

# Introduction to the Book

The transition from high school to college can be overwhelming. Krystal Buhr, one of the students interviewed for this book, remembers her initial one-on-one meeting with her college English professor. “She tore my first paper up as I watched! I was stunned. No one had ever done anything like that to me before.”

Krystal’s experience reminds me of my first college history class with a professor known as Shotgun O’Grady. From the start of the class, he scribbled quickly on the blackboard and fired off a steady stream of ideas, dates, and details. Taken aback, I just listened for several minutes, and then he noticed me sitting there, my arms folded. “I expect you to know all this,” he commented. So I started taking notes, lots of them, and halfway through the class my hand was cramped from writing. By the end of the class, I had over ten pages of notes, and I wondered how I would ever study and remember all the material.



Krystal Buhr is a student at Bucknell University.



John Langan

Krystal Buhr and I, like countless other students, had to do a lot of work developing the writing, reading, and study skills needed to succeed in college. Because we had not mastered or been taught these skills in high school, we had to learn how to learn—at the same time that we were trying to deal with the whole new world of college life. We could have used a book that would teach us the learning skills we needed to know and that would share with us the hard-earned wisdom of other college students. *Ten Skills You Really Need To Succeed in School* will try to be that kind of book for you. Intended for first-year college students as well as for high school students thinking of going on to college, the book provides the know-how needed to achieve academic success.

## If You're in College Now

If you're in college now or starting soon and want immediate practical help, you should pay special attention to the following:

Learning how to manage your time (Chapter 4, pages 75–88)

Learning how to take effective classroom notes (Chapter 5, pages 89–104)

Learning how to study and memorize material (Chapter 6, pages 105–118)

Learning how to read and study textbooks (Chapter 7, pages 119–132)

Learning how to be a good test-taker (Chapter 8, pages 133–146)

Learning how to write effective papers (Chapters 9 and 10, pages 147–192)

Also, be sure to read carefully Chapter 1, pages 5–22. Many students in their first year of college must go through a period of adjustment, and if that transition takes too long, it can detract from the time needed for study. Chapter 1 will help you really think about why you are in college and will help you focus on the heart of the matter—which is to work hard at your studies.

## If You're in High School Now

If you're in high school, the first chapter you should turn to is Chapter 3. On pages 43–74, you'll see that one college student after another advises high-school students that the key to academic success is regular reading. Also, be sure to read the stories about Dr. Ben Carson, Maria Cardenas, and Ryan Klootwyk, three people who have transformed their lives through the power of reading.

After Chapter 3, you should go on to work through all the other chapters in the book. The chapters teach the skills that you need to become a better student. Chapter 1 may be of special value in helping you gain greater self-knowledge. Many high school students are accustomed to moving passively through the school system. They are more concerned about being like their peers and being liked by their peers than about learning or grades. Lacking a long-term view, they fail to realize that their peers are not going to help them succeed in college or in a career. The key to becoming a serious student is to realize that *you—and you alone—are responsible for your life.*

## The Book's Special Features

*Ten Skills You Really Need To Succeed in School* is a practical book with a special human dimension. It presents as clearly as possible the nuts-and-bolts skills needed for success in school. Using a hands-on approach, it provides a number of activities at the end of each chapter so that you can learn through doing. At the same time, the book personalizes the skills by including photos and testimonials of a number of college students and graduates. Seeing their pictures and reading their comments will give you a better sense that the skills presented are ones that really work. All the students and graduates quoted speak from their own hard-earned experience; all have bridged the gap between high school and college and learned what they need to do well in college.

## A Final Thought

Several years ago, my wife and I were vacationing in New Mexico. As we drove into one small town, we suddenly came upon a huge billboard. I was so struck by what it said that I stopped our car and wrote the words down:

**If you never have a dream, you'll never make a dream come true.**

On the first page of the first chapter, I comment that if you don't have the right attitude, you might as well throw this book in the trash. I'm not kidding. Some students are just pretenders: they talk the talk, but they're not ready to walk the walk. *Ten Skills You Really Need To Succeed in School* will help you “walk the walk”; it will help you master the thinking, reading, study, and writing skills needed to be a success. But the starting point must be a dream inside you—a belief and resolve in your heart that you will achieve a college education. If you decide—and *only you can decide*—that you want a college degree, this book will help you reach that goal.

John Langan