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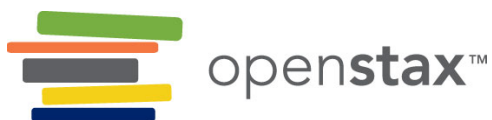
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# College Success

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## OpenStax

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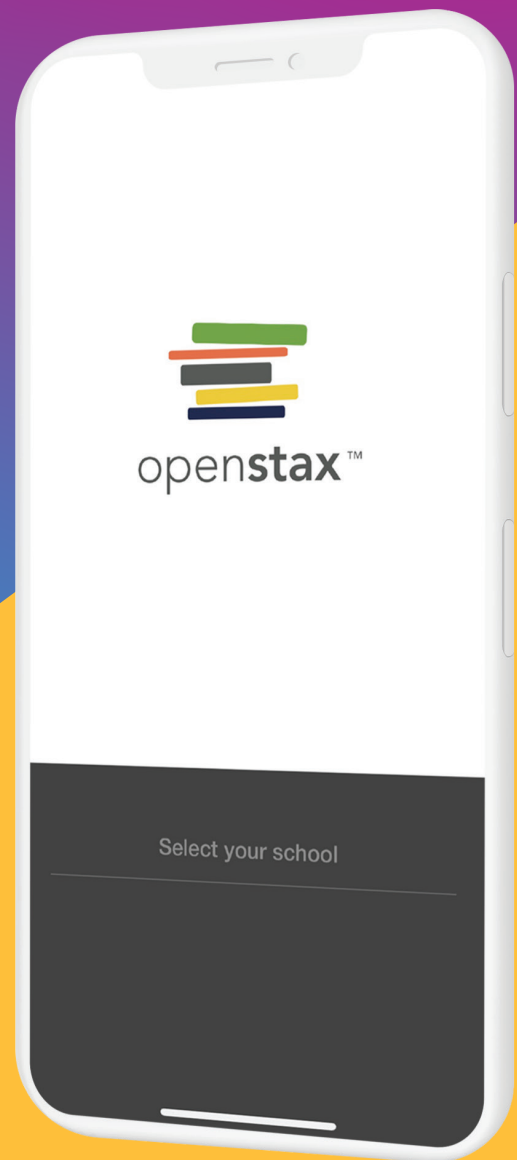
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1

## Exploring College



Figure 1.1

### Chapter Outline

- 1.1 Why College?
- 1.2 The First Year of College Will Be an Experience
- 1.3 College Culture and Expectations
- 1.4 How Can This Book And This Course Help?

### Introduction

How do you feel about your ability to meet the expectations of college? These questions will help you determine how the chapter concepts relate to you right now. As we are introduced to new concepts and practices, it can be informative to reflect on how your understanding changes over time. We'll revisit these questions at the end of the chapter to see whether your feelings have changed. Take this quick survey to figure it out, ranking questions on a scale of 1 – 4, 1 meaning “least like me” and 4 meaning “most like me.”

Don't be concerned with the results. If your score is low, you will most likely gain even more from this book.

1. I am fully aware of the expectations of college and how to meet them.
2. I know why I am in college and have clear goals that I want to achieve.
3. Most of the time, I take responsibility for my learning new and challenging concepts.
4. I feel comfortable working with faculty, advisors, and classmates to accomplish my goals.

You can also take the [Chapter 1 survey \(https://openstax.org/l/howdoyoufeel3\)](https://openstax.org/l/howdoyoufeel3) anonymously online.

## STUDENT PROFILE

As students transitioning to college, responsibility is an inherent component of self-advocacy. As someone accepted on full funding to a 4-year university, but whose life's circumstances disallowed attending college until years later, I used to dream of a stress-free college life. The reality is, college can be a meaningful place, but it can also be challenging and unpredictable. The key is to *be your own best advocate*, because no one else is obliged to advocate on your behalf.

When I began my community college studies, I knew what I wanted to do. Cybersecurity was my passion, but I had no understanding of how credits transfer over to a 4-year university. This came to haunt me later, after I navigated the complex processes of transferring between two different colleges. Not everyone involved volunteers information. It is up to you, the student, to be the squeaky wheel so you can get the grease. Visit office hours, make appointments, and schedule meetings with stakeholders so that you are not just buried under the sheaf of papers on someone's desk.

**-Mohammed Khalid**, University of Maryland

### About this Chapter

In this chapter, you will learn about what you can do to get ready for college. By the time you complete this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Recognize the purpose and value of college.
- Describe the transitional experience of the first year of college.
- Discuss how to handle college culture and expectations.
- Identify resources in this text and on your campus for supporting your college success.

## Near Final Proof

Reginald	Madison
<p>Reginald has, after much thought and with a high level of family support, decided to enroll in college. It has been a dream in the making, as he was unable to attend immediately after high school graduation. Instead, he worked several years in his family's business, got married, had a son, and then decided that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life regretting that he didn't get a chance to follow his dreams of becoming a teacher. Because it has been almost a decade since he sat in a classroom, he is worried about how he will fit in as an adult learner returning to college. Will his classmates think he is too old? Will his professors think he is not ready for the challenges of college work? Will his family get tired of his long nights at the library and his new priorities? There is so much Reginald is unsure of, yet he knows it's a step in the right direction.</p>	<p>It has been only three months since Madison graduated from high school. She graduated in the top 10 percent of her class, and she earned college credit while in high school. She feels academically prepared, and she has a good sense of what degree she wants to earn. Since Madison was 5 years old, she's wanted to be an engineer because she loved building things in the backyard with her father's tools. He always encouraged her to follow her dreams, and her whole family has been supportive of her hobbies and interests. However, Madison is concerned that her choice of major will keep her from dance, creative writing, and other passions. Furthermore, Madison is heading to a distant college with no other people she knows. Will she be able to find new friends quickly? Will her engineering classes crush her or motivate her to complete college? Will she be able to explore other interests? Madison has a lot on her mind, but she aims to face these challenges head-on.</p>

While Reginald and Madison have had different experiences before and certainly have different motivations for enrolling in college, they have quite a bit in common. They are both committed to this new chapter in their lives, and they are both connected to their families in ways that can influence their commitment to this pursuit. What they don't know just yet—because they haven't started their classes—is that they will have even more in common as they move through each term, focus on a major, and plan for life after graduation. And they have a lot in common with you as well because you are in a similar position—starting the next chapter of the rest of your life.

In this chapter, you will first learn more about identifying the reason you are in college. This is an important first step because knowing your *why* will keep you motivated. Next, the chapter will cover the transitions that you may experience as a new college student. Then, the chapter will focus on how you can acclimate to the culture and meeting the expectations—all of which will make the transition to a full-fledged college student easier. Finally, the chapter will provide you with strategies for overcoming the challenges that you may face by providing information about how to find and access resources.

## 1.1 Why College?

Estimated completion time: 22 minutes.

### Questions to consider:

- Why are you in college?
- What are the rewards and value of a college degree?
- Why this course?

This chapter started with the profiles of two students, Reginald and Madison, but now we turn to who you are and why you are in college. Starting this chapter with *you*, the student, seems to make perfect sense. Like Reginald and Madison, you are probably full of emotions as you begin this journey toward a degree and the fulfillment of a dream. Are you excited about meeting new people and *finally* getting to take classes that interest you? Are you nervous about how you are going to handle your courses and all the other activities that come along with being a college student? Are you thrilled to be making important decisions about your future? Are you worried about making the right choice when deciding on a major or a career? All these thoughts, even if contradictory at times, are normal. And you may be experiencing several of them at the same time.



**Figure 1.2** Decision-making about college and our future can be challenging, but with self-analysis and support, you can feel more confident and make the best choices.

## Why Are You in College?

We know that college is not mandatory—like kindergarten through 12th grade is—and it is not free. You have made a *choice* to commit several years of hard work to earn a degree or credential. In some cases, you may have had to work really hard to get here by getting good grades and test scores in high school and earning money to pay for tuition and fees and other expenses. Now you have more at stake and a clearer path to achieving your goals, but you still need to be able to answer the question.

To help answer this question, consider the following questioning technique called “The Five Whys” that was originally created by Sakichi Toyoda, a Japanese inventor, whose strategy was used by the Toyota Motor Company to find the underlying cause of a problem. While your decision to go to college is not a problem, the exercise is helpful to uncover your underlying purpose for enrolling in college.

The process starts with a “Why” question that you want to know the answer to. Then, the next four “Why” questions use a portion of the previous answer to help you dig further into the answer to the original question. Here is an example of “The Five Whys,” with the first question as “Why are you in college?” The answers and their connection to the next “Why” question have been underlined so you can see how the process works.

