Tools for College Success … and BEYOND!

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An Open Education Resource Text adapted for use in The* Write *Path to Success AY 2019

Students enjoying fountain in the Quad at Mid-City Campus of Baton Rouge Community College. Photo by Joseph Smith

This online textbook is a condensed version of the CSSK 1023 text. We, the College Success faculty offer this text for use in BRCC's ***The WRITE Path To Success*** *with our hope that it will help you to maximize your time at BRCC and cause you to consider taking the entire CSSK 1023 class in the future!*

Contents

***Editor's note*: The grayed text indicates sections only found in full CSSK 1023 textbook.**

Contributors to the Customized Edition

Ms. Vinetta Frie, *Managing Editor*
Contributing Editors: Mr. David Clark, Jr., Ms. Alexandra Cavazos, Ms. Summer Doucet, Ms. Olukemi Shropshire, and Ms. Lenora White
Mr. Joseph Smith, BRCC *Senior Web Developer and photographer*

Authors

Ms. Ana Boone
Ms. Alexandria Cavazos
Ms. Vickie Flanders
Mr. Lucas Gassen
Ms. Bea Gymiah
Dr. Marcella Hackney
Dr. Mary Miller
Mr. Russell Nolan
Dr. Todd Pourciau
Ms. Jeanne Stacy
Ms. Sandra Taylor
Dr. Theresa Toulmon
Ms. Laura Younger

Chapter 1: You and Your College Experience

Welcome to BRCC!

Congratulations on your decision to attend college! For the great majority of college students, it really was your *decision*—not just an automatic thing to do. If you happen to be one of the few who just sort of ended up in college for want of anything better to do, the benefits of college will soon become obvious.

The reason for this book, and for almost all college courses, is that college does require commitment and effort. Like everything else in life that leads to meaningful results, success in college is not automatic. But when you apply yourself to your studies using the skills you'll learn in this book, you'll find you can succeed.

When asked, most students say they're in college primarily for the job or career they expect to follow after college. And they are correct that college pays off enormously in terms of future earnings, job security and stability, and job satisfaction. Every statistic shows that people with a college education will make much more in their lifetime (much, much more than the cost of college itself) and be much happier with the work they do.

But job and career issues are only a part of the big picture. A college education results in many other personal benefits, and these also should be part of your motivation for doing well and continuing with your college plans. Here are a few additional, less tangible benefits of a college education:

- understanding the world around you better.
- developing decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- meeting many interesting and diverse people and have a richer social life.
- gain greater self-confidence.
- gain learning skills that can continue for a lifetime.
- learn to make wiser decisions about lifestyle issues and live healthier.
- make wiser economic decisions the rest of your life.
- be better equipped to deal with other people, organizations, governmental agencies, and all the hassles of daily life.
- feel more fully a part of your college community, the larger culture, and history.

A college education is correlated with greater success in all those areas, even though most students are usually more concerned with making it through the next class or test than they are making it through the rest of their lives. But sometimes it helps to recall what a truly great step forward you are taking!

Sadly, however, it's important to recognize that some students do not succeed in college and drop out within the first year. Sometimes it's due to an unsolvable financial problem or a personal or family crisis, but most of the time students drop out because they're having problems passing their courses. The two biggest causes of this problem are a lack of motivation and not having learned the skills needed to succeed in college.

A book like this one can help you stay motivated when things get tough, but it can't necessarily *give* you motivation to start with. That's part of what you yourself have to bring to college. What we can promise you is that you can learn the skills for succeeding in college.

Special skills are needed because college isn't the same as high school. Throughout this book, we'll be looking at the many ways college is different from high school. To name just a few, college is different in study skills needed, in personal skills related to being independent, in social skills for getting along with instructors and others on campus, in financial realities, in matters of personal health, and more.

Remember, you can learn whatever you need in order to succeed. That's what this book is all about. You'll learn how to get the most out of going to class. You'll learn how to study in ways that use your time efficiently and help you pass tests. You'll even learn how to remember what you read in your college text-

books. You'll learn how to manage your time more effectively than you might have in the past, so that studying is less a burden and more a simple routine. You'll even learn how things like eating well and getting enough sleep and exercise make it easier to do well in your classes.

One warning: you might not at first see an immediate payoff for everything you read in this book. When it comes to certain things, such as tips for how to take good notes in class to help you study later on for a test, you will get specific, practical advice you can put to use immediately to get a better grade. But not everything is as obvious or immediately beneficial. Some of the things you'll read about here involve ideas you'll need to think about. Some things will help you get to know yourself better and understand more clearly what you really want from your education and how to go about achieving success.

But we promise you this: if you care enough to want to succeed in college and care enough to read these chapters and try to use the information, suggestions, and tips presented here, you *will* succeed in college. Throughout this chapter you will read comments from actual BRCC students who found that success.

Before we jump into the first topic, we want you to stop for a minute and set a goal for yourself. We will discuss the use of SMART goals later in this text but what is it that you want to accomplish this semester? Writing it down in your journal, making a note on your phone, putting it on a stick note, all three or some other method will help you to keep your focus this semester. Want a suggestion? We urge you to make this semester all about time. Give yourself the time it takes to develop into a life-long learner. So if you are ready to begin the "Semester of YOU", let's get started.

1.1 Who Are You, Really?

Succeeding in college is rather like succeeding in life. It's really much more about *you* than it is about *college*. So the most important place to start is to consider why you're here, what matters to you, and what you expect to get out it. Even if you have already thought about these questions, it's good to reaffirm your commitment to your plan as we begin to consider what's really involved in being a college student.

> Based on this semester I would consider myself achieving the title of successful student because I have been working at a job while maintaining A's and B's in school! The thing that is important to me now is keeping this up **next** semester. I learned so much this semester about HOW to learn! I plan to keep reviewing after every class, doing any homework I have at least two days before it due, and communicating with my professors more effectively by using their office hours.
>
> Comment from a male student

What's Your Plan?

Take a few minutes and write down short answers to the questions in Activity 1 on page 213. Be honest with yourself, and write down what *you* really feel. You are not writing for an instructor here (so you should not what you think someone *expects* to hear), and you are not being graded on your answers!

Many students keep a personal journal while going through this class. It doesn't have to be fancy. It could even be in a section of your notebook. You can use these "What's Your Plan?" sections as questions to answer in your journal. When you look back later in the semester, you may be surprised at what you learned about yourself!

> I have learned so much in this class about how to maintain myself and my school AND social life! CSSK 1023 has helped me get back on my feet right where I need to be and it was at an excellent point in my time at BRCC. It pointed me in the right direction and I had a great experience.
>
> Comment from a male student

What Matters to You?

The word ***values*** refers to things that matter to a person. What makes you feel good? What things would you be doing if you had all the time, money, and opportunities in the world? Questions like these help us define our own values. Every individual has his or her own values.

Thinking about your own values can help you know what you want from life and from college. Take a moment and consider the list of things in Activity 2 on page 213 that are valued by some people. For each value, rate how important that thing is to you.

Thinking Ahead to a Major and Career

If you've just begun college, should you already know what career you seek in the future and what courses you should take or what you should major in? Good question!

Some students say they have known from a very early age what they want to do after college, choose the college that is best for that plan, never waiver from the plan and choose each course with the one goal in mind, and then enter their chosen career after college or graduate school. At the other extreme, some students have only a vague sense of direction before beginning college, take a wide variety of courses, select a major only when they reach the point that they must major in something (or perhaps change majors multiple times), and then after college choose to work in an entirely different field.

Some students choose to major in an academic subject simply because they enjoy that subject, never concerned with what kind of job they may get afterward. The traditional idea of the liberal arts education is that you can go to college not to prepare for a specific career but to become a well-educated person who is then in a better position to work in any number of careers.

None of these different approaches to choosing a major and a career is better than others. All students receive the many benefits of college, and all are likely to find a more fulfilling career after graduation. So where are *you* in this great variety of attitudes about career and major choices?

Talk with an academic advisor or visit BRCC's Career Services Office to learn more about what future careers you may be interested in. Visit the virtual career office on the BRCC website at http://www.mybrcc.edu/career_center/index.php and register for College Central Network and Career Coach. Career Coach includes an excellent career inventory based on the work of Dr. John Holland. It helps you identify careers which match your personality and shows you actual jobs currently open which might appeal to you.

Although there's nothing wrong with starting out without an intended major or career path, it will require careful planning on your part not to accidentally take one or more courses that do not count toward the program goal or degree you later choose. You could end up in college longer than needed or have to pay for additional, needed courses you missed. Be sure to read your college catalog carefully, talk to your academic advisor(s), and confirm your career goal as soon as possible.

Your Past Educational Experience

It is important to understand how college is different from high school and how well your own past educational experiences have prepared you for what you will find in college. This is another way in which entering college "with your eyes wide open" will prove beneficial.

College is a unique experience for all students—whether you just graduated from high school or are returning to education after years of working. You are transitioning from one form of education to another. Some students have difficulty because of the differences between college and high school.

Generally speaking, however, the college experience is usually different from high school in these ways:

- Time management is more important in college because of varying class and work schedules and other time commitments.
- College instructors seldom seek you out to offer extra help if you're falling behind. You are on your own and expected to do the work, meet deadlines, and so on, without someone looking over your shoulder.
- There may be no attendance policy for classes. You are expected to be mature enough to come to class without fear of penalties.
- Many classes are large, making it easy to feel lost in a crowd.
- Many instructors, especially in large classes, teach by lecture—which can be difficult for those whose high school teachers interacted a great deal with students.
- College courses require more study time and require you to work on your own.
- Your social and personal life in college may be less supervised. Younger students may experience a sudden increase in freedom to do what they want.

- You will meet more people from more diverse backgrounds in college.

All of these differences, along with a change in living situation for many students, can lead to emotional changes—both positive and negative.

What does all this add up to? For some students, the sudden independence and freedom can lead in negative directions: sleeping late, skipping classes, missing deadlines, failing to study adequately for tests, and so on. Other students who are highly motivated and work hard in their classes may also have difficulty transitioning to the higher academic standards of college. Suddenly, you're responsible for everything. That can be thrilling but also a challenge to get used to. All the chapters in this book will help you make this transition successfully.

> Life for me as a successful student means maintaining good grades, perfect attendance for all my classes, and balancing my personal and school life. Taking CSSK 1023 made me look at things different in many ways. So everything I learned I'll take it and run with it in the future.
>
> Comment from a male student

Liking Yourself as a Student and Why That Matters

Of all the factors that affect how well one does in college, attitude is probably the single most important. A positive attitude leads to motivation, and someone who is strongly motivated to succeed can overcome obstacles that may occur. Now that you are in college, you are a new person, not just the same person who happens now to be a college student. What do you think of this new person?

If you're feeling excited, enthusiastic, capable, and confident in your new life—great! If you're less sure how well you'll do in your new role, take comfort in knowing that you're not alone. Some new college students, once they begin experiencing the differences from high school, start having doubts. Some may start to feel "I'm not a good enough student" or "I can't keep up with all this." Some may become fearful or apathetic.

These feelings, while a perfectly natural response to a big change in one's life, can hinder one's motivation and ability to succeed. If you think you can't make it, that might become true. If you're sure you'll make it, you will.

> Because of CSSK and our discussion, "Taking Control of Your Finances," I learned that even a small amount, added to your savings on a regular basis can make a big difference. Because of our discussion on how to control finances, I just invested in a small mutual fund!
>
> Returning Female Student

Again, we'll ask you to think honestly about this. If you have these thoughts sometimes, why is that? Are you just reacting to a low grade on your first test? Are you just feeling this way because you see other students who look like they know what they're doing and you're feeling out of place? Most likely, if you have doubts about being able to do well, this is just a reaction to college being more difficult than what you're used to. It's mostly a matter of having the right skills for succeeding in college. This book will help you learn them—everything from how to study effectively, how to do better on tests, even how to read your textbooks more effectively.

Why is it that some students need to work on strengthening their skills after beginning college while others seem to waltz right in and do well from the start?

The answer sounds simple but is actually rather complex. There simply are many differences among people. There are differences among high schools as well as one's past teachers, one's peer group, one's family, one's cultural background, and many other factors. As a result of many different things, some students just need a little more help to succeed in college. No student is better or automatically more capable than another, however, and everyone can learn the skills to succeed.

Your feelings about yourself or your past experiences in school may have lead you to schedule CSSK 1023. Whether you are excited about this new challenge or have a few doubts, if you are willing this class can make a difference that you may actually see before the end of this semester!! *95% of the students who took this class spring 2017 said it made them more successful in ALL of their classes*!!

Self-Management

To succeed in college, you need to take control of your life. Gone are the days when you could just "cruise" through school, or life, or let others motivate you or establish schedules to manage your time. This change presents an exciting opportunity. It's your first step in your new life and the key to your future. Here are a few thoughts to get you started in the right direction:

Accept responsibility for your life, from today forward. This puts you in a position to look for new opportunities to succeed.

Decide what you want to do to position yourself to take the next step. Don't just expect things to fall into place all by themselves.

Realize you can change. Learning new habits will make you a better student. Seeing improvement will change your attitudes. This positive cycle can push you to ongoing success in school, work, and life.

Develop a personal ethical code. Do what is right for you and for others. The college world demands ethical standards. It also rewards responsible, ethical behavior.

Enjoy your life! Going to college might seem overwhelming at times, but it also offers many new opportunities. Enjoy meeting new people, learning new things, and experiencing the diversity of the college experience. Most college graduates look back on their college years as one of the best periods in their whole lives!

1.2 Different Worlds of Different Students

Not all college students are the same, and the world of college is therefore sometimes different for different students. Students will answer the following questions in a variety of different ways:

1. Are you attending college directly from high school or within a year of graduation?
2. Are you a full-time student?
3. Is English your first language?
4. Are you the first person in your family to attend college?
5. Have you spent most of your life in a country other than the United States?
6. Are you married or living with a partner? Do you have children?
7. Do you now or have you worked full time?

When thinking about different "types" of students, be careful to avoid stereotyping. While there are genuine differences among individual students, we must never assume an individual person has certain characteristics simply because he or she is a certain "type" of student. For example, if you answered yes to questions 1 through 3 and no to the other questions, you may be called a "traditional" student—young and attending college after high school. The word "traditional" is used simply because, in the past, this group of students formed the majority of college students—even though, at many colleges, these students are now the minority. On the other hand, if you are older and have worked for some years before returning to school, or if you are an international student or are working and attending classes part time, you might be considered a "nontraditional" student. Again, this term comes from past statistics, even though very many colleges have more "nontraditional" students than "traditional" students.

What does that mean to you? First, realize that not everything discussed in this book will apply to you. If you're eighteen and living away from your family for the first time in an apartment, you will likely not face the same issues of finding time for studying as an older student working full time and having children at home. If you're thirty and returning to school after years of successfully managing a job, you may have to reestablish your study skills but will not face the same issues as a younger student who may be tempted by the sudden freedom of college and have difficulty setting boundaries.

Every student brings certain advantages to college from their background experience. Every student may also face certain kinds of difficulties. Understanding how your own background may impact your own preparedness for college can help you make a good start in your college experience.

"Traditional" Students

We're putting the quotation marks around the word "traditional," again, because this group of college students is no longer the majority at many colleges, although the term is still sometimes used by educators. Coming directly or almost directly from high school, "traditional" students are used to attending classes, reading textbooks, and studying and thus may find the transition to college easier. Many are single and unattached and have fewer time commitments to others. Although a high percentage do work while in college, the work is typically part time or during the summer and does not have a severe time impact on their studies.

On the other hand, "traditional" students are often leaving home for the first time which may cause such "traditional" students to face more psychological and social issues than other student groups. Even if one has not moved away from family and old friends, college may provide more freedom to make choices. You may find yourself facing all sorts of new temptations. Experiencing this sudden new freedom, many students experiment with or develop habits such as poor dietary and sleep habits, lack of exercise, and sometimes substance abuse or other behaviors that disrupt their academic routine and study habits. Many young students are forced to "grow up" quickly. Some students who do not manage well the freedoms of college are not proud of their academic performance.

Returning Students

Students returning to their education are often older, may have worked for a number of years, and may be used to living on their own and being financially and psychologically independent. They are often more mature and have a stronger sense of what they want from college; they also may be more goal driven. They may be paying their own way through college and want to get their money's worth. They may be full-time students but frequently are still working and can take only a part-time course load. They may own a home and have a mortgage. They may have children. Because they have made a very deliberate decision to go to college, returning students are often serious students and are motivated to do the work. Having spent time in the work world, they may also have developed good problem-solving and decision-making skills as a result of their "real-world" experience.

On the other hand, returning students may have less time for studying because of work and family commitments. They may feel more stress because of the time and financial requirements of college. Spending less time on campus may contribute to not feeling completely at home in the academic world. They may not have time for many extracurricular and campus activities. Although they may be dedicated and hard-working students, they may also be less patient while spending time learning "theory" in courses because these students want all their coursework to **directly** relate to the real world.

Other Student Groups

Beyond this difference of age, some other common differences also affect one's college experience. Students in the following groups may be either "traditional" students by age or returning students.

Commuter Students

At BRCC, because we do not have residence halls, all of our students are commuters! Many of our students continue to live at home or in their own apartments, coming to campus only for classes. Commuter students often face the same issues of limited time as returning students. They may find it difficult to find time to talk with an instructor outside of class.

Time management is especially important for commuter students, as travel times in Baton Rouge during peak traffic periods can be difficult and must be factored into schedule planning.

First-Generation Students

The phrase "first-generation student" refers to students who are the first in their families to attend college. These students may be "traditional," enrolling right after high school or may be returning to school after a break. Students whose parents did not attend college may be less familiar with some or all aspects

> Through CSSK, I have realized I am taking too many hours in conjunction with my work schedule. So to make it easier on myself, I will take only two courses to focus on. Since I have to work full time, it will give me a better chance at completing all the assignments and keeping up with the material compared to a full time load.
>
> Comment from a male student

of the college experience and thus may have to transition into their new life.

Recent Immigrant and International Students

Many colleges have a significant percentage of students who have recently immigrated to the United States or who are attending college here. What both groups may have in common is coming from a different culture and possibly speaking English as a second language. They may have to make cultural adjustments and accommodations. Language issues are often the most serious obstacle to overcome, especially since so much of college education is based on reading and writing in English.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits colleges and universities from discriminating on the basis of disabilities and forces them to ensure that both classes and extracurricular activities are accessible to students with disabilities. Accessibility includes both physical accessibility to campus buildings and housing and accessibility to services and aids necessary for effective communication. Students with disabilities have the right to request any accommodations needed to allow them to succeed in college. For more information or to receive answers to any specific questions, contact the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) at http://www.ahead.org.

BRCC also has an Office of Disability Services. We help students who self-identify and provide a copy of their documentation to obtain the assistance they need. Sometimes even students who have received accommodations in grade school for years fail to come forward and request this assistance. At BRCC, if you register with the Office of Disability Services, only those faculty and/or staff who provide your accommodations will be aware. We strongly encourage you to at least visit the office and find out for yourself.

Students Who Are Working

The key issue for working students often is time—how to find enough time for studying enough to do well in classes. Since it is very difficult to maintain two full-time schedules for both work *and* school, one or the other may suffer.

Students with a Family

While some returning students have families of their own, younger students may also have families to care for. Having children of your own means you have different priorities from some classmates, but a family shouldn't be viewed as an obstacle to college success. Time may be short, and you'll have to manage it carefully to avoid falling behind in your studies. Yet many such students count their families as their most important reason for being successful in school and work!

Profile of a Successful Student

While it's important to consider your strengths, it's also important to develop a plan for moving forward and ensuring you have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. The following are some of the characteristics of the successful student and are practiced in CSSK 1023:

- have a good attitude and know how to stay motivated.
- develop good time management strategies, such as scheduling study time and getting started early on assignments and projects. Chapter 4 will help you with this.
- develop your critical thinking skills and apply them in your studies.
- practice effective strategies for taking good notes in class and using them.
- learn more from your assigned textbook readings and remember key information you read.

- know how to prepare for and take tests successfully.
- interact well with your instructors and fellow students in and outside of class.
- learn to write well for your classes.
- develop social relationships that contribute to, rather than detract from, your educational experiences.
- take control of your health with good habits that help you to become a better student and feel less stress.
- get control over your finances to control expenditures and support your goal to complete your career preparation.
- are able to transition well from the world of college into your future careers.

> Before taking CSSK, I didn't know if I was coming or going! I wasn't on top of any of my work. I wasn't putting enough effort at all to pass any of my classes but after taking CSSK, I realized that there are more benefits, opportunities, and great outcomes if only I just put in the effort.
>
> Comment from a female student

1.3 How You Learn

One of the first steps for becoming a successful student is to understand the learning process itself. Certain characteristics of effective learning, including the four-step learning cycle, are true of all people. At the same time, people have different learning styles. Understanding these processes is important for maximizing your own learning while in college.

The Learning Cycle: Four Steps to Learning

Adult learning is different from learning in primary and secondary school. In high school, teachers often take much of the responsibility for how students learn—encouraging learning with class discussions, repeating key material, creating study guides, and looking over students' shoulders to make sure no one falls behind. In college, most of the responsibility for learning falls on the student. You're free to fail—or succeed—as you choose. This applies as well to how well you learn.

Learning an academic subject means really understanding it, being able to think about it in meaningful ways, and applying that understanding in new situations. This is very different from simply memorizing something and repeating it back on a test. Academic learning occurs most effectively in a cycle of four steps:

1. Preparing
2. Absorbing
3. Capturing
4. Reviewing

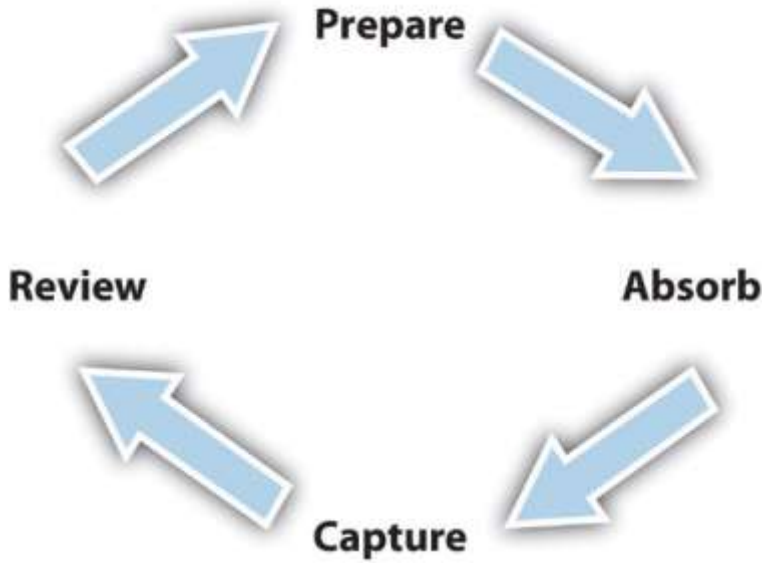
> …Having a job I enjoy has become most important to me. My mission statement is to move out the state with my nursing degree. I want to move somewhere I can get paid well and enjoy doing my job. Now that I am have completed the course I am more likely to think outside of my comfort zone. At one point in my life I would have never wanted to move out of Louisiana because of all the family that I have is here but now, CSSK has helped me to become comfortable with taking chances.
>
> Comment from a new traditional female student

Think first about the different situations in which you learn. Obviously you learn during class, whether by listening to the instructor speak or in class discussions in which you participate. But you also learn while reading your textbooks and other materials outside of class. You learn when you talk with an instructor during office hours. You learn by talking with other students informally in study groups. You learn when you study your class notes before an exam. All of these different learning situations involve the same four-step process.

Prepare

One student rolls out of bed a few minutes before class and dashes across campus and grabs the last Seat in the hall just as the instructor begins a lecture; it takes him a few minutes to find the right notebook in his backpack, and then he can't find a pencil. He's thinking about how he should've set his alarm a

Figure 1.4 The Learning Cycle



Little earlier, so he'd have had more time to grab a cup of coffee, since he's having trouble waking up. Finally he settles in his seat and starts listening, but now he can't figure out what the instructor is talking about. He starts jotting down phrases in his notes anyway, thinking he'll figure it out later.

Another student, while eating breakfast, looks over his notes from the previous class and quickly glances back at passages he'd highlighted in the textbook reading. He arrives at class a few minutes early, sits up front where he can hear well, and has his notebook open and pencil out. While waiting for the instructor to arrive, he talks to another student about her ideas for the paper due next week in this class.

It's obvious which of these students will learn more during today's class lecture. One has prepared and the other has not, and they will experience a huge difference in their understanding of today's topic. Preparing to learn is the first step for learning. The same is true when you sit down to read your textbook, to study for an exam, or to work on an out-of-class project. Partly you are putting yourself in the right mind-set to learn. But when you review yesterday's notes to prepare for today's class, you are also solidifying yesterday's learning.

Absorb

"Absorbing" refers to the actual taking in of new ideas, information, or experiences. This is what happens at the moment a student listens to a class lecture or reads a textbook. In high school, this is sometimes the only learning step taken by some students. They listen to what the instructor says and "regurgitate" it back on the test. But this won't work in college because learning now requires *understanding* the topic, not just repeating facts or information. In coming chapters you'll get tips for improving in this step.

Capture

"Capturing" refers to taking notes. No matter how good your memory, you need to take good notes in college simply because there is so much to learn. Just hearing something once is seldom enough. You have to go back over the material again, sometimes several times again, thinking about it and seeing how it all fits together.

The more effective your note-taking skills, the better your learning abilities. Take notes also when reading your textbooks. You'll learn methods for taking good notes in later chapters.

Review

> I will incorporate what you taught me by studying and doing my work on time. I will go to more school activities. I learned that I have to work on my finances being that I am a college student. Working on my time with my friends and family. I learned that I have a lot of growing to do in studying. I learned that I can't wait to the last minute to do work like I'm doing right now.
>
> Comment from a female student

The step of reviewing – your class notes, textbook reading and notes, and any other course materials possibly including recordings, online media, podcasts, and so on—is the next step for solidifying your learning and reaching a real understanding of the topic. Reviewing is also a way to prepare for new information and ideas. That's why this is a learning cycle: the end of the process loops back to the beginning as you prepare for additional learning.

Reviewing is also the step in which you discover whether you really understand the material. If you do not understand something fully, you may need to reread a section of the book, talk it over with a friend in the class, or go see your instructor.

What's Your Learning Style?

Different people have different learning styles. Style refers to a student's specific learning preferences and actions. One student may learn more effectively from listening to the instructor. Another learns more effectively from reading the textbook, while another student benefits most from charts, graphs, and images the instructor presents during a lecture.

Learning style is important in college. Each different style, described later in more detail, has certain advantages and disadvantages compared with other styles. None is "right" or "wrong." You can learn to use your own style more effectively.

College instructors also have different teaching styles, which may or may not match up well with your learning style. Although you may personally learn best from a certain style of teaching, you cannot expect that your instructors will use exactly the style that is best for you. Therefore it is important to know how to adapt to teaching styles used in college.

Dr. Neil Fleming in 1987 developed a method to identify the various ways an individual may prefer to learn new information. His approach to learning styles is called the VARK, which focuses on learning through different senses (**V**isual, **A**ural, **R**eading/Writing, and **K**inesthetic):

- Visual learners prefer images, charts, and the like.
- Aural learners learn better by listening.
- Reading/writing learners learn better through written language.
- Kinesthetic learners learn through doing, practicing, and acting.

You can take a free, self-scored online assessment of your VARK learning style at http://vark-learn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/The-VARK-Questionnaire.pdf. If you would like to know something more about Dr. Fleming, this link is an interview with him: http://vark-learn.com/introduction-to-vark/.

Just knowing your style, however, doesn't automatically provide a solution for how to do your best in your college courses. For example, although you may be a kinesthetic learner, you'll likely still have textbook reading assignments (verbal learning) as well as lecture classes (listening). All students need to adapt to other ways of learning.

The following sections look at the key ways in which learning occurs in college classes and offer some suggestions about how to adapt your strengths for success.

Reading (Read/Write Preference in VARK)

Reading skills are critically important in college. Most classes involve reading assignments. Although many instructors may cover some of the textbook's content in lectures or class discussions, students cannot skip the reading assignments and expect to do well.

