyright infringement, including the use of images or graphics without correct citations.
- What will happen to students who violate the policy? Claiming ignorance of the policy will not excuse acts of academic dishonesty.
 - At best, the instructor will allow you a chance to re-do the assignment and receive credit for your work.
 - At worst, you will have to appear before the dean, the provost, or other administrator and face disciplinary action, which may include receiving an automatic failing grade for the course, expulsion from your degree program, or even expulsion from the institution.
 - Academic dishonesty stays on your college records for life. You also remain responsible for your student loans when you're expelled. Bottom line? It's not worth it! You could end up with no degree, thousands of dollars in debt, and a seriously damaged reputation.

Instructor Policies

Every instructor has rules that they expect you to follow in their classroom, whether on campus or online. These are usually included in the course syllabus, and the instructor generally explains them on the first day of class as well.

- Classroom behavior:
 - Using electronic devices during class (phones, computers, tablets, games).
 - Using recording devices during class.
 - Consuming food or beverages in class.
 - Maintaining classroom civility

- Labs and Studios
 - The hours that this space is open.
 - Whether you are allowed to have visitors with you as you work.
 - Whether food or beverages are allowed in this space.
 - Expectations for cleaning up your materials and storing your work in progress.
 - Safety regulations.
- Expectations for:
 - Participation in class discussions and activities
 - Formatting written work
 - Submitting work on time.

The last item – submitting your work on time – is perhaps the most crucial to your academic success. Most instructors are sticklers for due dates, and some will even deduct points if you attempt to submit your work early, not just when it's late. Many feel that requiring stringent adherence to due dates prepares students for the rigors of real life and reflects the professional expectations of the workplace. This is why it's really important to closely study the late work policy and meet this expectation accurately.

- When is work due?
 - Any time on the stated due date?
 - By a particular moment on the stated due date?
- What is the penalty for submitting work late? Is there a penalty for early submission?
- How should the work be submitted?
 - Physical copy handed directly to the instructor at the start of class? By the end of class?
 - Electronic post to the course website or LMS?
 - Sent to the instructor via email?
- Are there exceptions or mitigating circumstances that the instructor will allow?
 - Death of an immediate family member
 - Physical or mental illness of the student or immediate family member serious enough to require medical intervention
 - The student's own military deployment
 - Natural catastrophe (flood, fire, hurricane, tornado, tsunami, earthquake)
- If the student claims one of the exceptions, what documentation will be required?

You should also determine how the instructor wants you to handle situations where you cannot meet the deadline for an assignment.

- Most instructors would prefer for you to let them know in advance that your work will be late, even when the reason isn't among the mitigating circumstances they've said they'll accept. Many instructors are willing to work with you to find a mutually acceptable solution, and some will waive or reduce late penalties when you demonstrate responsibility by being proactive.
- The worst possible thing you can do if you miss a deadline is to fail to submit the work altogether. This doesn't only result in a zero in the instructor's grade book – it sends your

instructor a message that you don't care, you're not committed to your academic achievement, and you don't respect their rules.

- The second worst thing you can do is wait until an assignment is long overdue and then expect to receive credit for doing the work even though it's late. If you find yourself in this situation, approaching the instructor with an apology, an explanation, and a humble request is usually the most effective. Something like, *"Dear Professor James, I'm so sorry that I didn't post my reading response last Friday. I know that forgetfulness is no excuse, but I sincerely forgot to do this while I was also working on the research paper that was due on Monday. Is there any possibility that you would accept the reading response even though it's late? I'd really appreciate knowing what the options might be. Again, I'm very sorry for forgetting about this deadline."*
- Respect, repentance, and humility go a long way towards convincing the instructor to be more understanding of your situation.

Colleges and universities are complex organizations full of rules, regulations, policies, and procedures. High academic achievement is not the sole criterion for success. You also need to know what the rules are and how to follow them.

SUCCESS CHECK

1. Do you know where to find and how to follow all of the institution's policies and procedures?
2. Do you understand the rules about academic honesty?
3. Do you know your instructor's policies, especially concerning late assignments?

Strategy 3: Read Your Textbook

Some of you might already be rolling your eyes at the title of this section. You're probably saying to yourself, "Of course I know how to read my textbook!"

What's probably more accurate is that you know *how to read*, and you've likely been exposed to some fairly complex literature or informational text. You're also aware that you're expected to do the readings that you're assigned.

Nevertheless, college-level textbooks present an entirely different proposition when compared to the textbooks you're used to reading.

- K-12 textbooks are written by teachers who specialize in the books' curricular field and design the book for an audience of students at a specific level of academic attainment (elementary school, middle school, high school). The authors' primary goal is to teach students the material covered in the book, and they often take at least some UX criteria into account. The textbooks and other curricular materials used in public schools must be vetted by committees of teachers and approved by the school board, which provides for a certain level of quality control. Individual K-12 teachers don't have much choice about the books that are used in their classrooms
- College-level textbooks are written by experts in their academic specialty for an audience of fellow experts. The primary purpose of college textbooks is to present a given body of disciplinary information that other experts also believe to be important. College-level textbooks usually don't consider UX criteria since they focus on experts' expectations, not the students who will use the book. Furthermore, college-level instructors have greater freedom to choose their textbooks. The institution usually requires that a course's description and learning outcomes receive approval by a curriculum committee and academic administrator, but the course details, including textbook selection, are left up to individual instructors.
- So what does this mean to students?
 - Your college textbooks might not have the helpful little features you're used to, like text boxes in the margins, questions for review, or glossaries.
 - Your college textbooks will probably be written at a reading level suitable to college professors, not necessarily college students.
 - Therefore, you *do* know how to read, but you might still really struggle with reading a college textbook.

