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Study Skills for College Success

Success in college has very little to do with how "smart" you are. You're smart enough to be successful in college. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here. Success in college has everything to do with your approach to being a student. Understanding expectations and practicing good study habits are key.

Find the Balance

Most college classes take a lot of time and energy. Don't overextend yourself. If you're working, raising kids, caring for other family members, and/or are going through a lot of transitions in your life, make sure you're not taking too many credits. Success in 8-12 credits/term is worth more than squeaking by with 16.

Of course, this decision can be complicated by financial aid and other issues, so make use of academic and financial aid advisors to find the best path for you.

If you find yourself overwhelmed in the middle of the term, talk to an advisor about options like withdrawing, taking a course pass/no pass, etc. Do this sooner rather than later.

Be Organized

- Bring books, notebook, folders, pens, textbooks, etc. to every class.
- Keep every handout you are given till after the class is done. Use a binder or folder (not the pocket of a backpack).
- Keep every assignment that is handed back to you till after the class is done. (This can be crucial if your instructor makes a clerical error in recording a grade.)
- Check your syllabus and Moodle (if used) often.
- Write down all homework assignments in a place you can easily find.
- Allow plenty of time to do your homework and avoid procrastination. This will give you time to work around things like computer crashes, running out of printer ink, that last minute phone call to pick up your niece...
- Never save homework for the day it's due. You know you'll get that phone call about your niece just when you're sitting down to read that chapter.
- Attend every class unless you are sick or there's an unavoidable emergency. Have a backup plan for transportation, childcare, etc. Discuss any difficulties with your instructor as soon as you sense them looming. (Ex. Many instructors are open to a having well-behaved child sitting quietly in class if the sitter can't make it that afternoon, but check with your instructor first if you can.)

Latin lesson: "procrastinate," from "pro" ("for") and "cras" ("tomorrow"): "to save it for tomorrow." Don't do this!

Be a Responsible Communicator

You are responsible for knowing what is happening in your classes and for keeping your instructor appropriately informed about what's happening with you. Most

instructors want to help if you're experiencing difficulties, but it's not their job to track you down or keep you informed about the class. What does a responsible communicator look like?

Responsible communicator: Misses a class and does not turn in the homework assignment, emails the instructor 24 hours later to say, "I'm sorry I missed class yesterday. I sprained my ankle. I can produce a doctor's note verifying this. Is it possible I could turn the assignment in next class? Can you give me an outline of the material/homework I missed (or where to find it), besides what's on the syllabus and Moodle? Thanks!"

Not so responsible communicator: Misses a class and does not turn in the homework assignment, comes to the next class with no homework and makes no mention of the absence. When the missed homework assignment is being handed back, says, "I didn't get to that assignment because I sprained my ankle. Can I turn it in late?"

As you can well imagine, these two students are going to get different responses.

The key is good lines of communication. The responsible student checks all documentation for the class (syllabus, Moodle, handouts, etc.) and checks in with the instructor ASAP in a clear, specific way.

Tip: Never ask your instructor if you missed anything important. The response will always be the same: "My dear student, everything in my class is important. If it weren't important, we'd all be at home."

Bonus Tip: Always be polite. This sounds basic, but sometimes it can be hard: if you feel your grade is unfair, if you're going through a lot at home, etc. If you're angry at your instructor, give it 24 hours. This will usually let you cool down enough that when you ask why you got that low grade (which is appropriate to ask), you will not say something you'll regret. If you're angry at a classmate you have to work with, let your instructor know privately and ask for advice or assistance.

Know Your Grade

The responsible student always knows how she is doing in the class. Many instructors routinely update grades on Moodle, but you don't need an online gradebook to know your grades.

Every syllabus should have a breakdown of how the class is graded. If it doesn't, it is entirely appropriate for you to ask for one. Keep track of every assignment that is handed back to you. You can use your arithmetic skills to compute what percentage of the points possible you have earned at any point in the term. If you're not sure how your assignment grade translates into points or another grading system (ex. it just says, "B"), ask your instructor.

In many classes that grade on participation, you may not have a participation score computed until the end of the term, but you can always ask your instructor for a general sense of how you're doing.

Know the course late work policy (usually on the syllabus; ask if it's not). Know what assignments have been due and what assignments (if any) you have missed. Factor in late assignments when you compute grades.

You should review your current progress every couple of weeks if not more.

Use Assignment Sheets as Checklists

It is possible to lose many points for not following directions. As you do an assignment, have the assignment sheet in front of you and refer to it. When you are finishing up the assignment, run through the assignment sheet and use a pen or pencil to check off every part of the assignment. If you haven't completed a part, go back and complete it.

Take Notes (or Keep Records in a Alternative Format)

The more actively you involve your brain in learning, the better you will learn. You also want to have a record of information like homework assignments given in class. For the vast majority of students, this means taking in-class notes.

Write down information on the board, overhead, PowerPoint, etc.

Write down significant things your instructor says, including anything that is repeated anything that is signaled by words like, "This is important. Remember this. This will be on the test. You'll be graded on this. This is part of your homework. This is a fundamental principle," etc.

Take notes on your readings. It is okay to write in your books, but if you don't want to, keep notes in a notebook or on word processor document clearly labeled with textbook pages.

Always distinguish summary (what you've read/heard) from your own commentary (your own thoughts about what you've read/heard). I do this by putting my own commentary in [square brackets], but use whatever system works for you.

When you review notes, you may wish to use color-coding (ex. different colors of highlighters) to organize the information into visual categories.

If you are a strong audio learner, you may wish to record class lectures. As a courtesy, ask your instructor if this is okay. You can also use oral/audio engagement for readings: read aloud, discuss the reading with a classmate or family member, record a podcast of yourself reading or talking about the reading and listen to that.

Use Resources

Many resources exist to support you in your college studies. Common ones include:

- Instructors' office hours or appointments: check in if you have a problem or want more help.
- Tutoring services
- Disability services
- Advisors and counselors (financial aid, academic, personal)
- Library (help with research, course reserves, computer resources, study space)
- Additional programs that may apply to you: Women's Center, TRIO, Veterans Affairs, childcare, health center, etc.

Check "Quick Links" on the Lane home page (google "Lane Community College") for lots of contact information, including "Help for Students." For tutoring services, search the Lane website for "tutoring."

The Common Denominator of All This

Know what's going on. This applies not just to the course material but to the dynamics of the course and college itself (homework, scheduling, policies, grades, contact information, etc.). Don't let college take you by surprise. Listen to information; record it; be able to find it; check it; verify it; know it.