If your personal learning style is verbal and independent—that is, if you learn well by sitting alone and reading—these tips could help maximize your learning:

- Underline and highlight key ideas when reading.
- Take good notes on your reading, using *your own words*.
- Write descriptions that summarize information presented in nonverbal modes, such as in a chart or a graph.
- Do all optional and supplemental readings, to deepen your knowledge.
- Take good notes in class, as you may remember more from your written words than from the instructor's spoken words.
- If a class involves significant non-reading learning, such as learning hands-on physical processes, study with other students who are kinesthetic or "doing" learners.

If you have a different learning style, then you may need to give more attention to your reading skills. Always allow plenty of time for reading assignments—rushing makes it harder to understand what you are reading. Do your reading at times of the day when you are most alert. Find a quiet, comfortable place conducive to reading.

Try also to maximize your learning through your personal style. If you learn better by listening, for example, sit up front in lecture classes where you can see and hear the instructor better. If needed, ask if you can tape-record an instructor's lectures and then listen again at a convenient time, such as when commuting to class or work. If you are more of a visual learner, sit in class where you can see PowerPoint slides and other visual presentations most clearly. Use a visual approach in your class notes, as described in Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering," page 49. Check out whether video podcasts may be available for reviewing lectures. Try to relate all of these visual images to the textbook's content when you're reading an assignment. In addition, pay special attention to illustrations and diagrams in the book, which will further help you understand the written ideas and information. If you are more of an interpersonal learner, form a study group with other students and talk with others about the course topics. Take advantage of your instructors' office hours to help clarify your understanding after reading assignments.

Listening (Aural Preference in VARK)

Listening skills are as important in college as reading skills. College students are expected to listen to their instructors in class and remember and understand what is said. In discussion classes, listening is important also for participating well in discussions.

If your personal learning style favors listening, then you may already be good at understanding class lectures. Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering," page 49 provides tips to help you pay close attention, take good notes, and recall the information and ideas you have heard. Here are some more tips:

- Sit where you can best hear the instructor, away from other distractions.
- Study with other students and listen to what they say about the course material. Hearing them talk from their class notes may be more helpful than reviewing your own written notes.
- Record lectures and listen to them again later when reviewing material before a test.
- When studying, read your notes **aloud**. Review previous tests by reading the questions aloud and speaking your answers. If a section in your textbook seems confusing, read it aloud.
- Talk with your instructor if you feel you are not understanding course readings.
- Use rhymes or acronyms to recall verbal information. For more information, see Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering" page 49
- Explore supplemental learning aids, such as audio and video podcasts (even from

> If TODAY my life was everything I want it to be, what is important to me, I would have finished college and my Bachelor's Degree in Nursing! I'm successful in my field. I thank my CSSK class for the success I now have, because there I learned the value of studying and being successful in college.
>
> Comment from a male student

other colleges and universities) on the course's subject matter.

Seeing (Visual Preference in VARK)

A "seeing" learner learns more effectively through seeing than through reading or listening. Some college courses include demonstrations and physical processes that can be observed. If you are a visual learner, work on developing your reading and listening skills, too, because you will need to learn in these ways as well. Here are some tips to improve learning related to seeing:

- Pay special attention in class to visual presentations, such as charts, diagrams, and images.
- Take lecture notes using a visual approach. Do the same when taking notes on class readings. Use diagrams, different colors, lists, and sketches to help you remember. For more information, see Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering."
- Use video podcasts or other visual aids for reviewing lectures.
- Pay special attention to your textbooks' illustrations and diagrams.
- If your instructor or textbook uses few visuals to help you understand and recall information and ideas, try to imagine how you would present this information visually to others if you were giving a class presentation. In your notes, create sketches for a PowerPoint slideshow capturing the highlights of the material.
- Study with other students who may learn better by reading or listening, and watch how they explain the material.

Doing (Kinesthetic Preference in VARK)

People who learn best by doing are often attracted to careers with a strong physical or hands-on component, which can vary from athletics to engineering. But these students may need to use other learning skills as well. Here are some tips to help maximize your learning related to doing:

- Try to engage all your senses when learning. Even when reading about something, try to imagine what it would feel like if you touched it, how it might smell, how you could physically manipulate it, and so forth.
- Think about how you yourself would teach the topic you are presently learning. What visuals could you make to demonstrate the idea or information? Imagine a class lecture as a train of boxcars and think about what things you would put in those cars to represent the lecture topics.
- When it becomes difficult to concentrate when reading while sitting in a quiet place, get up and move around while studying; make gestures as you read aloud.
- Use your hands to create a range of study aids rather than just taking notes: make charts, posters, flash cards, and so on.
- When taking notes, sketch familiar shapes around words and phrases to help you remember them. Try to associate abstract ideas with concrete examples.
- The act of writing—handwriting more than typing at a keyboard—may increase retention; write key things several times.
- Study with other students who may learn better by reading or listening.

Feeling

Feeling learners focus on the emotional side of information and learn through personal connections. In CSSK, we stress active learning as a way to connect to the course content and engage with your instructor and classmates. In this way, many students find their emotional needs addressed. Too often they may feel that a college textbook or a class is "dry" or "boring" if it focuses exclusively on written information. In addition to improving their reading and listening skills, students with this style can enrich their learning by focusing on what they and others **feel** about the information and ideas being learned. Here are some tips to help maximize your learning related to feeling:

- Try to establish an emotional connection with the topic you are learning. In a history class, for example, imagine yourself as someone living in the period you are studying: what would you feel about the forces at work in your life? In a science class, think about what the implications of a particular scientific principle or discovery might mean for you as a person or how you yourself might have felt if you had been the scientist making that discovery.
- Talk with your instructor during office hours. Even instructors who may seem "dry" in a lecture class often share their feelings toward their subject in conversation.
- Do supplemental reading about the people involved in a subject you're studying. For example, reading an online biographical sketch of a historical figure, scientist, or theorist may open your eyes to a side of the subject you hadn't seen before and increase your learning.
- Study with other students who may learn better by reading or listening. Talk with them about what the material means to them. Teach each other during the study session, sharing not just information but also how each study group member feels about it. This practice will create a stronger memory!
- Also try the strategies listed for the "doing" learning style.

Your Style, Your Instructor's Style

Many college classes tend to focus on certain learning styles. Instructors in large lecture classes, for example, generally emphasize listening carefully and reading well. Don't worry, however, if these are not your particular strengths, for much of this book focuses on learning study skills and other college skills related to these activities. We strongly recommend that YOU take responsibility for your own learning, rather than expecting the instructor to help you through the subject in your own personal way. For example, if you are a visual learner but your instructor simply stands at a podium and lectures, taking responsibility means that YOU must provide your own visual stimulation by sketching concept maps in your notes or by visualizing how information being presented might look in a pie chart or graph. For more information, see Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering" page 49.

As you move further into your college curriculum, you will likely have more small classes with class discussions, demonstrations, group presentations, and other learning activities. Once you are in classes closely related to a career path that interests you, you will find your personal style more relevant to the kinds of material you will be learning.

Much learning in college also comes from interactions with others, who often have different learning styles. Be open to interacting with other students and instructors who are different from you, and you will find yourself learning in ways that may be new to you.

Finally, if a genuine mismatch is occurring between your learning style and your instructor's teaching style to the extent that you may not succeed in a course, talk to your instructor privately during office hours. You can explain how you best learn and ask for suggestions about other resources that may help you.

1.4 What Is College, Really?

Big Classes, Small Classes

Many BRCC face-to-face classes have 24 to 40 students. Some classes in a university can be very large—up to several hundred students in a lecture class. In large lecture classes you may feel totally anonymous—even invisible. This feeling can get some students in trouble, however. Here are some common mistaken assumptions and attitudes about large classes:

- The instructor won't notice me sitting there, so I can check e-mail or read for a different class if I get bored.
- The instructor doesn't know my name or recognize me, so I don't even need to go to class as long as I can borrow someone's notes to find out what happens.
- I hate listening to lectures, so I might as well think about something else because I'm not going to learn anything this way anyway.

These comments all share the same flawed attitude about college: it's up to the instructor to teach in an entertaining way if I am to learn at all, and it's actually the college's or instructor's fault that I'm stuck in this large class, so they're to blame if I think about or do other things. But remember, *in college, you take responsibility for your own learning*. Sure, a student is free to try to sleep in a lecture class, or not attend the class at all—the same way a student is "free" to fail any class he or she chooses!

If you dislike large lecture classes but can't avoid them, the best solution is to learn how to learn in such a situation. Later chapters will give you tips for improving this experience. Just remember that it's up to you to stay actively engaged in your own learning while in college—it's not the instructor's job to entertain you enough to "make" you learn.

There is one thing you need to know right away. Even in a lecture hall holding 40 students, your instructors often ***do*** know who you are. They may not know your name right away or even by the end of the term, but they can see you sitting there, doing whatever you are doing, looking wherever you are looking, a.nd will form a distinct impression of you. Instructors do have academic integrity and won't lower your grade on an exam because you slept in class, but the impression you make just might affect how far instructors go out of their way to offer a helping hand. Interacting with instructors is a crucial part of education—and the primary way students learn. Successful interaction begins with good communication and mutual respect. If you want your instructors to respect you, then you need to show respect for them and the work they provide in their classes.

Core Courses, Electives, Majors, and Credits

Every college has its own course requirements for different programs and degrees. This information is available in a printed course catalog or online. While academic advisors can help students to plot their path through college and take the most appropriate courses, **you** should also take this responsibility yourself to ensure you are registering for courses that fit well into your plan for a program completion or degree. In general there are three types of courses:

1. **Core courses**, sometimes called "general education requirements," involve a range of courses from which you can choose. You may need to take one or more English classes and possibly math or foreign language requirements.
2. **Required courses in your major** are determined by individual academic departments. Whether you choose a major in Business, Liberal Arts, STEM, or Technical Education, your individual department sets specific required courses you must take and gives you options for a required additional number of credits in the department.
3. **Electives** are courses you choose freely to complete the total number of college credits needed for your program or degree. BRCC degrees have few, if any electives, because you can only transfer 60 hours to most Universities.

Pay close attention to what courses you need and how each counts. Study the BRCC college catalog (http://www.mybrcc.edu/academics/academic_affairs/college_catalog.php) carefully. Jot down questions you have and talk with an academic advisor, program manager, or faculty member in your discipline. Do not rely on hearsay, EVEN if it comes from a trusted classmate. And don't just sign up for courses that sound interesting—you might end up taking courses that don't count toward your degree at all.

In addition, each term you may have to choose how many courses or hours to take. Colleges have rules about the maximum number of hours allowed for full-time students – 18 hours at BRCC -- but this maximum may in fact be more than you are prepared to manage—especially if you work or have other responsibilities. Taking a light course load, while allowing more time for studying and other activities, could add up over time and result in an extra full year of college (or more!), at significant additional expense. Taking 15 hours a semester will allow two years to complete most associate degrees at BRCC. If you need prerequisite developmental classes, a summer term can still keep you in the two year window to complete your degree. Part-time students often face decisions based more on time issues. Every student's situation is unique, however,

and all students should review their situation with a college representative each year or term. We strongly encourage keeping contact with the **same** advisor, to cultivate a mentoring relationship between you.

Online Courses

Most colleges now offer some online courses or regular courses with an online component; the latter is called a hybrid class. You experience an online course via a computer rather than a classroom. Many different variations exist, but all online courses share certain characteristics, such as working independently and communicating with the instructor (and sometimes other students) primarily through written computer messages. If you have never taken an online course, carefully consider what's involved to ensure you will succeed in the course.

- You need to own or have frequent access to a recent model of computer with a high-speed Internet connection.
- Without the set hours of a class, **you** need to schedule time to participate regularly. You must be self-motivating to be successful!
- Without an instructor or other students in the room, you need to be self-disciplined to learn from your computer screen. Learning on a computer is not as simple as passively watching television!
- Without verbal reminders in a classroom and peer pressure from other students, you'll need to take responsibility to complete all assignments and papers on time.
- Since your instructor will evaluate you primarily through your writing, you need good writing skills for an online course. If you believe you need to improve your writing skills, consider delaying taking an online course until you arrange for the needed support, like a tutor, free online English/writing aids like Khan Academy or http://www.dailygrammar.com
- You must take the initiative to ask questions of your instructor if you don't understand something.
- You may need to be creative to find other ways to interact with other students in the course. You could form a study group and get together regularly in person with other students in the same course.

If you feel you are ready to take on these responsibilities and are attracted to the flexibility of an online course and the freedom to schedule your time in it, go for it! Another important consideration is your ability to access the technology with the appropriate hard and software. The first portion of the assigned eSkills activity is an orientation for eLearning Classes at BRCC and allows you to consider the suitability of your computer/connection. This link also provides more information http://www.mybrcc.edu/academics/division_innovative_learning/elearning/index.php The second part is a helpful dive into learning what CANVAS, the BRCC learning management system, can do to help you.

Class Attendance and Promptness

In face-to-face classes, attendance is important. In some classes, attendance may be required; thus absences can affect one's grade in the course. Missing a class session planned by your professor for your learning will inevitably affect your grade. Reading another student's notes is not the same as hearing, seeing, and participating in person.

Arriving to class promptly is also important. Walking into a class that has already begun is rude to the instructor (remember what we said earlier about the impression you may be making) and to other students. A mature student respects the instructor and other students and in turn receives respect.

College Policies

A college campus is almost like a small town—or country—unto itself. The campus has its own police force, its own government, its own stores, its own ID cards, its own parking rules, and so on. Colleges also have their own policies regarding many types of activities and behaviors. Students who do not understand the rules can sometimes find themselves in trouble. The rules and procedures that govern your behavior at

BRCC are found in the Student Handbook. You can find it on our website at this address: http://www.mybrcc.edu/academics/academic_affairs/student_handbook.php

Academic honesty is very important at BRCC and many other schools. Cheating is taken very seriously. Some high school students may have only received a slap on the wrist if caught looking at another student's paper during a test or turning in a paper containing sentences or paragraphs found online or purchased from a "term-paper mill." In many colleges, academic dishonesty like this may result in automatic failure of the course—or even expulsion from college. The principle of academic honesty is simple: every student must do his or her own work. If you have any doubt of what this means for a paper you are writing, a project you are doing with other students, or anything else, check the BRCC Catalog. In the current 2018-2019 Catalog, you will find detailed information about plagiarism on pages 60-63 and of course you can always talk with your instructor.

> Now that I have reached the end of the semester I feel that I am better equipped to succeed for the rest of my college career, as well as the rest of my life. I learned several valuable lessons. Some which stood out more than others include discovering what I really want to do and fighting procrastination. I made many short term and long term goals that I plan to strive for AND complete!
>
> Comment from a male student

Colleges also have policies about alcohol and drug use, sexual harassment, hazing, hate crimes, and other potential problems. The college registrar has policies about course add and drop dates, payment schedules and refunds, and the like. Such policies are designed to ensure that all students have the same right to a quality education—one not unfairly interrupted by the actions of others. You can find these policies on the college Web site: http://www.mybrcc.edu/about_brcc/policy_index/index.php

College Resources

To be successful in college, you need to be fully informed and make wise decisions about the courses you register for, college policies, and additional resources. Always remember that your college *wants* you to succeed. That means that if you are having any difficulties or have any questions whose answers you are unsure about, there are college resources available to help you get assistance or find answers. This is true of both academic and personal issues that could potentially disrupt your college experience. *Never* hesitate to go looking for help or information—but realize that usually **you have to take the first step**.

The college catalog has already been mentioned as a great source of many kinds of information. While BRCC updates the catalog every year, if you are continuously enrolled every fall and spring semester until you graduate, you will follow the same catalog in effect when you started. Here is the link to an archive of BRCC catalogs: http://www.mybrcc.edu/academics/academic_affairs/college_catalog.php. This is a link to the current BRCC Catalog 2018-2019.

The college's Web site www.mybrcc.edu is the second place to look for help. Students are often surprised to see how much information is available online, including information about college programs, offices, special assistance programs, and so on, as well as helpful information such as studying tips, personal health, financial help, and other resources. Take some time to explore your college's Web site and learn what is available—this could save you a lot of time in the future if you experience any difficulty.

In addition, BRCC has offices staffed with individuals, who can help in a variety of ways. Learn more about BRCC's resources online or by visiting the Bienvenue Student Center or Magnolia Building:

- **Student Success Center.** This office includes three broad services to help all BRCC students achieve their maximum potential.
    - **Student Success Center** includes three basic services:
        - **Student Success Guides** who help new students acclimate to BRCC. You will find a lot of answers to questions often asked by new students in this section of the website: http://www.mybrcc.edu/registrar/how_do_i_faqs.php
        - **The Office of Disability Services** promotes full participation in campus life for individuals with disabilities. Services are provided collaboratively to help students learn

how to advocate for themselves and assume responsibility for their academic outcomes and personal goals. Visit this section of the website: http://www.mybrcc.edu/disability_services/

- **Confidential counseling services** to promote the celebration of diversity, respectful of one's age, race, sexual orientation, social and economic status, spirituality and world view – and every factor which makes you unique. Students, faculty and staff utilize the opportunity to discuss any problems, feelings or fears which are important to them. For services provided and more detailed information, visit: http://www.mybrcc.edu/counseling_services/index.php .

- **Career Services** at BRCC is both a physical office AND a virtual office which resides online at this address: http://www.mybrcc.edu/career_center/index.php. This center can help you make or confirm your career choice, find a student job or internship, plan for your career after graduation, and receive career counseling.

- **The Academic Learning Center** or ALC is where students can go for comprehensive help for their courses. While ALC does provide tutoring, it offers so much more than that! Take a look at their many serviced at this link: http://www.mybrcc.edu/alc/index.php and select ALC Online Learning Center. Also see page 24 of this text for 5 Questions Students Ask About ALC.

- **Financial aid office.** If you are presently receiving financial aid or may qualify for assistance, you should know this office well. Here is a link to their portion of our website: http://www.mybrcc. edu/financial_aid/index.php.

- **The Magnolia Library** is a hub of academic activity. Located at the center of our campus, it is a great place for study, meeting, using computers and more. Many of you will see a Reference Librarian in your classroom as guest presenters. You may also use one of the LibGuides they created for nearly every BRCC class to help you with information literacy – take a look at the one for CSSK here: http://guides.mybrcc.edu/cssk.

- **Computer lab.** Before students became skilled in computer use and had their own computers, colleges built labs where students could use campus computers and receive training or help resolving technical problems. For help with computer issues, visit the **BRCC Computer Help Desk**, which is located in room 229 of the Governors Building. Their phone number is 216-8448. This link will provide assistance to frequently asked questions about computing services at BRCC: http://www.mybrcc.edu/it_services/helpdesk_faqs/

> The most important thing to me right *now* is getting good grades. I realize how important that is for me to be successful in life and successful as a student. It took me painfully long to learn that I can't just go to class and just get good grades, it takes effort and motivation to be a successful student which is something that CSSK has taught me.
>
> Comment from a female student

- **eLearning Services** are growing in popularity among students who use them to supplement in-person classes or prefer the flexibility of continuing college without having to attend physical classes. The eSkills activity you have or will take, begins with an orientation to learn how online classes on conducted and the technology needed to maximize your experience. It will also teach you how to better navigate CANVAS, BRCC's learning management system.

- **Student Programs and Resources, SPAR.** Participating in a group of like-minded students often supports academic success. SPAR also provides free Scantrons and Blue Books that are needed for tests or exams in many of your classes. For more information, click here: http://www.mybrcc.edu/spar/.

- **Bonne Santé Wellness Center.** This building includes several important functions: offices for some Adjunct Faculty, classrooms, the Athletic Office, Gymnasium and exercise room and dance studio. The hours of availability for the training rooms varies each semester. Using these facilities should help you to improve or maintain your personal health, which promotes academic success.
- **Other specialized offices for student populations.** If you find that you need a service and you are unsure of where to go, the Welcome Center in the Bienvenue Student Center is a good place to start.
- **Your instructors.** It never hurts to ask one of your instructors if he or she knows of any additional college resources you haven't yet discovered. There may be a brand new program on campus, or a certain department may offer a service not widely promoted through the college Web site. Coordinators in academic offices on campus can also be great resources!

Everyone needs help at some time—you should never feel embarrassed or ashamed to seek help. Remember that a part of your tuition and fees are going to these offices, and you have every right to take advantage of them.

> I plan to graduate college in December … with an Associate's Degree in Care and Development of Young Children, by completing my next three semesters in school here at BRCC, and passing each class with a "C" or higher and also remaining focused on my school work and not allowing circumstances to weigh me down. I plan to study hard, put in more time at school, create a budget to overcome financial problems, and remain healthy!
>
> Comment from a female student

1.5 Let's Talk about Success

Success in college is the theme of this book—and you'll be learning more about everything involved in achieving that success in the following chapters. Let's first define what success really means so that you can get started, right now, on the right foot. While no book can "make" you successful, it can only offer the tools for you to use if you want. What are you thinking right now as you read these words? Are you reading this right now only because you *have* to? Do you see reading as busy work from which your mind keeps drifting to other things because you're feeling bored? Or are you interested because you've decided you *want* to succeed in college?

If this chapter has reinforced or awakened a feeling that it is possible for you to motivate yourself to become a better student, if you are even a little bit excited about the change, we think that **CSSK will help you become a better student!** But even if you aren't quite at that point, we hope you'll keep reading and do some thinking about why you're in college and what changes may improve your college experience, and beyond.

"Success" and "Failure"

So what does "success" actually mean in college? Good grades? That's what many students would say—at least toward the beginning of their time in college. When you ask people about their college experience a few years later, grades are seldom one of the first things mentioned. College graduates reflecting back typically emphasize the following:

- The complete college experience (often described as "the best years of my life")
- Exploring many different subjects and discovering one's own interests
- Meeting a lot of interesting people, learning about different ways to live
- Learning how to make decisions and solve problems that are now related to a career
- Gaining the skills needed to get the job—and life—one desires

When you are achieving what you want in life and when you are happy and challenged and feel you are living life to its fullest and contributing to the world, then you are more likely to feel successful. When you reach this point, your grades in college are more like a happy by-product of your being a successful college

student. This is not to say that grades don't matter—just that getting good grades is not the ultimate goal of college or the best way to define personal success while in college. Five or ten years from now, no one is going to care much about what grade you got in freshman English or Biology 101. A successful college experience does include acceptable grades, of course, but in the end—in your long-range goals—grades are only one component of an even larger picture.

How Much Do Grades Matter?

As you begin your college experience, it's good to think about your attitude toward grades, since grades often motivate students to study and do well on assignments. Valuing grades too highly, or not highly enough, can cause problems. A student who is determined to get only the highest grades can easily be frustrated by difficult college classes. Expectations that are too high may lead to disappointment—possibly depression or anxiety—and may become counterproductive. At the other extreme, a student who is too relaxed about grades, who is content simply with passing courses, may not be motivated to study enough even to pass, and may be at risk for failing courses.

What is a good attitude to have toward grades? The answer to that depends in part on how grades do matter generally—and specifically in your own situation. Here are some ways grades clearly do matter:

- At most colleges, all students must maintain a certain grade point average (GPA) to be allowed to continue taking courses and to graduate.
- Financial aid and scholarship recipients must maintain a certain grade in all courses, or a minimum GPA overall, to continue receiving their financial award.
- In some programs, the grade in certain courses must be higher than simply passing in order to count toward the program or major.

After graduation, it may be enough in some careers just to have completed the program or degree. But sometimes, and more often for those without much work experience, how well one did in college may still affect your success. Employers often ask how well you did in college. Students who are proud of their grades usually include their GPA on their résumés. Students with a low GPA may avoid including it on their resume, but employers may ask on the company's application form or in an interview (and being caught in a lie can lead to being fired). An employer who asks for a college transcript will see all your grades, not just the overall GPA. After all, an employer may think, if this person goofed off so much in college that he got low grades, how can I expect him not to goof off on the job?

Not only can your grades impact your initial employment, but they can also impact future degrees. If you plan to continue to a bachelor's degree or other educational programs—all of which require your transcript – your BRCC GPA can help or hurt your admissibility.

Certainly grades are not the only way people are weigh your prospects, but along with all forms of experience (work, volunteer, internship, hobbies) and personal qualities and the recommendations of others, they are an important consideration. You want your experiences to indicate that you are ready and able to translate your success in college to success at the next level in your life.

How to Calculate Your GPA

Because of various requirements for maintaining a GPA at a certain level, you may need to know how to calculate your GPA before grades come out at the end of the term. The math is not difficult, but you need to consider both the grade in every course and the number of credit hours for that course in order to calculate the overall GPA. Here is how you would do the calculation in the traditional four-point scale. First, translate each letter grade to a numerical score:

A = 4
B = 3
C = 2
D = 1

Then multiply each grade's numerical score by the number of units or hours for that course For example, a grade of "B" in Calculus would be 3 points times 5 credit hours or 3 × 5 = **15 quality points.** A grade of "B" in an English class would be 3 points times 3 hours or 3 × 3 **= 9 quality points**. A grade of "C" in a Library

Science class would be 2 points times 1 credit hour or 2 x1 = **2 quality points**. An "A" grade in CSSK would be 4 points times × 3 hours = 4 × 3 = **12 quality points.** Quality points means the weighted value of the letter grades you earn. The higher the credit hours of the class, the higher the value of the grades you earn. This is how you put it altogether:

- Then add together the quality points earned for the grades in each course: **15 + 9 + 2 + 12 = 38.**
- Then divide that total by the total number of credit hours: **38 ÷ 12 = 3.167 = GPA of 3.167**

The best attitude to take toward grades in college is simply to do the best you can do. You don't need to kill yourself, but if you're not going to make an effort then there's not much reason to be there in the first place. Almost everything in this book—from time management to study skills to social skills and staying healthy—will contribute to your overall success and, yes, to getting better grades.

If you have special concerns about grades, such as feeling unprepared in certain classes and at risk of failing, talk with your professor and/or academic advisor. If a class requires more preparation than you have from past courses and experience, you might be urged to drop that class and take another—or to seek extra help. Your advisor can help you work through any individual issues related to doing well and getting the best grade you can.

Succeeding in Your First Year

The first year of college is almost every student's most crucial time. Statistics at BRCC indicate that when a student completes 15 hours of college work, that student is MUCH more likely to graduate! Why? Because for many students, adjusting to college is not easy. Students wrestle with managing their time, their freedom, and their other commitments to family, friends, and work. It's important to recognize that it may not be easy for you.

Are you ready? Remember that everything in this book will help you succeed in your first year. Motivation and a positive attitude are the keys to getting off to a running start. The next section lists some things you can do to start right now, today, to ensure your success.

Can You Challenge a Grade?

Yes and no. College instructors are very careful about how they assign grades, which are based on clear-cut standards often stated in the course syllabus. The likelihood of an instructor changing your grade if you challenge it is very low. On the other hand, we're all human—mistakes can occur, and if you truly feel a test or other score was miscalculated, you can ask your instructor to review the grade. Just be sure to be polite and respectful.

Most situations in which students want to challenge a grade, however, result from a misunderstanding regarding the expectations of the grading scale or standards used. Students may simply feel they deserve a higher grade because they think they understand the material well or spent a lot of time studying or doing the assignment. The instructor's grade, however, is based on your actual responses on a test, a paper or other assignment. The instructor is grading not what he or she thinks is in your head, but what you actually wrote down.

If you are concerned that your grade does not accurately reflect your understanding or effort, you should still talk with your instructor—but your goal should be not to argue for a grade change but to gain a better understanding of the course's expectations so that you'll do better next time. Instructors do respect students who want to improve. Visit the instructor during office hours or ask for an appointment and prepare questions ahead of time to help you better understand how your performance can improve and better indicate how well you understand the material.

