

Introduction

So, you've decided to dual enroll at community college. So did I, a few years back, so I know where you're coming from. Homeschooled, looking to get a jump start on higher education. Maybe, like your author, you've spent some time away from the U.S. having adventures. Maybe you've gone to school before, or maybe you've done school online, or perhaps you've only ever known whatever curriculum your mom brewed up in a cauldron with some eye of newt and essence of knowledge. Either way, college is very different than any other school you've ever done, and it's far more challenging.

The first key feature of college, in general, is that it is elective. Until now, your education has been involuntary, and you've had no choice but to go through the grades, passively learning. But no longer. College is not mandatory, and you don't have to go through with it if you don't want to. In fact, if you don't want to, you probably shouldn't go through with it. If you are not internally motivated to do well in college, you probably will not. A college education takes a lot of time and energy, and if you are not serious about pursuing your goals of higher learning, then that time and energy may very well be wasted. So be very careful when you decide to venture into the wilds of higher education.

To do well in college, you must have a good reason to be there. Maybe you hope to become a professional and you need a degree in a certain field to achieve your dreams. Maybe you have no idea what you want to be, but you hope college will provide a way forward. Maybe you are enrolling because you want to take advantage of the opportunity to save time that dual enrollment provides. In any case, you must want to succeed. If you don't want to succeed, then

boy are you in the wrong place. College is difficult, but if you have what it takes to brave the wilds, then it can be enjoyable, and deeply rewarding. In college, you are either the guardian of your own academic success or the architect of your failure. You're determined and impassioned? Good. The following notes will help you survive.



College is Difficult

College, as a rule, is more challenging than high school. The workload for each class is heavier in general, and the grading system more stringent than in most public schools (though maybe not your parents'). Each class you take will have its own challenges, and the more classes you take, the more work. This work generally takes two forms: homework and class sessions.

A class session is your basic lecture. You sit in a chair with your classmates while the professor talks for a few hours. Notably, you don't have to attend every single session, though if you don't, you will miss out on learning opportunities that will come back to bite you. Different professors have differing policies too. One of my first professors locked the door to keep out latecomers. Another thing to bear in mind is that unless you have good info to the contrary, you cannot have your phone or other technology out during a class session. A few people in my class got busted for this and had to leave the room, so be warned. Despite the tighter regulations, a classroom is my favorite way to learn. At a community college like the one I went to, the classes are typically very small, so the professor can give more attention to each student.

As a homeschooler, this may be your first brush with a classroom. It may seem daunting, but it is one of the best ways to learn and receive help from your professor. If you find yourself stricken by social anxiety from being in a room with strangers, don't worry, you don't have to take an active role in the discussion unless the professor calls upon you. Instead, take more detailed notes, and listen to other students. You can learn from their questions to the professor

too, not just your own. If, on the contrary, you find the atmosphere and debate exhilarating, then feel free to engage in the lecture by asking questions of the professor and noting their answers.

As you will swiftly learn, much of the academic work is performed outside the classroom, in the form of homework. Typically, each class will recommend that you do 4-6 hours of homework a week outside of the classroom. This may not seem like much when compared to a week or a month, but trust me, it adds up,

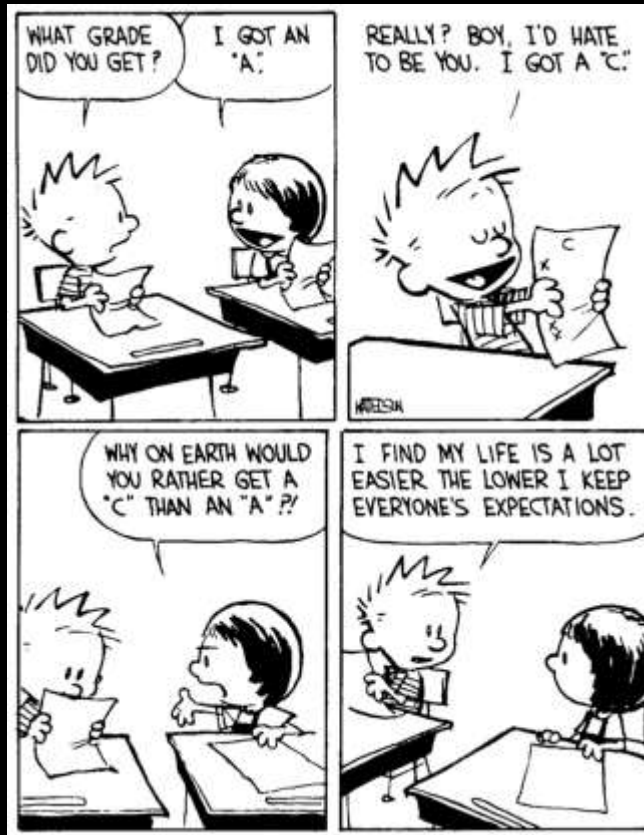
The homework itself can take many forms, again depending on the class and the whim of your professor. Homework could be a textbook to be read over the week, a quiz, a paper, or a thousand other things. Homework often provides the bulk of your final grade in a class, so make sure that you do it well. It also takes time to complete, so make sure that you leave enough time in your schedule to do it all. This may mean cutting out fun activities, so you will just have to forgo those pleasures that conflict too harshly with your school schedule. When conflict with each other, for instance, if two classes have each assigned you massive chapters to read from different textbooks, you may not have time to do them both and must prioritize the most critical assignment for your desired grade.

