

Top 10 College Success Tips

Being successful in college takes hard work and perseverance. Know that Student Support Services is there to assist you on your college journey every step of the way. Here are ten tips for succeeding in college.



1. Go to every class

Many college students think that if a professor doesn't take attendance, then regular attendance isn't that important. Not true! You can never make up what you miss and you can't get it from someone else.

2. Study smart

Students who study smart spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades. Find a good place to study, organize your study time, silence your phone, and focus on one thing at a time.

3. Get involved

Students who participate in campus life usually have higher grades and enjoy college more. Join student organizations and explore your interests and passions, but don't spread yourself too thin. Your coursework should always come first.

4. Get to know your professors

Developing positive relationships with your instructors and professors is one way that you can significantly improve and enhance your college experience.

Being a First-Generation College Student

Being a first-generation college student is something you should be proud of, but it can come with its own set of challenges. Here are some tips to help you succeed in college and have a great college experience.



Build connections

It's not uncommon for first-generation college students to feel a bit isolated, especially if it feels like no one on campus shares their background.

The best way to feel like you belong is to participate in student activities and organizations. It's a great way to meet students who share your interests, and have some fun. *Be sure to also take advantage of all that your SSS program has to offer.*

Take charge of your education

There are people and services on campus to help and support you, but no one can do the work for you. You are responsible for your own academic progress.

Stay informed

Succeeding in college requires more than going to class and studying. You also need to understand your school's policies and procedures.

It's often assumed that college students know their school's policies and are aware of the procedures they need to follow. It is therefore up to you to get clarification when you don't understand something.

Choosing Your Classes

Choosing your classes is one of the most important things you'll do in college. And while your SSS and academic advisors can offer suggestions, the decision about which classes to take and when to take them is up to you.



Understand registration

Colleges generally assign a registration date (or range of dates) according to the number of hours students have completed.

Learn about your college's registration procedures and know the date and time you've been assigned to register. Be ready as soon as it opens! Some classes fill up quickly, so always register at the earliest possible time.

Choose your classes wisely

- ▶ Months before you need to register, schedule an appointment with your academic advisor to discuss the courses you're considering.
- ▶ Create a list of first-choice classes, along with a list of alternate course selections.
- ▶ Get all core requirements and prerequisites completed as early as possible.
- ▶ Schedule courses on a variety of subjects, with varying levels of difficulty.
- ▶ Know which courses are required for your major. Also know which courses must be taken in sequence, and which have a prerequisite.

Getting Organized

Being organized saves you time and makes your day run more smoothly. When you're organized, you also have less stress and feel more in control of your life.



Being organized will not only make you a better college student—it will also help you succeed in your career, and in life.

Organization Tips

Use a planner

Take a planner to every class. Record assignments, exam dates, special events, holidays, breaks, and the beginning and ending dates of each term.

Also use your planner to break large assignments and projects down into more manageable parts.

Have a system for organizing papers

- ▶ Keep important course information (instructor's email address, office hours, syllabus) in the front of your notebook or binder.
- ▶ It doesn't matter whether you use folders, spiral notebooks, or 3-ring binders. The important thing is that you have a system for organizing your papers and class notes that works for you—and that you have a specific place for every paper.
- ▶ Have a file for material that might be useful in the future, such as notes and tests from courses in your major.

Managing Your Time

In college, you are in control of how you use your time. While the freedom you have can be exciting, not managing your time wisely can make it more difficult to succeed in your classes, especially when you have other responsibilities (such as a job).



Here are some tips for managing your time.

Time management strategies

Create a weekly schedule

A schedule will help you plan out your days so that you're able to do everything you need to do—and still have time for fun and relaxation.

First, write in all classes, appointments, and work hours. You can then see when you have blocks of time for homework and studying—and when you have time for relaxation and social activities.

Identify wasted chunks of time

If you have time between classes, meet with a professor or your SSS advisor, run an errand, study, or just relax. The important thing is that you think about how you can best use the time you have.