While the example is one from a student who knows what she wants to major in, this process does not require that you have a specific degree or career in mind. In fact, if you are undecided, then you can explore the “why” of your indecision. Is it because you have lots of choices, or is it because you are not sure what you really want out of college?

### The Five Whys in Action

Why are you in college?	I am in college to <u>earn a degree in speech pathology</u> .
Why do you want to <u>earn a degree in speech pathology</u> ?	I want to be able to <u>help people who have trouble speaking</u> .
Why do you want to <u>help people who have trouble speaking</u> ?	I believe that <u>people who have trouble speaking deserve a life they want</u> .
Why do you feel it is important that <u>people who have trouble speaking deserve a life they want</u> ?	I feel they often <u>have needs that are overlooked and do not get treated equally</u> .
Why do you want to use your <u>voice to help these people live a life they deserve</u> ?	I feel it is my purpose to help others achieve their full potential despite having physical challenges.

Do you see how this student went beyond a standard answer about the degree that she wants to earn to connecting her degree to an overall purpose that she has to help others in a specific way? Had she not been instructed to delve a little deeper with each answer, it is likely that she would not have so quickly articulated that deeper purpose. And that understanding of “why” you are in college—beyond the degree you want or the job you envision after graduation—is key to staying motivated through what will most likely be some challenging times

How else does knowing your “why,” or your deeper reason for being in college, help you? According to Angela Duckworth (2016), a researcher on *grit* -- what it takes for us to dig in deep when faced with adversity and continue to work toward our goal -- knowing your purpose can be the booster to grit that can help you succeed.<sup>[1]</sup> Other research has found that people who have a strong sense of purpose are less likely to experience stress and anxiety (Burrown, 2013)<sup>[2]</sup> and more likely to be satisfied in their jobs (Weir, 2013).<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, being able to answer the question “Why are you in college?” not only satisfies the person asking, but it also has direct benefits to your overall well-being.

1 Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power and Passion of Perseverance*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

2 Burrow, A.L. & Hill, P.L. (2013). Derailed by diversity? Purpose buffers the relationship between ethnic composition on trains and passenger negative mood. *Personality and Psychology Bulletin*, 39 (12), 1610-1619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499377>.

3 Weir, K. (2013). More than job satisfaction: Psychologists are discovering what makes work meaningful--and how to create value in any job. *American Psychological Association*, 44 (11), 39.

## ACTIVITY



Try “The Five Whys” yourself in the table below to help you get a better sense of your purpose and to give you a worthy answer for anyone who asks you “Why are you in college?”

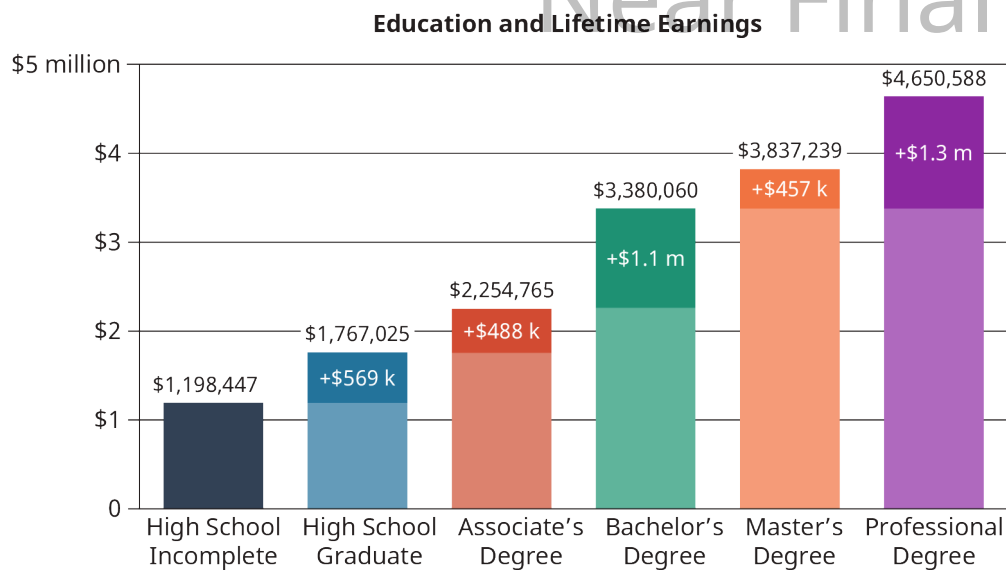
#### The Five Whys: Your Turn

<i>Why are you in college?</i>	I am in college to . . .
<i>Why do you . . .</i>	I . . .
<i>Why do you . . .</i>	I . . .
<i>Why do you . . .</i>	I . . .
<i>Why do you . . .</i>	I . . .

## What Are the Rewards and Value of a College Degree?

Once you have explored your “why” for enrolling in college, it may be worth reviewing what we know about the value of a college degree. There is no doubt you know people who have succeeded in a career without going to college. Famous examples of college dropouts include Bill Gates (the cofounder and CEO of Microsoft) and Ellen DeGeneres (comedian, actor, and television producer, among her many other roles). These are two well-known, smart, talented people who have had tremendous success on a global scale. They are also not the typical profile of a student who doesn’t finish a degree. For many students, especially those who are first-generation college students, a college degree helps them follow a career pathway and create a life that would not have been possible without the credential. Even in this time of rapid change in all kinds of fields, including technology and education, a college degree is still worth it for many people.

Consider the following chart that shows an average of lifetime earnings per level of education. As you can see, the more education you receive, the greater the increase in your average lifetime earnings. Even though a degree costs a considerable amount of money on the front end, if you think about it as an investment in your future, you can see that college graduates receive a substantial return on their investment. To put it into more concrete terms, let’s say you spend \$100,000 for a four-year degree (*Don’t faint! That is the average sticker cost of a four-year degree at a public university if you include tuition, fees, room, and board*). The return on investment (ROI) over a lifetime, according to the information in the figure below, is 1,500%! You don’t have to be a financial wizard to recognize that 1,500% return is fantastic.



Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau; Help Wanted, The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Figures are in 2008 dollars.

**Figure 1.3** Every education level brings with it potential for greater lifetime earnings. These are simply averages and may not apply to all career types and individuals. For clarity, the “professional degree,” attaining the highest earnings, refers to degrees such as those given to doctors or lawyers. Monetary values are in 2008 dollars. (Credit: based on data provided by Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce)

Making more money over time is not the only benefit you can earn from completing a college degree. College graduates are also more likely to experience the following:

- **Greater job satisfaction.** That’s right! College graduates are more likely to get a job that they like or to find that their job is more enjoyable than not.
- **Better job stability.** Employees with college degrees are more likely to find and keep a job, which is comforting news in times of economic uncertainty.
- **Improved health and wellness.** College graduates are less likely to smoke and more likely to exercise and maintain a healthy weight.
- **Better outcomes for the next generation.** One of the best benefits of a college degree is that it can have positive influences for the graduate’s immediate family and the next generations.

One last thing: There is some debate as to whether a college degree is needed to land a job, and there are certainly jobs that you can get without a college degree. However, there are many reasons that a college degree can give you an edge in the job market. Here are just a few reasons that graduating with a degree is still valuable:

- More and more entry-level jobs will require a college degree. According to Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, in 2020, 35% of jobs will require a college degree.<sup>[4]</sup>
- A credential from a college or university still provides assurance that a student has mastered the material. Would you trust a doctor who never went to medical school to do open-heart surgery on a close relative? No, we didn’t think so.
- College provides an opportunity to develop much-needed soft skills. The National Association of Colleges

4 Carnevale, A.P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). Recover: Job growth and education requirements through 2020. Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/>.

and Employers has identified eight career-readiness competencies that college students should develop: critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communication, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, and global/intercultural fluency.<sup>[5]</sup> There are few occasions that will provide you the opportunity to develop all of these skills in a low-stakes environment (i.e., without the fear of being fired!). You will learn all of this *and* more in your classes. Seems like a great opportunity, doesn't it? If you find yourself asking the question "What does *this* course have to do with my major?" or "Why do I have to take *that*?" challenge yourself to learn more about the course and look for connections between the content and your larger educational, career, and life goals.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

In what ways will earning a college degree be valuable to you now and in the future? Be sure to describe the financial, career, and personal benefits to earning a college degree.