Getting Started on the Right Foot Right Now

- **Make an appointment** to talk with your academic advisor if you have any doubt about the courses you have already enrolled in or about the direction you're taking. Start examining how you spend your time and ensure you make enough time to keep up with your courses.
- **Check for tutoring assistance** if you feel you may need it and make an appointment or schedule time to visit tutoring centers on your college campus to see what help you can get if needed.
- **Like yourself**. You've come a long way to reach this point, you have succeeded in taking this first step toward meeting your college goal, and you are fully capable of succeeding the rest of the way. Avoid the trap of feeling down on yourself if you're struggling with any classes.
- **Pay attention to your learning style and your instructors' teaching styles**. Begin immediately applying the guidelines discussed earlier for situations in which you do not feel you are learning effectively.
- **Plan ahead.** Check your syllabus for each class and highlight the dates of major assignments and tests. Write on your calendar the important dates coming up.
- **Look around your classroom and plan to introduce yourself right away to one or two other students.** Talking with other students is the first step in forming study groups that will help you succeed.
- **Introduce yourself to your instructors**, if you haven't already. In a large lecture, go up to the instructor after class and ask a question about anything in the lecture or about an upcoming assignment.
- **Participate in your classes**. If you're normally a quiet person who prefers to observe others asking questions or joining class discussions, you need to take the first step toward becoming a participating student—another characteristic of the successful student. Find something of particular interest to you and write down a question for the instructor. Then raise your hand at the right time and ask. You'll find it a lot easier than you may think!
- **Vow to pay more attention to how you spend your money**. Some students have to drop out because they get into debt.
- **Take good care of your body**. Good health makes you a better student. Vow to avoid junk food, to get enough sleep, and to move around more. When you're done reading this chapter, take a walk!

Excellent! Start doing these few things, and already you'll be a step or two ahead—and on your way to a successful first year!

1.6 Chapter Takeaways

- The first year of college is the most critical. Make the commitment to overcome any obstacles to a successful transition and stay committed and motivated to succeed.
- Although college students differ in many ways, all successful students share certain common traits, including a positive attitude, effective critical thinking skills, good time management skills, effective study skills, interactions with instructors and other students, and good habits for personal health and financial stability.
- You can learn to maximize your learning by attending to each step of the learning process: preparing, absorbing, capturing, and reviewing.

> CSSK has helped me focus in school. Because I also have a part-time job I learned that I have to judge everything I do all day. Like do I really have time to do this or should I focus on that. I learned to studying as never before. Before this class I just looked over the book before the test. It feels so good to know what I am doing! I have passed all of my classes, earning my highest grades in college so far!
> I now turn in my work **before** it's due. It feels good to be on the top of everything. I even learned to make and manage a budget as a "broke" college student! My budget is helping me to be more financially stable.
>
> Comment from a traditional male student

- It is important to understand your personal learning style and use it well in classes, while also making the effort to learn in new ways and work with other students for a more effective overall learning experience.
- Working with your academic advisor and taking advantage of the many resources available at your college are key actions to ensure success.
- Understanding the larger characteristics of college success leads to a richer college experience, supplementing the value of good grades.
- While it may take a few weeks to develop all the skills needed for success in college, there are many steps you can begin taking today to get moving in the right direction.

Adult student using the Library to study. Photo by Joseph Smith

Chapter 2: Interacting with Instructors and Classes

Interacting with the College Experience

Throughout this text you have been reading about how success in college depends on your active participation in the learning process. Much of what you get out of your education is what you yourself put into it. This chapter considers how to engage in the learning process through interactions with your instructors and other students. Students who actively interact with others in the educational experience are much more successful than passive students who do not.

Yet relatively few college students consistently interact with their instructors and other students in class. Typically only five to seven students in a class, regardless of the class's size, do most of the participating. Why is that? If you're just too shy, you can learn to feel comfortable participating.

Interacting with instructors and participating in class discussions with other students is among the most important steps you can take to make sure you're successful in college. The real essence of a college education is not just absorption of knowledge and information but learning a way of thinking that involves actively responding to the ideas of others. Employers seek graduates who have learned how to think critically about situations and ideas, to solve new problems, and to apply traditional knowledge in new circumstances. And these characteristics come from active participation in the learning process.

Differences from High School

To understand why interaction is so important in college, let's look again at some of the typical differences between high school and college instructors:

Many college classes focus more on how one thinks about a subject than on information about the subject. While instructors in some large lecture classes may still present information to students, as you take more classes in your major and other smaller classes, you'll find that simply giving back facts or information on tests or in assigned papers means much less. You really are expected to develop your own ideas and communicate them well. Doing that successfully usually requires talking with others, testing out your thoughts against those of others, responding to instructors' questions, and other interactions.

Instructors are usually very actively involved in their fields. While high school teachers often are most interested in *teaching*, college instructors are often more interested in their own fields. They may be passionate about their subject and want you to be as well. They can become excited when a student asks a question that shows some deeper understanding of something in the field.

College instructors give *you* the responsibility for learning. Many high school teachers monitor their students' progress and reach out if they see a student not doing well. In college, however, students are considered adults in charge of their own learning. Miss some classes, turn in a paper late, do poorly on an exam, and you will get a low grade, but the instructor likely won't come looking for you to offer help. However, if *you* ask questions when you don't understand and actively seek out your instructor during office hours to more fully discuss your ideas for a paper, then the instructor will likely give you the help you need.

Academic freedom is very important in college. High school instructors generally are given a set curriculum and have little freedom to choose what—or how—to teach. College instructors have academic freedom, however, allowing them to teach controversial topics and express their own ideas—and they may expect you to partake in this freedom as well. They have more respect for students who engage in the subject and demonstrate their thinking skills through participation in the class.

2.1 Why Attend Classes at All?

Among the student freedoms in college is the choice not to attend classes. Most college instructors do not "grade" attendance, and some college students soon develop an attitude that if you can get class notes

from someone else, or watch a podcast of a lecture, there's no reason to go to every class at all. What's wrong with that?

It is in fact true that you don't have to attend every single class of every course to get a good grade. But thinking only in terms of grades and how much one can get away with is a dangerous attitude toward college education. The real issue is whether you're trying to get the most out of your education. Let's compare students with different attitudes toward their classes:

> Carla wants to get through college, and she knows she needs the degree to get a decent job, but she's just not that into it. She's never thought of herself as a good student, and that hasn't changed much in college. She has trouble paying attention in those big lecture classes, which mostly seem pretty boring. She's pretty sure she can pass all her courses, however, as long as she takes the time to study before tests. It doesn't bother her to skip classes when she's studying for a test in a different class or finishing a reading assignment she didn't get around to earlier. She does make it through her freshman year with a passing grade in every class, even those she didn't go to very often. Then she fails the midterm exam in her first sophomore class. Depressed, she skips the next couple classes, then feels guilty and goes to the next. It's even harder to stay awake because now she has no idea what they're talking about. It's too late to drop the course, and even a hard night of studying before the final isn't enough to pass the course. In two other classes, she just barely passes. She has no idea what classes to take next term and is starting to think that maybe she'll drop out for now.

> Karen wants to have a good time in college and still do well enough to get a good job in business afterward. Her sorority keeps a file of class notes for her big lecture classes, and from talking to others and reviewing these notes, she's discovered she can skip almost half of those big classes and still get a B or C on the tests. She stays focused on her grades, and because she has a good memory, she's able to maintain OK grades. She doesn't worry about talking to her instructors outside of class because she can always find out what she needs from another student. In her sophomore year, she has a quick conversation with her academic advisor and chooses her major. Those classes are smaller, and she goes to most of them, but she feels she's pretty much figured out how it works and can usually still get the grade. In her senior year, she starts working on her résumé and asks other students in her major which instructors write the best letters of recommendation. She's sure her college degree will land her a good job.

> Alicia enjoys her classes, even when she has to get up early after working or studying late the night before. She sometimes gets so excited by something she learns in class that she rushes up to the instructor after class to ask a question. In class discussions, she's not usually the first to speak out, but by the time another student has given an opinion, she's had time to organize her thoughts and enjoys arguing her ideas. Nearing the end of her sophomore year and unsure of what to major in given her many interests, she talks things over with one of her favorite instructors, whom she has gotten to know through office visits. The instructor gives her some insights into careers in that field and helps her explore her interests. She takes two more courses with this instructor over the next year, and she's comfortable in her senior year going to him to ask for a job reference. When she does, she's surprised and thrilled when he urges her to apply for a high-level paid internship with a company in the field—that happens to be run by a friend of his.

If You Must Miss a Class …

If you know that you will miss a class, take steps in advance. Tell your instructor and ask if he or she teaches another section of the course that you might attend instead. Ask about any handouts or special announcements.

Ask another student whose judgment you trust if you can copy his or her notes. Then talk to them after you've read their notes to go over things that may be unclear to you.

It may not be necessary to see your instructor after missing a lecture class, and no instructor wants to give you fifty minutes of office time to repeat what was said in class. But if you are having difficulty after the *next* class because of something you missed earlier, stop and see your instructor and ask what you can do to get caught up. But remember the worst thing you can say to an instructor: "I missed class—did you talk about anything important?"

Think about the differences in the attitudes of these three students and how they approach their classes. One's attitude toward learning, toward going to class, and toward the whole college experience is a huge factor in how successful a student will be. Make it your goal to attend every class—don't even think about not going. Going to class is the first step in engaging in your education by interacting with the instructor and other students. Here are some reasons why it's important to attend every class:

- Miss a class and you'll miss *something*, even if you never know it. Even if a friend gives you notes for the class, they cannot contain *everything* said or shown by the instructor or written on the board for emphasis or questioned or commented on by other students. What you miss might affect your grade or your enthusiasm for the course. Why go to college at all if you're not going to ***go*** to college?
- While some students may say that you don't have to go to every class to do well on a test, that is very often a myth. Do you want to take that risk?
- Your final grade often reflects how you think about course concepts, and you will think more often and more clearly when engaged in class discussions and hearing the comments of other students. You can't get this by borrowing class notes from a friend.
- Research shows there is a correlation between absences from class and lower grades. It may be that missing classes causes lower grades or that students with lower grades miss more classes. Either way, missing classes and lower grades can be intertwined in a *downward spiral of achievement.*
- Your instructor will notice your absences—even in a large class. In addition to making a poor impression, you reduce your opportunities for future interactions. You might not ask a question the next class because of the potential embarrassment of the instructor saying that was covered in the last class, which you apparently missed. Nothing is more insulting to an instructor than when you skip a class and then show up to ask, "Did I miss anything important?"
- You might be tempted to skip a class because the instructor is "boring," but it's more likely that you found the class boring because you weren't very attentive or didn't appreciate how the instructor was teaching.
- You paid a lot of money for your tuition. Get your money's worth!

Attending the first day of class is especially critical. There you'll get the syllabus and other handouts, learn the instructor's policies and preferences for how the class will function, and often take notes in an opening lecture.

The Value of Interaction in Class

As noted earlier, there are many good reasons to attend every class. But it's not enough just to *be* there—you need to interact with the instructor and other students to enjoy a full educational experience:

Nursing student practicing how to give shots in class. Photo by Joseph Smith

- Participating in class discussions is a good way to start meeting other students with whom you share an interest. You may form a study group, borrow class notes if you miss a class, or team up with other students on a group project. You may meet students with whom you form a lasting relationship, developing your network of contacts for other benefits in the future, such as learning about internships or jobs.
- Asking the instructor questions, answering the instructor's questions in class, and responding to other students' comments is a good way to make an impression on your instructor. The instructor will remember you as an engaged student—and this matters if you later need extra help or even a potential mentor.
- Paying close attention and thinking critically about what an instructor is saying can dramatically improve your enjoyment of the class. You'll notice things you'd miss if you're feeling bored and may discover your instructor is much more interesting than you first thought.
- Students actively engaged in their class learn more and thus get better grades. When you speak out in class and answer the instructor's questions, you are more likely to remember the discussion.

Are Podcasts and Recordings an Effective Alternative to Attending Class?

Why not just listen to a recording of the lecture—or a video podcast, if available—instead of going to class? After all, you hear and perhaps see the lecture just as if you were there, and you can sleep late and "go" to this class whenever it's convenient for you. What could be wrong with that?

This issue has received considerable discussion in recent years because many colleges and universities began videotaping class lectures and making them available for students online or in podcasts. There was a lot of debate about whether students would stop coming to class and simply watch the podcasts instead. In fact, some students do cut class, as some always have, but most students use podcasts and recordings as a way to review material they do not feel they grasp completely. A video podcast doesn't offer the opportunity to ask questions or participate, and even if you pay close attention to watching a video, it's still a passive experience from which you're likely to learn much less.

2.2 Participating in Class

We've already discussed the many benefits of participating in class as a form of actively engaging in learning. Not everyone naturally feels comfortable participating. Following some general guidelines makes it easier.

Guidelines for Participating in Classes

Smaller classes generally favor discussion, but often instructors in large lecture classes also make some room for participation.

A concern or fear about speaking in public is one of the most common fears. If you feel afraid to speak out in class, take comfort from the fact that many others do as well—and that anyone can learn how to speak in class without much difficulty. Class participation is actually an impromptu, informal type of public speaking, and the same principles will get you through both: preparing and communicating.

- Set yourself up for success by **coming to class fully prepared**. Complete reading assignments. Review your notes on the reading and previous class to get yourself in the right mind-set. If there is something you don't understand well, start formulating your question now.
- **Sit in the front** with a good view of the instructor, board or screen, and other visual aids. In a lecture hall, this will help you hear better, pay better attention, and make a good impression on the instructor. Don't sit with friends—socializing isn't what you're there for.
- Remember that **your body language** communicates as much as anything you say. Sit up and look alert, with a pleasant expression on your face, and make good eye contact with the instructor. Show some enthusiasm.
- Pay attention to the **instructor's body language**, which can communicate much more than just his or her words. How the instructor moves and gestures, and the looks on his or her face, will add meaning to the words—and will also cue you when it's a good time to ask a question or stay silent.
- **Take good notes**, but don't write obsessively—and never page through your textbook (or browse on a laptop). Don't eat or play with your cell phone. Except when writing brief notes, keep your eyes on the instructor.
- **Follow class protocol** for making comments and asking questions. In a small class, the instructor may encourage students to ask questions at any time, while in some large lecture classes the instructor may ask for questions at the end of the lecture. In this case, jot your questions in your notes so that you don't forget them later.
- **Don't** say or ask anything just to **try to impress your instructor**. Most instructors have been teaching long enough to immediately recognize insincere flattery—and the impression this makes is just the opposite of what you want.
- Pay attention to the **instructor's thinking style**. Does this instructor emphasize theory more than facts, wide perspectives over specific ideas, abstractions more than concrete experience? Take a cue from your instructor's approach and try to think in similar terms when participating in class.
- It's fine to **disagree** with your instructor when you ask or answer a question. Many instructors invite challenges. Before speaking up, however, be sure you can explain why you disagree and give supporting evidence or reasons. Be **respectful**.
- Pay attention to **your communication style**. Use standard English when you ask or answer a question, not slang. Avoid sarcasm and joking around. Be assertive when you participate in class, showing confidence in your ideas while being respectful of the ideas of others. But avoid an aggressive style that attacks the ideas of others or is strongly emotional.
- How to respond to a general question:
  - Raise your hand and make eye contact, but don't call out or wave your hand all around trying to catch his or her attention.
  - Before speaking, take a moment to gather your thoughts and take a deep breath. Don't just blurt it out—speak calmly and clearly.

- If you are asked a question directly by your instructor:
  - Be honest and admit it if you don't know the answer or are not sure. Don't try to fake it or make excuses. With a question that involves a reasoned opinion more than a fact, it's fine to explain why you haven't decided yet, such as when weighing two opposing ideas or actions; your comment may stimulate further discussion.
  - Organize your thoughts to give a sufficient answer. Instructors seldom want a yes or no answer. Give your answer and provide reasons or evidence in support.

- When you want to ask the instructor a question:
  - Don't ever feel a question is "stupid." If you have been paying attention in class and have done the reading and you still don't understand something, you have every right to ask.

- Ask at the appropriate time. Don't interrupt the instructor or jump ahead and ask a question about something the instructor may be starting to explain. Wait for a natural pause and a good moment to ask. On the other hand, unless the instructor asks students to hold all question until the end of class, don't let too much time go by, or you may forget the question or its relevance to the topic.
- Don't ask just because you weren't paying attention. If you drift off during the first half of class and then realize in the second half that you don't really understand what the instructor is talking about now, don't ask a question about something that was already covered.
- Don't ask a question that is really a complaint. You may be thinking, "Why would so-and-so believe that? That's just crazy!" Take a moment to think about what you might gain from asking the question. It's better to say, "I'm having some difficulty understanding what so-and-so is saying here. What evidence did he use to argue for that position?"
- Avoid dominating a discussion. It may be appropriate in some cases to make a follow-up comment after the instructor answers your question, but don't try to turn the class into a one-on-one conversation between you and the instructor.

Lecture Hall Classes

While opportunities are fewer for student discussions in large lecture classes, participation is still important. The instructor almost always provides an opportunity to ask questions. Because time is limited, be ready with your question or comment when the opportunity arises—and don't be shy about raising your hand first.

Being prepared is especially important in lecture classes. Have assigned readings done before class and review your notes. If you have a genuine question about something in the reading, ask about it. Jot down the question in your notes and be ready to ask if the lecture doesn't clear it up for you.

Being prepared before asking a question also includes listening carefully to the lecture. You don't want to ask a question whose answer was already given by the instructor in the lecture. Take a moment to organize your thoughts and choose your words carefully. Be as specific as you can. Don't say something like, "I don't understand the big deal about whether the earth revolves around the sun or the sun around the earth. So what?" Instead, you might ask, "When they discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, was that such a disturbing idea because people were upset to realize that maybe they weren't the center of the universe?" The first question suggests you haven't thought much about the topic, while the second shows that you are beginning to grasp the issue and want to understand it more fully.

Following are some additional guidelines for asking good questions:

- Ask a question or two early in the term, even on the first day of class. Once the instructor has "noticed" you as a class participant, you are more likely to be recognized again when you have a question. You won't be lost in the crowd.
- Speak deliberately and professionally, not as you might when talking with a friend. Use standard English rather than slang.
- If you're very shy about public speaking or worried you'll say the wrong thing, write down your question before asking. Rehearse it in your mind.
- When you have the opportunity to ask questions in class, it's better to ask right away rather than saving a question for after class. If you really find it difficult to speak up in a large class, this is an acceptable way to ask your question and participate. A private conversation with an instructor may also be more appropriate if the question involves a

Don't use your cell phone during class time. *Tom Woodward – Undercover – CC BY-NC 2.0.*

paper or other project you are working on for the course.

A note on technology in the lecture hall. Colleges are increasingly incorporating new technology in lecture halls. For example, each student in the lecture hall may have an electronic "clicker" with which the instructor can gain instant feedback on questions in class. Or the classroom may have wireless Internet and students are encouraged to use their laptops to communicate with the instructor in "real time" during the lecture. In these cases, the most important thing is to take it seriously, even if you have anonymity. Most students appreciate the ability to give feedback and ask questions through such technology, but some abuse their anonymity by sending irrelevant, disruptive, or insulting messages.

Teaching Style versus Learning Style

As you learned in Chapter 1 "You and Your College Experience", page 7 students have many different learning styles. Understanding your learning style(s) can help you study more effectively. Most instructors tend to develop their own teaching style, however, and you will encounter different teaching styles in different courses.

When the instructor's teaching style matches your learning style, you are usually more attentive in class and may seem to learn better. But what happens if your instructor has a style very different from your own? Let's say, for example, that your instructor primarily lectures, speaks rapidly, and seldom uses visuals. This instructor also talks mostly on the level of large abstract ideas and almost never gives examples. Let's say that you, in contrast, are more a visual learner, that you learn more effectively with visual aids and visualizing concrete examples of ideas. Therefore, perhaps you are having some difficulty paying attention in class and following the lectures. What can you do?

- Capitalize on your learning strengths, as you learned in Chapter 1 "You and Your College Experience". In this example, you could use a visual style of note taking, such as concept maps, while listening to the lecture. If the instructor does not give examples for abstract ideas in the lecture, see if *you* can supply examples in your own thoughts as you listen.
- Form a study group with other students. A variety of students will likely involve a variety of learning styles, and when going over course material with other students, such as when studying for a test, you can gain what they have learned through their styles while you contribute what you have learned through yours.
- Use ancillary study materials. Many textbooks point students to online resource centers or include a computer CD that offers additional learning materials. Such ancillary materials usually offer an opportunity to review course material in ways that may better fit your learning style.
- Communicate with your instructor to bridge the gap between his or her teaching style and your learning style. If the instructor is speaking in abstractions and general ideas you don't understand, ask the instructor for an example.
- You can also communicate with the instructor privately during office hours. For example, you can explain that you are having difficulty understanding lectures because so many things are said so fast.

Finally, take heart that a mismatch between a student's learning style and an instructor's teaching style is not correlated with lower grades.

2.3 Communicating with Instructors

So far we've been looking at class participation and general interaction with both instructors and other students in class. In addition to this, students gain very specific benefits from communicating directly with their instructors. Learn best practices for communicating with your instructors during office hours and through e-mail.

Additional Benefits of Talking with Your Instructors

College students are sometimes surprised to discover that instructors like students and enjoy getting to know them. After all, they want to feel they're doing something more meaningful than talking to an empty room. The human dimension of college really matters, and as a student you are an important part of your instructor's world. Most instructors are happy to see you during their office hours or to talk a few minutes after class.

This chapter has repeatedly emphasized how active participation in learning is a key to student success. In addition, talking with your instructors often leads to benefits beyond simply doing well in that class.

- Talking with instructors helps you feel more comfortable in college and more connected to the campus. Students who talk to their instructors are less likely to become disillusioned and drop out.
- Talking with instructors is a valuable way to learn about an academic field or a career. Don't know for sure what you want to major in, or what people with a degree in your chosen major actually *do* after college? Most instructors will share information and insights with you.
- You may need a reference or letter of recommendation for a job or internship application. Getting to know some of your instructors puts you in an ideal position to ask for a letter of recommendation or a reference in the future when you need one.
- Because instructors are often well connected within their field, they may know of a job, internship, or research possibility you otherwise may not learn about. An instructor who knows you is a valuable part of your network. Networking is very important for future job searches and other opportunities. In fact, most jobs are found through networking, not through classified ads or online job postings.
- Think about what it truly means to be "educated;" how one thinks, understands society and the world, and responds to problems and new situations. Much of this learning occurs outside the classroom. Talking with your highly educated instructors can be among your most meaningful experiences in college.

Guidelines for Communicating with Instructors

Getting along with instructors and communicating well begins with attitude. As experts in their field, they deserve your respect. Remember that a college education is a collaborative process that works best when students and instructors communicate freely in an exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives. So while you should respect your instructors, you shouldn't fear them. As you get to know them better, you'll learn their personalities and find appropriate ways to communicate. Here are some guidelines for getting along with and communicating with your instructors:

- **Prepare before going to the instructor's office.** Go over your notes on readings and lectures and write down your specific questions. You'll feel more comfortable, and the instructor will appreciate your being organized.
- **Don't forget to introduce yourself.** Especially near the beginning of the term, don't assume your instructor has learned everyone's names yet and don't make him or her have to ask you. Unless the instructor has already asked you to address him or her as "Dr. ____," "Ms. _____," or Mr. _____," or something similar, it's appropriate to say "Professor _____."
- **Respect the instructor's time.** In addition to teaching, college instructors sit on committees, do research and other professional work, and have personal lives. Don't show up two minutes before the end of an office hour and expect the instructor to stay late to talk with you.
- **Realize that the instructor will recognize you from class—even in a large lecture hall.** If you spent a lecture class joking around with friends in the back row, don't think you can show up during office hours to find out what you missed while you weren't paying attention.
- **Don't try to fool an instructor.** Insincere praise or making excuses for not doing an assignment won't make it in college. Nor is it a good idea to show you're "too cool" to take all this seriously—another attitude sure to turn off an instructor. To earn your instructor's respect, come to

class prepared, do the work, participate genuinely in class, and show respect—and the instructor will be happy to see you when you come to office hours or need some extra help.

- **Try to see things from the instructor's point of view.** Imagine that you spent a couple hours making PowerPoint slides and preparing a class lecture on something you find very stimulating and exciting. Standing in front of a full room, you are gratified to see faces smiling and heads nodding as people understand what you're saying—they really get it! And then a student after class asks, "Is this going to be on the test?" How would *you* feel?
- **Be professional when talking to an instructor.** You can be cordial and friendly, but keep it professional and on an adult level. Come to office hours prepared with your questions—not just to chat or joke around. Be prepared to accept criticism in a professional way, without taking it personally or complaining.
- **Use your best communication skills.** In Chapter 9 "The Social World of College," page 124 you'll learn the difference between assertive communication and passive or aggressive communication.

E-mail Best Practices

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Just as e-mail has become a primary form of communication in business and society, e-mail has a growing role in education and has become an important and valuable means of communicating with instructors. Virtually all younger college students have grown up using e-mail and have a computer or computer access in college, although some have developed poor habits from using e-mail principally with friends in the past. Some older college students may not yet understand the importance of e-mail and other computer skills in college; if you are not now using e-mail, it's time to learn how (see "Getting Started with E-mail"). Especially when it is difficult to see an instructor in person during office hours, e-mail can be an effective form of communication and interaction with instructors. E-mail is also an increasingly effective way to collaborate with other students on group projects or while studying with other students.

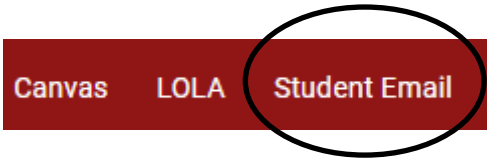
Part Time and Returning Students

Students who are working and who have their own families and other responsibilities may have special issues interacting with instructors. Sometimes an older student feels a little out of place and may even feel "the system" is designed for younger students; this attitude can lead to a hesitation to participate in class or see an instructor during office hours.

But participation and communication with instructors is very important for all students—and may be even more important for "nontraditional" students. Getting to know your instructors is particularly crucial for feeling at home in college. Instructors enjoy talking with older and other nontraditional students—even when, as sometimes happens, a student is older than the instructor. Nontraditional students are often highly motivated and eager to learn. If you can't make the instructor's office hours because of your work schedule, ask for an appointment at a different time—your needs will be respected.

Part-time students, especially in community colleges where they may be taking evening courses, often have greater difficulty meeting with instructors. In addition, many part-time students taking evening and weekend classes are taught by part-time faculty who, like them, may be on campus only small amounts of time. Yet it is just as critical for part-time students to engage in the learning process and have a sense of belonging on campus. With effort, you can usually find a way to talk with your instructors. Don't hesitate to ask for an appointment at another time or to meet with your instructor over a cup of coffee after class before driving home. Assert yourself: You are in college for reasons just as good as those of other students, and you have the same rights. Avoid the temptation to give up or feel defeated; talk with your instructor to arrange a time to meet, and make the most of your time interacting together. Use e-mail to communicate when you need to, and contact your instructor when you have any question you can't raise in person.

Getting Started with E-mail



- BRCC provides computer labs in most campus buildings, if you don't have your own computer. Public Libraries often allow free use of computers as well.
- Use your BRCC email to communicate with your professors. You can also access your college email account via the BRCC website to conduct business with the college.
- Help in using email is available from the Academic Learning Center, ALC or the Computer Help Desk. This is an online tutorial: https://www.digitalunite.com/guides/email/how-send-email
- You will be able to email your professors and classmates through CANVAS.
- Once you begin using e-mail, remember to check it regularly for messages. Most people view e-mail like a telephone message and expect you to respond fairly soon.
- Be sure to use good e-mail etiquette when writing to instructors.

Unless your instructor says differently, use e-mail rather than the telephone for non-urgent matters. Using e-mail respects other people's time, allowing them to answer at a time of their choosing, rather than being interrupted by a telephone call.