Combine tasks

Study while you're doing laundry, go over a speech while cleaning your room, or review your notes while you're waiting for a ride. If you need to have a job, look for one that allows you to study during slow times.

Succeeding in Class

Smart students understand that when you're prepared, engaged, and involved in your classes, your grades will be higher and you'll enjoy your classes more. Here are some tips to help you succeed in all of your classes.



Class Success Tips

Be prepared

When you come to class, have all of your homework and reading done. Be alert, well-rested, and ready to learn. Put away anything that isn't directly related to what you're doing in that class, and give your instructor your full attention.

Sit up front and participate

When you sit up front, you can hear what's being said, see what's written, and you're less likely to get distracted. Sitting up front also makes it easier to ask and answer questions, and take part in discussions. When you're engaged and participate, you learn more and the time passes more quickly.

Take good notes

Most test questions come from information that's been presented in class. It's therefore important to have good notes to study from. Taking notes also helps you pay attention and stay focused—when you're taking notes, you don't have time to think about or do anything else.

For more notetaking tips, watch this short video.



VIDEO



Taking Good Notes

In college, you will spend much of your class time taking notes. Taking notes helps you stay focused on the information being presented, and because quizzes, tests, and exams usually cover material that's been discussed in class, having good notes to study from can significantly improve your grades.



Notetaking tips

Be organized

Whether you use three-ring notebooks, binders, spiral notebooks, or a laptop for class notes, the important thing is that you have a system for taking and organizing notes that works for you.

Format your notes

Start a new page for each day and class. Label each page with the class, date, page number, and topic. Use only one side of the paper, and skip lines between ideas/topics. This will give you space if you want to add something later. Also, leave a wide space on the left side of each page for key words (names, events, dates). Adding key words will help you organize your thoughts and make your notes easier to understand.

Don't worry about being perfect

To take notes faster, don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar, and use abbreviations and symbols.



VIDEO

For more notetaking tips, watch this quick video.



Studying Smart

As you have undoubtedly heard, you should study two (or more) hours for each hour you spend in class. But the key to success in college is not studying a lot—it's studying smart.



Here's how studying smart can help you get your assignments completed more efficiently and earn higher grades.

Get ready to study

Where, when, and how you study play a big part in how productive your study time will be.

Choose a good place to study

Your study area should be comfortable, quiet, well-lit, and have a surface for writing. This can be your dorm room or bedroom; however, these areas are often too distracting. Scope out quiet study areas on campus such as dorm study lounges, various locations in the library, or empty classrooms.

Eliminate distractions

Silence your phone and only use your tablet and laptop for study-related uses. Consider downloading an app, such as Self Control, that limits the use of your phone for a specified time.

Choose a good time to study

Some students like to study at night; others are more focused in the morning. Know when you study best and try to organize your day so you're able to study when you're the most alert and productive.



Dealing with Stress

As a college student, you have a lot on your plate: classes, studying, social obligations, and perhaps a part-time job. All of this can, at times, cause you to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and stressed.



While some stress in college is normal and should be expected, constant and extreme stress can take a toll on your physical and mental health. Learning to cope with stress in healthy ways will help you succeed in your classes and enjoy college life more.

What is stress?

Stress is your body's reaction to change, demands, and/or difficult situations. When you experience stress, your body responds naturally in both physical and psychological ways.

Symptoms of extreme stress

The human body is designed to withstand normal levels of stress. However, when you're under extreme stress for a long period of time, you can experience physical and emotional symptoms that are problematic. These include:

- ▶ trouble sleeping
- ▶ feelings of sadness and depression
- ▶ headaches and/or upset stomach
- ▶ eating too much or too little
- ▶ feelings of dread and/or panic
- ▶ high blood pressure
- ▶ chest pain and tightness
- ▶ panic attacks

Staying Motivated

We all get stuck sometimes. After all, college can be tough—and maintaining the focus, energy, and effort necessary to succeed in college can sometimes be difficult.



Here are some tips for staying motivated.