## Why This Course?

Now that you have considered why you are in college and why a college degree may be valuable to you, it's time to focus on why you are reading this book. Most likely, you are enrolled in a course that is helping you learn about college and how to make the most of it. You may be asking yourself "Why am I taking this course?" or even "Why do I have to read this book?" Answers to the first question may vary, depending on your college's requirements for first-year students. Nevertheless, you are probably taking this course because your college believes that it will *help you succeed in college and beyond*. Likewise, the reason your professor has assigned this book is because it has been designed to give you the best information about how to make your transition to college a little smoother. If you are not convinced just yet of the value of this course and its content, consider the following questions that you will be encouraged to answer as you learn about how to succeed in college:

- What will college expect of me in terms of skills, habits, and behaviors, and how can I develop them to ensure that I am successful?
- What do I need to know about how to navigate the process of completing a college degree?
- How can I ensure that I develop worthy long-term goals, and how best can I meet those goals?

These questions are designed to assist you in the transition from high school, or the workforce, to the new world of college. And this won't be the last monumental transition that you will experience. For example, you will experience a new job more than once in your life, and you may experience the excitement and challenge of moving to a new house or a new city. You can be assured that transitions will require that you identify what you need to get through them and that you will experience some discomfort along the way. It wouldn't be such a great accomplishment without a little uncertainty, doubt, and self-questioning. To help you, the next section speaks specifically to transitions for the purpose of making your next steps a little smoother.

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5 National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2019). Career readiness defined. Retrieved from <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>.



## 1.2 The First Year of College Will Be an Experience

Estimated completion time: 14 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- How will you adjust to college?
- What are the common college experiences you will have?

### Adjustments to College Are Inevitable

College not only will expand your mind, but it may also make you a little uncomfortable, challenge your identity, and at times, make you doubt your abilities. It is hard to truly learn anything without getting messy. This is what education does: it transforms us. For that to happen, however, means that we will need to be open to the transformation and allow the changes to occur. *Flexibility*, *transition*, and *change* are all words that describe what you will experience. Laurie Hazard and Stephanie Carter (2018)<sup>[6]</sup> use the word *adjustment*. Hazard and Carter (2018) believe there are six adjustment areas that first-year college students experience: academic, cultural, emotional, financial, intellectual, and social. Of course, you won't go through these adjustments all at once or even in just the first year. Some will take time, while others may not even feel like much of a transition. Let's look at them in brief as a way of preparing for the road ahead:

- *Academic adjustment*. No surprises here. You will most likely—depending on your own academic background—be faced with the increased demands of learning in college. This could mean that you need to spend more time learning to learn and using those strategies to master the material.
- *Cultural adjustment*. You also will most likely experience a cultural adjustment just by being in college because most campuses have their own language (*syllabus*, *registrar*, and *office hours*, for example) and customs. You may also experience a cultural adjustment because of the diversity that you will encounter. Most likely, the people on your college campus will be different than the people at your high school—or at your workplace.
- *Emotional adjustment*. Remember the range of emotions presented at the beginning of the chapter? Those will likely be present in some form throughout your first weeks in college and at stressful times during the semester. Knowing that you may have good days and bad—and that you can bounce back from the more stressful days—will help you find healthy ways of adjusting emotionally.
- *Financial adjustment*. Most students understand the investment they are making in their future by going to college. Even if you have all your expenses covered, there is still an adjustment to a new way of thinking about what college costs and how to pay for it. You may find that you think twice about spending money on entertainment or that you have improved your skills in finding discounted textbooks.
- *Intellectual adjustment*. Experiencing an intellectual “a-ha!” moment is one of the most rewarding parts of college, right up there with moving across the graduation stage with a degree in hand. Prepare to be surprised when you stumble across a fascinating subject or find that a class discussion changes your life. At the very least, through your academic work, you will learn to think differently about the world around you and your place in it.
- *Social adjustment*. A new place often equals new people. But in college, those new relationships can have even more meaning. Getting to know professors not only can help you learn more in your classes, but it can also help you figure out what career pathway you want to take and how to get desired internships and jobs. Learning to reduce conflicts during group work or when living with others helps build essential

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6 Hazard, L., & Carter, S. (2018). A framework for helping families understand the college transition. *E-Source for College Transitions*, 16(1), 13-15.

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workplace and life skills.

The table Six Areas of Adjustment for First-Year College Students provides a succinct definition for each of the areas as well as examples of how you can demonstrate that you have adjusted. Think about what you have done so far to navigate these transitions in addition to other things you can do to make your college experience a successful one.

	Academic	Cultural	Emotional	Financial	Intellectual	Social
What Is It?	Students will take a more active role in their learning than they had to in high and have the ability to meet the increasing demands of change.	Students will interact with others of various cultures, religious beliefs, sexual identities and orientations, ages, and abilities.	Students will need to be prepared for the stressors of college and develop habits and behaviors to cope with these changes.	Students will need to demonstrate basic financial literacy, an understanding of the cost of college, and methods of paying for those costs.	Students will have the opportunity to join an academic community that includes classmates, faculty, support personnel, and administrators.	Students will be faced with shifts in their relationships, finding a new peer group and handling the pressure of fitting in.
Students exhibit it when they:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take an active role in learning.</li> <li>• Attain college-level learning strategies.</li> <li>• Are open to feedback and change.</li> <li>• Make adjustments to learning strategies as needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept and welcome differences in others.</li> <li>• Recognize the include of their own cultural identity.</li> <li>• Seek opportunities to explore other cultures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readily handle the stressors of college life.</li> <li>• Develop emotional coping strategies.</li> <li>• Seek support from campus resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage money independently.</li> <li>• Recognize the costs of college.</li> <li>• Explore job and aid opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in intellectual discussions.</li> <li>• Are open to new ideas, subject areas, and career choices.</li> <li>• Integrate new ideas into belief systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Join a club or organization.</li> <li>• Form supportive, healthy relationships.</li> <li>• Understand the impact of peer pressure.</li> <li>• Manage conflict in relationships.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.4 Six Areas of Adjustment for First-Year College Students** Based on work by Laurie Hazard, Ed.D., and Stephanie Carter, M.A.

“Experiencing an intellectual ‘a-ha!’ moment is one of the most rewarding parts of college, right up there with moving across the graduation stage with a degree in hand.”

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

Which of the six areas of adjustment do you think will be the least challenging for you, and which do you think will be most challenging? What can you do now to prepare for the more challenging transitions?

## WHAT STUDENTS SAY

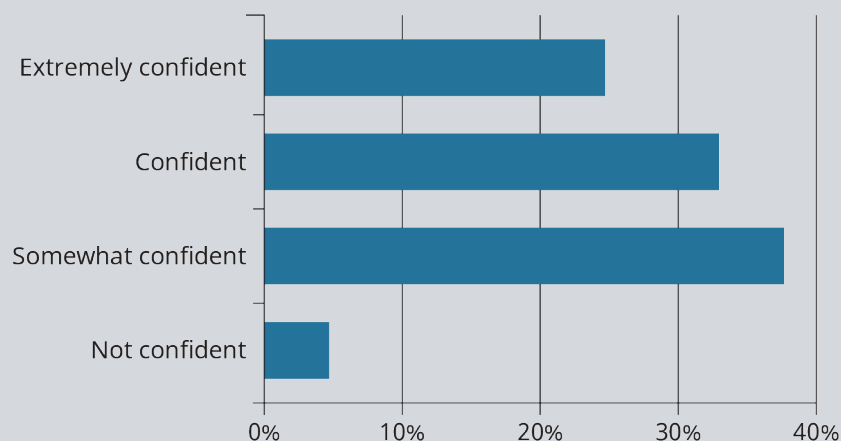


1. How confident are you that your high school and/or work experience have prepared you academically for college?
  - a. Extremely confident
  - b. Confident
  - c. Somewhat confident
  - d. Not very confident
2. When you experience a college-related challenge and are not really sure how to solve it, what best describes the action you're likely to take?
  - a. I will likely persist and persevere until I figure it out.
  - b. I will likely try to solve the problem, but if it is really difficult, I will simply move on to something else.
  - c. I will likely ask my parents or friends for advice.
  - d. I will likely seek help from resources on campus.
3. Rank the following in terms of how much stress you feel in these situations (1 being the least amount of stress and 6 being the most amount of stress):
  - a. The amount of work required in all of my courses
  - b. The fact that I know hardly anyone
  - c. My ability to handle all of my obligations
  - d. Making good grades so I can continue to stay in college
  - e. My concern that I may not belong in college
  - f. All of the above are equally stressful

You can also take the anonymous [What Students Say \(https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey\)](https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey) surveys to add your voice to this textbook. Your responses will be included in updates.