But e-mail is a written form of communication that is different from telephone voice messages and text messages. Students who text with friends have often adopted shortcuts, such as not spelling out full words, ignoring capitalization and punctuation, and not bothering with grammar or full sentence constructions. This is inappropriate in an e-mail message to an instructor, who expects a more professional quality of writing. Most instructors expect your communications to be in full sentences with correctly spelled words and reasonable grammar. Follow these guidelines:

BRCC Students in a Science Class. Photo by Joseph Smith

- For business communication, use a professional e-mail name. Your BRCC email provides that for you.
- Use the subject line to label your message effectively at a glance. "May I make an appointment?" says something; "In your office?" doesn't. A clear subject tells your professor what you need and will get you help quicker.
- Address e-mail messages as you do a letter, beginning "Dear Professor ____." Using CANVAS for email will show your professor your name and class.
- Get to your point quickly and concisely. Don't make the reader scroll down a long e-mail to see what it is you want to say.
- Because e-mail is a written communication, it does not express emotion the way a voice message does. Don't attempt to be funny, ironic, or sarcastic, Write as you would in a paper for class.
- Don't use capital letters to emphasize. All caps look like SHOUTING.
    - Avoid abbreviations, nonstandard spelling, slang.
    - Don't make demands or state expectations such as "I'll expect to hear from you soon" or "If I haven't heard by 4 p.m., I'll assume you'll accept my paper late."
    - When you reply to a message, leave the original message within yours. Your reader may need to recall what he or she said in the original message.
    - Be polite. End the message with a "Thank you" or something similar.

- **Proofread** your message **before** sending it.
- With any important message to a work supervisor or instructor, it's a good idea to wait and review the message later before sending it. You may have expressed an emotion or thought that you will think better about later. Many problems have resulted when people sent messages too quickly without thinking.

Resolving a Problem with an Instructor

The most common issue students face is when an instructor assigns a lower grade than he or she expected. This is especially true for new students not yet used to the expectations of college work. It can be depressing to get a low grade, but it's not the end of the world. Don't be too hard on yourself—or on the instructor. Take a good look at what happened on the test or paper and make sure you know what to do better next time. Review the earlier chapters on studying habits, time management, and taking tests.

If you genuinely believe you deserved a higher grade, your first step is to discuss the matter with your instructor. ***How*** you communicate in that conversation, however, is very important. Instructors are used to hearing students complain about grades and patiently explaining their standards for grading. While your instructors may not change the grade, unless there was an error made, you could still learn a lot about what to expect in the future from the experience.

Follow these guidelines to talk about a grade or resolve any other problem or disagreement with an instructor:

- First go over the requirements for the paper or test and the instructor's comments. Be sure you actually have a reason for discussing the grade—not just that you didn't do well. Be prepared with specific points you want to go over.
- Make an appointment with your instructor during office hours or another time mutually convenient for you both. Don't try to talk about this before or after class or with e-mail or the telephone.
- Begin by politely explaining that you thought you did better on the assignment or test (not simply that you think you deserve a better grade) and that you'd like to go over it to better understand the result.
- Allow the instructor to explain his or her comments on the assignment or grading of the test. Don't complain or whine; instead, show your appreciation for the explanation. Raise any specific questions or make comments at this time. For example, you might say, "I really thought I was being clear here when I wrote…."
- Use good listening skills. Whatever you do, don't argue!
- Ask what you can do to improve grade, if possible. Can you rewrite the paper or do any extra-credit work to help make up for a test score? While you are showing that you would like to earn a higher grade in the course, also make it clear that you're willing to put in the effort and that you want to *learn more*, not just get the higher grade.
- If there is no opportunity to improve on this specific project, ask the instructor for advice on what you might do on the next assignment or when preparing for the next test. You may be offered some individual help or receive good study advice, and your instructor will respect your willingness to make the effort as long as it's clear that you're more interested in learning than simply getting the grade.

Tips for Success: Talking with Instructors

- When you have a question, ask it sooner rather than later.
- Be prepared and plan your questions and comments in advance.
- Be respectful but personable, and communicate professionally.
- Be open minded and ready to learn. Avoid whining and complaining.
- There is no such thing as a "stupid question."

Controlling Anger over Grades

If you're going to talk with an instructor about your grade or any other problem, control any anger you may be feeling. The GPS LifePlan project of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System offers some insights into this process:

- Being upset about a grade is good because it shows you care and that you have passion about your education. But anger prevents clear thinking, so rein it in first.
- Since anger involves bodily reactions, physical actions can help you control anger: try some deep breathing first.
- Try putting yourself in your instructor's shoes and seeing the situation from his or her point of view. Try to understand how grading is not a personal issue of "liking" you—that instructors are really doing something for your educational benefit.
- It's not your life that's being graded. Things outside your control can negatively affect your performance on a test or assignment, but the instructor can grade only on what you actually did on that test or assignment—not what you *could have done* or *are capable of doing*. Understanding this can help you accept what happened and not take a grade personally[1].

Finding a Mentor

A mentor is someone who is usually older and more experienced than you who becomes your trusted guide, advisor, and role model. A mentor is someone you may want to be like in your future career or profession—someone you look up to and whose advice and guidance you respect.

Finding a mentor can be one of the most fulfilling aspects of college. As a student, you think about many things and make many decisions, large and small, almost daily: What do you want to do in the future? How can you best balance your studies with your job? What should you major in? Should you take this course or that one? What should you do if you feel like you're failing a course? Where should you put your priorities as you prepare for a future career? How can you be a better student? The questions go on and on. We talk about things like this with our friends and often family members, but often they don't have the same experience or background to help us as a mentor can.

Most important, a mentor is someone who is willing to help you, to talk with you about decisions you face, to support you when things become difficult, and to guide you when you're feeling lost. A mentor can become a valuable part of your future network but also can help you in the here and now.

Many different people can become mentors: other students, family members, people you know through work, your boss. As a college student, however, your best mentor likely is someone involved in education: your advisor, a more experienced student, or an instructor. Finding a mentor is another reason to develop good relationships with your instructors, starting with class participation and communication outside of class.

A mentor is not like a good friend, exactly—you're not going to invite your instructor to a movie—but it does involve a form of friendship. Nor is a mentor a formal relationship: you don't ask an instructor to become your mentor. The mentor relationship is more informal and develops slowly, often without actively looking for a mentor. Here's an example of how one student "found" a mentor:

> *As a freshman taking several classes, Miguel particularly liked and admired one of his instructors, Professor Canton. Miguel spoke up more in Canton's class and talked with him sometimes during office hours. When it was time to register for the next term, Miguel saw that Canton was teaching another course he was interested in, so he asked him about that course one day during office hours. Miguel was pleased when Professor Canton said he'd like to have him in his class next term.*
>
> *By the end of his first year of college, Miguel seemed to know Canton better than any of his other instructors and felt very comfortable talking with him outside of class. One day after talking about a reading assignment, Miguel said he was enjoying this class so much that he*

was thinking about majoring in this subject and asked Professor Canton what he thought about it. Canton suggested that he take a few more classes before making a decision, and he invited Miguel to sit in on a seminar of upper-level students he was holding.

In his second year, Miguel's interests turned in another direction as he began to think about his future job possibilities, but by then he felt comfortable enough talking with Canton that he occasionally he stopped by the professor's office even though he was not taking a class with him. Sometimes he was surprised how much Professor Canton knew about other departments and other faculty, and Canton often shared insights about other courses he might be interested in that his advisor had not directed him to. When Miguel learned about a summer internship in his field and was considering applying, Canton not only volunteered to write him a letter of recommendation but even offered to help Miguel with the essay part of the application if he wanted.

Currently BRCC does not have a formal mentoring program. This only means that you have the opportunity to select a mentor yourself. In your first semester, you shouldn't go searching frantically for a mentor, but you should begin interacting with your instructors and other students in ways that may lead, over time, to developing that kind of relationship.

Similarly, your academic advisor or a college counselor might become a mentor for you if you share interests and you look up to that person as a role model and trusted guide. If you do not connect with the first advisor you see, try another. It takes time to build a good relationship with your advisor, the same as with instructors—following the same guidelines in this chapter for communication and interaction.

Relating to an Instructor of an Online Course

The number of online courses offered has increased tremendously in recent years, and BRCC is no exception. While online learning once focused on students at a distance from campus, now many students enrolled in regular classes also take some courses online. Online courses have a number of practical benefits but can also pose special issues, primarily related to how students interact with other students and the instructor.

Some online courses do involve "face time" or live audio connections with the instructor and other students, via Webcasts or Webinars. Many online courses are self-paced and asynchronous, meaning that you experience the course on your own time and communicate with others via messages back and forth rather than communicating in real time. All online courses include opportunities for interacting with the instructor, typically through e-mail or a bulletin board where you may see comments and questions from other students as well.

Many educators argue that online courses can involve *more* interaction between students and the instructor than in a large lecture class, not less. But two important differences affect how that interaction occurs and how successful it is for engaging students in learning. Most communication is written, with no or limited opportunity to ask questions face to face or during office hours, and students must take the initiative to interact beyond the requirements of online assignments.

Many students enjoy online courses, in part for the practical benefit of scheduling their own time. Some students who are reluctant to speak in class communicate more easily in writing. But other students may have less confidence in their writing skills or may never initiate interaction at all and end up feeling lost. Depending on your learning style, an online course may feel natural to you (if you learn well independently and through language skills) or more difficult (if you are a more visual or kinesthetic learner). Online courses can have higher drop-out and failure rates due to some students feeling isolated and unmotivated.

Success in an online course requires commitment and motivation. Follow these guidelines:

- **Make sure you have the technology to support taking an online class.** If you're not comfortable reading and writing on a computer, don't rush into an online course.

- **Accept that you'll have to motivate yourself and take responsibility for your learning.** It's actually harder for some people to sit down at the computer on their own than to show up at a set time.
- **Work on your writing skills.** When communicating with the instructor of an online course, follow the guidelines for effective e-mail outlined earlier.
- **Use critical thinking skills.** Most online courses involve assignments requiring problem solving and critical thinking. It's not as simple as watching video lectures and taking multiple-choice tests. You need to actively engage with the course material.
- **Take the initiative to ask questions and seek help.** You must take the first step to communicate your questions.
- **Be patient.** When you ask a question or seek help with an assignment, you have to wait for a reply from your instructor. You may need to continue with a reading or writing assignment before you receive a reply. If the instructor is online at scheduled times for direct contact, take advantage of those times for immediate feedback and answers.
- **Use all opportunities to interact with other students in the course.** Ask questions of other students and monitor their communications. If you know another person taking the same course, try to synchronize your schedules so that you can study together and talk over assignments. Students who feel they are part of a learning community always do better than those who feel isolated and on their own.

[1]Adapted from "How to Communicate and Problem Solve with Your Instructor," http://www.gpslifeplan.org/generic/pdf/how-to-communicate-with-professor.pdf (accessed December 27, 2009).

2.4 Public Speaking and Class Presentations

Public speaking—giving an oral presentation before a class or another group of people—is a special form of interaction common in education. You will likely be asked to give a presentation in one of your classes at some point, and your future career may also involve public speaking. It's important to develop skills for this form of communication.

Public speaking is like participating in class—sharing your thoughts, ideas, and questions with others in the group. In other ways, however, public speaking is very different. You stand in front of the class to speak, rather than from your usual seat—and for most students, that changes the psychology of the situation. You also have time outside of class to prepare your presentation, allowing you to plan it carefully—and, for many, giving more time to worry about it and experience even more anxiety!

Overcoming Anxiety

Although a few people seem to be natural public speakers, most of us feel some stage fright or anxiety about having to speak to a group, at least at first. This is completely normal. We feel like everyone is staring at us and seeing our every flaw, and we're sure we'll forget what we want to say or mess up. Take comfort from knowing that almost everyone else is dreading giving class presentations the same as you are! But you can learn to overcome your anxiety and prepare in a way that not only safely gets you through the experience but also leads to success in your presentation. The following are proven strategies for overcoming anxiety when speaking in public:

- **Understand anxiety.** Since stage fright is normal, don't try to deny that you're feeling anxious. A little anxiety can help motivate you to prepare and do your best. Accept this aspect of the process and work to overcome it. Anxiety is usually worst just before you begin but often eases up once you've begun.
- **Understand that your audience actually wants you to succeed.** They're not looking for faults or hoping you'll fail. Other students and your instructors are your allies, not your enemy. They likely

won't even see your anxiety.

- **Reduce anxiety by preparing and practicing.** The more fully you prepare and the more often you practice, the more your anxiety will go away.
- **Focus on what you're saying, not how you're saying it.** Don't obsess about speaking, but focus on the content of your presentation. Think, for example, of how easily you share your ideas with a friend or family member, as you naturally speak your mind. The same can work with public speaking if you focus on the ideas themselves.
- **Develop self-confidence.** As you prepare, you will make notes you can refer to during the presentation. The more you practice, the more confident you'll become.

Six Steps to Produce College-Level Presentations

Preparing and delivering a presentation in class (or in business or other settings) is a process, which breaks down into these **six basic steps**:

1. Analyze your audience and goals
2. Plan, research, and organize your content
3. Draft and revise the presentation
4. Prepare speaking notes
5. Practice the presentation
6. Deliver the presentation

Proud Grad with his children. Photo by Joseph Smith

Step 1: Analyze Your Audience and Goals

Who will see and hear your presentation—and why? Obviously, other students and the instructor. But you still need to think about what they already know, and don't know, about your topic. If your topic relates to subject matter in class lectures and readings, consider what background information your audience members already have and be careful not to give a boring recap of things they already know. It may be important, however, to show how your specific topic fits in with subjects that have been discussed already in class, especially in the beginning of your presentation, but be sure to focus on your new topic.

New terms and concepts may become familiar to you while doing your research and preparation, but remember to define and explain them to other students. Consider how much explanation or examples will be needed for your audience to grasp your points. If your topic involves anything controversial, or if it may provoke emotion, consider your audience's attitudes and choose your words carefully. Thinking about your audience will help you find ways to get their attention and keep them interested.

Be sure you are clear about the goals for the presentation. Are you primarily presenting new information or arguing for a position? Are you giving an overview or a detailed report? Review the assignment and talk with the instructor if you're unsure. Your goals guide everything in the presentation: what you say, how much you say, what order you say it in, what visual aids you use, whether you use humor or personal examples, and so forth.

Step 2: Plan, Research, and Organize Your Content

Starting with the assignment and your goals, brainstorm your topic. Jot notes on specific topics that seem important. Often you'll do reading or research to gather more information. Take notes as you would with any reading. As you research the topic at this stage, don't worry at first about how much content you

are gathering. It's better to know too much and then pick out the most important things to say than to rush ahead to drafting the presentation and then realize you don't have enough material.

Organizing a presentation is similar to organizing topics in a class paper and uses the same principles. Introduce your topic and state your main idea (thesis), go into more detail about specific ideas, and conclude your presentation. Look for a logical order for the specifics in the middle. Some topics work best in chronological (time) order or with a compare-and-contrast organization. If your goal is to persuade the audience, build up to the strongest reason. Put similar ideas together and add transitions between different ideas.

While researching your topic and outlining your main points, think about visual aids that may help the presentation.

Also start thinking about how much time you have for the presentation, but don't limit yourself yet in the outline stage.

Step 3: Draft and Revise the Presentation

Unless required by the assignment, you don't need to actually write out the presentation in full sentences and paragraphs. How much you write depends on your own learning and speaking style. Some students speak well from brief phrases written in an outline, while other students find it easier to write sentences out completely. There's nothing wrong with writing the presentation fully like a script if that helps you be sure you will say what you intend to, just so **you** don't actually get up and read from the script.

You can't know for sure how long a presentation will last until you rehearse it later, but you can estimate the time while drafting it. On the average, it takes two to three minutes to speak what can be written on a standard double-spaced page—but with visual aids, pauses, and audience interaction, it may take longer. While this is only a rough guide, you can start out thinking of a ten-minute presentation as the equivalent of a three to four-page paper.

Never wait until the last minute to draft your presentation. Arrange your time to prepare the first draft and then come back to it a day or two later to ask these questions:

- Am I going on too long about minor points? Could the audience get bored?
- Do I have good explanations and reasons for my main points? Do I need more data or better examples? Where would visual aids be most effective?
- Am I using the best words for this topic and this audience? Should I be more or less informal in the way I talk?
- Does it all hold together and flow well from one point to the next? Do I need a better introduction or transition when I shift from one idea to another?

Kinesthetic learners enjoy hands on classroom experiences. Photo by Joseph Smith

Step 4: Prepare Speaking Notes

As mentioned earlier, your goal is to *deliver* your report. To keep your audience's attention, it's important to make eye contact with them and to use a normal speaking voice—and you can't do this if you keep your eyes on a written script.

Speaking notes are a brief outline for your presentation. You might write them on index cards or sheets of paper. Include important facts and data as well as keywords for your main ideas, but don't write too much. (If you forget things later when you start practicing, you can always add more to your outline then.) Be sure to number your cards or pages to prevent a last-minute mix-up.

Think especially about how to open and close your presentation, because these two moments have the most impact of the whole presentation. Use the opening to capture the audience's attention, but be sure it is appropriate for your audience and the goals. Here are some possibilities for your opening:

- A striking fact or example (illustrating an issue or a problem)
- A brief interesting or humorous anecdote (historical, personal, or current event
- A question to the audience
- An interesting quotation

Then relate the opening to your topic and your main point and move into the body of the presentation.

Your closing mirrors the opening. Transition from your last point to a brief summary that pulls your ideas together. You might end with a challenge to the audience, a strong statement about your topic, or a personal reflection on what you have been saying. Just make sure you have a final sentence planned so that you don't end up uncomfortably fumbling around at the end and say: "Well, I guess that ends my presentation."

Step 5: Practice the Presentation

Practice may be the most important step. It is also the best way to get over stage fright and gain confidence.

Practice first in an empty room where you imagine people sitting, so that you can move your eyes around the room to this "audience." The first time through, focus on putting your outlined notes into full sentences in your natural speaking voice. Don't read your notes aloud. Glance down at your notes only briefly and then look up immediately around the room. Practice two or three times just to find the right words to explain your points and feel more comfortable working with your notes. Time yourself, but don't obsess over your presentation being the exact length required. If your presentation is much too long, however, adjust it now in your notes so that you don't start memorizing things that you might accidentally still say later on even though you cut them from your notes.

Once you feel good speaking from your notes, practice to add some more polish to your delivery. You might want to record or videotape your presentation or ask a friend or roommate to watch your presentation. Pay attention to these aspects of how you speak:

- Try to speak in your natural voice, but not in a monotone as if you were just reading aloud. If you will be presenting in a large room without a microphone, you will need to speak louder than usual, but still try to use a natural voice.
- In usual conversation, we speed up and slow down and vary the intensity of our words to show how we feel about what we're saying. Practice changes in your delivery style to emphasize key points.
- Don't keep looking at your notes. It's fine if you use words that are different from those you wrote down—the more you rehearse without looking at your notes, the more natural sounding you will be.
- Be sure you can pronounce all new words and technical terms correctly. Practice saying them slowly and clearly to yourself until you can say them naturally.

- Don't forget transitions. Listeners need a cue when you're moving to a new idea. Practice phrases such as "*Another* important reason for this is…" or "Now let's move on to *why* this is so…."
- Watch out for all those little "filler" words people use so often, such as "like," "you know," "well," and "uh." They're very distracting to most audiences. Listen to or watch your tape to see if you are using these fillers or ask your friend to point it out.
- Pay attention to body language when practicing. Stand up straight and tall in every practice session so that you become used to it. Unless you have to stand at a podium to use a fixed microphone in your presentation, practice moving around while you speak; this helps keep the audience watching you. Use hand and arm gestures if they are natural for you, but don't try to make up gestures for the presentation because they will look phony. Most important, keep your eyes moving over the audience. Practice smiling and pausing at key points.
- Finally, it's a good idea to be ready in case of an accident. Most likely your presentation will go smoothly, you'll stay on track with your notes, and your PowerPoint slides will work fine, but sometimes a mishap happens. Be ready to joke about it, rather than becoming flustered. If the computer fails and you lose your visuals, say something like, "Well, that's a shame, I had some really great photos to show you!" If you drop your index cards or notes, or accidentally skip ahead in your presentation and then have to backtrack, make a joke: "Sorry about that, I was so excited to get to my next point that I'm afraid I lost control there for a moment!" Let your audience laugh with you—they'll still be on your side, and you can defuse the incident and move on without becoming more nervous.

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Step 6: Deliver the Presentation

Be sure to get enough sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. Don't drink too much caffeine or else you'll become hyper and nervous. Wear your favorite—and appropriate—clothing and comfortable shoes.

Remember, your audience is on your side! If you're still nervous before your turn, take a few deep breaths. Rehearse your opening lines in your mind. Smile as you move to the front of the room, looking at your audience. You'll see some friendly faces smiling back encouragingly. As you start the presentation, move your eyes among those giving you a warm reception—and if you see some students looking bored or doing something else, just ignore them. But don't focus on any one person in the audience for too long, which could make that person nervous or cause him or her to look away.

Don't keep looking at your watch or a clock: If your rehearsal times were close to your assigned time, your presentation will be also. If you do notice that you're running behind schedule, it may be that you're saying too much out of nervousness. Use your notes to get back on track and keep the pace moving. But it's better to deliver your presentation naturally and fluidly and be a bit long or short than to try to change your words and end up sounding unnatural.

At the closing, deliver your last line with confidence, sweeping your eyes over the audience. If appropriate, ask if there are any questions. When you're done, pause, smile, say "Thank you," and walk back to your seat.

Later on, ask other students and your instructor for comments. Be open minded—don't just ask for praise. If you hear a suggestion for improvement, file that in your memory for next time.

Guidelines for Group Presentations in College

You may be assigned to give a presentation in a small group. The six-step process discussed previously works for group presentations, too, although group dynamics often call for additional planning and shared responsibilities:

- Schedule a group meeting as soon as possible to get started. Don't let another student put things off.
- Begin by analyzing your audience and your goals together as a group to make sure everyone understands the assignment the same. Discuss who should do what. Everyone will take on specialized roles. One or more may begin research and gathering information. Others who are good writers may volunteer to draft the presentation, while one or more others may develop the visual aids. Those who have public speaking experience may volunteer to do all or most of the speaking (unless the assignment requires everyone to have a speaking role). You also need a team leader to keep everyone on schedule, organize meetings, and so on. The best team leader is an even-tempered student with good social skills, who can motivate everyone to cooperate.
- Steps 2 and 3 (page 43-44) can likely be carried out individually with assigned tasks, but group members should stay in touch to be sure all is moving as planned.
- Before preparing notes in step 4, meet again to go over the content and plan for visuals. Everyone should be comfortable with the plan so far.
- Make final decisions about who will do each section of the presentation. Set the time for each segment. Then speakers should prepare their own speaking notes. Let someone with strong speaking skills open or close the presentation (or both), with others doing the other parts.
- The whole group should be present for practice sessions in step 5, even if not everyone is speaking. Those not speaking should take notes and give feedback. If one student is doing most of the presenting, an alternate should be chosen in case the first choice is sick on the scheduled day. The alternate also needs to practice.
- During the delivery, especially if using technology for visual aids, one student should manage the visuals while others do the presenting. If several students present different segments, plan the transition from one to another so that the presentation keeps flowing without pauses.

Student deep in thought, studying in the Magnolia Library. Photo by Joseph Smith

2.5 Chapter Takeaways

- Actively engaging in your college education is essential for success, including attending classes, participating, and communicating with your instructors.
- Students benefit in several important ways when they participate in class and feel free to ask questions.
- Successful participation in class and interaction with your instructor begin with fully preparing for class and working on communication skills.
- Networking with instructors has additional benefits for your future and may lead to finding a helpful mentor.
- Both impromptu speaking in class and more formal class presentations help develop key skills.
- Learning to work well in a group is an element of college success.

Outside the Book

Choose your current class with the largest enrollment and decide to ask the instructor a question in the next class or during office hours. Prepare by carefully reviewing your class and reading notes and select a subject area that you do not feel confident you fully understand. Focus in on a specific topic and write down a question whose answer would help you better understand the topic. Go to class prepared to ask that question if it is relevant to the day's discussion or lecture; if it is not relevant, visit your instructor during office hours and ask the question. If this is your first time talking with this instructor, remember to introduce yourself and explain your interest in the topic as you ask the question. Remember that your second goal is to begin establishing a relationship with this instructor.

Chapter 3: Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering

As you embark on your college career, you have found yourself in an environment like no other. You soon will discover the new social structure, you may be invigorated by a new freedom, and you may be daunted by the number of options you have for activities. We cover these nonacademic aspects of college life starting in Chapter 9 "The Social World of College". But for now, consider some of the differences between college classes and what you likely were used to in high school. These differences are important because they demand you change your behavior if you want to be a successful student.

Table 3.1 Differences between High School and College Classes

In High School	Your teacher would guide you and let you know when you were falling behind.
In College	You are expected to take responsibility for your academic success.
In High School	Your teacher prepared and submitted attendance reports; the teacher provided make-up work for the material you missed.
In College	Your instructor rarely takes attendance but expects you to be in class and understand the material.
In High School	Your teacher typically reminded you to complete assignments.
In College	It is up to you to read, save, and follow the course syllabus and to know what material you must read and understand and by when; instructors will rarely remind you of assignment due dates.
In High School	Each class would typically meet three to five times each week with minimal homework each night.
In College	Class often meets less frequently but requires much more work from each student. Studying for two to three hours for each hour of class is often needed to avoid falling behind. In college it is much harder to catch up if you do get behind.
In High School	High school teachers are passionate about guiding their students and teaching them to learn.
In College	College instructors are often more passionate about their subject matter than they are about their teaching. But you can tap into their passion for what they are talking about and guide your own learning by asking questions, seeking advice during office hours, and participating in class discussions.
In High School	Daily homework assignments and unit quizzes contributed heavily to your grade. Extra credit opportunities to give students a chance to make up for lapses along the way are routine.
In College	Your grade in a course may be determined primarily by one or two exams and a long-term project or paper. A subpar performance on a single exam or paper can really drag your grades down. In college, most instructors do **NOT** provide extra credit!!
In High School	You were told what you should study and when. You followed a predetermined curriculum set by state and local officials.
In College	You determine what you want to learn. It is your education—not someone else's. Find your passion and follow it! You will be a much better student if you do.

Your CSSK Instructor will, for a time, attempt to bridge the gap between how you worked with high school teachers to prepare you for the full college experience. Your other college instructors will likely expect more from you from the first day of class!

3.1 Setting Yourself Up for Success

Too many students try to get the grade just by going to class, maybe a little note taking, and then cramming through the text right before an exam they feel unprepared for. Sound familiar? This approach may have worked for you in high school where tests and quizzes were more frequent and teachers prepared study guides for you, but colleges require **you** to take responsibility for your learning and to be better prepared.

Most students simply have not learned how to study and don't understand how learning works. As we discussed in Chapter 1 "You and Your College Experience", learning is actually a cycle of four steps: preparing, absorbing, capturing, and reviewing. When you get in the habit of paying attention to this cycle, it becomes relatively easy to study well. But you must use all four steps.

This chapter focuses on listening, a key skill for learning new material, and note taking, the most important skill in the capturing phase of the cycle. These skills are closely related. Good listening skills make you a better note taker, and taking good notes can help you listen better. Both are key study skills to help you do better in your classes.

Principles of Active Listening

- Give the speaker your undivided attention. Your goal is to understand.
- Repeat what you just heard to confirm.
- Ask questions, and don't assume!
- Read the speaker's body language and other non-verbal cues like tone of voice. Confirm what you "hear," say for example, "You seem very excited about this."
- Listen for requests. Sometimes a speaker will hide a request as a problem. A friend may say, "I hate math," but may mean, "Can you help me figure out a solution to this problem?"

3.2 Are You Ready for Class?

A professional athlete wouldn't take the field without warming up first. An effective student won't go to a class without preparing for it first. To get the most out of a class, you need to get yourself in the right frame of mind. This does not take a lot of time, but it greatly increases your ability to listen actively and take good notes.

Like a good athlete, first you need to get psyched. Clearly visualize your goals. Thinking about the following questions may help:

- What do I want to get out of the class?
- What is the main idea the class will cover?
- How will today's class help me do better in this course?

Go to class with confidence. The best way to achieve this is to start early and be sure you've completed any assignment the instructor gave you in the last class. Think about how today's material will tie into what you've already learned. You should also review the course syllabus to see what the instructor expects to cover in the class and how it relates to what you have learned so far. Be physically prepared, too:

- Make sure you are getting enough sleep and eating nutritious meals, including breakfast. It's hard to focus on learning when you're hungry.
- Make sure you have all materials you'll need for class (paper, pens, laptop, books, etc.).
- Be punctual. Give yourself plenty of time to get into your seat and organize your space. If you are late, you'll struggle to get into the right mind-set for listening, and you won't feel in control of your learning as you try to catch up with the class. If you're tardy, you also create a distraction for your classmates—and the instructor, who will take notice!
- Clear away all other distractions before the instructor starts. Remember that putting your cell phone on "vibrate" may still distract you—so turn it off, all the way off.
- Then take a deep breath, focus on the instructor, listen, and learn!