Something else that sets college apart from public school is the rigor of the grading system. Many new students are dismayed to discover that their papers and tests receive low grades, despite them having performed the assignment to the letter. This is because grades in college are built up from zero, instead of starting at 100, and centered around 70, or C. That means that when a professor is grading your paper, they will mark your paper up according to the strength of your performance, instead of marking your grade down from 100 according to

your errors. A submission that follows all the rules and fulfills the assignment to the letter will achieve a grade of C. To earn a higher grade, you will have to go above and beyond the letter of assignment to demonstrate true insight and mastery of the course material. This usually takes more effort.

However, as my first professor told me, effort and performance are not always linked. A student may get an A after doing very little work to earn it, while another student may get a very low grade despite agonizing over their submission for days. Most assignments will have a rubric. Be sure to examine it and model your submission according to the ideals laid out therein. You will really have to work for your grades. This is why internal motivation is so crucial. Between the heavy workload and high standards, if you are not motivated to invest real effort into your work, you will not be rewarded with a good grade. Always go the extra mile for that A.

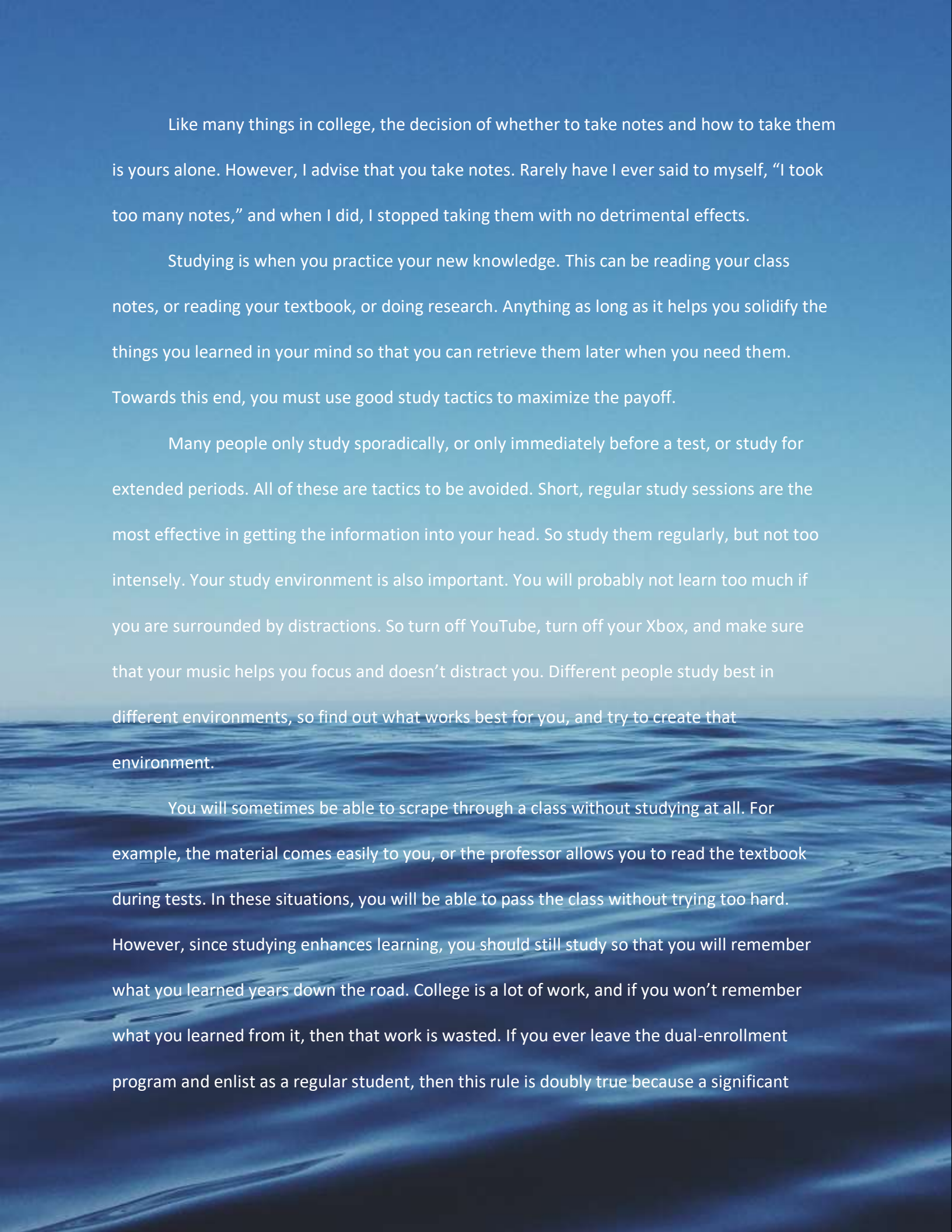




Taking Notes and Studying