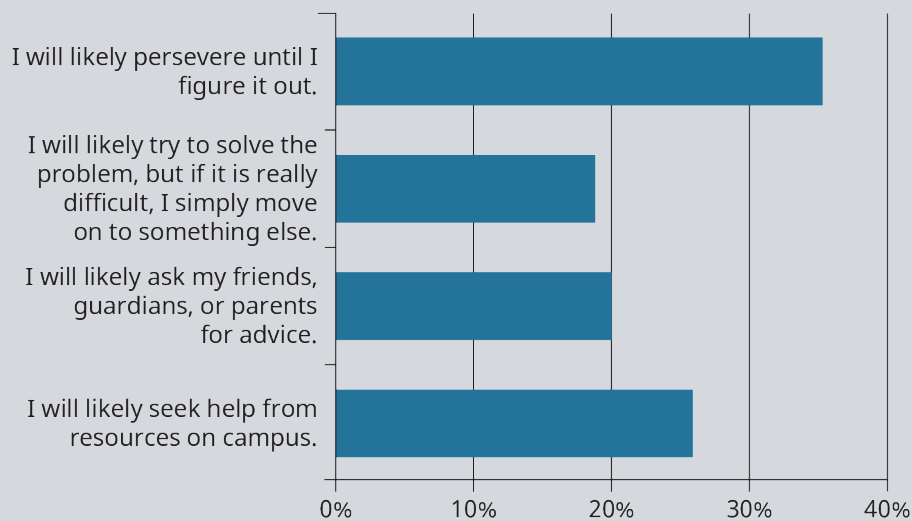
Students offered their views on these questions, and the results are displayed in the graphs below.

How confident are you that your high school and/or work experience have prepared you academically for college?



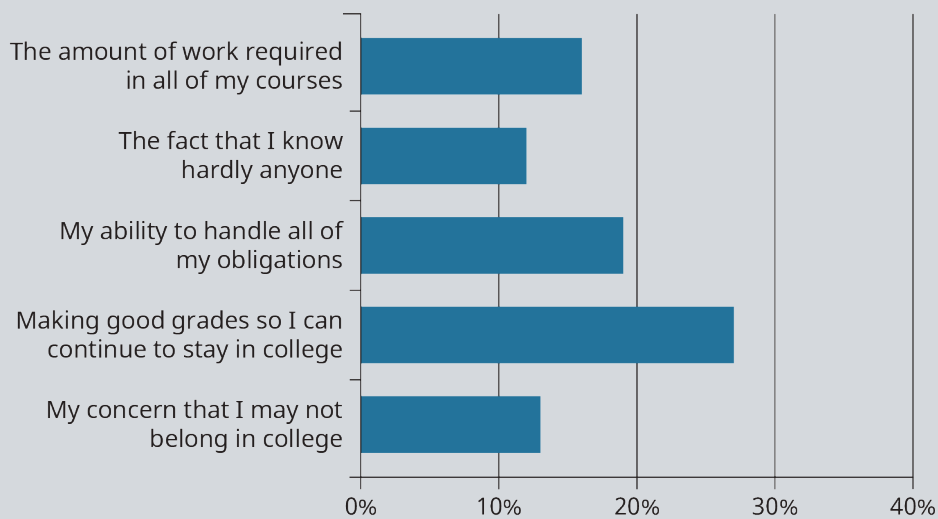
**Figure 1.5**

When you experience a college-related challenge and are not really sure how to solve it, what best describes the action you're likely to take?



**Figure 1.6**

Rank the following in terms of how much stress you feel in these situations (1 being the least amount of stress and 6 being the most amount of stress):



**Figure 1.7**

### 1.3 College Culture and Expectations

Estimated completion time: 32 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- What language and customs do you need to know to succeed in college?
- What is your responsibility for learning in college?

- What resources will you use to meet these expectations?
- What are the common challenges in the first year?

## College Has Its Own Language and Customs

Going to college—even if you are not far from home—is a cultural experience. It comes with its own language and customs, some of which can be confusing or confounding at first. Just like traveling to a foreign country, it is best if you prepare by learning what words mean and what you are expected to say and do in certain situations.

Let's first start with the language you may encounter. In most cases, there will be words that you have heard before, but they may have different meanings in a college setting. Take, for instance, "office hours." If you are not in college, you would think that it means the hours of a day that an office is open. If it is your dentist's office, it may mean Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In college, "office hours" can refer to the specific hours a professor is in her office to meet with students, and those hours may be only a few each day: for example, Mondays and Wednesdays from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m.

"Syllabus" is another word that you may not have encountered, but it is one you will soon know very well. A syllabus is often called the "contract of the course" because it contains information about what to expect—from the professor and the student. It is meant to be a roadmap for succeeding in the class. Understanding that office hours are for you to ask your professor questions and the syllabus is the guide for what you will be doing in the class can make a big difference in your transition to college. The table on Common College Terms, has a brief list of other words that you will want to know when you hear them on campus.

**Common College Terms, What They Mean, and Why You Need to Know**

Term	What It Means	Why You Need to Know
Attendance policy	A policy that describes the attendance and absence expectations for a class	Professors will have different attendance expectations. Read your syllabus to determine which ones penalize you if you miss too many classes.
Final exam	A comprehensive assessment that is given at the end of a term	If your class has a final exam, you will want to prepare for it well in advance by reading assigned material, taking good notes, reviewing previous tests and assignments, and studying.
Learning	The process of acquiring knowledge	In college, most learning happens <i>outside</i> the classroom. Your professor will only cover the main ideas or the most challenging material in class. The rest of the learning will happen on your own.
Office hours	Specific hours professor is in the office to meet with students	Visiting your professor during office hours is a good way to get questions answered and to build rapport.

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## Common College Terms, What They Mean, and Why You Need to Know

Term	What It Means	Why You Need to Know
Plagiarism	Using someone's words, images, or ideas as your own, without proper attribution	Plagiarism carries much more serious consequences in college, so it is best to speak to your professor about how to avoid it and review your student handbook's policy.
Study	The process of using learning strategies to understand and recall information	Studying in college may look different than studying in high school in that it may take more effort and more time to learn more complex material.
Syllabus	The contract of a course that provides information about course expectations and policies	The syllabus will provide valuable information that your professor will assume you have read and understood. Refer to it first when you have a question about the course.

### ACTIVITY



The language that colleges and universities use can feel familiar but mean something different, as you learned in the section above, and it can also seem alien, especially when institutions use acronyms or abbreviations for buildings, offices, and locations on campus. Terms such as “quad” or “union” can denote a location or space for students. Then there may be terms such as “TLC” (The Learning Center, in this example) that designate a specific building or office. Describe a few of the new terms you have encountered so far and what they mean. If you are not sure, ask your professor or a fellow student to define it for you.

In addition to its own language, higher education has its own way of doing things. For example, you may be familiar with what a teacher did when you were in high school, but do you know what a professor does? It certainly seems like they fulfill a very similar role as teachers in high school, but in college professors' roles are often much more diverse. In addition to teaching, they may also conduct research, mentor graduate students, write and review research articles, serve on and lead campus committees, serve in regional and national organizations in their disciplines, apply for and administer grants, advise students in their major, and serve as sponsors for student organizations. You can be assured that their days are far from routine. See the Table on Differences between High School Teachers and College Professors for just a few differences between high school teachers and college professors.

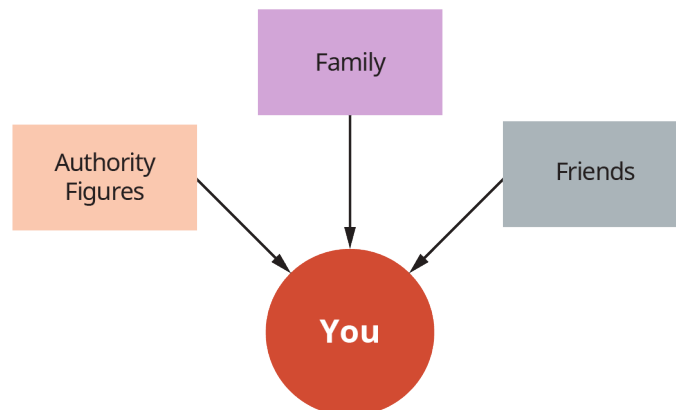
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## Differences between High School and College Faculty

High School Faculty	College Faculty
Often have degrees or certifications in teaching in addition to degrees in subject matter	Most likely have not even taken a course in teaching as part of their graduate program
Responsibilities include maximizing student learning and progress in a wide array of areas	Responsibilities include providing students with content and an assessment of their mastery of the content
Are available before or after school or during class if a student has a question	Are available during office hours or by appointment if a student needs additional instruction or advice
Communicate regularly and welcome questions from parents and families about a student's progress	Cannot communicate with parents and families of students without permission because of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The relationships you build with your professors will be some of the most important ones you create during your college career. You will rely on them to help you find internships, write letters of recommendation, nominate you for honors or awards, and serve as references for jobs. You can develop those relationships by participating in class, visiting during office hours, asking for assistance with coursework, requesting recommendations for courses and majors, and getting to know the professor's own academic interests. One way to think about the change in how your professors will relate to you is to think about the nature of relationships you have had growing up. In Figure 1.X: You and Your Relationships Before College you will see a representation of what your relationships probably looked like. Your family may have been the greatest influencer on you and your development.