Knowing upfront that reading a college textbook will be challenging lets you prepare to meet this challenge successfully. The strategy we'll use is based on an approach called SQ3R.³ It's been around for decades, but it's still very useful.

- S = Survey
 - Take two or three minutes to preview the chapter you've been assigned to read.

- Pay special attention to the introduction, headings, subheadings, illustrations, captions, and conclusion.
- Q= Question
 - After your survey, ask yourself: what will I learn in this chapter? What is the big idea of this chapter?
 - Asking this question primes your brain to find the information you're looking for, which in this case is to identify the overarching concepts presented in the chapter. Think of it this way: when you go shopping with nothing particular in mind, you'll wander all over the store. When you go with a shopping list, you'll focus on the items you need and accomplish your shopping much more efficiently.
- R = Read
 - Get a notebook and pencil or open a Word document on your computer so that you can take notes.
 - Start reading at the beginning of the chapter and read through to the end.
 - Now go back and read the chapter again. This time:
 - Highlight or underline the main ideas.
 - Take notes about points you felt were especially important and write down questions you had as you were reading.
 - Record any especially memorable quotes (don't forget the page number and paragraph where you found them!)
- R = Recite
 - On your second trip through the chapter, stop at the end of each section, subsection, or paragraph and ask yourself, "What did I just read? What does it mean?"
 - Write the main idea of that section (or subsection or paragraph) in your own words. This step is essential to developing your understanding of the material. If you can't put an idea in your own words, you don't understand it! Go back and re-read that part of the text until the meaning becomes clear to you.
 - If you still don't understand what you've read, it's time to get some help.
 - Read the passage aloud to yourself. Sometimes hearing yourself say the words can really help you understand it better.
 - Listen to somebody else read the passage aloud. You can also accomplish this with technologies designed for the visually impaired.
 - Ask a classmate to discuss the reading with you.
 - Look online for an explanation of particularly difficult concepts.
- R = Review
 - Most students read the assigned pages once, stopping to highlight along the way. Then when they sit down to study before an exam, they'll look at the highlighted areas and think, "Okay, I remember this."
 - Unfortunately, this isn't true. What's happening, instead, is that you *recognize* the items you highlighted, but you might not understand them or even remember them when the book isn't in front of you anymore.

- Review is different. It starts with looking back at the chapter, stopping at the end of each section and asking yourself, again, “What does this mean?” If you can still put the idea in your own words, you’ve really learned it.
- Then look back at your notes.
 - Did you find answers to all of the questions that you noted while you were reading?
 - Do your notes make sense to you?
 - Do you feel like you understand the material?
- Last, go back to the “Question” phase and ask yourself again: what is the big idea of this chapter? And, is this the same as I expected it to be before I completed the reading?

Without a doubt, this is a much more time-consuming and labor-intensive approach to reading than you’re used to. Think of it as an investment: you’re putting in the labor upfront. Then the night before the exam, you won’t have to re-read the textbook because you’ll have learned and remembered so much more of the material. Look over the highlighted parts of the text, look over your notes, and put the ideas in your own words. If you can do that, you’ve successfully met the challenge.

Finally, don’t fall into the trap of thinking that your college professors will explain the readings in class, just like your high school teachers used to.

- Your instructors will assume that you can, in fact, read and understand the material on your own.
- They might ask if anyone has any questions, and they might review a few key details or essential concepts in class, but they will not summarize the chapter for you.
- If they do take time in class to talk about the readings, pay attention! The things they choose to discuss often end up on the exam.

SUCCESS CHECK

1. Do you know what each of the letters in SQ3R represents?
2. Why should you go to all this trouble to read your textbook?
3. How will it help you study for your exams more efficiently?

Strategy 4: Take Notes

Notetaking is ubiquitous in academia because the vast majority of the instruction you'll receive will occur through lectures. Students typically enter the classroom, take out their notebook (or laptop, where these are allowable), and prepare to take notes. (Note: Don't use any recording technologies without the instructor's express permission, though! That can constitute a serious violation of privacy that could land you in legal trouble.)

On Campus

- Instructors usually speak faster than their students can write. We have to make quick decisions about which of the instructor's comments are important and which we can skip.
- Sometimes we're trying so hard to keep up that we're not sure what we've written afterward.
- That's why it's essential to take a few moments immediately after the class period ends to go back through your notes and fill in any details or explanations that you might have missed.
- If you wrote something that you can't understand, ask a classmate.
- If you still don't understand something after reading through your notes, ask the instructor. You might feel like you're a bother, but most instructors are pleased when students go out of their way to understand something from class. It shows that you're a serious student who's committed to their learning and that you're interested in doing a good job in class.
- Don't wait to review your notes after class. Every conversation you have, every website you read, every subsequent class you attend will push the information farther and farther from your memory.
- When it's time to study for an exam, compare your notes with a classmate. Each of you may have remembered different points of the lecture, so your notes will be more complete together than they were separately.
- Compare your notes to the required readings. Where there are points of commonality, you can be reasonably sure that the information is important and will be on the exam.