As I've said before, the classes are probably more challenging and the workload heavier than anything you've done before. The test will be more rigorous, and at times you may feel like you just don't know the material well enough. But it doesn't have to be that way. There are two things you can do to help you more completely learn the material and to retain it: taking notes and studying.

Any time you are in a class session and the professor is speaking, you should be taking notes. Any time you are reading your textbook and come across something you didn't already know; you should be taking notes. Notes serve to help you remember what you were taught in class or read in your book. Unless you have a perfect memory, and few of us do, you will often wish you could remember what your professor said in class yet be unable to recall it. The volume of notes you take is entirely up to you and may vary by class. For example, I hardly took any notes for my sociology class because it was, for once, easy. However, I took copious notes for my statistics and algebra classes. These notes served as a reference for later studying. Additionally, the process of writing helps solidify information in your memory, so you will recall it better when you need it. The type of notes is also up to you. Some people keep very organized notes, essentially outlining the professor's lecture or the textbook chapter, and ranking their points by importance. Some people, myself included, keep disorganized notes with facts and points jumbled about the page with particularly interesting points underlined, and seasoned with a light garnish of doodles.



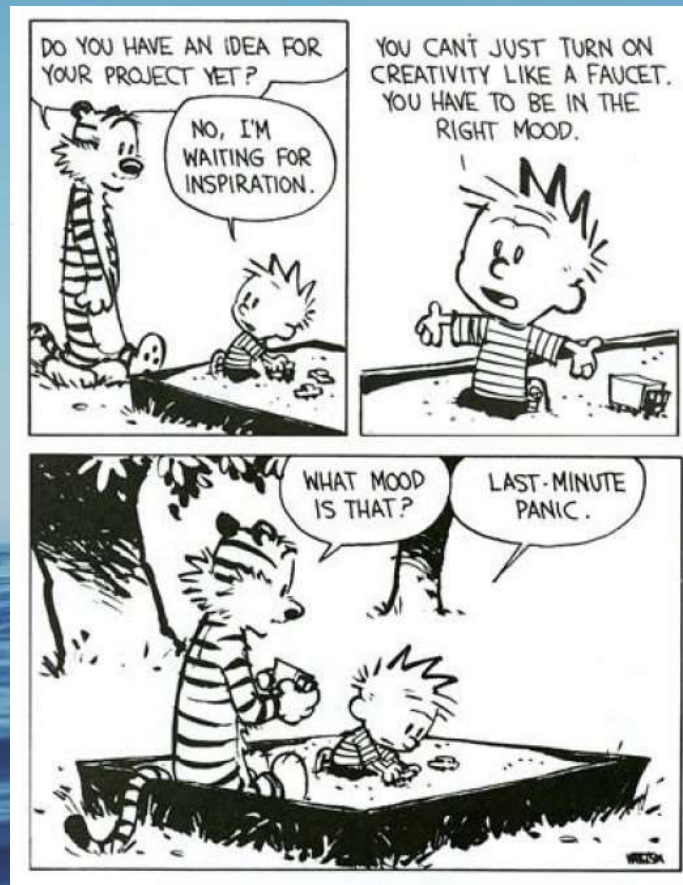
Like many things in college, the decision of whether to take notes and how to take them is yours alone. However, I advise that you take notes. Rarely have I ever said to myself, “I took too many notes,” and when I did, I stopped taking them with no detrimental effects.