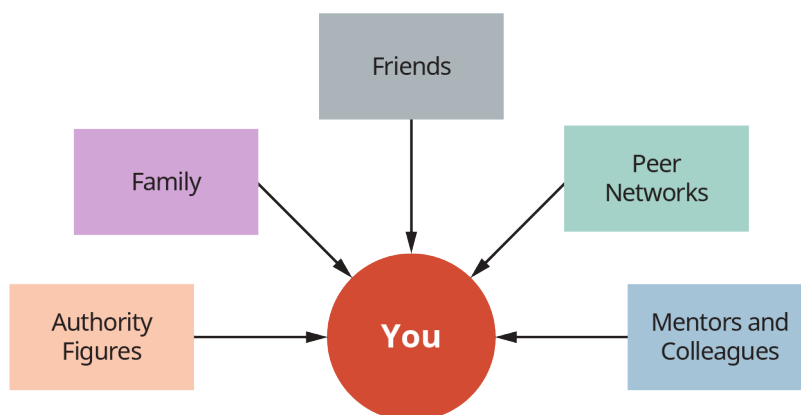
"The relationships you build with your professors will be some of the most important ones during your college career."



**Figure 1.8** You and Your Relationships Before College.

In college, your networks are going to expand in ways that will help you develop other aspects of yourself. As described above, the relationships you will have with your professors will be some of the most important. But

they won't be the only relationships you will be cultivating while in college. Consider the Figure on You and Your Relationships during College and think about how you will go about expanding your network while you are completing your degree.



**Figure 1.9** You and Your Relationships During College

Your relationships with authority figures, family, and friends may change while you are in college, and at the very least, your relationships will expand to peer networks—not friends, but near-age peers or situational peers (e.g., a first-year college student who is going back to school after being out for 20 years)—and to faculty and staff who may work alongside you, mentor you, or supervise your studies. These relationships are important because they will allow you to expand your network, especially as it relates to your career. As stated earlier, developing relationships with faculty can provide you with more than just the benefits of a mentor. Faculty often review applications for on-campus jobs or university scholarships and awards; they also have connections with graduate programs, companies, and organizations. They may recommend you to colleagues or former classmates for internships and even jobs.

Other differences between high school and college are included in the table about Differences between High School and College. Because it is not an exhaustive list of the differences, be mindful of other differences you may notice. Also, if your most recent experience has been the world of work or the military, you may find that there are more noticeable differences between those experiences and college.

### Differences between High School and College

	High School	College	Why You Need to Know the Difference
Grades	Grades are made up of frequent tests and homework, and you may be able to bring up a low initial grade by completing smaller assignments and bonuses.	Grades are often made up of fewer assignments, and initial low grades may keep you from earning high course grades at the end of the semester.	You will need to be prepared to earn high grades on all assignments because you may not have the opportunity to make up for lost ground.



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## Differences between High School and College

	High School	College	Why You Need to Know the Difference
Learning	Learning is often done in class with the teacher guiding the process, offering multiple ways to learn material and frequent quizzes to ensure that learning is occurring.	Learning happens mostly outside of class and on your own. Faculty are responsible for assigning material and covering the most essential ideas; you are responsible for tracking and monitoring your learning progress.	You will need to practice effective learning strategies on your own to ensure that you are mastering material at the appropriate pace.
Getting Help	Your teachers, parents, and a counselor are responsible for identifying your need for help and for creating a plan for you to get help with coursework if you need it. Extra assistance is usually reserved for students who have an official diagnosis or need.	You will most likely need help to complete all your courses successfully even if you did not need extra help in high school. You will be responsible for identifying that you need it, accessing the resources, and using them.	Because the responsibility is on you, not parents or teachers, to get the help you need, you will want to be aware of when you may be struggling to learn material. You then will need to know <i>where</i> the support can be accessed on campus or <i>where</i> you can access support online.
Tests and Exams	Tests cover small amounts of material and study days or study guides are common to help you focus on what you need to study. If you paid attention in class, you should be able to answer all the questions.	Tests are fewer and cover more material than in high school. If you read all the assigned material, took good notes in class, and spent time practicing effective study techniques, you should be able to answer all the questions.	This change in how much material and the depth of which you need to know the material is a shock for some students. This may mean you need to change your strategies dramatically to get the same results.

### Some of What You Will Learn Is “Hidden”

Many of the college expectations that have been outlined so far may not be considered common knowledge, which is one reason that so many colleges and universities have classes that help students learn what they need to know to succeed. The term, which was coined by sociologists,<sup>[7]</sup> describes unspoken, unwritten, or unacknowledged (hence, *hidden*) rules that students are expected to follow that can affect their learning. To illustrate the concept, consider the situation in the following activity.

7 P.P. Bilbao, P. I. Lucido, T. C. Iringan and R. B. Javier. (2008). *Curriculum Development*.

## ACTIVITY



Situation: Your history syllabus indicates that, on Tuesday, your professor is lecturing on the chapter that covers the stock market crash of 1929.

This information sounds pretty straightforward. Your professor lectures on a topic and you will be there to hear it. However, there are some unwritten rules, or hidden curriculum, that are not likely to be communicated. Can you guess what they may be? Take a moment to write at least one potential unwritten rule.

1. What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing before attending class? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing in class?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing after class?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is an unwritten rule if you are not able to attend that class?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Some of your answers could have included the following:

*Before class: Read the assigned chapter, take notes, record any questions you have about the reading.*

*During class: Take detailed notes, ask critical thinking or clarifying questions, avoid distractions, bring your book and your reading notes.*

*After class: Reorganize your notes in relation to your other notes, start the studying process by testing yourself on the material, make an appointment with your professor if you are not clear on a concept.*

*Absent: Communicate with the professor, get notes from a classmate, make sure you did not miss anything important in your notes.*

The expectations before, during, and after class, as well as what you should do if you miss class, are often unspoken because many professors assume you already know and do these things or because they feel you should figure them out on your own. Nonetheless, some students struggle at first because they don't know about these habits, behaviors, and strategies. But once they learn them, they are able to meet them with ease.

## Learning Is Your Responsibility

As you may now realize by reviewing the differences between high school and college, learning in college is your responsibility. Before you read about the how and why of being responsible for your own learning, complete the Activity below.

## ACTIVITY



For each statement, circle the number that best represents you, with 1 indicating that the statement is least like you, and 5 indicating that the statement is most like you.

Most of the time, I can motivate myself to complete tasks even if they are boring or challenging.				
1	2	3	4	5
I regularly work hard when I need to complete a task no matter how small or big the task may be.				
1	2	3	4	5
I use different strategies to manage my time effectively and minimize procrastination to complete tasks.				
1	2	3	4	5
I regularly track my progress completing work and the quality of work I do produce.				
1	2	3	4	5
I believe how much I learn and how well I learn is my responsibility.				
1	2	3	4	5

Were you able to mark mostly 4s and 5s? If you were even able to mark at least one 4 or 5, then you are well on your way to taking responsibility for your own learning. Let's break down each statement in the components of the ownership of learning:

- **Motivation.** Being able to stay motivated while studying and balancing all you have to do in your classes will be important for meeting the rest of the components.
- **Deliberate, focused effort.** Taking ownership of learning will hinge on the effort that you put into the work. Because most learning in college will take place outside of the classroom, you will need determination to get the work done. And there will be times that the work will be challenging and maybe even boring, but finding a way to get through it when it is not exciting will pay in the long run.
- **Time and task management.** You will learn more about strategies for managing your time and the tasks of college in a later chapter, but without the ability to control your calendar, it will be difficult to block out the time to study.
- **Progress tracking.** A commitment to learning must include monitoring your learning, knowing not only what you have completed (*this is where a good time management strategy can help you track your tasks*), but also the quality of the work you have done.