Online

- Online lectures tend to be posted as PowerPoint or PDF files, mp4 or video content, or even on sites like YouTube.
- Regardless of the file format, you're able to control the speed at which you experience a recorded lecture, pausing the playback while you take notes.
- Online lectures might also be accompanied by a written transcript so that the course meets the requirements for students with visual disabilities. Transcripts are an advantage for all students because you can download the document, then highlight and annotate as you work your way through the lecture.
- Because you can take your time with an online lecture, you don't have to write or type as quickly. Then you're not as likely to write things that don't make sense to you later on.

- Nevertheless, it's still a very good idea to review your notes right after you've finished viewing/reading the lecture while the content is fresh in your mind.
 - Ask yourself: Does this make sense? What questions do I still have about this material?
 - If you still have questions, or if your notes don't make sense, take responsibility for your learning:
 - Email your question to the professor or post your question to the discussion board.
 - Do some online research about the question – you just might find a helpful video or website with an answer.
 - Check out the supports available in the online classroom. There's often live online tutoring, video libraries, or other helpful information at your fingertips.

Last, we can note a very interesting phenomenon that attests to the powerful impact of notetaking on learning. Given the option of using notes on an exam, students often comment, "I didn't even need to look at my notes during the test." That's because the act of notetaking forges multiple sensory pathways into your brain.

- Auditory: you HEAR the instructor's lecture
- Kinesthetic: you WRITE the notes
- Visual: you READ the notes as you study

To *supercharge* your learning, you can add one additional component:

- Social: EXPLAIN your notes to someone else. One of the best ways to learn anything is to teach it. Your brain loves interacting with other humans, so you're more alert and engaged with the ideas you're learning if you talk to another person about them. It also plays on the reading strategy of "Recite" because putting an idea in your own words is the mark of whether or not you really understood it.

SUCCESS CHECK

1. Do you take notes during lectures?
2. Do you go over the notes right after class, adding detail or clarification?
3. Do you identify areas in the notes where you still have questions or need additional information?
4. Do you take steps to find answers to those questions or locate the information you needed?

Strategy 5: Study Smarter

How do you feel when you hear the word “study”? Probably not happy, excited, and ready to learn, right? The task of studying often becomes a dreaded chore, but that very attitude sabotages what we’re trying to accomplish. Our job in this section is to discover ways to study smarter, not harder.

First, research has shown that the average college freshman can pay attention for about 25 minutes – feeling good and staying focused and productive.⁴ After that, our attention wanes. We get tired. Our minds wander, and we find ourselves reading the same part of the textbook that we’ve already read twice. We can force ourselves to keep sitting at the desk, keep reading and re-reading the same part of the textbook, but the longer we press on, the worse we feel and the less we’re accomplishing. Sound familiar?

Rhythm

There’s a simple solution that can help you increase your focus and productivity: build short “fun breaks” into your study time. In just 5 minutes of enjoyable activity, our brains reset, and we’re able to return to our desk and work productively for another 25 minutes or so. Take another 5-minute fun break, and go back to work again. Keep this up until you’ve studied for as long as you need to for the day.

- Fun breaks might include:
 - Calling a friend.
 - Watching a funny video on your computer.
 - Playing a game.
 - Getting up and walking around the building.
- Fun breaks that incorporate activity, social interaction, or creativity work very well. The trick, of course, is to keep the fun breaks to 5 minutes, then get back to work.
 - For the sake of your health, try not to turn the fun break into a snack break too often. If you need a snack, stick with healthy, crunchy foods like carrots, apples, and pretzels because crunchy foods increase alertness. Loading up on sugar feels like it gives you a short-term boost, but your blood sugar will crash later on, making studying all the more unpleasant.
 - Use technology to help. If you have a FitBit or other fitness tracker, program it to remind you to get up and move every 25 minutes. Or find a phone app with 5-minute exercise routines, set a timer, and take an exercise break every 25 minutes.
- Don’t think that 25 minutes of study + 5 minutes of fun is a mandate. If you know that you’re able to focus for an hour at a time, take a break every hour. If you can only focus for 15-minute blocks, then break every 15 minutes. The point is to build the rhythm of study + break into your routine.
 - Knowing that we have a break to look forward to turns the study time between breaks into a more pleasant experience.

- In contrast, feeling like you're chained to your desk slogging through the mud is miserable.
- Our brains love connections and associations.
 - If you associate learning with fun, you'll be more productive.
 - If you associate learning with pain, your study will be ineffective no matter how long you try to focus on it.
- If you want to lengthen your breaks and spread your study out over a longer time, that's okay too. The point is to build a healthy pattern alternating between focus and fun.
- Whenever possible, start your study sessions earlier in the day so that you can look forward to spending your evening hours doing something you enjoy.
 - Students often hang out with friends until late in the evening, then go back to their dorm and expect to study for several hours.
 - They're tired even before they begin, and the quality of their studying suffers because of it.
- Study by daylight
 - The human brain is programmed to be awake and alert during daylight hours and to rest during darkness. Sunlight is a powerful mood booster that also enhances cognitive performance.⁵
 - Studies show that students exposed to six hours of sunlight significantly improved alertness and academic performance over students exposed to six hours of artificial light.
 - Extended exposure to artificial light is also associated with increased levels of depression and sleep disruption, both of which negatively impact our ability to learn.
 - Delaying your study until late evening fights your brain's natural wake/sleep cycle, making it more difficult to learn.
 - Use your daylight hours to your advantage, even if you can't find a continuous block of time during the day.
 - Choose a study spot near a window, preferably with a pleasant view. Studies show that looking at nature, especially seeing the color green, boosts memory and concentration. Even looking for 30 seconds at a photograph of a natural scene helped workers concentrate better.⁶
- Reinforce your studying by planning a reward for yourself when you're done for the day.
 - Go out and socialize with your friends. Go to the gym. Watch a movie. Do something that makes you happy!
 - Rewarding yourself for a job well done reinforces your brain's association between studying and enjoyment.
- Capitalize on your natural tendency to be a night owl or an early bird.
 - Everyone has a time of day when they feel best and are mentally the sharpest.
 - If you know when this is, schedule your study times around it. You'll get the most out of your effort by working when you're the most alert and energized.