3.3 Are You Really Listening?

Are you a good listener? Most of us like to think we are, but when we really think about it, we recognize that we are often only half listening. We're distracted, thinking about other things, or formulating what

we are going to say in reaction to what we are hearing before the speaker has even finished. Effective listening is one of the most important learning tools you can have in college. And it is a skill that will benefit you on the job and help your relationships with others. Listening is purposefully focusing on what a speaker is saying with the objective of understanding.

This definition is straightforward, but there are some important concepts that deserve a closer look. "Purposefully focusing" implies that you are actively processing what the speaker is saying, not is just letting the sounds of his or her voice register in your senses. "With the objective of understanding" means that you will learn enough about what the speaker is saying to be able to form your own thoughts about the speaker's message. Listening is an active process, as opposed to hearing, which is passive.

You listen to others in many situations: to interact with friends, to get instructions for a task, or to learn new material. There are two general types of listening situations: where you will be able to interact freely with the speaker (everyday conversations, small discussion classes, business meetings) and where interaction is limited (lectures and Webcasts).

In interactive situations, you should apply the basic principles of active listening (See "Principles of Active Listening" in the sidebar). These are not hard to understand, but they can be are hard to implement and require practice to use them effectively.

Listening in a classroom or lecture hall to learn can be challenging because you are limited by how—and how much—you can interact with an instructor during the class. The following strategies help make listening at lectures more effective and learning more fun.

1. **Get yourself in the right space.** Sit toward the front of the room where you can make eye contact with the instructor easily. Most instructors read the body language of the students in the front rows to gauge how they are doing and if they are losing the class. Instructors often believe students who sit near the front of the room take their subject more seriously and are more willing to give them help when needed or to give them the benefit of the doubt when making a judgment call while assigning grades.

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2. **Focus on what is being said.** Eliminate distractions. If you are using your laptop for notes, close all applications except the one that you use to take notes. Clear your mind and keep quiet. Listen for new ideas. Think like an investigative reporter: you don't just want to accept what is being said passively—you want to question the material and be convinced that it makes sense.

3. **Look for signals.** Each instructor has a different way of telling you what is important. Some will repeat or paraphrase an idea; others will raise (or lower) their voices; still others will write related words on the board. Learn what signals your instructors tend to use and be on the lookout for them. When they use that tactic, the idea they are presenting needs to go in your notes and in your mind—and don't be surprised if it appears on a test or quiz!

4. **Listen for what is <u>not</u> being said.** If an instructor doesn't cover a subject, or covers it only minimally, this may signal that that material is not as important as other ideas covered in greater length.

5. **Sort the information.** Decide what is important and what is not, what is clear and what is confusing, and what is new material for you and what is review. This mental organizing will help you remember the information, take better notes, and ask better questions.

6. **Take notes.** We cover taking notes in much greater detail later in this chapter, but for now think about how taking notes can help recall what your instructor said and how notes can help you organize your thoughts for asking questions.
7. **Ask questions.** Asking questions is one of the most important things you can do in class. Most obviously it allows you to clear up any doubts you may have about the material, but it also helps you take ownership of (and therefore remember) the material. Good questions often help instructors expand upon their ideas and make the material more relevant to students. Thinking through the material critically in order to prepare your questions helps you organize your new knowledge and sort it into mental categories that will help you remember it.

A note about tape-recording lectures: You may want to record a lecture to double-check what you heard in class, but it's usually not a good idea. Depending on a recording may lead you to listen less effectively and think less actively. Additionally, some instructors do not allow students to record their lectures, so discuss your interest with your instructor and DO NOT record anyone without their knowledge AND permission.

3.4 Got Notes?

Everybody takes notes, or at least everybody claims to. But if you take a close look, many who are claiming to take notes on their laptops are actually surfing the Web, and paper notebooks are filled with doodles interrupted by a couple of random words with an asterisk next to them reminding you that "This is important!" In college, these approaches will not work. In college, your instructors expect *you* to make connections between class lectures and reading assignments; they expect *you* to create an opinion about the material presented; they expect *you* to make connections between the material and life beyond college. Your notes are your road maps for these thoughts. Do you take good notes? After learning to listen, note taking is the most important skill to ensure your success in a class.

Effective note taking is important because it

- supports your listening efforts,
- allows you to test your understanding of the material,
- helps you remember the material better when you write key ideas down,
- gives you a sense of what the instructor thinks is important,
- creates your "ultimate study guide."

Special Listening Challenges

If your instructor speaks TOO FAST… Read the chapter **before** the lecture to be better prepared. Exchange notes with other students to fill in gaps. You can talk to the instructor, very politely, but habits like fast talking are hard to break!

If your instructor has a HEAVY ACCENT… Sit as close to the front of the room as possible to help you hear better. Think about what the instructor seems to be saying and what is being presented visually. Visit the instructor during office hours. The more you speak with the instructor, you more likely you will get accustomed to the accent and better understand.

If your instructor speaks SOFTLY OR MUMBLES … Sitting closer to the front is obvious, but try to hold eye contact as much as possible. You will convey that you are paying attention, so that when you ask questions, your instructor will know that you were not daydreaming during the lecture. Ask other students if they are having trouble. If it has been a while, since your hearing was last tested, you could also consider a hearing test, especially if this seems to be happening in other classes, too.

There are various forms of taking notes, and which one you choose depends on both your personal style and the instructor's approach to the material. Each can be used in a notebook, on index cards, or in a digital form on your laptop. No specific type is good for all students and all situations, so we recommend that you develop your own style, but you should also be ready to modify it to fit the needs of a specific class or instructor. To be effective, all of these methods require you to listen actively and to think; merely jotting down words the instructor is saying will be of little use to you.

Table 3.2 Note-Taking Methods

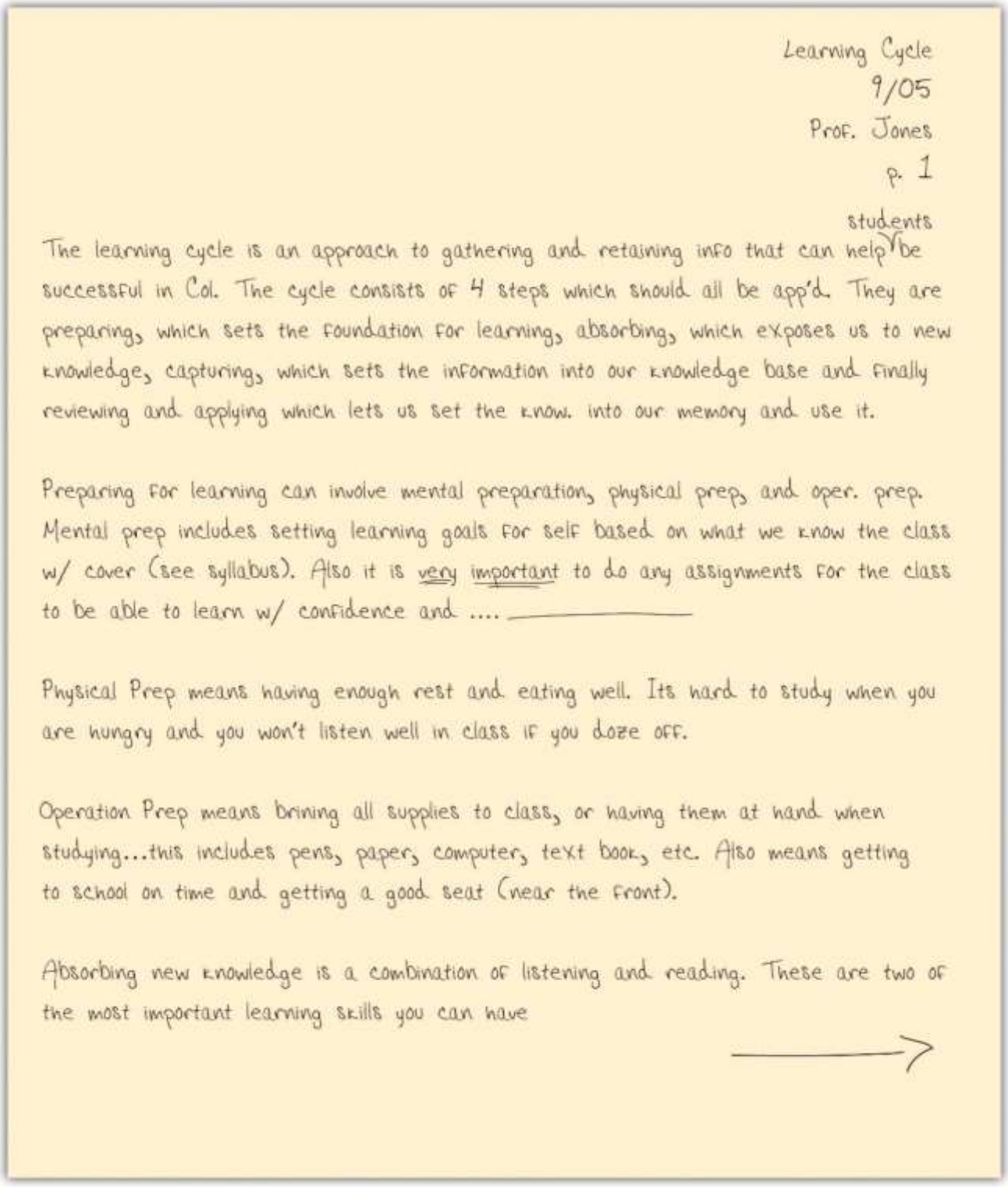
Method	Description	When to Use
Lists	A sequential listing of ideas as they are presented. Lists may be short phrases or complete paragraphs describing ideas in more detail.	This method typically requires a lot of writing, and you may find that you are not keeping up with the professor. It is not easy for students to prioritize ideas in this method.
Outlines	The outline method places most important ideas along the left margin, which are numbered with Roman numerals. Supporting ideas to these main concepts are indented and are noted with capital letters. Under each of these ideas, further detail can be added, designated with an Arabic number, a lowercase letter, or even a bullet point!	This is a good method to use when material presented by the instructor is well organized. It is also easy to use when taking notes on your computer.
Concept Maps	When designing a concept map, place a central idea in the center of the page and then add lines and new circles in the page for new ideas. Use arrows and lines to connect the various ideas.	This is a great method to show relationships among ideas. It is also good if the instructor tends to hop from one idea to another and back.
Cornell Method	The Cornell method uses a two-column approach. The left column takes up no more than a third of the page and is often referred to as the "cue" or "recall" column. The right column (about two-thirds of the page) is used for taking notes using any of the methods described above or a combination of them. After class or completing the reading, review your notes and write the key ideas and concepts or questions in the left column. You may also include a summary box at the bottom of the page, in which to write a summary of the class or reading in your own words.	The Cornell method can include any of the methods above and provides a useful format for calling out key concepts, prioritizing ideas, and organizing review work. Most colleges recommend using some form of the Cornell method.

The List Method

The list method is usually **not** the best choice because it is focused exclusively on capturing as much of what the instructor says as possible, not on processing the information. Most students who have not learned effective study skills use this method, because it's easy to think that this is what note taking is all about. Even

if you are skilled in some form of shorthand, you should probably also learn one of the other methods described here, because they are all better at helping you process and remember the material. You may want to take notes in class using the list method, but transcribe your notes to an outline or concept map method after class as a part of your review process. It is always important to review your notes as soon as possible after class and write a summary of the class in your own words.

Figure 3.3 The List Method of Note Taking



Learning Cycle
9/05
Prof. Jones
p. 1

The learning cycle is an approach to gathering and retaining info that can help students be successful in Col. The cycle consists of 4 steps which should all be app'd. They are preparing, which sets the foundation for learning, absorbing, which exposes us to new knowledge, capturing, which sets the information into our knowledge base and finally reviewing and applying which lets us set the know. into our memory and use it.

Preparing for learning can involve mental preparation, physical prep, and oper. prep. Mental prep includes setting learning goals for self based on what we know the class w/ cover (see syllabus). Also it is very important to do any assignments for the class to be able to learn w/ confidence and ....

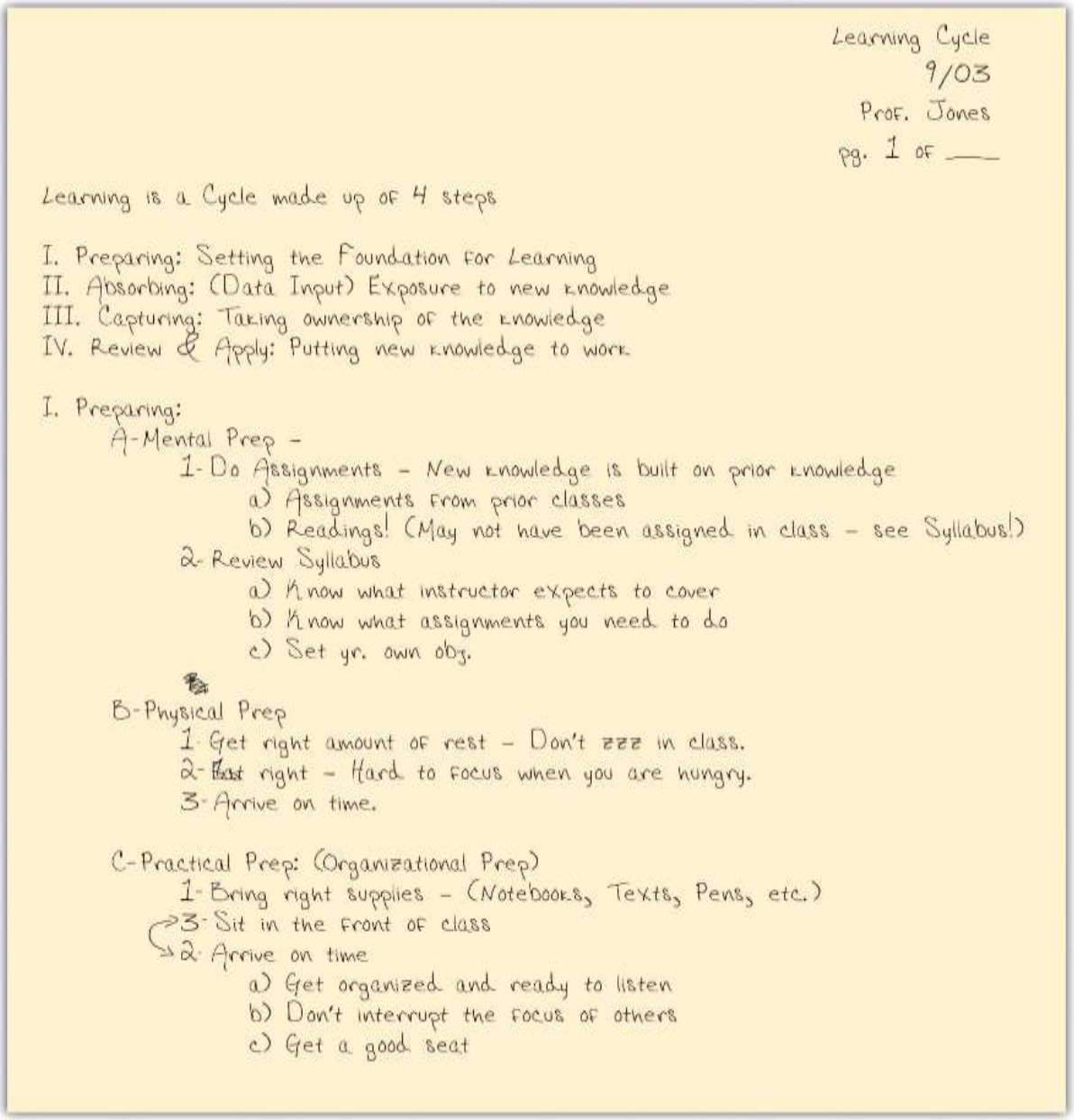
Physical Prep means having enough rest and eating well. Its hard to study when you are hungry and you won't listen well in class if you doze off.

Operation Prep means bringing all supplies to class, or having them at hand when studying...this includes pens, paper, computer, text book, etc. Also means getting to school on time and getting a good seat (near the front).

Absorbing new knowledge is a combination of listening and reading. These are two of the most important learning skills you can have

The Outline Method

Figure 3.4 The Outline Method of Note Taking



The advantage of the outline method is that it allows you to **prioritize** the material. Key ideas are written to the left of the page, subordinate ideas are then indented, and details of the subordinate ideas can be indented further. To further organize your ideas, you can use the typical outlining numbering scheme (starting with Roman numerals for key ideas, moving to capital letters on the first subordinate level, Arabic numbers for the next level, and lowercase letters following.) At first you may have trouble identifying when the instructor moves from one idea to another. This takes practice and experience with each instructor, so don't give up! In the early stages you should use your syllabus to determine what key ideas the instructor plans to present. Your reading assignments before class can also give you guidance in identifying the key ideas.

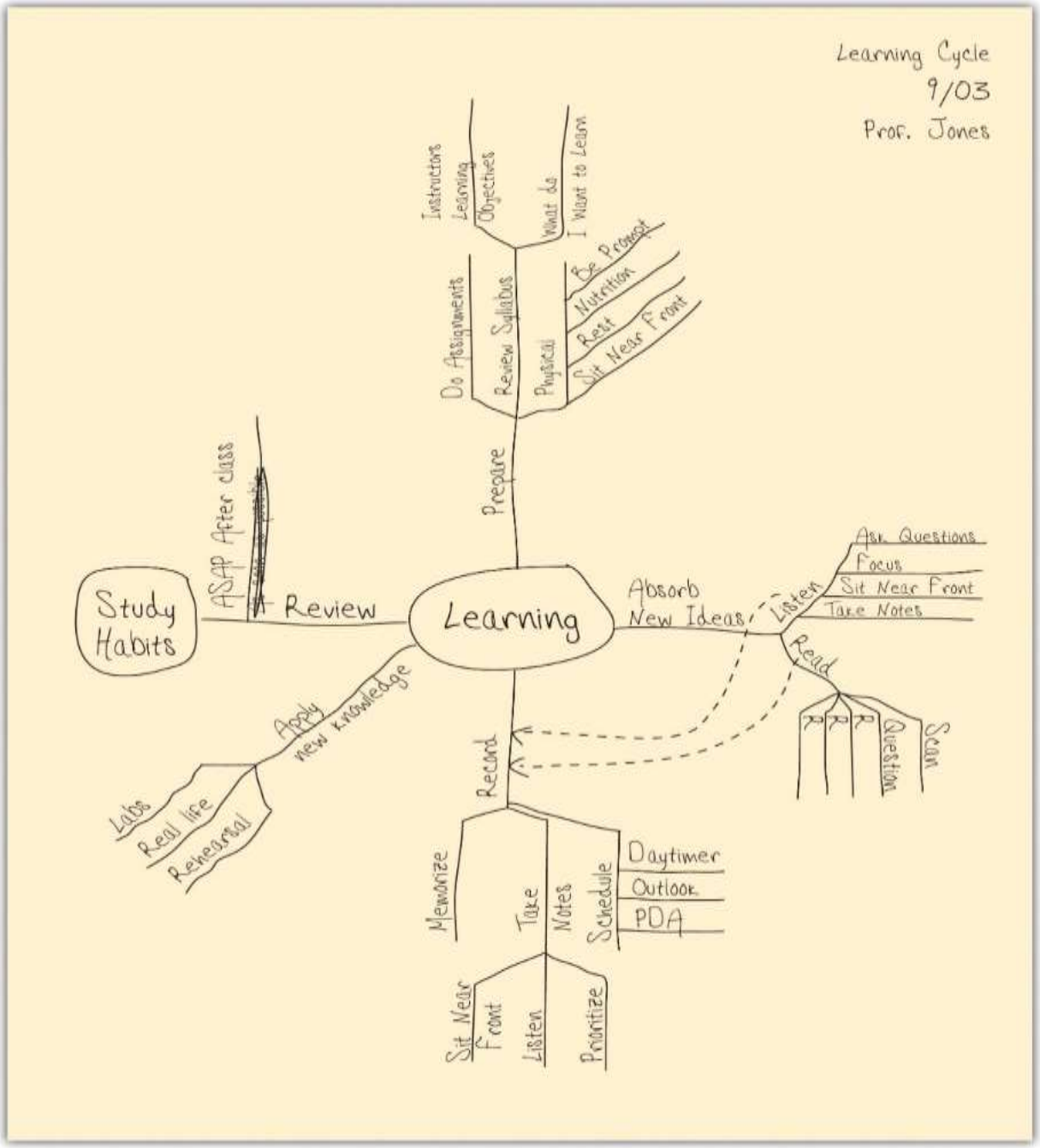
If you're using your laptop computer for taking notes, a basic word processing application is very effective. Format your document by selecting the outline format from the format bullets menu. Use the increase

or decrease indent buttons to navigate the level of importance you want to give each item. The software will take care of the numbering for you!

After class be sure to review your notes and then summarize the class in one or two short paragraphs using your own words. This summary will significantly affect your recall and will help you prepare for the next class.

The Concept Map Method

Figure 3.5 The Concept Map Method of Note Taking



This is a very graphic method of note-taking that is especially good at capturing the relationships among ideas. Concept maps harness your visual sense to understand complex material “at a glance.” They

also give you the flexibility to move from one idea to another and back easily (so they are helpful if your instructor moves freely through the material).

To develop a concept map, start by using your syllabus to rank the ideas you will listen to by level of detail (from high-level or abstract ideas to detailed facts). Select an overriding idea (high level or abstract) from the instructor's lecture and place it in a circle in the middle of the page. Then create branches off that circle to record the more detailed information, creating additional limbs as you need them. Arrange the branches with others that interrelate closely. When a new high-level idea is presented, create a new circle with its own branches. Link together circles or concepts that are related. Use arrows and symbols to capture the relationship between the ideas. For example, an arrow may be used to illustrate cause or effect, a double-pointed arrow to illustrate dependence, or a dotted arrow to illustrate impact or effect.

As with all note-taking methods, you should summarize the chart in one or two paragraphs of your own words after class.

Using Index Cards for the Cornell Method

Some students like to use index cards to take notes. They actually lend themselves quite well to the Cornell method. Use the "back" or lined side of the card to write your notes in class. Use one card per key concept. The "front" unlined side of the card replaces the left hand "cue" column. Use it after class to write keywords, comments, or questions. When you study, the cards become flash cards with questions on one side and answers on the other. Write a summary of the class on a separate card and place it on the top of the deck as an introduction to what was covered in the class.

The Cornell Method

The Cornell method was developed in the 1950s by Professor Walter Pauk at Cornell University. It is recommended by most colleges because of its usefulness and flexibility. This method is simple to use for capturing notes, is helpful for defining priorities, and is a very helpful study tool.

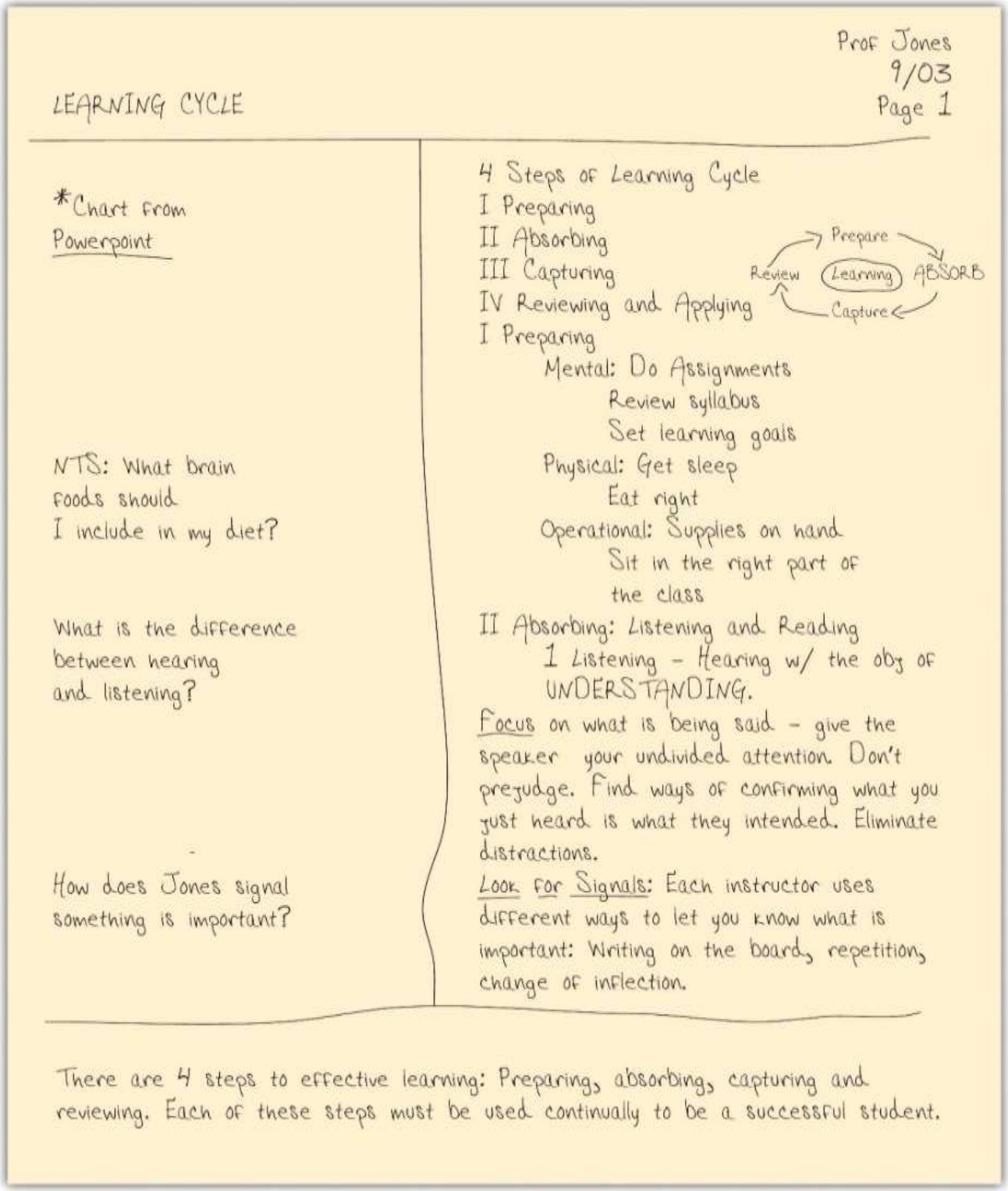
The Cornell method follows a very specific format that consists of four boxes: a header, two columns, and a footer.

The header is a small box across the top of the page. In it you write identification information like the course name and the date of the class. Underneath the header are two columns: a narrow one on the left (no more than one-third of the page) and a wide one on the right. The wide column, called the "notes" column, takes up most of the page and is used to capture your notes using any of the methods outlined earlier. The left column, known as the "cue" or "recall" column, is used to jot down main ideas, keywords, questions, clarifications, and other notes. It should be used both during the class and when reviewing your notes after class. Finally, use the box in the footer to write a summary of the class in your own words. This will help you make sense of your notes in the future and is a valuable tool to aid with recall and studying.

Said a student from the Southern Methodist University: "I used to tape my lecture classes so I could fill in my sketchy notes afterward. Now that I'm using the Cornell system, my notes are complete and organized in much less time. And my regular five-minute reviews make learning almost painless. No more taping and listening twice."

You may have noticed that all methods end with the same step: reviewing your notes as soon as possible after class. Any review of your notes is helpful (reading them, copying them into your computer, or even recasting them using another note-taking method). But THINK! Make your review of notes a thoughtful activity, not a mindless process. When you review your notes, think about questions you still have and determine how you will get the answers. (From the next class? Studying with a friend? Looking up material in your text or on the internet?) Examine how the material applies to the course; make connections with notes from other class sessions with materials in your text, notes from other class sessions, with materials in your text, and with

Figure 3.6 The Cornell Method of Note Taking



concepts covered in class discussions. Finally, it's fun to think about how the material in your notes applies to real life. Consider this both at the very strategic level (as in "What does this material mean to me in relation to what I want to do with my life?") as well as at a very mundane level (as in "Is there anything cool here I can work into a conversation with my friends?").