Taking responsibility for your learning will take some time if you are not used to being in the driver's seat. However, if you have any difficulty making this adjustment, you can and should reach out for help along the

way.

## What to Expect During the First Year

While you may not experience every transition within your first year, there are rhythms to each semester of the first year and each year you are in college. Knowing what to expect each month or week can better prepare you to take advantage of the times that you have more confidence and weather through the times that seem challenging. Review the table on First-Year College Student Milestones. There will be milestones each semester you are in college, but these will serve as an introduction to what you should expect in terms of the rhythms of the semester.

**First-Year College Student Milestones for the First Semester**

August	September	October	November	December
Expanding social circles	Completing first test and projects	Feeling more confident about abilities	Balancing college with other obligations	Focusing on finishing strong
Experiencing homesickness or imposter syndrome	Earning “lower-than-usual” grades or not meeting personal expectations	Dealing with relationship issues	Staying healthy and reducing stress	Handling additional stress of the end of the semester
Adjusting to the pace of college	Learning to access resources for support	Planning for next semester and beyond	Thinking about majors and degrees	Thinking about the break and how to manage changes

While each student’s first semester will differ, you will likely experience some of the following typical college milestones.

The first few weeks will be pretty exhilarating. You will meet new people, including classmates, college staff, and professors. You may also be living in a different environment, which may mean that a roommate is another new person to get to know. Overall, you will most likely feel both excited and nervous. You can be assured that even if the beginning of the semester goes smoothly, your classes will get more challenging each week. You will be making friends, learning who in your classes seem to know what is going on, and figuring your way around campus. You may even walk into the wrong building, go to the wrong class, or have trouble finding what you need during this time. But those first-week jitters will end soon. Students who are living away from home for the first time can feel homesick in the first few weeks, and others can feel what is called “imposter syndrome,” which is a fear some students have that they don’t belong in college because they don’t have the necessary skills for success. Those first few weeks sound pretty stressful, but the stress is temporary. After the newness of college wears off, reality will set in. You may find that the courses and assignments do not seem much different than they did in high school (more on that later), but you may be in for a shock when you get your graded tests and papers. Many new college students find that their first grades are lower than

they expected. For some students, this may mean they have earned a B when they are used to earning As, but for many students, it means they may experience their first *failing or almost-failing grades* in college because they have not used active, effective study strategies; instead, they studied how they did in high school, which is often insufficient. This can be a shock if you are not prepared, but it doesn't have to devastate you if you are willing to use it as a wake-up call to do something different.

By the middle of the semester, you'll likely feel much more confident and a little more relaxed. Your grades are improving because you started going to tutoring and using better study strategies. You are looking ahead, even beyond the first semester, to start planning your courses for the next term. If you are working while in college, you may also find that you have a rhythm down for balancing it all; additionally, your time management skills have likely improved.

By the last few weeks of the semester, you will be focused on the increasing importance of your assignments and upcoming finals and trying to figure out how to juggle that with the family obligations of the impending holidays. You may feel a little more pressure to prepare for finals, as this time is often viewed as the most stressful period of the semester. All of this additional workload and need to plan for the next semester can seem overwhelming, but if you plan ahead and use what you learn from this chapter and the rest of the course, you will be able to get through it more easily.

## Don't Do It Alone

Think about our earlier descriptions of two students, Reginald and Madison. What if they found that the first few weeks were a little harder than they had anticipated? Should they have given up and dropped out? Or should they have talked to someone about their struggles? Here is a secret about college success that not many people know: successful students seek help. They use resources. And they do that as often as necessary to get what they need. Your professors and advisors will expect the same from you, and your college will have all kinds of offices, staff, and programs that are designed to help. This bears calling out again: *you need to use those resources*. These are called "help-seeking behaviors," and along with self-advocacy, which is speaking up for your needs, they are essential to your success. As you get more comfortable adjusting to life in college, you will find that asking for help is easier. In fact, you may become really good at it by the time you graduate, just in time for you to ask for help finding a job! Review the table on Issues, Campus Resources, and Potential Outcomes for a few examples of times you may need to ask for help. See if you can identify where on campus you can find the same or a similar resource.

**Issues, Campus Resources, and Potential Outcomes**

Type	Issue	Campus Resource	Potential Outcome
Academic	You are struggling to master the homework in your math class.	The campus tutoring center	A peer or professional tutor can walk you through the steps until you can do them on your own.
Health	You have felt extremely tired over the past two days and now you have a cough.	The campus health center	A licensed professional can examine you and provide care.

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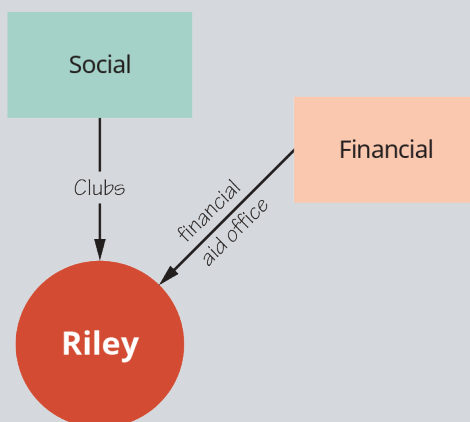
## Issues, Campus Resources, and Potential Outcomes

Type	Issue	Campus Resource	Potential Outcome
Social	You haven't found a group to belong to. Your classmates seem to be going in different directions and your roommate has different interests.	Student organizations and interest groups	Becoming a member of a group on campus can help you make new friends.
Financial	Your scholarship and student loan no longer cover your college expenses. You are not sure how to afford next semester.	Financial aid office	A financial aid counselor can provide you with information about your options for meeting your college expenses.

## APPLICATION



Using a blank sheet of paper, write your name in the center of the page and circle it. Then, draw six lines from the center (see example in the figure below) and label each for the six areas of adjustment that were discussed earlier. Identify a campus resource or strategy for making a smooth adjustment for each area.



**Figure 1.10** For each of the six adjustment areas mentioned above -- Academic, Cultural, Emotional, Financial, Intellectual, and Social -- identify a campus resource or strategy that will aid you in making a smooth adjustment.

## Common Challenges in the First Year

It seems fitting to follow up the expectations for the first year with a list of common challenges that college students encounter along the way to a degree. If you experience any—or even all—of these, the important point here is that you are not alone and that you can overcome them by using your resources. Many college

students have felt like this before, and they have survived—even thrived—despite them because they were able to identify a strategy or resource that they could use to help themselves. At some point in your academic career, you may do one or more of the following:

1. **Feel like an imposter.** There is actually a name for this condition: imposter syndrome. Students who feel like an imposter are worried that they don't belong, that someone will "expose them for being a fake." This feeling is pretty common for anyone who finds themselves in a new environment and is not sure if they have what it takes to succeed. Trust the professionals who work with first-year college students: you *do* have what it takes, and you *will* succeed. Just give yourself time to get adjusted to everything.
2. **Worry about making a mistake.** This concern often goes with imposter syndrome. Students who worry about making a mistake don't like to answer questions in class, volunteer for a challenging assignment, and even ask for help from others. Instead of avoiding situations where you may fail, embrace the process of learning, which includes—is even dependent on—making mistakes. The more you practice courage in these situations and focus on what you are going to learn from failing, the more confident you become about your abilities.
3. **Try to manage everything yourself.** Even superheroes need help from sidekicks and mere mortals. Trying to handle everything on your own every time an issue arises is a recipe for getting stressed out. There will be times when you are overwhelmed by all you have to do. This is when you will need to ask for and allow others to help you.
4. **Ignore your mental and physical health needs.** If you feel you are on an emotional rollercoaster and you cannot find time to take care of yourself, then you have most likely ignored some part of your mental and physical well-being. What you need to do to stay healthy should be non-negotiable. In other words, your sleep, eating habits, exercise, and stress-reducing activities should be your highest priorities.
5. **Forget to enjoy the experience.** Whether you are 18 years old and living on campus or 48 years old starting back to college after taking a break to work and raise a family, be sure to take the time to remind yourself of the joy that learning can bring.

## GET CONNECTED



Which apps help you meet the expectations of college? Will you be able to meet the expectations of being responsible for your schedule and assignments?

- [My Study Life \(https://www.mystudylife.com\)](https://www.mystudylife.com) understands how college works and provides you with a calendar, to-do list, and reminders that will help you keep track of the work you have to do.