Studying is when you practice your new knowledge. This can be reading your class notes, or reading your textbook, or doing research. Anything as long as it helps you solidify the things you learned in your mind so that you can retrieve them later when you need them. Towards this end, you must use good study tactics to maximize the payoff.

Many people only study sporadically, or only immediately before a test, or study for extended periods. All of these are tactics to be avoided. Short, regular study sessions are the most effective in getting the information into your head. So study them regularly, but not too intensely. Your study environment is also important. You will probably not learn too much if you are surrounded by distractions. So turn off YouTube, turn off your Xbox, and make sure that your music helps you focus and doesn't distract you. Different people study best in different environments, so find out what works best for you, and try to create that environment.

You will sometimes be able to scrape through a class without studying at all. For example, the material comes easily to you, or the professor allows you to read the textbook during tests. In these situations, you will be able to pass the class without trying too hard. However, since studying enhances learning, you should still study so that you will remember what you learned years down the road. College is a lot of work, and if you won't remember what you learned from it, then that work is wasted. If you ever leave the dual-enrollment program and enlist as a regular student, then this rule is doubly true because a significant

amount of money will be going into your education. Moreover, trying to scrape through a class without studying will be stressful. Your grades will certainly be worse than if you had studied, paradoxically, putting in the extra work will save yourself a load of stress.



Communication

The college workload is very heavy, and the material is challenging. It may very well be that you find that you are falling behind no matter how hard you study. However, you are not out of resources yet. Your professor can answer many of your questions and will be happy to see you do well in their class. Communication is very important in college, but there are a few rules surrounding it.

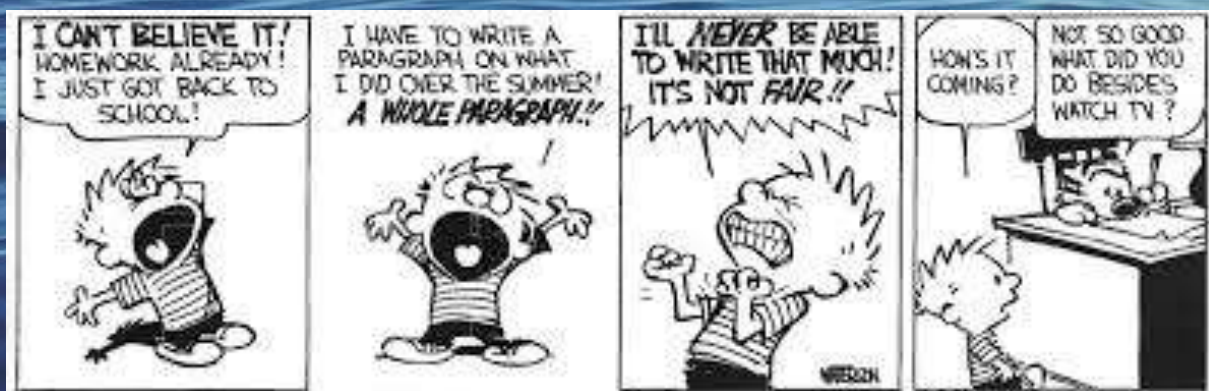
The first rule is professionalism. You are no longer treated as a child, and you are not expected to communicate like one. The primary mode of communication with your professors is through email, and your emails must be written professionally. You must present a specific question or questions, and provide enough detail in your question for your professor to give you a detailed and comprehensive answer. You should always address your professor with their title and never with their first name. The subject line on your email should also give them a good idea of what the email contains. Bear in mind that you are not your professor's only student, or that they might teach more than one class, so their attention is very divided. Most professors will respond to your emails within 24 hours, so do not wait to ask your questions until the last minute.

If your class has in-person sessions, your professor will likely be available during office hours to consult with you in person. This is a great way to get your questions answered and also to get to know your professor a little better. However, you aren't their only student, and their time is limited. To make the best of your limited time in their office, you should have your questions ready. It may help to write them out, as I've found that I often forget half of what I

meant to ask. You may need to schedule an appointment ahead of time, so be sure to find out about your professor's policy on office hours. The information will probably be available in the class syllabus.