Environment

Where do you normally study? Your bedroom? The kitchen or dining room table? In the middle of the living room or family room? In every case, our brains have already established the primary function of that room. The function of a bedroom is to sleep. The kitchen and dining room are for eating and socializing. The living room or family room are for entertainment and relaxing. And none of those purposes is conducive to studying!

Dorm rooms serve almost all of those functions, as well as being noisy, crowded, and cluttered. We can overcome this problem, though, with a few simple steps.

- Arrange the furniture so that you don't have a direct line of sight to the bed while you're working.
 - If it's late and you're tired, that bed will start whispering to you. "Come over here and lie down. Just close your eyes for a little while. It will be all right."
 - Before you know it, the sun is rising, and you didn't get your work done.
 - Blocking your line of sight might mean hanging a curtain between the desk and the bed or getting creative with the furniture arrangement, but it will make a difference in your focus.
 - The same is true of other areas where people often study.
 - Place your desk where you do not have a direct line of sight to whatever else usually goes on in that room.
 - Use a curtain or room divider to create a semi-private space for studying.
 - Only use your desk to study. When you sit down, your brain will think, "Study time!"
- Tap into the power of visual cues.
 - Get a small desk lamp. Put a sticker on it that says "Study Lamp."
 - ONLY use the lamp while you're actively studying. Do not use it for anything else. You're training your brain that when the lamp is on, it's time to study.
 - Get everything ready in advance so that you don't waste time. Sit down at your desk, turn on the lamp, and start working. As soon as you feel your focus start to wane, turn off the lamp and take a break. Then go back to your desk, turn on the lamp, and study some more.
 - The lamp is a visual cue that reminds you to stay on track and get your work done.
- Multitasking is a myth.
 - We think we're doing many things at the same time: reading, listening to music, talking to our roommate. But really, we're toggling our attention between activities in short bursts. The more that's going on around you, the more you're diluting your attention to the task you're supposed to be doing.
 - Eliminate distractions.
 - Turn off the TV. Close tempting windows on your computer.

- Put on some noise-canceling headphones and cue up some classical music. Baroque music like Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi, or classical works from Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn work especially well.
 - This musical genre tends to be highly structured, almost mathematical, and has few distracting emotional associations.
 - Think about it: if you're listening to your favorite style of music, you'll pay attention to it and even start to sing along. That defeats the purpose of using music as a study aid. If you're singing along with your favorite song, you're not studying!
 - Even if you choose a playlist with instrumental-only versions of popular music, you'll find yourself thinking or even humming the tunes.
 - Baroque or other classical music can mask distractions and enhance your focus. The point is to choose instrumental music that you can basically ignore.
 - The headphones also say to other people in the room: please don't talk to me – I'm studying.
 - Enlist help
 - Unless you live alone, the other people who live in your house, apartment, or dorm will distract you. This fact is especially true for adult learners, online learners, and commuter students.
 - Have a conversation with the people you live with about your need to focus on your studies.
 - Ask them to respect the study lamp or headphones: when they're on, please stay away.
 - Assure them that you'll be taking a break for 5 minutes out of each ½ hour, and you'll be happy to talk to them during those break times.
 - Remind them that studying is important to your future and ask them to support you by helping you focus. Plus, the sooner you finish your study time for the day, the more time you'll have to spend with them.
 - Parents of young children find it especially difficult to carve out time for study. In this case, you might need to resort to extreme measures.
 - Find a babysitter so that you can leave the house to study.
 - Plan your study time for hours when your children are most likely to be asleep.

Sleep

Students regularly deprive themselves of sleep in order to study. This choice isn't just detrimental to your health but to your learning.⁷

- The brain needs high-quality REM sleep to cement memories. People with disorders such as sleep apnea don't get enough REM sleep, resulting in memory loss.
- Don't undermine good study by not sleeping on what you've just learned. If you don't sleep (or don't sleep enough), you won't remember what you learned.

- Research shows that sleep consolidates memory. Students who slept between study sessions remembered more initially and over time than those who took a break between study sessions but did not sleep.
- A short catnap won't work. You need seven continuous hours of sleep each night to maximize your ability to learn.⁸

Memorization

The information we need to learn generally takes two forms: facts and concepts.