How can you set goals and work toward them while in college?

- [The Strides \(https://www.stridesapp.com\)](https://www.stridesapp.com) app provides you with the opportunity to create SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound) goals and track daily habits. These daily habits will add up over time toward your goals.

What can you do to develop your learning skills?

- [Lumosity \(https://www.lumosity.com/en/\)](https://www.lumosity.com/en/) is a brain-training app that can help you build the thinking and learning skills you will need to meet learning challenges in college. If you want to test your memory and attention—and build your skills—take the fit test and then play different games to improve your fitness.

How can you develop networks with people in college?

- [LinkedIn](http://legacy.cnx.org/content/m79847/1.2/www.linkedin.com) (<http://legacy.cnx.org/content/m79847/1.2/www.linkedin.com>) is a professional networking app that allows you to create a profile and network with others. Creating a LinkedIn account as a first-year college student will help you create a professional profile that you can use to find others with similar interests.
- [Internships.com](https://www.internships.com) (<https://www.internships.com>) provides information, connections, and support to help your career planning and activities. Even if you are not planning an internship right away, you may find some useful and surprising ideas and strategies to motivate your approach.

## 1.4 How Can This Book And This Course Help?

Estimated completion time: 6 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- How will you be able to develop your purpose?
- In what ways will you be able to create strategies for your success?
- What other resources can you use to help you succeed?

As Reginald and Madison go through their college experiences and create a balance between their academic and personal lives, their stories, no doubt, will diverge. But you can be assured that each of them will demonstrate grit, the ability to stay focused on a goal over the long-term, along the way. As Duckworth (2016) has said, it takes passion and perseverance to be gritty. It also takes resilience, or the ability to bounce back from adversity. The challenges you face will certainly stretch you, but if you have these three things—purpose, strategies, and resources—you will be more likely to bounce back, even become stronger in the process. This book has been designed with these things in mind.

### Develop Your “Why”

This chapter began with the suggestion to explore why you are in college or, more simply, what your purpose is. This course—and this book—will help you continue to refine your answer and create a map for your journey to fulfill your purpose. The features in this book that help you develop your purpose include the following:

- Student Survey Questions: Each chapter opens with several questions that provide you with a snapshot on how you feel about the chapter content. How does this feature help you develop purpose? It allows you to develop better self-awareness, which will in turn help you build an awareness of your purpose.
- Analysis Questions: These questions are included throughout each chapter. Consider them “pauses” to help you reflect on what you have read and how to incorporate the information into your own journey.

### Refine Your Strategies for Success

Purpose by itself may illuminate the pathway forward, but it will take strategies to help you complete your journey. Think of the strategies you will learn in this course as tools you will need along the way to completing your degree. The following features provide you with an opportunity to practice and refine strategies for



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success:

- **Application Questions:** Any time you are asked to *apply* what you are learning in the chapters, you are improving your skills. Look for them throughout and take some time to stop, think, and use the skill.
- **Activities:** As you read, you will also have the opportunity to interact with the content. They give you the chance to refine the strategies that will help you succeed in college.
- **Career Connection:** This feature allows you to consider how the skills you are developing for college connect to your future career. Making these connections will help you appreciate the deeper importance of them.

## Use Your Resources

In addition to developing strategies for succeeding in your academic and future professional career, you will find that this course will point out the resources you may need to obtain more tools or refuel your desire to continue along the pathway. No one succeeds at anything by oneself. The features related to resources will certainly help you find ways to fill up your toolkit of information.

- **Get Connected:** Despite its ability to distract us from the work we need to do, technology can help you accomplish your day-to-day tasks with relative ease. This feature offers suggestions for apps and websites that can help you build skills or just keep track of due dates!
- **Where Do You Go from Here?:** The skills and habits you are building now will serve you well in your future endeavors. This feature is designed to help you dig deeper into the chapter content and refine your research skills. It also asks that you find ways to connect what you are learning now to your life and career.

All of these features, in addition to the content, will help you see yourself for who you are and provide opportunities to develop in ways that will make reaching your goal a little easier. Will it be challenging at times? Yes, it will. Will it take time to reflect on those challenges and find better ways to learn and reach your goals? Most definitely. But the effort you put into completing your college degree will result in the confidence you will gain from knowing that anything you set your mind to do—and you work hard for—can be accomplished.



## Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to the transition to college by first asking “Why?” Understanding why you are in college and what a college degree can do for you is the foundation of making a smooth transition. These transitional experiences are part of being in college, and this chapter provides you with information about what to expect and how to handle the changes you will go through. Next, the chapter discusses college culture and how to understand the customs and language of higher education. The chapter ends with resources throughout the text that can help you practice skills and dive deeper into the topics.



## Rethinking

Revisit the questions you answered at the beginning of the chapter, and consider one option you learned in this chapter that might change your answer to them.

1. I am fully aware of the expectations of college and how to meet them.

2. I know why I am in college and have clear goals that I want to achieve.
3. Most of the time, I take responsibility for my learning new and challenging concepts.
4. I feel comfortable working with faculty, advisors, and classmates to accomplish my goals.



## Where do you go from here?

Making the transition into college smoother for you can have long-term benefits. What have you learned about in this chapter that you want to know more about that could help you? Choose topics from the list below or create your own, and then create an annotated bibliography of three to five reliable sources that provide information about your topic.

- What is the long-term value of a college degree?
- What is the “hidden curriculum,” and how can knowing about it help you succeed in college?
- What learning strategies are the most effective?
- What kinds of resources and services do colleges now offer that help students’ personal development?



**Figure 3.1** Our devices can be helpful tools for managing time, but they can also lead to distraction.

## Chapter Outline

- 3.1 The Benefits of Time Management
- 3.2 Time Management in College
- 3.3 Procrastination: The Enemy Within
- 3.4 How to Manage Time
- 3.5 Prioritization: Self-Management of What You Do and When You Do It
- 3.6 Goal Setting and Motivation
- 3.7 Enhanced Strategies for Time and Task Management



## Introduction

How do you feel about your time management abilities? Take this quick survey to figure it out, ranking questions on a scale of 1–4, 1 meaning “least like me” and 4 meaning “most like me.” These questions will help you determine how the chapter concepts relate to you right now. As you are introduced to new concepts and practices, it can be informative to reflect on how your understanding changes over time. We’ll revisit these questions at the end of the chapter to see whether your feelings have changed.

1. I regularly procrastinate completing tasks that don't interest me or seem challenging.
2. I use specific time management strategies to complete tasks.
3. I find it difficult to prioritize tasks because I am not sure what is really important.
4. I am pleased with my ability to manage my time.

You can also take the [Chapter 1 survey \(https://openstax.org/l/howdoyoufeel\)](https://openstax.org/l/howdoyoufeel) anonymously online.

## STUDENT PROFILE

Before I started college, I had heard that the amount of work would be overwhelming, and that it would be much harder than high school. That was true, but after being in college for a couple of weeks, I felt that people made it seem scarier than it actually was. I had some homework assignments here, some essays, some hard classes, but it wasn't that bad..until Midterms and Finals came knocking. I had so much to study and so little time. The pressure was unimaginable. And since there was so much material to learn, I kept procrastinating. The nights before the exams were a disaster.

After the semester, I realized that I needed to do something differently. Instead of crashing before midterms and finals, I would study throughout the semester. I would review notes after class, do a few practice problems in the book even if homework wasn't assigned, and try to ask professors questions during their office hours if I was confused. This continual effort helped me do better on exams because I built up my understanding and was able to get a good night's sleep before the big test. I still studied hard, but the material was in reach and understanding it became a reasonable goal, not an impossibility. I also felt more confident going into the exams, because I knew that I had a deeper knowledge — I could recall things more easily. Most importantly, I now had peace of mind throughout the day and during the tests themselves, since I knew that I was better prepared.

**-Nachum Sash**, Actuarial Science Major, City University of New York

### About This Chapter

In this chapter you will learn about two of the most valuable tools used for academic success: prioritizing and time management. By the time you complete this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Articulate the ways in which time management differs from high school to college.
- Outline reasons and effects of procrastination, and provide strategies to overcome it.
- Describe ways to evaluate your own time management skills.
- Discuss the importance and the process of prioritization.
- Articulate the importance of goal setting and motivation.
- Detail strategies and specific tactics for managing your time.

### 3.1 The Benefits of Time Management

Estimated completion time: 9 minutes.

“Poor time management can set into motion a series of events that can seriously jeopardize a student’s success.”

