

# Advice for college students

On every college campus, at the beginning of every semester, you can almost feel the optimism in the air. Indeed, one of the wonderful characteristics of life as a college student is that all students get a fresh start every semester. Students who did poorly last semester can put that experience behind them. Then, they can make adjustments that enable them to perform better in the current semester.

What adjustments can they make? I recommend four. First, students should establish a routine and stick to it. Students who struggle in college often have trouble managing their time. They procrastinate and after time passes, they end up with too much work left to do in too little time. Students can overcome the tendency to procrastinate by treating their college experience as a work experience. Students should establish a work day, perhaps working 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day (or every weekday). If students give themselves an hour for lunch, they will have a nine-hour work day. This will give them enough time to get all of their work done.

Second, students should find a place to study that does not have distractions. When I was in college, I tried to study in the library but so many people wandered around chatting that I found it hard to concentrate. Staying in the library prevented me from making good

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use of my study time, so I found other quiet places, such as empty classrooms and my apartment (where I had a desk). Third, students should set up a reward system for themselves. We all respond to incentives, and students are no different. Students should identify small goals that they want to accomplish during a day and during a week and give themselves rewards when they accomplish their goals. Students should avoid using social media during most of their work day because doing so will keep them from doing their work. However, students can harness their desire to be on social media to help them get some work done. For instance, suppose a student wants to read a chapter in her biology textbook, she can allow herself to be on social media for 5 or 10 minutes after she finishes reading the chapter. Or if the student sticks to her schedule, by working from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., she can start off the next day with a specialty coffee. When I was in graduate school, I used to do push-ups and sit-ups after reading a certain number of pages. I know that this might not be much of a reward for some people, but it worked for me. Every student

will have different rewards that will work for him or her.

Fourth, students should actively engage with their material. If they have highlighters, they should throw them out. Highlighting important passages is too passive. A student is only recognizing something as important. The student would be much better off taking notes on their reading assignments. If students can write out, in their own words, a chapter's main points, they are more likely to understand and remember those points. Students can actively engage with their material in other ways as well. They can do practice problems. This will help them identify what they know and what they don't. If a student gets a practice problem wrong, she can figure out her mistake and she will be unlikely to make that mistake again. Students can also engage with their material by participating in study groups. In the group, students will have to explain concepts to each other. Once a student can explain a concept to someone else, she has a firm grasp of the concept.

These four suggestions can help students achieve their academic goals. If students adopt these suggestions, their current optimism is more likely to be well-founded.

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