- Facts are bits of information such as names, dates, math facts, chemical formulas.
- Concepts are overarching ideas that shape our thinking.
- Facts are easily forgotten but usually fairly easy to look up.
- Concepts, once learned, stay with us for life.
- For example, biology students learn the taxonomic categories for classifying organisms: domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. Each describes a group into which an organism belongs, moving from the most general to the most specific.⁹
 - Reading the description above, you now understand something of the concept that we can identify organisms by sorting them into categories.
 - The fact – names for the levels of the taxonomy – is more difficult to remember.
- Mnemonics are systems that facilitate the recall of information. These strategies can help you memorize facts.
 - Think of your brain as though it were made of Lego bricks. When you want to add a new brick (new knowledge), it needs to connect to an existing brick. In this same way, we need to connect new learning to facts and concepts that we already know.
 - There are three styles of mnemonics.
 - Acronyms use the first letter of each word in a phrase to make a new word.
 - ROY G BIV = the colors of the spectrum of light: Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet
 - SCUBA = Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus
 - Coined sayings are memorable strings of words that we can associate with facts.
 - In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.
 - Righty-tighty, lefty-loosey
 - My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Noodles (names of the planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune)
 - Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge (Notes associated with the lines on a musical staff: E, G, B, D, F)
 - Interacting images link a fact to an idea. The more novel or creative the association, the better you'll remember the fact.
 - Let's say you're studying nutrition and you're having trouble memorizing the number of calories per gram of different nutrients.¹⁰

- Carbohydrates have four calories per gram. Cars have four wheels. The word “carb” has four letters.
 - Proteins have four calories per gram. A pro-car (like a race car) has four wheels. Racing cars have numbers on them. Our pro car is number 4.
 - Fats have nine calories per gram. Fats are rich. A rich fat cat has nine lives.
- Chunking helps us remember large amounts of information by breaking it into smaller, “bite-sized” pieces.¹¹
 - We dial phone numbers as a continuous string of numbers: 8008675309. But we remember them in chunks: 800-867-5309.
 - We remember birthdates in chunks of month, day, year. 12131938 becomes 12/13/1938.
 - Many of us remember the order of the letters in the alphabet by chunking, setting this to music: abcdefg – hijk - lmnop – qrs – tuv – wxyz.
 - Lists can be chunked into categories that help us remember them. Organizing a shopping list by the areas of the store you’re visiting will help you remember to purchase all the items you need.
 - Processes can be chunked according to the steps involved. To create a painting, you’d organize your work by (1) preparation, (2) painting, and (3) clean-up.
- Music helps us remember facts. Think about how many commercial jingles or TV theme songs you remember!
 - *Schoolhouse Rock!* is familiar to those of us who grew up during the 1970s and ‘80s.
 - This show was a series of animated songs about educational topics including grammar, math, science, history, civics, and economics broadcast between Saturday morning cartoon shows on the ABC television network. Generations of students memorized their multiplication facts, the Preamble to the Constitution, the parts of speech, and the process of passing a bill through Congress with these catchy tunes and simple lyrics.
 - Adults have benefitted from *Schoolhouse Rock!* as well. Several governmental and lobbyist groups asked the series’ creators to use “I’m Just a Bill” to train their staffers. The University of Michigan and Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons requested permission to use “Telegraph Line” to introduce the nervous system to first-year medical students.¹²

Personal Matters

The best study strategies in the world can’t help if you’re experiencing difficulties in your personal life.

Time Management

Everybody in the world has the same 168 hours per week. If you’re a full-time undergraduate student, how much time do you really have to study?

- Sleep (7 hours per night) = 49 hours

- Class attendance (5 three-credit courses meeting twice per week for one hour each) = 10 hours
- Study expectation (2 hours outside of class per credit hour undertaken, per week) = 30 hours
- Notice that class attendance + study = 40 hours, or the equivalent of a full-time job.
- $49 + (10 + 30) = 89$ hours. That still leaves 79 hours open for work, socializing, co-curricular activities, and recreation.
- The way you choose to organize your time will make an enormous difference in your academic success.
- If you struggle with time management, start by assessing how you're actually spending your time.
 - Conduct a self-study of everything you do in the 24 hours of a typical school day, noting the number of minutes spent on each activity.
 - Ex: wake up at 7 a.m. Eat breakfast and check email (25 minutes). Shower and dress (45 minutes). Drive to campus (30 minutes). Walk to class, stopping at the coffee shop on the way (20 minutes). Class from 9 to 10 a.m. (etc.)
 - Analyze your results at the end of the day. Did you spend your time effectively? Or were there periods where you could have used your time better?
- Use the results of your self-study to create a schedule that will allow you to use your time more effectively, remembering the advice already presented in this section.
- Remember the mantra: Work FIRST, relax LATER.
 - If you prioritize what you *must* do, it allows you to enjoy what you *want* to do. The enjoyable activity is your reward for meeting your obligations.
 - If you do what you want to do first, saving work for later, you increase your risk of running out of time. Worse, work becomes an unpleasant chore that casts a shadow of guilt over the enjoyable activities you'd prefer to be doing. No matter how you look at it, this doesn't work!

Organization

You can't do your work effectively if you can't find what you need. Keep your files and materials organized.

- Digital files
 - Create a folder on your computer desktop for each course you're presently taking.
 - Store everything for the class in that folder.
 - Create a folder for related documents such as your schedule, financial aid documents, etc.
 - At the end of the semester, place all of those folders into another folder labeled with the semester name (like "Spring 2021").
- Paper files
 - Purchase a binder or accordion file and label a section for each course that you're taking.