Surround yourself with positive people

We come across all kinds of people in life. Some are positive influences, and some are not. Avoid people who are negative or critical. Instead, choose to be around people who support and encourage you. These are the people who will help you achieve your goals and realize your dreams.

Set goals

Goals provide focus and direction. Create both short-term academic goals (*get an A or B your math exam*) and long-term academic goals (*graduate with a 3.0+ GPA*). Also create some personal goals (*work out three times a week*).

Practice positive self-talk

We all have an “inner voice,” and when things aren’t going well, that voice can be negative and critical. You can help yourself stay positive and motivated just by changing your self-talk. Replace “*I’m terrible at math*” with “*I’m smart—I can do this*.” Changing how you think will change how you feel and act. For more tips on staying positive, watch this short video.



VIDEO

Building a Budget

Many college students are unaware of how much they spend, what they can afford, and what they owe. This often leads to overspending and debt. This can be avoided by having a budget.



A budget is a plan that helps you decide how you’re going to spend your money over a period of time. To create a budget, follow these steps.

Select a time period. Choose a time period that works for you (week, month, semester) and figure out your total income for that time period.

Categorize your expenses. Think about what you spend your money on and create a list of expense categories that’s tailored to your spending (such as food, car payment, cell phone, clothes).

Determine if each expense is fixed or flexible. Fixed expenses are the same every time period, such as rent. Flexible expenses, such as dining out, change each time period.

Budget an amount for each category. Enter the amount you are budgeting for each category for that time period.

Keep track of your spending. Enter all of your expenses into a spreadsheet or budgeting app.

Balance your budget. At the end of your budget period, compare your income with your expenses. If your income exceeds your expenses, you have money to save. A “negative balance” reveals that you are spending more money than you’re taking in.

Smart Spending

The financial decisions you make today can have a major impact (positive or negative) on your future. College is a great time to learn about money management and take control of your finances.



Here’s what you need to know about smart spending.

Recognize wants vs. needs

Needs are things that are necessary for living, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Wants are things you don’t have to have—they are the things you would like to have or do (such as a larger TV, new phone, or concert tickets).

Businesses work hard to convince you that you don’t just want what they’re selling—you need it. Smart consumers are aware of these sales tactics and don’t let them influence their decisions.

Be a smart consumer

Take your time. Wait a day or two before making a purchase. Waiting helps eliminate bad decisions.

Do your research. Read customer reviews, and do some comparison shopping.

Beware of hidden charges. Some companies use extravagant shipping and handling charges to hide the actual cost of their products.

Don’t purchase extended warranties or protection plans. Businesses love for you to buy these, but they are seldom a good deal for the customer.



Earning While You Learn

Working while you're in college can be hard, but it's a necessity for many college students. Here are some tips to help you succeed in college and get the most out of your college experience—while also working at a job.



Choose your job wisely

When working in college, you have three basic choices: on-campus jobs, off-campus jobs, and internships. Your schoolwork needs to be your top priority, so look for a job that will allow you the time and flexibility to succeed in your classes.

On-campus jobs

One advantage of on-campus employment is convenience. Hours are flexible, and jobs are available all over campus. Students typically work 10–15 hours per week.

Off-campus jobs

Off-campus jobs are most often in the service sector at restaurants, retail stores, and other local businesses. Getting to and from the job may be a hassle and the hours may not be as flexible as on-campus jobs. The pay, however, may be higher.

Internships

An internship is a temporary job that allows you to “test drive” a career related to your major. Because some internships do not pay or pay very little, it can be difficult to depend on them for income. However, internships often provide a stepping stone to a post-graduation career.



Grants & Scholarships

College is expensive, and taking out student loans can make it even more expensive in the long run. If you need help paying for college, learn about and pursue all financial aid opportunities.



Grants and scholarships are “free money” for college. Smart students get as much grant and scholarship money as they can.

Grants

Grants are money given to students who have a financial need. Grants do not need to be repaid and are available from several sources.

- ▶ **The federal government** awards Pell Grants, TEACH Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), and more.

