

Get Organized for Success

Planners and To Do Lists

The examples below are all great tips to start your own method of organization. Don't go overboard and attempt to try all of these though. Find the strategies that work for you.

- Buy a planner and write in all of your classes and assignments (including reading assignments).
- Make a weekly list of reading assignments and keep it somewhere you will see it.
- Buy a separate notebook for each class. Write out the assignments and readings in the front and use the rest for notes and studying.
- Write the dates and reading assignments on the inside cover of your textbooks. Every day you can open your book to see what needs to be done.
- The syllabus you receive on the first day of class is important. Don't lose it and read it several times.

Scheduling Study Time

- How much time do you need to study? You will hear that you need between two and three hours of study time for each hour you spend in class. You will find that the actual time you need to be successful will vary depending on the course and the types of assignments given.
- Expect to have an assignment every time you have class. This may be a graded assignment or it may be reading and preparing for class. Make sure you give yourself time to do this work.
- Also expect that there will be key points in the term where you will have even more homework and tests. The middle and end of each term typically include exams and large projects for most courses.
- You can better plan for study time when you use one of the organization tips above to map out your project and exam dates. This will allow you to plan ahead for busy parts of the term.
- You do not have to study at the same time or location each week. You do need to have short review sessions several times a week.
- Know what percent of your final grade each assignment or test is worth and spend an appropriate amount of time on the assignment. For example, you better be sure to do a great job on something that is worth 50 percent of your final grade in a course.

Note Taking Tips

Before Class

- Read and review materials before class. Look for main ideas by looking for headings or bolded words. Develop questions for class while you read the day's assignment.
- Sit where you are most likely to pay attention.
- Review the previous day's notes before class. This refreshes your memory and is especially helpful for classes where new material builds on what has already been covered. Interacting with class material more frequently also helps you remember it for exams.

During Class

- Listen for clues that will tell you what is important. If an instructor repeats something, it is probably a key theme for the day. Instructors will sometimes use language that outlines the themes for the day and that highlights the main points. Examples include introductory phrases like "today we will discuss," outline words like "first" or "second" and concluding phrases such as "the main idea of today's lecture was." Pay attention to what an instructor writes on the board or has printed in a presentation.
- Make sure that your notes are organized. This will mean something different for each student. Determine what works best for you. Generally speaking though, your notes should be in chronological order, labeled and separated by course.
- Try using pictures, diagrams and charts to visually explain what you have written down.
- Leave open space on each page of notes. This allows you to fill in anything you may have missed during the lecture.

After Class

- Review your notes within 24 hours of the lecture.
- Do not be afraid to edit your notes. This is why you left open space on the page. Try re-reading your course materials or working with a study group to determine if you missed anything in class.
- Conduct weekly note review sessions. Again, repetition will help you remember the information.
- Some students find it helpful to re-write their notes.

Study Techniques

Be sure to find study techniques that work for you. The important thing is to study throughout the semester rather than only studying for tests. Below are some ideas for frequent short study sessions.

- Talk to a friend or family member about what you are learning. Explaining ideas and concepts to someone else helps your mind organize and understand material better.
- Study with a friend from class. You may understand different topics and be able to boost each other's knowledge.
- Make diagrams and charts to organize ideas and see connections.
- Try to apply a theory or concept to "real life." Find real life examples of what you are learning.
- Ask why and how, not just what. This is not just about memorization. It is about why is it important to know the material.
- Think about whether you agree with an idea or theory.
- Challenge yourself to figure out similarities and differences between new ideas and others you have already learned.
- Be open to opportunities for quick study sessions. Traveling, waiting for friends and breaks between classes are all great opportunities.
- If you need to memorize, go back to basics.
 1. Flashcards do work!
 2. Find a naming device that helps you remember.
 3. Put it to music. You know you remember your favorite song lyrics.
 4. Review frequently rather than cramming.
- Repetition works. Copy your notes the same day you took them.