- Be diligent about placing items into the folder as soon as they come into your hands. Your goal is to touch each item once before it goes into the folder. Keep your notes for each class in the same section of the folder as the other materials.
- Create a section or folder for institutional documents such as your schedule, financial aid award letters, and so on.
- At the end of the semester, clean out the folder and store the documents in a file box or cabinet. Re-label the sections and begin again!
- Books
 - Keep all your books on a shelf near your designated workspace.
 - Be diligent about returning the books to the shelf immediately after you use them.
- Supplies
 - Keep a supply of pens, pencils, post-it notes, scissors, highlighters, tape, and other office supplies at your desk.
 - This strategy prevents you from hunting all over your home for something you need, which can be a huge waste of time.
 - Once you leave your desk to find something, you've broken your study pattern, and you also expose yourself to further distractions. "Oh, there's a pencil, right here in the kitchen drawer. While I'm here, I'll think I'll get a snack. Maybe I should put a load of laundry in the washing machine before I sit back down, too." Before you know it, you've wasted an hour just because of a pencil.

Financial and Logistical Difficulties

There's no way to avoid the fact that higher education is expensive. Many students cover the cost of tuition, sometimes including room and board, with student loans, grants, and scholarships, which reduces the short-term impact of this major expense.

We're still left with the incidental expenses associated with our studies. Finding ways to manage or reduce these costs can prevent a major source of stress in your life.

- Textbooks are very expensive. Instructors usually expect you to purchase the latest edition of the required book, but older editions or used copies can save you a substantial amount of money. Whenever possible, ask your instructor if an older edition of the book would be acceptable.
- Course materials can be quite costly, especially in creative fields like visual art. If your instructor has asked you to purchase an expensive brand or type of item, see if there's a cheaper alternative and ask the instructor if it's acceptable for you to make this substitution.
- Whether you live on campus or commute, transportation to and from campus can present financial hardships. We don't consider this expense as part of the cost of attendance, but it can definitely impact your wallet.
- Online learners are very dependent on their technologies. If your computer breaks, you'll have to buy a new one. You need a stable internet connection, which costs money, too. These

expenses are part of our everyday lives, but it's disastrous when things go wrong because you can't pursue your education without them.

- Daily expenses like your morning cup of coffee on the way to class, the can of soda you pick up in the afternoon, or purchases like a new t-shirt from the campus bookstore can add up quickly. Pay attention to where your cash is going, and find ways to reduce your spending.

We don't think about paying back our student loans while we're still students, but you'll enter repayment once you leave college, whether or not you graduate. Your goal should be to borrow as little money as possible so that student loan debt doesn't ruin your life later on.

- Find a part-time job to cover your living expenses while you're in school rather than borrowing money or putting your expenses on a credit card.
- Avoid private student loans if you can. These have fewer options for income-based repayment and higher interest rates, which means that you'll be making higher payments later on.
- Scholarships and grants are free money you don't have to repay. Work with the school's financial aid office to learn about your options and check with your academic department, which may know of discipline-related funding opportunities.

Physical and Mental Health

It's very difficult to study or attend class when you're not at your best physically or emotionally.

We all know the rules for maintaining our physical health:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid alcohol or other intoxicants
- Get enough sleep

When you're ill, you face the dilemma of going to class anyway or giving yourself a chance to rest. Instructors vary on their policy for sick days. Some will insist that you absolutely show up to class unless your illness is serious enough to warrant medical intervention, for which they will expect documentation. Others will be more lenient, preferring that you (and your germs) stay home until you're back to normal. In either case, you should:

- Communicate with your instructor and explain the situation.
- Visit the campus health center or see your usual healthcare provider
- Increase your intake of fluids
- Get extra rest.

Mental health issues are complex and poorly understood by most people unless they, or someone close to them, also suffer from a similar problem.

- Depression is widespread among college students, with as many as 30% of students indicating that they "felt so depressed that it was difficult to function" at some point in the past year.¹³

- Depression can result from a chemical imbalance, or it can emerge in response to stressful circumstances such as the death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, or academic difficulties.
- Depression increases the risk of suicide and substance abuse.
- Most colleges and universities provide services to help students who are experiencing mental health issues.
 - If you're feeling depressed:
 - Seek help before the problem reaches a crisis point. The sooner you receive treatment, the greater the chances it will help and the faster you'll recover.
 - Manage your stress by breaking large tasks into smaller ones. Don't attempt to do too many things at once.
 - Spend time with other people and talk to them about your feelings.
 - If you have a friend who is depressed:
 - Encourage them to seek treatment and accompany them to the campus health center.
 - Offer support, understanding, and patience.
 - Be a good listener.
 - Never ignore comments about suicide – contact your friend's counselor or therapist immediately.
 - If your friend is in crisis, don't leave them alone.

Learning is most effective when you work with your brain's natural processes and systems. The strategies here will help you to do just that!

SUCCESS CHECK

1. How can you establish a rhythm for study by alternating periods of focus with breaks for fun?
2. Where will you study? How will you create a space that minimizes distraction?
3. How will you ensure that you get enough sleep to allow your brain to retain what you've learned?
4. How can you use mnemonics, chunking, and music to enhance your memorization of facts?
5. How will you manage personal issues to maximize your learning?

