

2

Some Quick Study Tips

While it's not my purpose in this book to teach study skills, I do want to give you four quick hints that can make you a better student. The hints are based on my thirty years of experience working with first-year college students and teaching reading and study skills.

TIP **Tip 1** The most important steps you can take to succeed in school are to *go to every class* and *take a lot of notes*. If you don't go to class, or you go but just sit there without taking notes, chances are you're heading for a heap of trouble.

TIP **Tip 2** Let me ask you a question: Which is more important—learning how to read a textbook or learning how to read your professor? Write your answer here:

You may be surprised at the answer: What is far more important is learning how to read your professor—to understand what he or she expects you to learn in the course and to know for tests.

I remember becoming a good student in college only after I learned the truth of this statement. And I have interviewed hundreds of today's students who have said the same thing. Let me quote just one of them:

You absolutely have to be in class. Then you learn how to read the teacher and to know what he or she is going to want on tests. You could read an entire textbook, but that wouldn't be as good as being in class and writing down a teacher's understanding of ideas.

TIP **Tip 3** Many teachers base their tests mainly on the ideas they present in class. But when you have to learn a textbook chapter, do the following:

First, read the first and last few paragraphs of the chapter; they may give you a good overview of what the chapter is about.

Second, as you read the chapter, look for and mark off definitions of key terms and examples of those definitions.

Third, as you read the chapter, number any lists of items; if there are series of points and you number them 1, 2, 3, and so on, it will be easier to understand and remember them.

Fourth, after you've read the chapter, take notes on the most important material and test yourself on those notes until you can say them to yourself without looking at them.

TIP **Tip 4** Here's another question: Are you an organized person? Do you get out of bed on time, do you get to places on time, do you keep up with school work, do you allow time to study for tests and write papers?

If you are *not* an organized person, you're going to have trouble in school. Here are three steps to take to control your time:

First, pay close attention to the course outline, or *syllabus*, your instructors will probably pass out at the start of a semester. Chances are that syllabus will give you the dates of exams and tell you when papers or reports are due.

Second, move all those dates onto a *large monthly calendar*—a calendar that has a good-sized block of white space for each date. Hang the calendar in a place where you'll be sure to see it every day—perhaps above your desk or on a bedroom wall.

Third, buy a small notebook and write down every day a “*to do*” list of things that need to get done that day. Decide which items are most important, and focus on them first. (If you have classes that day, going to those classes will be “A” priority items.) Carry your list with you during the day, referring to it every so often and checking off items as you complete them.

Questions

1. Of the four hints listed above, which is the most important one for you? Why?
2. Which hint is the second most important for you, and why?
3. You may not realize just how quickly new information can be forgotten. For example, how much class material do you think most people forget in just two weeks? Check (✓) the answer you think is correct.

___ 20 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 40 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 60 percent is forgotten within two weeks

___ 80 percent is forgotten within two weeks

The truth is that within two weeks most people forget almost 80 percent of what they have heard! Given that fact, what should you be sure to do in all your classes?