College Reading and Writing

Tips for College Writing

- Trust the writing process: use pre-writing, drafting, peer review and revision to improve your writing. This process is about formulating your ideas and improving your writing. It is not simply about grammar.
- Figure out what times and where you write best.
- Utilize the Writing Studio for all stages of the writing process.
- Consider your purpose and your audience as you write. In other words, why are you writing it and who will be reading it.

Suggestions for Careful Reading

- Slow Down! There are times for rapid reading (road signs, the newspaper perhaps), but difficult reading, as of dense theoretical or literary texts, requires spending some time to make sure you grasp what is being said.
- Read Actively: This means reading to understand what the writer is saying (reading with the grain), and then thinking critically about what the writer is saying (reading against the grain). Practically, this means marking significant passages and writing comments in the margins when appropriate. For this purpose, a pencil might be better and more incisive than a highlighter. It does take a little longer to read actively, but doing so makes the text useful to you because you will have decided what parts struck you, and to what extent you agree with what's been said. For coursework, moreover, marking up your texts gives you a map for future writing and exam work—know what you will need to do with the text. And if you have insights as you read, write them down! It will be much easier to do so than to try to reconstruct the ideas later.
- Use a dictionary, especially with unfamiliar (and sometimes even familiar) words that seem key to the writer.
- Reconstruct the rhetorical context (figure out who is talking and why).
 1. "Who is the author? What are her or his motives, purposes, etc.?"
 2. "Who is the intended audience? How well do you fit into that intended audience?"
 3. "How does the context in which you are reading influence what you think of the text?"
- Determine the thesis and main points, as far as you can tell.
- Note significant questions provoked by the text and bring them to class.
- Discuss what you have read with others. Explaining something will help you better understand and will help you remember what you have read. Discussing something with others also helps you learn more as you hear the other person's perspective.
- Understand your attention span. Take breaks rather than reading for two hours. This gives you the opportunity to think about what you have read before reading more and it refreshes you so you can be more alert.

Test Taking Techniques

The best way to be successful on tests is to have good basic study habits and to study throughout the semester.

General Tips

- As soon as you get the test, write down any formulas or important information you do not want to forget.
- Read through the exam to develop a game plan.
 1. Know how many points each section is worth
 2. Determine how to allocate your time.
 3. Do you want to tackle the questions you are most confident with in order to spend more time later on difficult questions?
 4. Do you want to start with the section worth the most points?
- Do not linger on questions when you do not know the answer. Mark the question in the margin and come back to it if you have time.
- Think critically about each question and how it is phrased. If you do not understand what a question is asking, try to rephrase it in your mind or look at it from a different perspective.
- Do not rush out of the room when you finish. Take time to review your test.
 1. Did you answer every question?
 2. Did you answer thoroughly?
 3. Re-read the essay questions and the answers.
 4. Make sure you answered all parts of each question.
- Be sure that you are well rested on exam days and also eat breakfast the morning of exam days.

Tips for Multiple-Choice Questions

- Think of the correct answer before looking at the provided answer. If you find the answer you thought of as a choice, select it.
- Read all possible answers.
- Read questions carefully. Some questions ask for the best answer. Some questions ask for the only correct answer or the only incorrect answer.
- Do not base your answers on the letter choice of previous answers. (Do not look for patterns.)
- Use process of elimination. Cross out the answers you know are wrong, then determine which answer to select from the remaining.

Tips for Essay or Short Answer Questions

- Make a quick outline of the points you want to make in your answer.
- Read the question carefully before and after writing your essay. Some students make the mistake of not answering the full question.
- Know how much each essay question is worth and allocate your time accordingly.
 1. A question worth 50 percent of the test grade should be answered as thoroughly as possible.
 2. A question worth 10 percent of the test grade may require more of a short answer.
- Look for key words that tell you how to answer the question
 1. Describe/Discuss: This means you will write about the topic or idea as thoroughly as possible.
 2. Explain: This means you will describe how or why.
 3. Compare: You will be expected to state how two or more items are the same and how they are different.
 4. Contrast: You will be expected to state how two or more items differ.
 5. Analyze: You will explain an idea or topic critically and note both its strength and weakness as an idea or argument.
- Even if you cannot remember the exact terminology, you can still explain a concept in your own words to demonstrate your knowledge.