Instructor Handouts

Some instructors hand out or post their notes or their PowerPoint slides from their lectures. These handouts should *never* be considered a substitute for taking notes in class. They are a very useful complement and will help you confirm the accuracy of your notes, but they do not involve you in the process of learning as well as your own notes do. After class, review your notes with highlighter in hand and mark keywords and ideas in your notes. This will help you write the summary of the class in your own words.

General Tips on Note Taking

Regardless of what note-taking method you choose, there are some note-taking habits you should get into for all circumstances and all courses:

1. **Be prepared.** Make sure you have the tools you need to do the job. If you are using a notebook, be sure you have it with you and that you have enough paper. Also be sure to have your pen (as well as a spare) and perhaps a pen with different colored ink to use for emphasis. If you are taking notes on your laptop, make sure the battery is charged! Select the application that lends itself best to your style of note taking. Microsoft Word works very well for outline notes, but you might find taking notes in Excel to work best if you are working within the Cornell method. (It's easier to align your thoughts in the cue or recall column to your notes in the right column. Just be sure you keep one idea per row!)
2. **Write on only one side of the paper.** This will allow you to integrate your reading notes with your class notes.
3. **Label, number, and date all notes at the top of each page.** This will help you keep organized.
4. **When using a laptop, position it such that you can see the instructor AND white board right over your screen.** This will keep the instructor in your field of vision even if you have to glance at your screen or keyboard from time to time. Make sure your focus remains with the instructor and not on your laptop. A word of caution about laptops for note taking: use them if you are very adept at keyboarding, but remember that not all note-taking methods work well on laptops because they do not easily allow you to draw diagrams and use special notations (scientific and math formulas, for example).
5. **Don't try to capture everything that is said.** Listen for the big ideas and write them down. Make sure you can recognize the instructor's emphasis cues and write down all ideas and keywords the instructor emphasizes. Listen for clues like "the four causes were…" or "to sum up…."
6. **Copy anything the instructor writes on the board.** It's likely to be important.
7. **Leave space between ideas.** This allows you to add additional notes later (e.g., notes on the answer to a question you or one of your classmates asked).
8. **Use signals and abbreviations.** Which ones you use is up to you, but be consistent so you will know exactly what you mean by "att." when you review your notes. You may find it useful to keep a key to your abbreviations in all your notebooks.
9. **Use some method for identifying your own thoughts and questions to keep them separate from what the instructor or textbook author is saying.** Some students use different color ink; others box or underline their own thoughts. Do whatever works for you.
10. **Create a symbol to use when you fall behind** or get lost in your note taking. Jot down the symbol, leave some space, and focus on what the instructor is covering now. Later you can ask a classmate or the professor to help you fill in what you missed, or you can find it in your textbook.
11. **Review your notes as soon after class as possible (the same day is best).** *This is the secret to making your notes work!* Use the recall column to call out the key ideas and organize facts. Fill in any gaps in your notes and clean up or redraw hastily drawn diagrams.
12. **Write a summary of the main ideas of the class in your own words.** This process is a great aid to recall. Be sure to include any conclusions from the lecture or discussion.

What If You Miss Class?

Clearly the best way to learn class material is to be at the class and to take your own notes. In college, regular attendance is expected. But life happens. On occasion, you may have to miss a class or lecture. When this happens, here are some strategies you can use to make up for it:

- Check with the instructor to see if there is another section of the class you can attend. Never ask the instructor "Did I miss anything important?" (Think about what that's saying and you'll see it's rather insulting.)
- If the instructor posts his or her lectures as a podcast, listen to the lecture online and take notes. If the instructor uses PowerPoint slides, request a copy (or download them if posted) and review them carefully, jotting down your own notes and questions. Review your notes with a classmate who did attend.
- You may want to borrow class notes from a classmate. If you do, don't just copy them and insert them in your notebook. They will not be very helpful. When you borrow notes from a classmate, you should take a picture or photocopy them and then review them carefully and mark your copy with your own notes and questions. Use your textbook to try to fill in the gaps. Finally, schedule a study session with the person who gave you the notes to review the material and confirm your understanding. (See studying with others in Chapter 8 "Preparing for and Taking Tests," page 113)
- If none of these options is available for you, use the course syllabus to determine what was covered in the class, then write a short paper (two pages or so) on the material using the class readings and reliable online sources. See your instructor during office hours to review your key findings and to answer any questions you still may have.

Keeping Your Notes

Class is over, and you have a beautiful set of notes in your spiral notebook or saved in your laptop. You have written the summary of the class in your own words. Now what?

Start by organizing your notes. We recommend you use a three-ring binder for each of your subjects. Print your notes if you used a computer. If you used note cards, insert them in plastic photo holders for binders. Group all notes from a class or unit together in a section; this includes class notes, reading notes, and instructor handouts. You might also want to copy the instructor's syllabus for the unit on the first page of the section.

Next, spend some time linking the information across the various notes. Use the recall column in your notes to link to related information in other notes (e.g., "See class notes date/page.").

If you have had a quiz or test on the unit, add it to your binder, too, but be sure to write out the correct answer for any item you missed. Link those corrections to your notes, too.

Use this opportunity to write "notes on your notes." Review your summary to see if it is still is valid in light of your notes on the reading and any handouts you may have added to your notes package.

You don't need to become a pack rat with your notes. It is fairly safe to toss them after the end of a course except in the following cases:

1. If the course you took is a prerequisite for another course, or when the course is part of a standard progression of courses that build upon each other (this is very common in math and science courses), you should keep them as a reference and review for the follow-up course.
2. If the course may pertain to your future major, keep your notes. You may not realize it now that they may have future value when you study similar topics or even the same topics in more depth.
3. If you are very interested in the course subject and would like to get into the material through a more advanced course, independent study, or even research, keep your notes as a prep tool for further work.

3.5 Remembering Course Materials

Up to now we have covered how to capture material in your notes. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to strategies for recording ideas and facts in your memory.

The Role of Memorization in Learning

Have you ever gone into an exam you have studied for and drawn a blank on a particular question? Have you ever walked into a room only to forget for a moment why you went there? Have you ever forgotten where you left your keys? How about finding yourself in a conversation with someone whose name you can't remember? The fact is, memory fails everyone from time to time. It is not surprising that students, with a huge amount of information they must commit to memory (not to mention frequent distractions and interruptions), are often frustrated by their memory.

Let's start by taking some of the pressure off you. You will not be required to memorize everything your instructor says in a class—nor should you try to. There is way too much to capture. People speak at a rate of 100 to 150 words per minute. An average 50-minute lecture may contain around 7,500 words. By listening effectively and taking notes, your job is to distill the main ideas and a few keywords. *These* are the things you should choose to memorize.

In your early and high school education, memorization was a key aspect of learning. You memorized multiplication tables, the names of the states, and vocabulary words. Memorized facts ensured your success on multiple-choice questions. In college, however, most of your work is focused on **understanding the material in depth**. Remembering the year of the 9/11 attack (2001) is far less important than grasping the impact of that attack on American foreign policy. Understanding themes and ideas and being able to think critically about them is really the key to your success in college learning. For more on critical thinking skills, see Chapter 5 "Thinking about Thought," which starts on page 80. Although memorization is not the primary key to success, having a good memory is important to capture ideas in your mind, and it helps tremendously in certain subjects like sciences and foreign languages.

How Memory Works

Memory is the process of storing and retrieving information. Think of a computer. In many ways it is an electronic model of the human memory. A computer stores, retrieves, and processes information similarly to how the human mind does. Like the human version, there are two types of memory: short-term or active memory (RAM in the computer) and long-term or passive memory (the computer's hard drive). As its name suggests, short-term or active memory is made up of the information we are processing at any given time. Short-term memory involves information being captured at the moment (such as listening in class) as well as from information retrieved from our passive memory for doing complex mental tasks (such as thinking critically and drawing conclusions). But short-term memory is limited and suffers from the passing of time and lack of use. We begin to forget data within thirty seconds of not using it, and interruptions (such as phone calls or distractions) require us to rebuild the short-term memory structure—to get "back on task." Learn more about multitasking in Chapter 4 "Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track," on beginning on page70 us a discussion on the down side of multitasking titled "The Distractions of Technology.". To keep information in our memory, we must either use it or place it into our long-term memory (much like saving a document on your computer).

How we save information to our long-term memory has a lot to do with our ability to retrieve it when we need it at a later date. Our mind "saves" information by creating a complex series of links to the data. The stronger the links, the easier it is to recall. You can strengthen these links by using the following strategies. You should note how closely they are tied to good listening and note-taking strategies.

- **Make a deliberate decision to remember the specific data.** "I need to remember Richard's name" creates stronger links than just *wishing* you had a better memory for names.
- **Link the information to your everyday life.** Tell yourself, "It is important to remember this because…"—and fill in the blank.
- **Link the information to other information you already have "stored."** Ask yourself how this is related to other information you have. Look for ways to tie items together.
- **Mentally group similar individual items into "buckets."** This practice will create links in your memory.
- **Use visual imagery.** Picture the concept vividly in your mind. Make those images big, bold, and colorful—even silly! Humor and crazy imagery can help you recall key concepts.
- **Use the information.** Studies have generally shown that we retain only 5 percent of what we hear, 10 percent of what we read, 20 percent of what we learn from multimedia, and 30 percent of what is demonstrated to us, but we do retain 50 percent of what we discuss, 75 percent of what we practice by doing, and 90 percent of what we teach others or use immediately in a relevant activity. Review your notes, participate in class, and study with others.

- **Break information down into manageable "chunks."** Memorizing the ten-digit number "3141592654" seems difficult, but breaking it down into two sets of three digits and one of four digits, like a phone number—(314) 159-2654—now makes it easier to remember.
- **Work from general information to the specific.** People usually learn best when they get the big picture first, and then look at the details.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Every time you have to "reboot" your short-term memory, you risk losing data points. Multitasking—listening to music or chatting on Facebook while you study—can play havoc with your ability to memorize because you will need to re-boot your short-term memory each time you switch mental tasks.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** Hear the information; read the information; say it (yes, out loud), and say it again. The more you use or repeat the information, the stronger the links to it. The more senses you use to process the information, the stronger the memorization. Write information on index cards to make flash cards and use downtime (when waiting in line or during a break between classes) to review key information.

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- **This is a test.** Test your memory often. Try to write down everything you know about a specific subject, from memory. Then go back and check your notes and textbook to see how you did. Practicing retrieval in this way helps ensure long-term learning of facts and concepts.
- **Location, location, location.** There is often a strong connection between information and the place where you first received that information. Associate information to learning locations for stronger memory links. Picture where you were sitting in the lecture hall as you repeat the facts in your mind.

Using Mnemonics

What do the names of the Great Lakes, the makings of a Big Mac, and the number of days in a month have in common? They are easily remembered by using mnemonic devices. Mnemonics (pronounced neh-MA-nicks) are tricks for memorizing lists and data. They create artificial but strong links to the data, making recall easier. The most commonly used mnemonic devices are acronyms, acrostics, rhymes, and jingles.

Acronyms are words or phrases made up by using the first letter of each word in a list or phrase. Need to remember the names of the Great Lakes? Try the acronym HOMES using the first letter of each lake:

Huron
Ontario
Michigan
Erie
Superior

To create an acronym, first write down the first letters of each term you need to memorize. Then rearrange the letters to create a word or words. You can find acronym generators online (just search for "acronym generator") that can help you by offering options. Acronyms work best when your list of letters includes vowels as well as consonants and when the order of the terms is not important. If no vowels are available, or if the list should be learned in a particular order, try using an acrostic instead.

Acrostics are similar to acronyms in that they work off the first letter of each word in a list. But rather than using them to form a word, the letters are represented by entire words in a sentence or phrase. If you've studied music, you may be familiar with "Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge" to learn the names of the notes on the lines of the musical staff: E, G, B, D, F. The ridiculous and therefore memorable line "My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas" was used by many of us to remember the names of the planets (at least until Pluto was downgraded):

My	**M**ercury
Very	**V**enus
Educated	**E**arth
Mother	**M**ars
Just	**J**upiter

Served	**S**aturn
Us	**U**ranus
Nine	**N**eptune
Pizzas	**P**luto

To create an acrostic, list the first letters of the terms to be memorized in the order in which you want to learn them (like the planet names). Then create a sentence or phrase using words that start with those letters.

Rhymes are short verses used to remember data. A common example is "In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Need to remember how many days a given month has? "Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November…," and so forth. Writing rhymes is a talent that can be developed with practice. To start, keep your rhymes short and simple. Define the key information you want to remember and break it down into a series

of short phrases. Look at the last words of the phrases: can you rhyme any of them? If they don't rhyme, can you substitute or add a word to create the rhyme? (For example, in the Columbus rhyme, "ninety-two" does not rhyme with "ocean," but adding the word "blue" completes the rhyme and creates the mnemonic.)

Jingles are phrases set to music, so that the music helps trigger your memory. Jingles are commonly used by advertisers to get you to remember their product or product features. Remember: "Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun"—the original Big Mac commercial. Anytime you add rhythm to the terms you want to memorize, you are activating your auditory sense, and the more senses you use for memorization, the stronger the links to the data you are creating in your mind. To create a jingle for your data, start with a familiar tune and try to create alternate lyrics using the terms you want to memorize. Another approach you may want to try is reading your data aloud in a hip-hop or rap music style.

Mnemonics are good memory aids, but they aren't perfect. They take a lot of effort to develop, and they also take terms out of context because they don't focus on the meaning of the words. Since they lack meaning, they can also be easily forgotten later on, although you may remember them through the course.

3.6 Chapter Takeaways

Listening

- Learning involves following a cycle of preparing, absorbing, recording, and reviewing.
- The most important difference between high school learning and college learning is that colleges expect you to take full responsibility for your learning. Many of the support mechanisms you had in high school do not exist in college.
- Listening takes place in two primary situations: where there can be open interaction with the speaker (social conversation, small group discussions, business meetings, and small classes) and where there is limited interaction with the speaker (lectures, online courses, and podcasts).
- In situations where interaction is allowed, active listening principles work well.
- In lecture situations, additional strategies are required. They include physical preparation, seating for listening, eliminating distractions, thinking critically about the material as it is presented, taking notes, and asking appropriate questions.
- Prepare for listening by completing all assignments for the class and reviewing the syllabus. Ask yourself what you expect to gain from the class and how that ties in to the rest of the course material.
- Think critically about what you are listening to. Do you agree with what the instructor is saying? How does it tie to the rest of the material in the course? What does this new material mean to you in "real" life?

Note Taking

- There are four primary ways of taking notes (lists, outlines, concept maps, and the Cornell method).
- Select the note-taking method that best serves your learning style and the instructor's teaching style. Remember that methods may be combined for maximum effect.
- Completing assignments and reviewing the syllabus can help you define the relative importance of the ideas the instructor presents.
- Don't expect to capture everything the instructor says. Look for keywords and central ideas.
- Anything the instructor writes on the board is likely to be important.
- Review your notes as soon as possible after the class, to annotate, correct, complete, and summarize.

Memory

- The two types of memory are short-term memory, which allows you to apply knowledge to a specific task, and long-term memory, which allows you to store and recall information.
- The brain commits information to long-term memory by creating an intricate system of links to that information. Strength, number, and variety of links all lead to better recall.
- To create strong links, start by making a conscious decision to want to commit something specific to memory. Link the information to real life and other data from the course. Group like information into "buckets" that create links among the terms you want to remember.
- Use the information. The more you use the information, the more you will activate the links in your brain.
- Eliminate distractions. Every time you are diverted from your task, you need to reboot your short-term memory, weakening the links.

Chapter 4: Staying Motivated, Organized, and On Track

Goals and Time Management

Since you're reading this now, you've already set at least one goal for yourself—to get a college education—and that you've been motivated to come this far. You should feel good about that, because lots of people don't make it this far. You're off to a great start!

But did you know that in many colleges in the United States, almost half of first-year College students will not make it to graduation? If you want to be among the students who do succeed, it's important to accept that college is not easy for most students. But we're not trying to scare or depress you! The evidence shows that the huge majority of those who really want to finish college can do so successfully, if they stay motivated and learn how to succeed. That's what this book is all about. But it may take some effort on your part! Succeeding in college involves paying attention to your studies in ways you may not have had to in your former school life.

The two most common reasons why students drop out are financial difficulties and falling behind in studying. While no one is guaranteed to easily find the money needed for college, there are many ways you can cut costs and make it easier to get through. Chapter 10 "Taking Control of Your Finances" has lots of tips for how to make it financially. This chapter looks at the other big issue: how to make sure that you succeed in your courses. The first step is to be committed to your education. You've been motivated to start college—now you need to keep that motivation going as you target specific goals for success in your classes. Much of this has to do with attitude. Success also requires managing your time effectively.

In fact, time management skills can make the difference between those who graduate from college and those who drop out. Time management is actually all about managing yourself: knowing what you want, deciding how to get what you want, and then efficiently and effectively getting it. That applies to fun things, too. In fact, you may want to think of the goal of this chapter as not just managing your time for studying but ensuring that even as you do well in your studies, you're still enjoying your life while in college!

4.1 Setting and Reaching Goals

Some people are goal oriented and seem to easily make decisions that lead to achieving their goals, while others seem just to "go with the flow" and accept what life gives them. While the latter may sound pleasantly relaxed, moving through life without goals may not lead anywhere at all. The fact that you're in college now shows you already have the major goal to complete your college program.

A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions. Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final examination may completely prevent reaching that goal. That's fairly obvious in an extreme case, yet still a lot of college students don't reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have **conflicting** goals. One way to prevent problems is to think about all your goals and priorities and to learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You're also a person with individual needs and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life.

Goals also vary in terms of time. Short-term goals focus on today and the next few days and perhaps weeks. Midterm goals involve plans for this school year and the time you plan to remain in college. Long-term goals may begin with graduating college and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (e.g., the kind of career you want) guide your midterm goals (getting the right education for that career), and your short-term goals (such as doing well on an exam) become steps for reaching those

larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals.

You should literally *write* your goals down, because the act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them. Follow these guidelines:

- **Goals should be specific.** Don't write, "I will become a great musician"; instead, write, "I will finish my music degree and be employed in a symphony orchestra."
- **Goals should have a time frame.** You won't feel very motivated if your goal is vaguely "to finish college someday." If you're realistic and specific in your goals, you should also be able to project a time frame for reaching the goal.
- **Goals should be realistic.** It's good to dream and to challenge yourself, but your goals should relate to your personal strengths and abilities.
- **You should really want to reach the goal.** We're willing to work hard to reach goals we really care about, but we're likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we don't feel strongly about a goal. If you're doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it's not your own personal goal—and you may have some more thinking to do about your life.

An Attitude for Success

What's your attitude *right now*—are you groaning to yourself, thinking, "No, not the attitude thing again!" Or, at the other extreme, maybe you were thinking, "This is great! Now I'm about to learn everything I need to get through college without a problem!" Those are two attitude extremes, one negative and skeptical, the other positive and hopeful. Most students are somewhere in between—but *everyone* has an attitude of one sort or another.

Everything you do and how you do it starts with attitude. One student gets up with the alarm clock and cheerfully prepares for the day, planning to study for a couple hours between classes, go jogging later, and see a friend at dinner. Another student oversleeps after partying too late last night, decides to skip the first class, somehow gets through later classes fueled by fast food and energy drinks while dreading tomorrow's exam, and immediately accepts a friend's suggestion to go out tonight instead of studying. Both students could have identical situations, classes, finances, and academic preparation. There could be just one significant difference—but it's the one that matters.

We started this chapter talking about goals, because people's goals and priorities have a huge effect on their attitude. Someone who really wants to succeed in college is better motivated and can develop a more positive attitude to succeed. But what if you are committed to succeeding in college but still feel kind of doubtful or worried or even down on yourself—what can you do then? Can people really change their attitude? Aren't people just "naturally" positive or negative or whatever?

While attitude is influenced by one's personality, upbringing, and past experiences, there is no "attitude gene" that makes you one way or another. It's not as simple as taking a pill, but attitude can be changed. If you're committed to your goals, you can learn to adjust your attitude. The following are some things you can start doing.

Fake It Until You Make It

We all have conversations with ourselves. I might do badly on a test, and I start thinking things like, "I'm just not smart enough" or "That teacher is so hard no one could pass that test." The problem when we talk to ourselves this way is that we listen—and we start believing what we're hearing. Think about what you've been saying to yourself since your first day at college. Have you been negative or making excuses, maybe because you're afraid of not succeeding? You *are* smart enough or you wouldn't be here. Even if you did poorly on a test, you can turn that around into a more positive attitude by taking responsibility. "OK, I goofed off too much when I should have been studying. I learned my lesson—now it's time to buckle down and study for the next test. I'm going to ace this one!" Hear yourself saying that enough and guess what—

you soon find out you *can* succeed even in your hardest classes. Sooner than you think, you will not have to "pretend" to be more positive!

Choose Whom You Spend Time With

We all know negative and positive people. Sometimes it's fun to hang out with someone with a negative attitude, especially if their sarcasm is funny. And if we've just failed a test, we might enjoy being with someone else who also blames the instructor or "the system" for whatever goes wrong. But often being with negative people is one of the surest ways to stay negative yourself. You not only hear your own negative self-talk making excuses and blaming others, but you also get an extra dose from the negative people you are hanging around. It probably will not take long for you to become convinced it's true. And you are well on your way to having You've developed a negative attitude that sets you up for failure.

College offers a great opportunity to make new friends. Friendships and other social relationships are important to all humans—and maybe to college students most of all, because of the stresses of college and the changes you're likely experiencing. Later chapters in this book have some tips for making new friends and getting actively involved in campus life, if you're not already there. Most important, try to choose friends with a positive attitude. It's simply more fun to be with people who are upbeat and enjoying life, people whom you respect—and who, like you, are committed to their studies and are motivated. A positive attitude can really be contagious.

Overcome Resistance to Change

It IS true that many people feel more comfortable when their life situations are always changing. However, many kinds of change are good and should be welcomed. College is often a big change from high school or working. Accepting that reality can help you be more positive about the differences. Sure, you have to study more, and the classes are harder. You may be working more and have less time for your personal life. But dwelling on those differences only reinforces a negative attitude. Look instead at the positive changes: the exciting and interesting people you're meeting, the education you're getting that will lead to a brighter future, and the mental challenges and stimulation you're feeling every day.

The first step may be simply to see yourself succeeding in your new life. Visualize yourself as a student taking control, enjoying classes, studying effectively, getting good grades. This book will help you do that in many ways. It all begins with the right attitude.

Tips for Success: **Stay Motivated**

- Keep your eye on your long-term goals while working on immediate goals.
- Keep your priorities straight AND save some time for **fun**.
- Strive to keep your attitude positive.
- Surround yourself with successful, positive people -- imitate them!
- Don't focus on past habits; replace them with better ones.
- Plan ahead to avoid last-minute pressures.
- Focus on your successes.
- Break large projects down into smaller tasks or stages.
- Reward yourself for completing significant tasks.
- Avoid multitasking.
- Network with other students; form a study group.

Overcome Fears

A common fear among college students is a fear of failure—of not being able to make the grade. While we know that we're not going to succeed at everything we try, deep down don't we really want to win at everything, all the time?! Reality requires each of us to accept the truth: Everyone experiences some sort of failure at some time—and everyone has fears. The question is what you do about it.

Again, think about your goals. You've enrolled in college for good reasons, and you've already shown your commitment by coming this far. If you still have any fear of failure, turn it around and use it in a positive way. If you're afraid you may not do well on an upcoming exam, don't mope around—sit down and schedule times to start studying well ahead of time. It's mostly a matter of attitude adjustment.

Stay Focused and Motivated

One minute you're enthusiastically starting a class project, and then maybe a friend drops by and suddenly all you want to do is close the books and relax a while, and hang out with friends. One of the characteristics of successful people is accepting that life is full of interruptions and change—and planning for it. Staying focused does not mean you become a boring person who does nothing but go to class and study all the time. You just need to make a plan.

Planning ahead is the single best way to stay focused and motivated to reach your goals. Don't wait until the night before an exam. If you know you have a major exam in five days, start by reviewing the material and deciding how many hours of study you need. Then schedule those hours spread out over the next few days—at times when you are most alert and least likely to be distracted. Allow time for other activities, too, to reward yourself for successful studying. Then when the exam comes, you're relaxed, you know the material, you're in a good mood and confident, and you do well.

Planning is mostly a matter of managing your time well, as we'll see later. Here are some other tips for staying focused and motivated:

- **Focus on the why.** Why did you decide to become a college student? If just thinking about graduating doesn't sound all that exciting, then think instead about the great, high-paying career that comes afterward and the things you can do with that income.
- **Say it loud AND aloud.** There truly is power speaking your positive intention aloud to yourself and/or to a positive friend. When you say, "I'm going to review now for 50 minutes and take a 10 minute a break—and I'm getting an A on that test tomorrow!" not only does it increase your commitment, but now someone else knows and can help you be accountable.
- **Count your successes.** As you begin a project or approach studying for a test, think about your past success on a different project or test. Remember how good it feels to succeed. Know you can succeed again.
- **Focus on the here and now.** If looking ahead to long term goals leads you to daydreaming and not taking care of what you need to do right now, make a change. Don't worry about what you're doing tomorrow or next week or month, for a little while. If your mind keeps drifting off, however, you may need to reward or even trick yourself to focus on the here and now.
- **Divide and conquer.** If you just can't focus in on what you should be doing because the task seems too big and overwhelming, break the task into smaller, manageable pieces. Instead of saying, "I need to study the next four hours," say instead, "I'll spend the next thirty minutes going through my class notes from the last three weeks and figure out what topics I need to spend more time on." It's a lot easier to stay focused when you're sitting down for thirty minutes at a time!
- **Never, ever multitask while studying!** You may think that you can monitor e-mail and send text messages while studying, but in reality, these other activities lower the quality of your studying.
- **Imitate successful people.** Does friends who always seem better able to stick with studying or work until they get it done? What are they doing that you're not? We all learn from observing others, and we can speed up that process by deliberately using the same strategies we see working with others. *Visualize yourself* studying in the same way and getting that same high grade on the test or paper.

- **Separate yourself from unsuccessful people.** If a roommate or a friend is always putting off things until the last minute or is distracted with other interests and activities, tell yourself how different you are. When you hear other students complaining about how hard a class is or bragging about not studying or attending class, visualize yourself as not being like them at all.
- **Reward yourself when you complete a significant task**—but only when you are done. Some people seem able to stay focused only when there's a reward waiting.
- **Focus on the your fear?** While some people work harder for the reward, others are motivated more by the ***price*** of failing. While some people are almost paralyzed by anxiety, if your fear is like yelling "bring it on!!" to help you tacking your lack of motivation and achieve your best, focus on your fear!!
- **Get the important things done first.** If you're about to sit down to read a chapter in a book you're not much enjoying, and you suddenly notice a pile of clothing piled up on a chair, you might think, "I really should clean up this place, and I'd better get my laundry done before I run out of things to wear." Don't try to fool yourself into feeling you're accomplishing something by doing laundry rather than studying. Complete the studying, stay focused, then straighten and wash as a break from studying!

Network for Success

Making friends with people with positive attitudes not only helps you maintain a positive attitude yourself, but it gets you started networking with other students in ways that will help you succeed.

Did you study alone or with friends in high school? Because college classes are typically much more challenging, many college students discover they do better, and find it much more enjoyable, if they study with other students taking same course. This might mean organizing a study group or just getting together with a friend to review material before a test. It's good to start thinking right away about networking with other students in your classes.

If you consider yourself an independent person and prefer studying and doing projects on your own rather than with others, think for a minute about how most people function in their careers and professions, what the business world is like. Most work today is done by teams or individuals working together in a collaborative way. Very few jobs involve a person always being and working alone. The more you learn to study and work with other students now, the more skills you are mastering for a successful career.

Studying with other students has immediate benefits. You can quiz each other to help ensure that everyone understands the course material; if you're not clear about something, someone else can help teach it to you. You can read and respond to each other's writing and other work. You can divide up the work in group projects. And through it all, you can often have more fun than if you were doing it on your own.