The Pell Grant is the largest federal college grant program and it provides billions of dollars each year to students who need help paying for college. A Pell Grant is often part of a student's financial aid package.

When students and parents submit a FAFSA, they automatically apply for a Pell Grant.

- ▶ **State governments** offer grants to students who live and attend college in their home state. While application procedures vary, in most states, the FAFSA serves as the application.
- ▶ **Colleges, organizations, and corporations** often award funds to deserving students.



Student Loans

When grants, scholarships, and work-study don't provide enough money to cover a family's financial need, a student or parent can take out a loan to cover the remaining college costs. Because loans must be paid back, students should do their best to keep loans to a minimum.



To have access to the following low-interest federal loans, you need to complete a FAFSA.

Direct Student Loans

Any college student is eligible for a federal Direct Loan. First-year students can borrow up to \$5,500 a year. Second-year students can borrow up to \$6,500 a year. Repayment doesn't begin until six months after a student has left college.

Direct Loans are either subsidized or unsubsidized. Direct Subsidized Loans are available for students with financial need; Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available for students without financial need. A Direct Subsidized Loan is preferable because the government pays the interest on the loan while the student is in college.

Direct PLUS Loans

These loans are available to parents with good credit. Parents can apply for a PLUS Loan for the total cost of attendance, minus any financial aid the student has received.

While many banks and lending institutions offer educational loans, students should exhaust their federal loan options before ever considering a private loan.



Building Good Credit

Just like your GPA tells others how well you do in school, your credit record lets others know how well you manage your money. Here's what you need to know about building a good credit record and getting your financial life off to a good start.



What is good credit?

Having good credit means having a strong credit history. Think of it this way: would you want to loan money to a friend who hasn't paid you back for money you loaned them in the past? Probably not.

Banks and businesses feel the same way. They want to work with people who have a history of repaying their loans—people whose past behavior has shown them to be financially responsible.

How do you build good credit?

The best way to build good credit is to always pay your bills on time. Being late with just one or two payments can adversely affect your credit. While a number of things are taken into consideration when creating and updating your credit report, paying your bills on time is the most important.

- ▶ Make all payments (credit card, rent, utilities, cell phone, car loan) in full and on time.
- ▶ If you have a credit card, use it regularly, but use less than half of your available limit.
- ▶ Don't apply for numerous credit cards or loans.



Landing an Internship

Job postings often state, "1–2 years of work experience preferred." Even when experience isn't preferred or required, college students and recent graduates often find themselves competing with experienced candidates.



One solution to this situation is to get an internship while you are in college. An internship enables you to obtain relevant work experience before you enter the job market.

What is an internship?

An internship allows you to "test drive" a career. Look at it as a temporary job that provides an inside look at an occupation, company, and industry—while helping you determine if a prospective career is right for you.

Do internships pay?

Some internships pay, and some do not. But it's important to remember that whether or not an internship pays doesn't impact the quality or benefit of the internship opportunity.

Are all internships the same?

No! Some companies and businesses use interns for "cheap labor," giving them menial tasks that do not contribute to their professional skill set. Ideally, an internship should provide you with relevant work experience and give you the opportunity to improve your skills.



Writing a Resume

Your resume is a marketing tool that highlights your education, work experience, accomplishments, skills, and talents.



Whether you're applying for an internship, a part-time job now, or a full-time job after graduation, the following tips will help you create a resume that's impressive and professional.

Parts of a resume

Personal information. Include your name, phone number, address, email, and the web address for your LinkedIn profile.

Objective. State what you're looking for in a job. Tailor this to the position you're applying for.

Education. List the schools you've attended, with the most recent first. Include the school name, city, state, and graduation date. Also include activities, awards, leadership positions, and any relevant courses you have taken.

Work experience. List any paid or unpaid work experience you've had, with the most recent first. Include the name of each business or organization, the dates you were employed, and a description of your responsibilities and duties. Note any accomplishments or awards.

Skills. List any special skills you have that may apply to the position you're seeking.

Activities and interests. List relevant activities and interests.