Strategy 6: Build Your Network

The Gallup-Purdue Index report (2015) identified six essential experiences that strongly influenced whether students felt that their colleges prepared them well for life.¹⁴

- Professors who made them feel excited about learning
- Professors who cared about them as people
- A mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams
- The opportunity to work on a long-term project
- Taking part in an internship or job where they could apply what they were learning in the classroom
- Being extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations during college.

The common denominator underneath most of these experiences is developing interpersonal relationships.

- Some instructors are masters at inspiring a passion for their subject and for learning in general. When you encounter these instructors, be proactive about building a relationship.
 - Seek out opportunities for personal interaction.
 - Sign up for the courses they teach.
 - Follow them on social media and post positive comments on their writing.
- Always treat your instructors with respect and consideration. Most people respond much more warmly to those who are kind and polite, just as we respond to the same qualities in other people.
 - Engage your instructors in conversations before and after class:
 - Ask questions about course content.
 - Compliment something that you particularly enjoyed during class.
 - Express an interest in how they're doing personally.
 - Volunteer to help another student who's struggling or to assist with a project.
 - Just be careful not to overdo it. Your instructor will appreciate your friendliness, but not if you seem too aggressive or insistent.
- Mentoring relationships take the instructor-student relationship a step farther.
 - Remain in contact with the instructors with whom you formed a positive relationship, especially if they are experts in the area you intend to pursue professionally.
 - Ask them for advice about graduate programs or career opportunities in this field.
 - Ask them for recommendations about journal articles in your field or professional organizations you might join.
 - If you're a graduate student, invite them to serve on your thesis or doctoral committee.
 - Read their research and express an interest in projects they currently have underway, volunteering to assist them, if appropriate.
 - Positive relationships with mentors can become lifelong professional affiliations.
Mentors can:
 - Write letters of recommendation for jobs, internships, or scholarships.

- Serve as peer reviewers for your professional writing.
 - Introduce you to individuals who are influential in your field.
 - Nominate you for jobs, internships, or fellowships.
 - Provide a sounding board when you're facing professional challenges and dispense wise advice.
- The mentoring relationship can also move in the other direction. You can serve your mentor in much the same capacity, writing recommendations, facilitating introductions, and maintaining a productive friendship for many years.
- Working on long-term projects allows you to build peer relationships and practice the art of collaboration.
 - Individuals who are your fellow students will eventually become fellow alumni. You might not become (or remain) close personal friends but having a network of contacts among these friends can facilitate professional accomplishment.
 - Our networks also provide personal benefits. For instance, let's say you worked on a long-term project with someone who eventually became a pediatrician, staying in touch over social media. You learn that your young child might have a troubling medical condition so you contact your old friend to ask for a recommendation to a specialist. Because you've maintained this relationship, your request is not an imposition, and your friend can feel comfortable helping you through your problem.
- Internships, externships, practicum experiences, co-op, and other work-related opportunities connect your classroom learning to the workplace, providing you with a firm foundation for your future career.
 - They also allow you to build relationships with peers and mentors in professional settings.
 - You might not find your first job through an internship, but you might find a supervisor or co-worker who will write you good letters of recommendation or inform you when they hear of job openings in your field.
 - The same relationship-building strategies apply in the workplace as they do in a classroom. When you demonstrate friendliness, kindness, and respect, when you're a good listener, a good teammate, and project an attitude of enthusiasm for whatever task is at hand, people will respond.

When you begin pursuing the career that you prepared for through your degree program, you'll realize that having a personal network of professional contacts is crucial to your success. Networking begins during your undergraduate experience, and it's extended in graduate school. Every interpersonal relationship you form has the potential to expand your network, not to mention making your educational experience that much more rich and enjoyable.

SUCCESS CHECK

1. Which professors make you feel excited about learning? How can you build a relationship with them?
2. What can you do to forge a better relationship with your present instructors?

3. Who among the faculty in your major field is an expert in the area you want to pursue? How can you initiate a professional relationship with this person?
4. What opportunities can you identify for participation in long-term collaborative projects?
5. What options exist for internships, externships, practicum experiences, or other workplace-related learning in your field?

Strategy 7: Get Involved on Campus

Think back to high school: what was the best part? The chances are good that you remember the friends you made and the experiences you had together.

Now dig a little deeper: did you meet those friends in class or while you were participating in some kind of group, club, or organization? The odds are in favor of the latter rather than the former.

We make friends when we share a common experience, which is stronger when that experience affects you emotionally. In other words, if you're doing something enjoyable together, it helps to foster friendships. Athletic teams from Big Ten sports teams to intramural badminton clubs, performing arts groups such as drama club or marching band, competitive clubs like the debate team or chess club, etc., cultural or foreign language clubs, special interest groups like anime club or photography club, all these and so many more exist in college just as they did in high school.

Study after study¹⁵ has proven that students who participate actively in co-curricular organizations have a better collegiate experience and attain higher levels of academic achievement. Conversely, students who choose not to participate in these groups demonstrate social isolation and don't feel connected to the college, both factors behind many students' choice to leave college altogether.

