



## How to Succeed In College



# A Positive College Experience SPRINGSPIRIT

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**In general, succeeding in college is all about being focused and efficient time management skills.**

- You will be responsible for yourself – no parents, teachers, or coaches to tell you what to do, when to do it, and most importantly make your meals, do your laundry, or clean your room. You are it sport.
- You will need to stay focused and not get distracted by your roommate(s), social events, and the new sense of freedom. You are paying a lot of money to learn and take the next life step on a long purposeful life.
- Learn to schedule your time and be 100% into what you have scheduled. If you plan study time everyday from 2 to 4 ... then find a quiet space, remove all distractions, how all the material you need and then actually study from 2 to 4. Have self-discipline.
- Have fun ... each step in life should be maximized for self development which includes having fun. Schedule exploration time, schedule downtime to unwind, meet people who are not from your home town, state or even country.
- Take the time to read, digest and personalize the detailed ten steps of success that are described on the following pages.

# 10 Steps to Success

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## 1. Take control.

For many students, the most striking difference between college and high school is that at college there's no one there to stand over you and tell you what to do. Getting to class, doing the homework, getting your papers in on time—all of these are things you're going to have to do without a parent or teacher to beat on you. Step up to bat and take responsibility. You're in charge of this thing.

**2 Audition your professors.** Many entering students think they should just take the "standard first-year program" their adviser hands them and be done with it. But a far better idea is to go to the first class or two and assess the professor. Ask yourself: Is the material presented clearly and forcefully? Does the class have a clear point? Is the professor at least moderately engaging? Is this someone I feel I can learn from? If the answer to any of these questions is "no," drop the class and find another.

**3. Get to class.** Most students have a "cutting budget": the number of classes they think they can miss and still do pretty well in the course. For four, five, six, seven classes, you might think: "No problem, I'll get the notes." But, miss seven classes and (if the course has 35 meetings) you've missed 20 percent of the content. This can-do major damage to your GPA come the tests.

**4. Adjust your attention span.** You're used to getting your content in short, entertaining blasts: one- to three-minute YouTube videos, hyper abbreviated text messages, and 140-character tweets. But your professor is thinking in terms of a 50-minute lecture - divided into perhaps two or three segments. Retrain your attention span to process long—very long, it will seem—units of content (rather than zoning in and out as things strike you).

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**5. Study; don't "study."** Though nobody quite tells you this, at college most of the work is done outside the classroom. Rule of thumb: one hour of lecture, two hours of preparation. As soon as the semester starts, find yourself a quiet place to study and block out the times of the week you're going to do the studying. Above all, don't count study-related activities as actual studying: copying over your notes, getting the e-readings, listening to the lecture again, and "getting acquainted" with your study group are all fine activities, but they don't count as studying.

**6. Always answer exactly the question asked.** More points are lost on tests and papers by not answering the question asked than by giving the wrong answer. Professors go to great lengths to craft appropriate questions (and sub-questions) and expect head-on answers to exactly what they asked—rather than general surveys of an area, dumps of everything you know about the subject, or rambling garbage.

**7. Take each test three times.** Before the exam, construct a pre-test (use questions from the study guide, from last year's exam, or from hints the professor dropped in lecture) and take it under "test conditions" (write it out, under strict time limit, with no looking at the book). At the actual exam, write full answers that draw on all the course materials (lectures, readings, and discussions) and that would be clear to any intelligent reader. Then, when you get your test back, go over any comments your instructor has written and do the question again in your head, given the new information.

**8. Connect with your professor (or TA).** The single most underutilized resource at college is the office hour, now available in-person, by e-mail, or by Skype. You might not have realized it, but professors are required to be in their office two to four hours a week to meet with students and help them with the course. Your tests and papers will go better if you've had a chance to ask about things you're confused about, and, with any luck, received some guidance from the professor about what your thesis sentence should be or what's going to be on the test.

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**9. Never major on the way in.** There's tremendous pressure these days at many colleges for students to declare a major either at orientation or very early in the first year. Unless you are 100 percent, positively, without a doubt sure about what you want to study, don't. A much better idea is to take three or four courses in the field—some introductory, some advanced—and then see what it's actually like to work in that field. And don't double or triple major unless there's some academic reason to do so: marketing and Mandarin Chinese, or chemistry and microbiology, go well together; art history and ichthyology—well, that's a combination for the birds.

**10. Pursue your passion.** Amidst all the distribution courses, general education requirements, prerequisites, and must-do's for the major, it's easy to forget what your intellectual interests, gifts, and passion were in the first place. Each semester, be sure to take at least one course in something you're good at and are really interested in. The joy of doing something you enjoy—and doing it well—will go a long way to making up for all the unpleasant things you have to do at college. Guaranteed.