Studying together is also a great way to start networking—a topic we'll discuss more in coming chapters. Networking has many potential benefits for your future. College students who feel they are part of a network on campus are more motivated and more successful in college.

Problem Solving: When Setbacks Happen

Even when you have clear goals and are motivated and focused to achieve them, problems sometimes happen. Accept that they *will* happen, since inevitably they do for everyone. The difference between those who succeed by solving the problem and moving on and those who get frustrated and give up is partly attitude and partly experience, which is at the heart of knowing how to cope when a problem occurs.

Lots of different kinds of setbacks may happen while you're in college—just as to everyone in life. Here are a few examples: financial crisis, illness or injury, crisis involving family members or loved ones, personal frustration of often feeling you don't have enough time, and strained relationships with your family/partner since you started college. Some of those things are not controlled by you. But if you understand that they ***can*** happen, you can think about how you might address one or more of them, should it happen to you. The chapters in this book were chosen to help you develop strategies to address the typically setbacks college students face. *Preventing* the problems that typically keep college students from succeeding is much of what this book is all about.

Not all problems can be avoided. What then? First, work to resolve the immediate problem:

- **Stay motivated and focused.** Don't let frustration, anxiety, or other negative emotions make the problem worse than it already is.
- **Analyze the problem to consider all possible solutions**. An unexpected financial setback doesn't automatically mean you have to drop out of school—not when alternatives such as student loans, less expensive living arrangements, or other possible solutions may be available.
- **Seek help when you need to.** None of us gets through life alone, and it's not a sign of weakness to see your academic advisor or a college counselor if you have a problem.
- **When you've developed a plan for resolving the problem, work to follow through**. If it will take a while before the problem is completely solved, track your progress in smaller steps so that you can see you really are succeeding. Every day will move you one step closer to putting it behind you.

After you've solved a problem, be sure to avoid it again in the future:

- **Be honest with yourself:** how did you contribute to the problem? If you don't honestly explore the factors that led to the problem, it's more likely to happen again.
- **Take responsibility for your life** and your role in what happens to you. It's no coincidence that those who blame others for their problems keep on **having** problems. Unless you *want* to keep having problems, don't keep blaming others.
- **Taking responsibility doesn't mean beating yourself up!** Failing at something doesn't mean *you* are a failure. We all fail at something, sometime. Adjust your attitude so you're ready to get back on track and feel happy that you'll never make that mistake again!
- **Make a plan.** You might still have a problem on that next big test if you don't make an effective study plan and stick to it. You may need to change your behavior in some way, such as learning time management strategies. (Read on!)

4.2 Organizing Your Space

Now that you've worked up an attitude for success and are feeling motivated, it's time to get organized. You need to organize both your space and your time. Space is important because it can affect your moods, attitudes, and levels of work productivity. Learning to use space to your own advantage helps get you off to a good start in your studies. Here are a few of the ways space matters:

- **Everyone needs his or her own space.** Having some physical area, regardless of size, that is really your own—even if it's only a small part of a shared space – is important. Within your own space, you generally feel more secure and in control.
- **Physical space reinforces habits.** For example, because your bed is primarily for sleeping, you probably fall asleep there easier than elsewhere. Trying to read Chemistry there will conflict with maintaining the attention and alertness that task requires.
- **Different places create different moods.** A place that may be bright and full of energy but filled with happy noisy people might not be the best place to study. A totally quiet, austere place devoid of color and sound and pleasant decorations can be just as unproductive. Everyone needs to discover what space works best for himself or herself—and then let that space reinforce good study habits.

The goal is to find, or create, the best place for studying, and then to use it regularly so that studying there becomes a good habit.

- **Choose a place you can associate with studying.** Make sure it's not a place already associated with other activities (eating, watching television, sleeping, etc.). Over time, the more often you study in this space, the stronger will be its association with studying, so that eventually you'll be completely focused as soon as you reach that place and begin.
- **Your study area should be available whenever you need it.** If you want to use your home or apartment but you never know if another person may be there and possibly distract you, then it's probably better to look for another place. You can reserve a

study board with a white board on the wall! Look for locations open at the hours when you may be studying. You may also need two study spaces—one in or near where you live, another on campus. Maybe you study best at home but have an hour free between two classes, and the library is too far away to use for only an hour? Look for a convenient empty classroom.

- **Your study space should meet your study needs.** An open desk or table surface usually works best for writing, and you'll tire quickly if you try to write notes sitting in an easy chair (which might also make you sleepy). You need good light for reading, to avoid tiring from eyestrain. If you use a laptop for writing notes or reading and researching, you need a power outlet so you don't have to stop when your battery runs out.
- **Your study space should meet your psychological needs.** Some students may need total silence with absolutely no visual distractions; they may find a perfect study carrel hidden away on the third floor in the library. Other students may be unable to concentrate for long without looking up from reading and momentarily letting their eyes move over a pleasant scene. Some students may find it easier to stay motivated when surrounded by other students also studying in a place like the Academic Learning Center with many tables spread out over an area. Experiment to find the setting that works best for you—and remember that the more often you use *this same space*, the more comfortable and effective your studying will become.
- **You may need the support of others to maintain your study space.** Students living at home, whether with a spouse and children or with their parents, often need the support of family members to maintain an effective study space. The kitchen table probably isn't best if others pass by frequently. Be creative, if necessary, and set up a card table in a quiet corner of your bedroom or elsewhere to avoid interruptions. Put a "do not disturb" sign on your door.
- **Keep your space organized and free of distractions.** Unplug a nearby telephone, turn off your cell phone, and use your computer only as needed for studying. Turn of notifications during your 50 minute study sessions and you will finish much quicker!
- **Plan for breaks.** Everyone needs to take a break occasionally when studying. Think about the space you're in and how to use it when you need a break. If in your home, stop and do a few exercises to get your blood flowing. If in the library, take a walk up a couple flights of stairs and around the stacks before returning to your study area.
- **Prepare for human interruptions.** Even if you hide in the library to study, there's a chance a friend may happen by. At home with family members or common space in an apartment, the odds increase greatly. Have a plan ready in case someone pops in and asks you to join him or here in some fun activity. Know when you plan to finish your studying so that you can make a plan for later—or for tomorrow at a set time.

The Distractions of Technology

Multitasking is the term commonly used for being engaged in two or more different activities at the same time, usually referring to activities using devices such as cell phones, smartphones, computers, and so on. Many people claim to be able to do as many as four or five things simultaneously, such as writing an e-mail while responding to an instant message (IM) and reading a tweet, all while watching a video on their computer monitor or talking on the phone. Many people who have grown up with computers consider this kind of multitasking a normal way to get things done, including studying. Even people in business sometimes speak of multitasking as an essential component of today's fast-paced world.

It is true that *some* things can be attended to while you're doing something else, such as checking e-mail while you watch television news—but only when none of those things demands your full attention. You can concentrate 80 percent on the e-mail, for example, while 20 percent of your attention is listening for something on the news that catches your attention. Then you turn to the television for a minute, watch that segment, and go back to the e-mail. But you're not actually watching the television *at the same time* you're composing the e-mail—you're rapidly going back and forth. In reality, the mind can focus only on one thing at any given moment. Even things that don't require much thinking are severely impacted by multitasking,

such as driving while talking on a cell phone or texting. An astonishing number of people end up in the emergency room from just trying to walk down the sidewalk while texting, so common is it now to walk into a pole or parked car while multitasking!

"Okay," you might be thinking, "why should it matter if I write my paper first and then answer e-mails or do them back and forth at the same time?" **It actually takes you longer to do two or more things at the same time than if you do them separately**—at least with anything that you actually have to focus on, such as studying. That's true because each time you go back to studying after looking away to a message or tweet, it takes time for your mind to shift gears to get back to where you were. Every time your attention shifts, add up some more "down-time"—and pretty soon it's evident that multitasking is costing you a lot more time than you think. And that's assuming that your mind *does* fully shift back to where you were every time, without losing your train of thought or forgetting an important detail. It doesn't always.

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The other problem with multitasking is the effect it can have on the attention span—and even on how the brain works. Scientists have shown that in people who constantly shift their attention from one thing to another in short bursts, the brain forms patterns that make it more difficult to keep sustained attention on any one thing. So when you really do need to concentrate for a while on one thing, such as when studying for a big test, it becomes more difficult to do even if you're not multitasking at that time. It's as if your mind makes a habit of wandering from one thing to another and then can't stop.

So stay away from multitasking whenever you have something important to do, like studying. If it's already a habit for you, don't let it become worse. Manipulate your study space to prevent the temptations altogether. Turn your computer off—or shut down e-mail and messaging programs if you need the computer for studying. Turn your cell phone off—if you just tell yourself not to answer it but still glance at it each time to see who sent or left a message, you're still losing your studying momentum and have to start over again. For those who are really addicted to technology (you know who you are!), go to the library and don't take your laptop or cell phone.

What about listening to music while studying? Some don't consider that multitasking, and many students say they can listen to music without it affecting their studying. Studies are inconclusive about the positive or negative effects of music on people's ability to concentrate, probably because so many different factors are involved. But there's a huge difference between listening to your favorite CD and spontaneously singing along with some of the songs and enjoying soft background music that enhances your study space the same way as good lighting and pleasant décor. Some people can study better with low-volume instrumental music that relaxes them and does not intrude on their thinking, while others can concentrate only in silence. And some are so used to being immersed in music and the sounds of life that they find *total* silence more distracting—such people can often study well in places where people are moving around. The key thing is to be honest with yourself: if you're *actively* listening to music while you're studying, then you're likely not studying as well as you could be. It will take you longer and lead to less successful results.

Family and Roommate Issues

Sometimes going to the library or elsewhere is not practical for studying, and you have to find a way to cope in a shared space. Part of the solution is time management. Agree with others on certain times that will be reserved for studying; agree to keep the place quiet, not to have guests visiting, and to prevent other distractions. These arrangements can be made with a roommate, spouse, and older children. If there are younger children in your household and you have child-care responsibility, it's usually more complicated. You may have to schedule your studying during their nap time or find quiet activities for them to enjoy while you study. Try to spend some time with your kids before you study, so they don't feel like you're ignoring them. (More tips are offered later in this chapter.)

The key is to plan ahead. You don't want to find yourself, the night before an exam, in a place that offers no space for studying.

Finally, accept that sometimes you'll just have to say no. If your roommate or a friend often tries to engage you in conversation or suggests doing something else when you need to study, just say no. Learn to be firm but polite as you explain that you just *really* have to get your work done first. Students who live at home may also have to learn how to say no to parents or family members—just be sure to explain the importance of the studying you need to do! Remember, **you can't be everything to everyone all the time**.

4.3 Organizing Your Time

This is the most important part of this chapter. When you know what you want to do, why not just sit down and get it done? The millions of people who complain frequently about "not having enough time" would love it if it were that simple!

Time management isn't actually difficult, but you do need to learn how to do it well.

Time and Your Personality

People's attitudes toward time vary widely. One person seems to be always rushing around but actually gets less done than another person who seems unconcerned about time and calmly goes about the day. Since there are so many different "time personalities," it's important to realize how you approach time. Start by trying to figure out how you spend your time during a typical week.

When seeking to manage time better, students should analyze how much time your classes require you to study. Study includes reading assignments using active learning techniques, textbook annotation, color keying notes, research online and/or through the library, meeting with a study partner or group, creating sample test questions. A college class of average difficulty typically requires two hours of study for every one hour in class or 2:1. If a class is relatively easy for you, a one-to-one hour ratio or 1:1 may be sufficient. If a class is very difficult for you, a three-to-one ratio may be needed. A time log, like the one below can be useful to help a student record and analyze how he or she is currently using time.

Time Management Strategies for Success

Following are some strategies you can begin using immediately to make the most of your time:

- **Prepare to be successful.** When planning ahead for studying, think yourself into the right mood: "When I get these chapters read tonight, I'll be ahead in studying for the next test, and I'll also have plenty of time tomorrow to do something fun."
- **Use your best—and most appropriate—time of day.** Some kinds of studying you may be able to start first thing in the morning as you wake, while others need your most alert moments at another time.
- **Break up large projects into small pieces.** It's easier to get going if you break it up into stages that you schedule at separate times—and then begin with the first section that requires only an hour or two.
- **Do the most important studying first.** When two or more things require your attention, do the more crucial one first. If something happens and you can't complete everything, you'll suffer less if the most crucial work is done.
- **If you have trouble getting started, do an easier task first.** If you can't get going, switch to an easier task you can accomplish quickly. That will give you momentum, and often you feel more confident tackling the difficult task after being successful in the first one.
- **If you're feeling overwhelmed and stressed because you have too much to do, revisit your time planner.** Stop and review your schedule for the next few days. This will reassure you

that you have scheduled everything important. This will allow you to concentrate on the task at hand, confident that you will complete what you need to.

- **If you're really floundering, talk to someone.** Maybe you just don't understand what you should be doing. Talk with your instructor or another student in the class to get back on track.

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- **Take a break.** We all need breaks to help us concentrate without becoming fatigued and burned out. As a general rule, a short break every 50 minutes or so is effective in helping recharge your study energy. Get up and move around to get your blood flowing, clear your thoughts, and work off stress.
- **Use unscheduled times to work ahead.** You've scheduled that hundred pages of reading for later today, but you have the textbook with you as you're waiting for the bus. Start reading now, or preview the chapter to get a sense of what you'll be reading later. Either way, you'll save time later. You may be amazed how much studying you can get done during downtimes throughout the day.
- **Keep your momentum.** Prevent distractions, such as multitasking, that will only slow you down. Check for messages, for example, only at scheduled break times.
- **Reward yourself.** It's not easy to sit still for hours of studying. When you successfully complete the task, you should feel good and deserve a small reward. A healthy snack, a quick video game session, or social activity can help you feel even better about your successful use of time.
- **Just say no.** Always tell others nearby when you're studying, to reduce the chances of being interrupted. Still, interruptions happen, and if you are in a situation where you are frequently interrupted by a family member, spouse, roommate, or friend, it helps to have your "no" prepared in advance: "No, I *really* have to be ready for this test" or "That's a great idea, but let's do it tomorrow—I *just can't* today." You shouldn't feel bad about saying no—especially if you told that person in advance that you needed to study.
- **Have a life.** Never schedule your day or week so full of work and study that you have no time at all for yourself, your family and friends, and your larger life.

Battling Procrastination

Procrastination is a choice to delay doing until later something that probably should be done now. If made often enough, this choice can become a habit which can sabotage your success in any area of your work, school and/or personal life. Procrastination is very powerful. Most college students procrastinate often, and about half say they need help avoiding procrastination. Procrastination can threaten one's ability to do well on an assignment or test.

People procrastinate for different reasons. Some people are too relaxed and seldom worry; they easily put off responsibilities. Others worry constantly, and that stress keeps them from focusing on the task at hand. Some procrastinate because they fear failure; others procrastinate because they fear success or are so perfectionistic that they don't want to let themselves down. Some are dreamers. Many different factors are involved, and there are different styles of procrastinating.

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Just as there are different causes, there are different possible solutions for procrastination. Different strategies work for different people. The time management strategies described earlier can help you avoid procrastination. However, because this is a **psychological issue**, some additional psychological strategies can also help:

- Since procrastination is usually a habit, work on breaking it as you would any other bad habit: one day at a time. Know that every time you overcome feelings of procrastination,

the habit to choose procrastination becomes weaker and weaker. Eventually you'll have a new habit of being able to start when you planned.

- Schedule times for studying using a daily or weekly planner. Carry it with you and look at it often. Just being aware of the time and what you need to do today can help you get organized and stay on track.
- Study with a motivated friend. Form a study group with other students who are motivated and won't procrastinate along with you. You'll learn good habits from them while getting the work done now.
- Keep a study journal. At least once a day write an entry about how you have used your time and whether you succeeded with your schedule for the day. If not, identify what factors kept you from doing your work. (Use the form on page 230.) This journal will help you see your own habits and distractions so that you can avoid things that lead to procrastination.
- Get help. If you really can't stay on track with your study schedule, or if you're always putting things off until the last minute, see a college counselor. They have lots of experience with this common student problem and can help you find ways to overcome this habit.

Calendar Planners and To-Do Lists

Calendar planners and to-do lists are effective ways to organize your time. Many types of academic planners are commercially available or you can make your own. Some people like a page for each day, and some like a week at a time. Some use computer calendars and planners. Almost any system will work well if you use it consistently.

Some college students think they don't need to actually write down their schedule and daily to-do lists. They've always kept it in their head before, so why write it down in a planner now? Of course, none of us ever forgets anything—until we do.

Calendars and planners help you look ahead and write in important dates and deadlines so you don't forget. But it's just as important to use the planner to schedule *your own time,* not just deadlines. For example, you'll learn later that the most effective way to study for an exam is to study in several short periods over several days. You can easily do this by choosing time slots in your weekly planner over several days that you will commit to studying for this test. You don't need to fill every time slot, or to schedule every single thing that you do, but the more carefully and consistently you use your planner, the more successfully will you will manage your time.

But a planner cannot contain every single thing that may occur in a day. We'd go crazy if we tried to schedule every telephone call, every e-mail, every bill to pay, every trip to the grocery store. For these items, we use a to-do list, which may be kept on a separate page in the planner.

Check the example of a weekly planner form in Figure 3.5 "Weekly Planner," which is on the next page. (You can copy this page and use it to begin your schedule planning. By using this first, you will find out whether these time slots are big enough for you or whether you'd prefer a separate planner page for each day.) Fill in this planner form for next week. First write in all your class meeting times; your work or volunteer schedule; and your usual hours for sleep, family activities, and any other activities at fixed times. Don't forget time needed for transportation, meals, and so on. Your first goal is to find all the blocks of "free time" that are left over.

Remember that this is an **academic planner**. Don't try to schedule in everything in your life—this is to plan ahead to use your study time most effectively.

Next, check the syllabus for each of your courses and write important dates in the planner. If your planner has pages for the whole term, write in all exams and deadlines. Use red ink or a highlighter for these key dates.

As you choose your study times, consider what times of day you are at your best and what times you prefer to use for social or other activities.

Don't try to micromanage your schedule. Don't try to estimate exactly how many minutes you'll need two weeks from today to read a given chapter in a given textbook. Instead, just choose the blocks of time you will use for your studies. Next, look at the major deadlines for projects and exams that you wrote in earlier. Estimate how much time you may need for each and work backward on the schedule from the due date.

If you're surprised by this amount of planning, you may be the kind of student who used to think, "The paper's due Friday—I have enough time Thursday afternoon, so I'll write it then." What's wrong with that? First, college work is more demanding than many first-year students realize, and the instructor expects higher-quality work than you can churn out quickly without revising. Second, if you are tired on Thursday because you didn't sleep well Wednesday night, you may be much less productive than you hoped—and without a time buffer, you're forced to turn in a paper that is not your best work.

Figure 3.6 "Example of a Student's Weekly Planner Page with Class Times and Important Study Sessions" shows what one student's schedule looks like for a week. This is intended only to show you one way to block out time—you'll quickly find a way that works best for you.

Here are some more tips for successful schedule planning:

- Studying is often most effective immediately after a class meeting. If your schedule allows, block out appropriate study time after class periods.
- Be realistic about time when you make your schedule. If your class runs to four o'clock and it takes you twenty minutes to wrap things up and reach your study location, don't figure you'll have a full hour of study between four o'clock and five o'clock.
- Don't overdo it. Few people can study four or five hours nonstop, and scheduling extended time periods like that may just set you up for failure. Up to three 50 minute sessions with 10 minute breaks in between is more typical.
- Schedule social events that occur at set times, but just leave holes in the schedule for other activities. Enjoy those open times and recharge your energies!
- Schedule some time for exercise at least three days a week.
- Plan to use your time between classes wisely. If three days a week you have the same hour free between two classes, what should you do with those three hours? Maybe you need to eat, walk across campus, or run an errand. But say you have an average forty minutes free at that time on each day. Instead of just frittering the time away, use it to review your notes from the previous class or for the coming class or to read a short assignment. Over the whole term, that forty minutes three times a week adds up to a lot of study time.
- If a study activity is taking longer than you had scheduled, look ahead and adjust your weekly planner to prevent the stress of feeling behind.
- If you maintain your schedule on your computer or smartphone, it's still a good idea to print and carry it with you. Don't risk losing valuable study time if you're away from the device.
- If you're not paying close attention to everything in your planner, use different colored highlighters to mark the times blocked out for really important things.
- When following your schedule, pay attention to starting and stopping times. If you planned to start your test review at four o'clock after an hour of reading for a different class, don't let the reading run long and take time away from studying for the test.

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Your Daily To-Do List

Your planner includes major activities that happen at the same time each week, like your class schedule and key events like exams, major projects and doctor's visits. Your daily to-do list is a window to keep you focused on

your day-to-day priorities. As with your planner, consistent use of your to-do list will make it an effective habit. Your to-do list often includes thing NOT on your planner, such as short errands, phone calls or e-mail, and the like. This still includes important things—but they're not scheduled out for specific times.

For maximum effectiveness, it is also wise to create a system to prioritize the items on your daily list. Some students use a 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C rating system for importance. Others simply highlight or circle items that are critical to get done today. This practice will make sure you accomplish the things most important to do today, but keep those things which can wait a day or two in mind so that you do not forget them.

Start every day with a fresh to-do list written in a special small notebook, on a brightly colored post-it note or on a clean page in your planner. As you check your planner for key activities for the week/day your daily list keeps you on track for today. Here are some more tips for effectively using your daily to-do list:

- Be specific: "Read history chapter 2 (30 pages)"—not "History homework."
- Put important things high on your list where you'll see them every time you check the list or mark them as priority.
- Make your list at the same time every day so that it becomes a habit.
- Don't make your list overwhelmingly long. If you worry you might forget something, write it in the margin of your planner's page a week or two away.
- *Use* your list. Lists often include little things that may take only a few minutes to do, so check your list any time during the day you have a moment free.
- Cross out or check off things after you've done them—doing this becomes rewarding.
- Avoid using your to-do list to procrastinate. Don't pull it out to find something else you just "have" to do instead of studying! Focus on your high priority items!

Time Management Tips for Students Who Work

If you're both working and taking classes, you seldom have large blocks of free time. Avoid temptations to stay up very late studying, for losing sleep can lead to a downward spiral in performance at both work and school. Instead, try to follow these guidelines:

- If possible, adjust your work or sleep hours so that you don't spend your most productive times at work. If your job offers flex time, arrange your schedule to be free to study at times when you perform best.
- Try to arrange your class and work schedules to minimize commuting time. If you are a part-time student taking two classes, taking classes back-to-back two or three days a week uses less time than spreading them out over four or five days. Working four ten-hour days rather than five eight-hour days reduces time lost to travel, getting ready for work, and so on.
- If you can't arrange an effective schedule for classes and work, consider online courses that allow you to do most of the work on your own time.
- Use your daily and weekly planner conscientiously. Any time you have thirty minutes or more free, schedule a study activity.
- Consider your "body clock" when you schedule activities. Plan easier tasks for those times when you're often fatigued and reserve alert times for more demanding tasks.
- Look for any "hidden" time potentials. Maybe you prefer the thirty-minute drive to work over a forty-five-minute bus ride. But if you can read on the bus, that's a gain of ninety minutes every day at the cost of thirty minutes longer travel time. An hour a day can make a huge difference in your studies.
- Can you do quick study tasks during slow times at work? Take your class notes with you and use even five minutes of free time wisely.
- Remember your long-term goals. You need to work, but you also want to finish your college program. If you have the opportunity to volunteer for some overtime, consider whether it's really worth

it. Sure, the extra money would help, but could the extra time put you at risk for not doing well in your classes?

- Be as organized on the job as you are academically. Use your planner and to-do list for work matters, too. The better organized you are at work, the less stress you'll feel—and the more successful you'll be as a student also.
- If you have a family as well as a job, your time is even more limited. In addition to the previous tips, try some of the strategies that follow.

Time Management Tips for Students with Family

If you are the only college student in your home, your family may not understand how stressful college life can be. Managing your family responsibilities will require careful time management. Use all the strategies described earlier, including family time in your daily plans the same as you would hours spent at work. Don't assume that you'll be "free" every hour you're home, because family events or a family member's need for your assistance may occur at unexpected times. Schedule your important academic work well ahead and in blocks of time you control. See also the earlier suggestions for controlling your space: you may need to use the library or another space to ensure you are not interrupted or distracted during important study times.

Students with their own families are also likely to feel time pressures. After all, you can't just tell your partner or kids that you'll see them in a couple years when you're not so busy with job and college! In addition to all the planning and study strategies discussed so far, you also need to manage your family relationships and time spent with family. While there's no magical solution for making more hours in the day, even with this added time pressure there are ways to balance your life well:

- Talk everything over with your family. Your family members may not have realized changes would occur with your college enrollment. Keep communication lines open so that your partner and children feel they're together with you in this new adventure. Eventually you will need their support.
- Work to enjoy your time together, whatever you're doing. You may not have as much time together as previously, but cherish the time you do have—even if it's washing dishes together or cleaning house. If you've been studying for two hours and need a break, spend the next ten minutes with family instead of checking e-mail or watching television. Ultimately, the important thing is *being together*, not going out to movies or dinners or the special things you used to do when you had more time. Look forward to being with family and appreciate every moment you are together, and they will share your attitude.
- Combine activities to get the most out of time. Don't let your children watch television or play video games off by themselves while you're cooking dinner, or you may find you have only twenty minutes family time together while eating. Instead, bring the family together in the kitchen and give everyone something to do. You can have a lot of fun together and share the day's experiences, and you won't feel so bad then if you have to go off and study by yourself.
- Share the load. Even children who are very young can help with household chores to give you more time. Attitude is everything: try to make it fun, the whole family pulling together—not something they "have" to do and may resent, just because Mom or Dad went back to school. (Remember, your kids will reach college age someday, and you want them to have a good attitude about college.) As they get older, they can do their own laundry, cook meals, and get themselves off to school, and older teens can run errands and do the grocery shopping. They will gain in the process by becoming more responsible and independent.
- Schedule your study time based on family activities. If you face interruptions from young children in the early evening, use that time for something simple like reviewing class notes. When you need more quiet time for concentrated reading, wait until they've gone to bed.
- Be creative with child care. Usually options are available, possibly involving extended family members, sitters, older siblings, cooperative child care with other adult students, as well as child-care

centers. At home, let your child have a friend over to play with. Network with other older students and learn what has worked for them. Explore all possibilities to ensure you have time to meet your college goals. And don't feel guilty: "day care babies" grow up just as healthy psychologically as those raised in the home full time.

Time Management Tips for Student Athletes

Student athletes often face unique time pressures because of the amount of time required for training, practice, and competition. During some parts of the year, athletics may involve as many hours as a full-time job. The athletic schedule can be grueling, involving weekend travel and intensive blocks of time. You can be exhausted after workouts or competitions, affecting how well you can concentrate on studies thereafter. Students on athletic scholarships often feel their sport is their most important reason for being in college, and this priority can affect their attitudes toward studying. For all of these reasons, student athletes face special time management challenges. Here are some tips for succeeding in both your sport and academics:

- Realize that even if your sport is more important to you, you risk everything if you don't **also** succeed in your academics. Failing one class in your first year may not get you kicked out, but you'll have to make up that class—and you'll end up spending more time on the subject than if you'd studied more to pass it the first time.
- Plan ahead! If you have a big test or a paper due the Monday after a big weekend game, start early. Use your weekly planner to plan well in advance, making it a goal, instead of thinking you can magically get it done Sunday night after victory celebrations. Working ahead will also free your mind to focus better on your sport.
- Accept that you have two priorities—your sport and your classes—and that both come before your social life. That's just how it is—what you have accepted in your choice to be a college athlete. If it helps, think of your classes as your job; you have to "go to study" the same as others "go to work."
- Use your planner to take advantage of any downtime you have during the day between classes and at lunch. Other students may seem to have the luxury of studying during much of the afternoon when you're at practice, and maybe they can get away with hanging out between classes, but you don't have that time available, at least not during the season. You need to use all the time you can find to keep up with your studying.
- Stay on top of your courses. If you allow yourself to start slipping behind, maybe telling yourself you'll have more time later on to catch up, just the opposite will happen. Once you get behind, you'll lose momentum and find it more difficult to understand what's going on the class. Eventually the stress will affect your athletic performance also.
- Get help when you need it. Many athletic departments offer tutoring services or referrals for extra help. But don't wait until you're at risk for failing a class before seeking help. A tutor won't take your test or write your paper for you—they can only help you focus in to use your time productively in your studies. You still have to want to succeed.