Let's look at this through the true story of two undergraduate women.¹⁶ Nicole and Heather have been friends since the fourth grade. They attended the same high school and sang in the concert choir together. They also went to the same college. Nicole joined the Women's Glee Club, but Heather did not. The girls remained friends, but after that, Nicole's entire collegiate experience differed dramatically from Heather's. Women's Glee Club rehearsed in the late afternoon, so many of the girls went to dinner together after practice. Heather, not being a member of the group, usually ate alone. Nicole went on concert tours to Europe and Florida. Heather had no such opportunities. The relationships Nicole developed with peers and with the group's director have lasted a lifetime. Heather and Nicole have maintained their relationship, but at the 25th reunion of their graduating class, Nicole spent an equal amount of time with her friends from the Glee Club, enjoying friendships that had continued unabated for a quarter-century. Heather felt as lonely and isolated as she had 25 years earlier. Both women performed well academically, and both have forged successful professional careers, yet the single difference of membership in a co-curricular organization caused the two of them to look upon their college experience in vastly different ways.

Parents sometimes fear that involvement in co-curricular organizations will take away from their child's studies, but the opposite is often the case. Co-curricular participation strengthens students' ability to manage their time productively and fuels their sense of connectedness to the institution, motivating their desire to succeed academically.

So, how should students go about finding a good co-curricular "fit"?

- Most colleges or universities have an open house or recruiting event where representatives from co-curricular organizations set up booths and speak to interested students. These events are a great way to see what's available and get a feel for whether you're interested in a particular group.
- Research the institution's web pages. Most have a section for the available groups.
- Consider the groups you were involved in during high school. Similar groups probably exist at your college or university.
- Look for groups that center on your interests or hobbies or groups related to your major field of study.
- Check out the groups that your friends or acquaintances have joined. Sometimes it's easier to fit in when you already know at least one person there.
- Don't give up! The first group you try might not be a good fit, but with so many choices available – sometimes even thousands at a large research university – there's bound to be something you'd enjoy.
- If you hope to join a somewhat exclusive group but don't get in (an athletic team or performing arts group, for instance), investigate similar but less competitive options. Just because you didn't make the marching band doesn't mean there's not another band you could join.

Despite the demonstrated benefits of co-curricular involvement, we can identify several student populations for whom co-curricular participation is difficult, if not impossible.

- Commuter students are often unable to be on campus during the times when co-curricular groups meet.
- Adult learners might have work or family responsibilities that prohibit their joining a club or organization.
- Graduate students join co-curricular organizations at a lower rate than undergraduates, partially due to their immersion in disciplinary study and research.
- Students who attend classes only online face the greatest isolation and have the fewest options for co-curricular participation.

Nevertheless, institutions are beginning to promote non-traditional co-curricular groups to support students who cannot take advantage of typical opportunities for social engagement.

- Social networks open only to students, with sub-groups for particular areas of interest.
- Clubs based on digital technologies, such as animation or video gaming.
- Adult or commuter students can form relationships with those experiencing similar personal circumstances. Although not a co-curricular group, these friendships can provide similar social benefits and offer mutual support.
- Graduate students tend to form social bonds with one another. Although curricular rather than co-curricular, these provide similar levels of social support and interaction.
- Adult learners might also feel more comfortable in groups intended for alumni due to their similar age demographics or life circumstances. Opening membership in these groups to a wider variety of participants can facilitate these relationships.

- If you're a non-traditional or online student, investigate what's available. If you don't find something that's to your liking, consider starting a group yourself!

Co-curricular involvement fosters peer relationships, promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness to the campus, and increases students' satisfaction with their education overall. It enhances academic achievement and professional success. There are many reasons to join, but few not to.

SUCCESS CHECK

1. Do you know what co-curricular options are available to you?
2. Have you attended the Welcome or Open House event for student organizations?
3. Don't miss out on this important chance to enhance your college experience!

A Final Word

Why do students fail to achieve their educational goals?

- They fall behind in their courses or earn poor grades on assignments or exams.
- They feel disconnected from their instructors, fail to form friendships with peers, and do not participate in campus life.
- They struggle with the expense of attendance, not only with tuition but incidental expenses such as books, materials, transportation, or related costs.
- They don't understand how to navigate the systems and processes of higher education.
- They lack study skills such as time management and organization or suffer from physical and mental health challenges.

All these obstacles are avoidable. If you implement the strategies in this guide, you'll increase the likelihood that problems won't subvert your goals and dreams.

Every college and university exists to educate students, yet the "user experience" doesn't usually receive much focused attention. Furthermore, each institution is different, with its own histories and traditions, systems, and structures that have evolved over decades. Therefore, it's up to you to design your own user experience. Even if you only implement a few of the strategies we've discussed, you can achieve greater academic success and mitigate some of the problems that could derail your education.

Let's pause to review the big ideas we've covered:

1. Learn as much as you can about the institution: where things are located, how they work, and what's available to you.
2. Identify and understand all the rules and expectations that impact your college experience.
3. Read your textbook strategically.
4. Maximize your notetaking.
5. Practice study skills that allow you to work smarter, not harder, and find solutions to the problems that you might encounter as a student.
6. Build a network of contacts with faculty, fellow students, and people you meet through internships and work experiences.
7. Enhance your college experience through active participation in co-curricular groups.

You CAN do this! In fact, you now have an advantage over most students because you've read through this guide and understand how all of these components work together to support your successful progression through your degree program.

Make the most of your time in higher education! You are the only one who can ensure that you receive the greatest value from the substantial investment of time, energy, and money that you've decided to make.

Leonardo da Vinci could have said it best: don't sit back and let higher education happen to you – go out and **happen to it!**

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