If your questions aren't necessarily about a class's coursework, but instead about the school in general, you can ask your academic advisor. They are there to help you do well in college and are a great resource. However, like your professor, your academic advisor will have very limited time and you will absolutely have to schedule an appointment ahead of time. Again, have a list of specific questions ready so as not to waste time.

Another resource at your disposal is your fellow students. Some of them may have taken the class before and can help you with troublesome assignments. Collaborating on assignments with friends can be a good way to achieve a good grade.



Managing your Time

A common problem among college students such as your author is poor time management. There are a limited number of hours in the day, and in addition to schoolwork, you also have to sleep, eat, and hopefully have some fun. However, striking a balance between all these things is never easy. Some people tend to do school to the exclusion of all else, and while that will keep your grades high, it won't be healthy. Most people, however, have a hard time fitting the right amount of school in with the rest of their lives. Some people have a job or have other commitments. Others spend most of their time having fun. If you are going to do well, you have to manage your time such that you don't spend too much on schoolwork and burn yourself out, and don't spend so little on school that you get bad grades. It's a delicate balance that only you can figure out, but here are some pointers.

A common tendency is for people to let their assignments slide until the deadline is imminent and then working feverishly to make up lost ground. This is an unhealthy habit and is to be avoided. It not only increases stress, but if you only complete your assignments on the last day, you won't be able to ask for feedback before you submit. Instead, you should work steadily and complete the project a few days before the deadline. Then, you can unofficially send it to your professor to get feedback, revise it a little bit, then submit it with plenty of time to spare.

Another common unhealthy tendency is something I call Tortoise and Hare Syndrome, in honor of the fable. Here, you work hard on an assignment for a while, then, when you see that you are ahead of schedule, you decide to take a break and goof off for a while.

Then, before you know it, the deadline is bearing down and you must rush to finish the project. The final product has a strong beginning, but a rushed ending, and you will probably not get the good grade you would have gotten if you had worked steadily. Working steadily and efficiently will yield a vastly superior finished project.

If you find that you are spending so much time on other things that your grades are suffering, then you will need to reorganize your schedule to make time for school. Some people, such as me, have a hard time physically forcing themselves to do school. If this is the case, you may want to find some way to externally motivate yourself to work harder. Money, candy, or simple peer pressure and accountability are all useful tools. Find what works for you.

Another thing that you will definitely want to do is to make a schedule that maps out your semester. At the very least, you should note down the due dates of your assignments, because nothing is more unpleasant than missing out on an assignment. That hurts your grades. Once, I mistook the deadline for a final exam submission and got a 0. That hurt.

Managing your time is just one of those life skills that you have to develop or die, and college provides a structured environment for you to do that. Make sure that you are spending enough time on your education to learn the material and get good grades. However, also be sure to balance that with the other obligations of your life.



Mental and Physical Health

College demands a lot. It demands copious amounts of time and energy, and it is often exhausting. However, it is probably not the only thing on your plate. You might have a job, or a gaming group, or band practice, or some other commitment that draws your attention away from schoolwork. Trying to pack all that into your days will be stressful, and it can even take a toll on your mental and physical health.

Sleeping time is often one of the first things to go when there's a draw on your time. This is bad for obvious reasons. You need sleep. If you aren't getting enough sleep, then you will not perform well in school or any other area of your life. If you ever find yourself nodding off during a lecture, you know it's time to reevaluate your schedule and build in extra hours of sleep. Coffee is no antidote, set a bedtime and stick to it.

Eating well and exercising are two other things that contribute to your overall wellbeing that are often sacrificed to the altar of homework. A life filled with study and lectures is often sedentary, so build time into your schedule to exercise. You don't have to be a fitness freak, but you should absolutely get moving. Similarly, you should eat well. Preparing good meals takes time and energy that maybe you don't want to spend. If you are still living at home, your parents may provide you with meals. If that's the case, good for you. If not, then you have to take the time to eat good food and not unhealthy but speedy meals.

Mental health is also important. College is incredibly stressful, so build in some time to spend doing something you like. Spend time with friends or family. Play video games. Watch movies. But be very careful that your leisure activities don't interfere with your homework. If

there is ever a choice to be made between urgent homework and fun, you should always choose the homework. Trust me. Though it may be unpleasant, college is an investment of time. If you put in the time, then you will reap knowledge and credentials. These things are irreplaceable, while a fun time with your friends or a few minutes at your favorite game is probably a renewable resource.

If you are in college, then you are there to learn and to make forward progress through your education, not to goof off. If you remember that good grades are important, remember your final life goals, and remember to take care of yourself, then you should have a fighting chance.