Math tutoring in the Academic Learning Center. Photo by Joseph Smith

4.4 Chapter Takeaways

- It's important to have short-, mid-, and long-term goals that are specific, realistic, time oriented, and attainable. Goals help you set priorities and remain motivated and committed to your college success.
- Attitude is the largest factor determining success in college. Work to stay positive and surround yourself with positive people, and you'll find you are motivated to carry out the activities that will help you succeed in your courses.
- Planning ahead, and then following your plan, is the essence of time management. Organize both your space and your time to develop the best study habits. Learning strategies to stay on track, avoid distractions of people and technology, and to prevent procrastination will pay off not only in college but also in your career thereafter.
- Plan your use of time based on your "time personality" after assessing how you typically use your free time. Then use an academic weekly and daily planner to schedule blocks of time most efficiently. Start well ahead of deadlines to prevent last-minute stresses and problems completing your work.
- Because many college students have significant time commitments with work, family, athletics, or other activities, time management techniques are among the most important skills you can learn to help ensure your success.

Chapter 6: Reading to Learn

Reading to Learn

Sure you can read. After all, that's what you are doing now, at this moment. But reading to learn is active reading, a process that involves gathering much of the new information you get in school—and in life.

Does the following sound familiar? You've had a full day of classes, so you go to the gym to get in a workout. Afterward, you meet a friend who suggests going out for a quick bite; you get back to your room around eight o'clock and settle in to work on your reading assignment, a chapter from your sociology text entitled "Stratification and Social Mobility." You jump right in to the first paragraph, but the second paragraph seems a bit tougher. Suddenly you wake up and shake your head and see your clock says 11:15 p.m. Oh no! Three hours down the drain napping, and your book is still staring back at you at the beginning of the chapter, and now you have a crick in your neck.

Now, picture this: You schedule yourself for a series of shorter reading periods at the library between classes and during the afternoon. You spend a few minutes preparing for what you are going to read, and you get to work with pen and paper in hand. After your scheduled reading periods, by 5:30 p.m. you have completed the assignment, making a note that you are interested in comparing the social mobility in India with that in the United States. You reward yourself with a workout and dinner with a friend. At 8 p.m., you return to your room and review your notes, feeling confident that you are ready for the next class.

The difference between these two scenarios is active reading. Active reading is a planned, deliberate set of strategies to engage with text-based materials with the purpose of increasing your understanding. This is a key skill you need to master for college. Along with listening, it is the primary method for absorbing new ideas and information in college. But active reading also applies to and facilitates the other steps of the learning cycle; it is critical for preparing, capturing, and reviewing, too.

In this chapter, you will learn the basics of active reading. Follow all the recommended steps, even though at first you may think they take too long. In the end, you will be able to cut your reading time while increasing what you learn from reading. Read on!

6.1 Are You Ready for the Big League?

Think back to a high school history or literature class. Those were probably the classes in which you had the most reading. You would be assigned a chapter, or a few pages in a chapter, with the expectation that you would be discussing the reading assignment in class. The teacher usually was a key part of how you learned from your reading.

If you have been away from school for some time, it's likely that your reading has been fairly casual. While time spent with a magazine or newspaper can be important, it's not the sort of concentrated reading you will do in college. And no one will ask you to write in response to a magazine piece you've read or quiz you about a newspaper article.

In college, reading is much different. You will be expected to read much more. For each hour you spend in the classroom, you will be expected to spend two or more additional hours studying between classes, and most of that will be reading. Assignments will be longer and may be much more difficult. College textbook authors write using many technical terms and include complex ideas. Many college textbook authors include research, and some textbooks are written in a style you may find very dry. You will also have to read from a variety of sources: your textbook, ancillary materials, primary sources, academic journals, periodicals, and online postings.

In college, most instructors do not spend much time reviewing the reading assignment in class. Rather, they expect that you have done the assignment before coming to class and understand the material. The class lecture or discussion is often based on that expectation. Tests, too, are based on that expectation. This is why active reading is so important—it's up to you to do the reading and comprehend what you read.

Note: It may not always be clear on an instructor's syllabus, but a reading assignment listed on any given class date should be read *before* coming to class on that date.

6.2 How Can You Read to Learn?

The four steps of active reading are almost identical to the four phases of the learning cycle—and that is no coincidence! Active reading is learning through reading the written word, so the learning cycle naturally applies. Active reading involves these steps:

1. Preparing
2. Reading
3. Capturing the key ideas
4. Reviewing

Let's take a look at how to use each step when reading.

Textbook "Anatomy"

Good textbooks are designed to help you learn. They differ from other types of academic publications which are intended to present research findings, advance new ideas, to deeply examine a specific subject. Textbooks have many features worth exploring because they can help you understand your reading better and learn more effectively. In your textbooks, look for the elements listed in Table 6.1 on page 81.

Preparing to Read

Start by thinking about why your instructor has chosen this text. Has the instructor said anything about the book or the author? Look at the table of contents; how does it compare with the course syllabus? What can you learn about the author from the front matter of the book? (See Table 6.1 "Anatomy of a Textbook," page 90.) Understanding this background will give you the context of the book and help define what is most important in the text. Doing this exercise once per textbook will give you a great deal of insight throughout the course.

Now it is time to develop a plan of attack for your assignment. Your first step in any reading assignment is to understand the context of what you are about to read. Think of your reading assignment in relation to the large themes or goals the instructor has spelled out for the class. Remember that you are not merely reading—you are reading for a purpose. What parts of a reading assignment should you pay special attention to, and what parts can you browse through?

Open your text to the assigned pages. What is the chapter title? Is the chapter divided into sections? What are the section titles? Which sections are longer? Are there any illustrations? What are they about? Illustrations in books cost money, so chances are the author and publisher thought these topics were particularly important, or they would not have been included. How about tables? What kinds of information do they show? Are there bold or italicized words? Are these terms you are familiar with, or are they new to you? Are you getting a sense for what is important in the chapter? Use the critical thinking skills discussed in Chapter 5 "Thinking about Thought" as you think about your observations. What do you think your instructor wants you to get out of the assignment? Why?

Now, before actually starting to read, create a purpose or quest for your reading, and this will help you become more actively engaged and less bored. Start by checking your attitude: if you are unhappy about the reading assignment and complaining that you even have to read it, you *will* have trouble with the reading. You need to get "psyched" for the assignment. Stoke your determination by setting yourself a

Preparing to Read, continued on the next page

Table 6.1 Anatomy of a Textbook

Textbook Feature	What It Is	Why You Might Find It Helpful
Preface	A section at the beginning of a book where the author/editor outlines its purpose and scope, acknowledges individuals who helped prepare the book, and outlines the book's features.	You will gain perspective on the author's point of view, what the author considers important. If the preface is written with the student in mind, it will also give you guidance on how to "use" the textbook and its features.
Foreword	A section at the beginning of the book where a subject matter expert, different from the author, endorses the author's work and explains why this new book is significant.	A foreword will give you an idea about what makes this book different from others in the field. It may provide hints as to why your instructor selected the book for your course.
Author Profile	A short biography of the author illustrating the author's credibility in the subject matter.	This will help you understand the author's perspective and what the author considers important.
Table of Contents	A listing of all the chapters in the book and, in most cases, primary sections within chapters.	The table of contents is an outline of the entire book. It will be very helpful in establishing links among the text, the course objectives, and the syllabus.
Chapter Preview or Learning Objectives	A section at the beginning of each chapter, where the author outlines what will be covered and what the student should expect to know or be able to do at the end of the chapter.	These sections are invaluable for telling you what to pay special attention to. Be sure to compare these outcomes with the objectives stated in the course syllabus.
Introduction	The first paragraph(s) of a chapter states the chapter's objectives and key themes. An introduction is also common at the beginning of primary chapter sections.	Introductions to chapters or sections are "must reads" because they give you a road map to the material you are about to read, pointing you to what is truly important in the chapter or section.
Applied Practice Elements	Exercises, activities, or drills designed to let students apply their knowledge gained from the reading. Some of these features may be presented via Web sites designed to supplement the text.	These features provide you with a great way to confirm your understanding of the material. If you have trouble with them, you should go back and reread the section. They also have the additional benefit of improving your recall of the material.
Chapter Summary	A section at the end of a chapter that confirms key ideas presented in the chapter.	It is a good idea to read this section before you read the body of the chapter. It will help you strategize about where you should invest your reading effort.
Review Material	A section at the end of the chapter that includes additional applied practice exercises, review questions, and suggestions for further reading.	The review questions will help you confirm your understanding of the material.
Endnotes & Bibliographies	Formal citations of sources used to prepare the text.	These will help you infer the author's biases and are also valuable if doing further research on the subject for a paper.

Preparing to Read, continued from page 97

reasonable time to complete the assignment and schedule some short breaks for yourself. Approach the reading with a sense of curiosity and thirst for new understanding. Think of yourself more as an investigator looking for answers than a student doing a homework assignment.

Take out your notebook for the class for which you are doing the reading. Remember the Cornell method of note taking from Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering"? You will use the same format here with a narrow column on the left and a wide column on the right. This time, with reading, approach taking notes slightly differently. In the Cornell method used for class notes, you took notes in the right column and wrote in questions and comments in the left column after class as you reviewed your notes. When using this system with reading, write your questions about the reading first in the left column

(spacing them well apart so that you have plenty of room for your notes while you read in the right column). From your preliminary scanning of the pages, as described previously, you should already have questions at your fingertips.

Use your critical thinking skill of questioning what the author is saying. Turn the title of each major section of the reading into a question and write it down in your left column of your notes. For example, if the section title is "The Chemistry of Photosynthesis," you might write, "What chemical reactions take place to cause photosynthesis, and what are the outcomes?" Note that your question is related to the kind of material you are hearing about in class, and they usually require not a short answer but a thoughtful, complete understanding. Ideally, you should not already know the answer to the questions you are writing! Expect to learn something new in your reading even if you are familiar with the topic already. Finally, also in the left column, jot down any keywords that appear in boldface. You will want to discover their definitions and the significance of each as you read.

Alternative Approaches for Preparing to Read

In Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering" you may have determined that you are more comfortable with the outline or concept map methods of note taking. You can use either of these methods also to prepare for reading. With the outline method, start with the chapter title as your primary heading, then create subheadings for each section, rephrasing each section title in terms of a question. If you are more comfortable using the concept map method, start with the chapter title as your center and create branches for each section within the chapter. Make sure you phrase each item as a question. There is a chart which explains how to use various parts of graphic information shared in textbooks on pages 236-237.

Now Read

Now you are ready to start reading actively. Start by taking a look at your notes; they are your road map. What is the question you would like to answer in the first section? This helps put you in the right mindset to accept new material. Now read through the entire section with the objective of understanding it. Follow these tips while reading, but do not start taking notes or highlighting text at this point:

- Look for answers to the questions you wrote.
- Pay particular attention to the first and last lines of each paragraph.
- Think about the relationships among section titles, boldface words, and graphics.
- Skim quickly over parts of the section that are not related to the key questions.

After reading the section, can you answer the section question you earlier wrote in your notes? Did you discover additional questions that you should have asked or that were not evident from the title of the section? Write them down now on your notes page. Can you define the keywords used in the text? If you can't do either of these things, go back and reread the section.

Capture the Key Ideas

Once you can answer your questions effectively and can define the new keywords, it is time to commit these concepts to your notes and to your memory. Start by writing the answers to your questions in your notes in the right column. Also define the keywords you found in the reading. You may also use your highlighter or pencil to call out key ideas and words and make notes in your margins. Marking up your book may go against what you were told in high school, when the school owned the books and expected to use them year after year. In college, *you* bought the book. Make it truly yours. Although some students may tell you that you can get more cash by selling a used book that is not marked up, this should *not* be a concern at this time—that's not nearly as important as understanding the reading and doing well in the class!

The purpose of marking your textbook is to make it your personal studying assistant with the key ideas called out in the text. Most readers tend to highlight too much, hiding key ideas in a sea of yellow lines. When it comes to highlighting, **less is more**. Think critically before you highlight. Your choices will have a big impact on what you study and learn for the course. Make it your objective to highlight no more than 10 percent of the text.

Use your pencil also to make annotations in the margin. Use a symbol like an exclamation mark (*!*) or an asterisk (*) to mark an idea that is particularly important. Use a question mark (*?*) to indicate something you don't understand or are unclear about. Box new words, then write a short definition in the margin. Use "TQ" (for "test question") or some other shorthand or symbol to signal key things that may appear in test or quiz questions. Write personal notes on items where you disagree with the author. Don't feel you have to use the symbols listed here; create your own if you want, just be consistent. Your notes won't help you if the first question you later have is "I wonder what I meant by that?"

If you are reading an essay from a magazine or an academic journal, remember that such articles are typically written in response to other articles. You'll need to be especially alert to signals like "according to" or "Jones argues," which make it clear that the ideas don't belong to the author of the piece you are reading. Be sure to note when an author is quoting someone else or summarizing another person's position. Sometimes, students in a hurry to get through a complicated article don't clearly distinguish the author's ideas from the ideas the author argues against. Other words like "yet" or "however" indicate a turn from one idea to another. Words like "critical," "significant," and "important" signal ideas you should look at closely. After annotating, you are ready to read the next section.

Reviewing What You Read

When you have completed each of the sections for your assignment, you should review what you have read. Start by answering these questions: "What did I learn?" and "What does it mean?" Next, write a summary of your assigned reading, in your own words, in the box at the base of your notepaper. Working from your notes, cover up the answers to your questions and answer each of your questions aloud. (Yes, out loud. Remember from Chapter 3 "Listening, Taking Notes, and Remembering" that memory is improved by using as many senses as possible.) Think about how each idea relates to material the instructor is covering in class. Think about how this new knowledge may be applied in your next class.

If the text has review questions at the end of the chapter, answer those, too. Talk to other students about the reading assignment. Merge your reading notes with your class notes and review both together. How does your reading increase your understanding of what you have covered in class and vice versa?

Strategies for Textbook Reading

The four steps to active reading provide a proven approach to effective learning from texts. Following are some strategies you can use to enhance your reading even further:

- **Pace yourself.** Divide the assignment into smaller blocks rather than trying to read the entire assignment in one sitting. If you have a week to do the assignment, for example, divide the work into five daily blocks, not seven. If everything works out on schedule, you'll end up with an extra day for review.
- **Schedule your reading.** Set aside blocks of time, preferably at the time of the day when you are most alert, to do your reading assignments. Don't just leave them for the end of the day after completing written and other assignments.
- **Get yourself in the right space.** Choose to read in a quiet, well-lit space. Your chair should be comfortable but provide good support. Libraries were designed for reading—they should be your first option! Don't use your bed for reading textbooks; since the time you were read bedtime stories, you have probably associated reading in bed with preparation for sleeping.
- **Avoid distractions.** Active reading takes place in your short-term memory. Every time you move from task to task, you have to "reboot" your short-term memory and you lose the continuity of active reading. Multitasking will cause you to lose your place and force you to start over again. Every time you lose focus, you cut your effectiveness and increase the amount of time you need to complete the assignment.
- **Avoid reading fatigue.** Work for about fifty minutes, and then give yourself a break for five to ten minutes. Put down the book, walk around, get a snack, stretch, or do some deep knee bends. Short physical activity will do wonders to help you feel refreshed.

- **Read your most difficult assignments early** in your reading time, when you are freshest.
- **Make your reading interesting.** Try connecting the material you are reading with your class lectures or with other chapters. Ask yourself where you disagree with the author. Approach finding answers to your questions like an investigative reporter. Carry on a mental conversation with the author.

6.3 Dealing with Special Texts

While the active reading process outlined earlier is very useful for most assignments, you should consider some additional strategies for reading assignments in other subjects.

Mathematics Texts

Mathematics present unique challenges in that they typically contain a great number of formulas, charts, sample problems, and exercises. Follow these guidelines:

- Do not skip over these special elements as you work through the text.
- Read the formulas and make sure you understand the meaning of all the factors.
- Substitute actual numbers for the variables and work through the formula.
- Make formulas real by applying them to real-life situations.
- Do all exercises within the assigned text to make sure you understand the material.
- Since mathematical learning builds upon prior knowledge, do not go on to the next section until you have mastered the material in the current section.
- Seek help from the instructor or teaching assistant during office hours if need be.

Reading Graphics

You read earlier about noticing graphics in your text as a signal of important ideas. But it is equally important to understand what the graphics intend to convey. Textbooks contain tables, charts, maps, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, and the newest form of graphics—Internet URLs for accessing text and media material. Many students are tempted to skip over graphic material and focus only on the reading. Don't. Take the time to read and understand your textbook's graphics. They will increase your understanding, and because they engage different comprehension processes, they will create different kinds of memory links to help you remember the material.

BRCC students in class.
Photo by Joseph Smith

To get the most out of graphic material, use your critical thinking skills and question why each illustration is present and what it means. Don't just glance at the graphics; take time to read the title, caption, and any labeling in the illustration. In a chart, read the data labels to understand what is being shown or compared. Think about projecting the data points beyond the scope of the chart; what would happen next? Why?

Table 6.2 "Common Uses of Textbook Graphics" shows the most common graphic elements and notes what they do best. This knowledge may help guide your critical analysis of graphic elements.

Scientific Texts

Science occurs through the experimental process: posing hypotheses, and then using experimental data to prove or disprove them. When reading scientific texts, look for hypotheses and list them in the left column of your notes pages. Then make notes on the proof (or disproof) in the right column. In scientific studies these are as important as the questions you ask for other texts. Think critically about the hypotheses and the experiments used to prove or disprove them. Think about questions like these:

- Can the experiment or observation be repeated? Would it reach the same results?
- Why did these results occur? What kinds of changes would affect the results?
- How could you change the experiment design or method of observation? How would you measure your results?
- What are the conclusions reached about the results? Could the same results be interpreted in a different way?

Social Sciences Texts

Social sciences texts, such as those for history, economics, and political science classes, often involve interpretation where the authors' points of view and theories are as important as the facts they present. Put your critical thinking skills into overdrive when you are reading these texts. Record your reflections in the margins and in your notes. As you read, ask yourself questions such as the following:

- Why is the author using this argument?
- Is it consistent with what we're learning in class?
- Do I agree with this argument?
- Would someone with a different point of view dispute this argument?
- What key ideas would be used to support a counterargument?

Social science courses often require you to read primary source documents. Primary sources include documents, letters, diaries, newspaper reports, financial reports, lab reports, and records that provide firsthand accounts of the events, practices, or conditions you are studying. Start by understanding the author(s) of the document and his or her agenda. Infer their intended audience. What response did the authors hope to get from their audience? Do you consider this a bias? How does that bias affect your thinking about the subject? Do you recognize personal biases that affect how you might interpret the document?

Foreign Language Texts

Reading texts in a foreign language is particularly challenging—but it also provides you with invaluable practice and many new vocabulary words in your "new" language. It is an effort that really pays off. Start by analyzing a short portion of the text (a sentence or two) to see what you do know. Remember that all languages are built on idioms as much as on individual words. Do any of the phrase structures look familiar? Can you infer the meaning of the sentences? Do they make sense based on the context? If you still can't make out the meaning, choose one or two words to look up in your dictionary and try again. Look for longer words, which generally are the nouns and verbs that will give you meaning sooner. Don't rely on a dictionary (or an online translator); a word-for-word translation does not always yield good results. For example, the Spanish phrase "Entre y tome asiento" might correctly be translated (word for word) as "Between and drink a seat," which means nothing, rather than its actual meaning, "Come in and take a seat."

Reading in a foreign language is hard and tiring work. Make sure you schedule significantly more time than you would normally allocate for reading in your own language and reward yourself with more frequent breaks. But don't shy away from doing this work; the best way to learn a new language is practice, practice, practice.

Note to English-language learners: You may feel that every book you are assigned is in a foreign language. If you do struggle with the high reading level required of college students, check for college resources that may

be available to ESL (English as a second language) learners. Never feel that those resources are only for weak students. As a second-language learner, you possess a rich linguistic experience that many American-born students should envy. You simply need to account for the difficulties you'll face and (like anyone learning a new language) practice, practice, practice.

Integrating Reading with Your Family Life

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If you are a parent of young children, you know how hard it is to get your schoolwork done with them around. You might want to consider some of these strategies.

- Don't expect that you will often get long periods of uninterrupted reading time. Find or create short periods of time to do things like scanning the assignment and preparing your questions.
- Schedule your heavy reading for early in the morning or late at night when the children are sleeping. Don't use that precious uninterrupted time for watching television or washing the dishes; those can be done when the kids are awake.
- Read to your children and then tell them it's time for everybody to read their own book. (Even very young children like to "read" books by looking at the pictures.) You'll be surprised how long kids will read, especially when they see Mommy and Daddy reading, too.
- Take your reading with you. You can get a lot of reading done while waiting for your children during music or dance class or soccer practice, or while you wait to pick them up at school.
- Share child-care responsibilities with other students who also have children. This can buy an additional big block of reading time for each of you.

Online Reading

When accessing materials online, you should ask additional questions in order to fully understand the assignment. The Internet provides access to virtually endless numbers of articles on just about any subject. The following five steps will help you understand the "story behind the story" in online materials and also evaluate the reliability of the material, especially if this is a reading you selected yourself for research or independent work.

1. Look at the URL, the Web address. It can give you important information about the reliability and intentions of the site. For example, a different article about cholesterol on a pharmaceutical company's Web site might be biased toward treatment of high cholesterol with a drug the company makes.
2. Look at the page's perimeter and the "masthead" at the top of the page. What can you learn from poking around with navigation tabs or buttons: what do they tell you about the objective of the Web site? Look for a tab labeled "About Us" or "Biography"; those pages will give you additional background on the writer.
3. Check the quality of the information. Based on what you learned earlier, ask yourself if the information from this Web site is reliable for your needs. If you need the most up-to-date information, check the bottom of the page, where a "last modified" date may be shown. Does the author reference reliable sources? Are they active and reputable?
4. Consider what others are saying about the site. Does the author offer references, reviews, or quotes about the material? Check blogs to see what other people think of the author or Web site by searching for the title of the article together with the word "review" or "blog." Trust your impressions about the material. You have recently been exposed to related material in your class and textbooks. What does your "gut" say about the material? If you are unsure of

the quality of the information, don't use it or check first with your instructor or college librarian before you do.

Additional Resources

University of California Berkeley Library. http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html
Cornell University Olin and Uris Libraries. http://guides.library.cornell.edu/evaluating_Web_pages

6.4 Building Your Vocabulary

Both leaders and advertisers inspire people to take action by choosing their words carefully and using them precisely. A good vocabulary is essential for success in any role that involves communication, and just about every role in life requires good communication skills. We include this section on vocabulary in this chapter on reading because of the connections between vocabulary building and reading. Building your vocabulary will make your reading easier, and reading is the best way to build your vocabulary.

Learning new words can be fun and does not need to involve tedious rote memorization of word lists. The first step, as in any other aspect of the learning cycle, is to prepare yourself to learn. Consciously decide that you want to improve your vocabulary; decide you want to be a student of words. Work to become more aware of the words around you: the words you hear, the words you read, the words you say, and those you write. Do you have a lazy vocabulary? Wake it up with the "lazy speech" exercise. (See activity on page 3xx)

Building a stronger vocabulary should start with a strong foundation of healthy word use. Just as you can bring your overuse of certain words to your conscious awareness in the previous activity, think about the kinds of words you should be using more frequently. Some of the words you might consciously practice are actually very simple ones you already know but significantly underuse or use imprecisely. For example, many students say he or she "goes" instead of he or she "says." This may seem like a small matter, but it's important from both a reader's and a writer's perspective to distinguish among the different meanings. And you can develop greater awareness by bringing some of these words into your speech.

These habits are easier to put into action if you have more and better material to draw upon: a stronger vocabulary. The following tips will help you gain and correctly use more words.

- **Be on the lookout for new words.** Most will come to you as you read, but they may also appear in an instructor's lecture, or a class discussion. They may pop up in random places like billboards, menus, or even online ads!
- **Write down the new words you encounter, along with the sentences in which they were used.** Do this in your notes with new words from a class or reading assignment. Many word lovers carry a small notepad or a stack of index cards specifically for this purpose.
- **Infer the meaning of the word.** The context in which the word is used may give you a good clue about its meaning. Do you recognize a common word root in the word? (Check Table 5.3 "Common Latin and Greek Word Roots" for common roots.) What do *you* think it means?
- **Look up the word in a dictionary.** Do this as soon as possible (but only after inferring the meaning within a couple hours, definitely during the same day. How does the dictionary definition compare with what you inferred?
- **Write the word in a sentence, ideally one that is relevant to you.** If the word has more than one definition, write a sentence for each.
- **Say the word out loud** and then say the definition and the sentence you wrote.
- **Use the word.** Find occasion to use the word in speech or writing over the next two days.
- **Schedule a weekly review** with yourself to go over your new words and their meanings.

Table 6.5 Common Latin and Greek Word Roots

Root	Meaning	Examples
auto	self	automatic, automobile
bi	two	bicycle, biplane
bio	life	biography, biology
chrono	time	synchronize, chronicle
dict	say	predict, dictate
gen	give birth	generate, genetic
geo	earth	geology, geography, geometry
log	thought	biology, logic, pathology
manu	hand	manufacture, manual
phil	love	philosophy, anglophile
port	carry	transport, portable
sub	under	submarine, subtract
vac	empty	vacuum, evacuate

6.5 Chapter Takeaways

Reading

- Reading, like learning, involves a cycle of preparing, absorbing, recording, and reviewing.
- In college, you will be expected to do much reading; it is not unusual to do two or more hours of reading for every hour you spend in class. In college, you are also expected to think critically about what you read.
- Active reading involves four steps:
    1. Prepare for reading by scanning the assignment and developing questions for which you want to discover answers through your reading.
    2. Read the material and discover the answers to your questions.
    3. Capture the information by highlighting and annotating the text as well as by taking effective notes.
    4. Review the reading by studying your notes, by integrating them with your class notes, and by discussing the reading with classmates.
- Before you read, learn as much as you can about the author and his or her reason for writing the text. What is his or her area of expertise? Why did the instructor select this text?
- When scanning a reading, look for clues to what might be important. Read the section titles, study illustrations, and look for keywords and boldface text.
- Do not highlight your text until you have read a section completely to be sure you understand the context. Then go back and highlight and annotate your text during a second read-through.
- Think critically about what you are reading. Do you agree with what the author is saying? How does it relate to the rest of the material in the course? What does this new material mean to you in "real life?"

Special Texts and Situations

- Do all the exercises in math textbooks; apply the formulas to real-world situations.
- Practice "reading" the illustrations. Each type of graphic material has its own strength or purpose.
- Look for statements of hypotheses and experimental design when reading science texts.

- History, economics, and political science texts are heavily influenced by interpretation. Think critically about what you are reading.
- Working with foreign language texts requires more time and more frequent breaks. Don't rely on word-for-word translations.
- If you need to read with children around, don't put off your reading until you have a large block of time; learn to read in short periods as available.
- When reading on the Internet, be extra diligent to evaluate the source of the material to decide how reliable that source may be.
- If English is your second language, seek out resources that may be offered on campus. In any case, be patient with the process of mastering college-level English. And always remember this: what feels like a disadvantage in one situation can be a great gift in another situation.

Vocabulary

- Reading and vocabulary development are closely linked. A stronger vocabulary makes reading easier and more fun; the best way to build a vocabulary is to read.
- Look for new words everywhere, not just in class.
- When you encounter a new word, follow these steps:
    1. Write it down and write down the sentence in which it was used.
    2. Infer its meaning based on the context and word roots.
    3. Look it up in a dictionary.
    4. Write your own sentence using the word.
    5. Say the word, its definition, and your sentence out loud.
    8. Find an opportunity to use the word within two days.

BRCC Student in science class. Photo by Joseph Smith