



Taking the Stress Out of Learning

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

Published

September 10th, 2017

When I travelled to California for my doctoral convocation I was surprised to be asked this question by the Registrar of the University. "How did you complete this program in only two years?" My reply was "I thought it was a two-year program." He answered "It is but nobody has finished in two years even though it is a full-time task". That surprised me further and I said "But I worked full-time and while I completed the program part-time". We laughed. You see I didn't know there were options.

It took me thirteen years to finish my first university degree. But I got faster. In a period of ten years, I graduated with four degrees from four different universities. Many have asked me how I did that while only taking one four-month leave of absence to do my Social Work practicum. Here are some hints for those who are wanting to succeed academically:

1. Start with the end goal in sight- Never enroll in any program that will not get you to where you want to be. It doesn't make sense to do upgrading if you have already passed your high school courses or to register for courses just because you don't know what you want to do. Choose a career and then load your courseload to get your credentials as quickly as possible.
2. Research study options - The internet and distance education institutions provide unique ways for you to learn. Always choose electives that are relevant to your desired career and make sure that you can transfer them into your degree program.
3. Apply for funding - Besides Student Loans there are hundreds of thousands of scholarships and bursaries that are available. In fact, many of these are not awarded because no one applies for them. When my uncle died, the family set up a scholarship in his name and were so disappointed when they didn't have one application for the first three years. Apply!
4. Get ahead of the class - As soon as you have been accepted into a course, ask for contact information of the instructor. Then ask for the course syllabus and order the text books. Think about the assignments. I used to do these things in the spring so that when the fall class began I was very aware of the expectations and ready to begin. Often I could ask questions and submit assignments even before my classmates had purchased their books.
5. Know yourself - I figured out that when I was tired the work took three times longer so often I would go home after work and have a nap. I would set my alarm for two hours and when I woke up found that I could zoom through my homework because I felt rested.
6. Develop a template - Set up an essay format that includes a submission page, body headings and bibliography so that you can easily just fill in each section.
7. Set boundaries - We are in an age of information so you will never be able to study every single research paper or article about your topic. Do what you can and then let it go. Make sure that you are one of the first to hand in your assignment as this will build your confidence and give you a sense of accomplishment versus crisis.
8. Eliminate excuses - Life will try to distract you but if you are committed you will do your work early enough that you will never need to ask for an extension. Just do it!
9. Keep realistic goals - You do not have to get more than 90% in a course to pass. My friend always keeps things in perspective by asking "What do you call the medical student with the lowest passing grade?" Of course, the answer is "Doctor". If you pass the courses, you will graduate. Most potential employers do not even ask for your transcript of marks.
10. Be wise - Choose a practicum placement in a setting where you would love to work. The organization will be a source of learning for you and will also provide the employer an opportunity to assess your skills. If you are well matched, you will have a job offer!