A very unfortunate but all-too-common situation in higher education is the danger students face from poor time management. Many college administrators that work directly with students are aware that a single

mishap or a case of poor time management can set into motion a series of events that can seriously jeopardize a student's success. In some of the more extreme instances, the student may even fail to graduate because of it.

To better understand how one instance of poor time management can trigger a cascading situation with disastrous results, imagine that a student has an assignment due in a business class. She knows that she should be working on it, but she isn't quite in the mood. Instead she convinces herself that she should think a little more about what she needs to complete the assignment and decides to do so while looking at social media or maybe playing a couple more rounds of a game on her phone. In a little while, she suddenly realizes that she has become distracted and the evening has slipped away. She has little time left to work on her assignment. She stays up later than usual trying to complete the assignment but cannot finish it. Exhausted, she decides that she will work on it in the morning during the hour she had planned to study for her math quiz. She knows there will not be enough time in the morning to do a good job on the assignment, so she decides that she will put together what she has and hope she will at least receive a passing grade.

At this point in our story, an evening of procrastination has not only resulted in a poorly done business class assignment, but now she is going to take a math quiz that she has not studied for. She will take the quiz tired from staying up too late the night before. Her lack of time management has now raised potential issues in two courses. Imagine that each of these issues also causes additional problems, such as earning low scores on *both* the assignment and the quiz. She will now have to work harder in both courses to bring her grades up. Any other problems she has with future assignments in either course could cause a domino effect of circumstances that begins to overwhelm her.

In our imagined situation, you can see how events set into motion by a little procrastination can quickly spiral out of control. You can probably think of similar experiences in your own life, when one small bit of poor time management set off a chain of events that threatened to cause big problems.

## The High Cost of Poor Time Management

It's not just your academic performance that can be affected by cascading events that have a domino effect on your college path. And dropping out of school is not your only danger. There are other consequences that affect the financial cost to you as a student if your lack of time management skills causes you to delay when you finish college.

Based on independent research, a *Washington Post* article details the financial impact delaying graduation by two semesters can have on a student.<sup>[1]</sup> (Spending a Few Extra Years in College May Cost You More Than You Think, Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, June 21, 2016)

According to the article, there is a significant cost associated with delaying graduation from college by only one year (by dropping and retaking courses, taking less than a full credit load, etc.). Not only will you pay for additional tuition, textbooks, and other fees associated with going to school, but if you are using student loans, you will also accumulate interest on those loans. On average this would come to an extra \$12,557 in actual costs and \$6,040 in interest at a public university, or \$18,992 in tuition and fees and \$7,823 in interest (over 10 years) at a private school. That's a lot of extra cost to you!

"In the long run, just two extra semesters of college can cost you almost \$150,000."

While a loss of \$26,815 may seem like a lot of money, it pales in comparison to the other financial areas

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1 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/06/21/spending-a-few-extra-years-in-college-may-cost-you-more-than-you-think/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.f06be365e5d6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/06/21/spending-a-few-extra-years-in-college-may-cost-you-more-than-you-think/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f06be365e5d6)

# Near Final Proof

impacted by a single extra year in school. The *Washington Post* article estimates that one year's delay of graduation would cost you an additional \$46,355 based on average lost earnings. To make matters worse, like the story of the student that procrastinates finishing her business assignment, there is a spiraling effect that takes place with loss of income when it comes to retirement investments. The figure cited by the *Washington Post* as lost retirement earnings for taking five years instead of four years to graduate is \$82,074. That brings the average total cost for only two extra semesters to over \$150,000. Measured by the financial cost to you, even a slight delay of graduation can have a serious impact.

**Average Cost of an Additional Year of College**

Tuition, textbooks, and fees	\$15,774
Interest on student loans	\$6,932
Lost wages	\$46,335
Lost retirement earnings	\$82,074
<b>Average total loss:</b>	<b>\$151,115</b>

**Table 3.1** Credit: *Washington Post*. Note the numbers in the table above have been averaged between the two scenarios described.

It is worth noting that any situation that brings about a delay in graduation has the potential to increase the cost of college. This also includes attending school on a part-time basis. While in some instances responsibilities may make it impossible to go to school full-time, from a financial perspective you should do all you can to graduate as soon as you can.

While it may not be possible to prevent life challenges while you are in college, you can do a great deal to prevent the chaos and the chain reaction of unfortunate events that they can cause. This can be accomplished through thoughtful prioritization and time management efforts.

What follows in the rest of this chapter is a close look at the nature of time management and prioritization in ways that can help keep you on track to graduate college on time.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

Can you identify any areas in your life that might be a potential problem if there were a temporary setback (e.g., temporary loss of transportation, temporary loss of housing, an illness that lasted more than a week, etc.)? What could you do for a backup plan if something did happen?

## 3.2 Time Management in College

Estimated completion time: 11 minutes.

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Questions to consider:

- Is time management different in college from what I am used to?
- How different is college schoolwork from high school work?

You may find that time management in college is very different from anything you have experienced previously. For the last 12 years, almost all your school time was managed by educators and your parents. What you did and when you did it was controlled by others. In many cases, even after-school time was set by scheduled activities (such as athletics) and by nightly homework that was due the next day.

In the workplace, the situation is not very different, with activities and time on task being monitored by the company and its management. This is so much a part of the working environment that many companies research how much time each task should take, and they hold employees accountable for the time spent on these job functions. In fact, having these skills will help you stand out on the job and in job interviews.

K-12	College
Many class activities are planned.	Class time is given to receiving information.
Homework is often similar for each student.	You may have freedom in homework choices.
Time is managed by others more often.	Time is managed by the student.

In college, there is a significant difference because a great deal of time management is left up to you. While it is true that there are assignment due dates and organized classroom activities, learning at the college level requires more than just the simple completion of work. It involves decision-making and the ability to evaluate information. This is best accomplished when you are an active partner in your own learning activities.



**Figure 3.2** Students may set aside specific times and specific places to study.

As an example of how this works, think about a college assignment that involves giving a classroom presentation. To complete the assignment, you are given time to research and reflect on the information found. As a part of the assignment, you must reach your own conclusions and determine which information that you have found is best suited for the presentation. While the date of the actual presentation and how long it will last are usually determined by the instructor, how much time you spend gathering information, the

sources you use, and how you use them are left to you.

## WHAT STUDENTS SAY

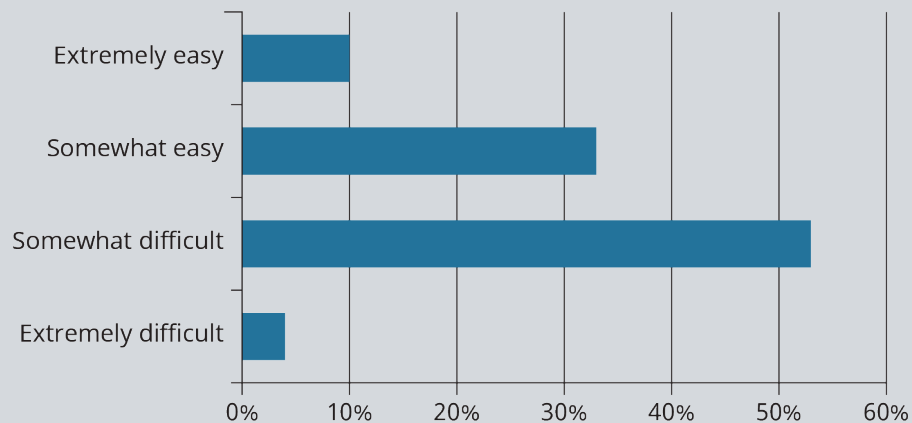


1. How difficult is it for you to keep track of multiple tasks over the course of a term?
  - a. Extremely easy
  - b. Somewhat easy
  - c. Somewhat difficult
  - d. Extremely difficult
2. Do you use a particular app to help you manage your time?
  - a. I use Google calendar
  - b. I use the calendar on my phone
  - c. I use a paper/notebook planner
  - d. I use the calendar on my learning management system
  - e. I use another app or system
  - f. I don't use any type of planner or app
3. Rank the following in terms of what you would most like to improve regarding your time management skills.
  - a. My ability to predict how much time my tasks will take.
  - b. My ability to balance various obligations.
  - c. My ability to avoid procrastination.
  - d. My ability to limit distractions.

You can also take the anonymous [What Students Say \(https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey\)](https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey) surveys to add your voice to this textbook. Your responses will be included in updates.

Students offered their views on these questions, and the results are displayed in the graphs below.

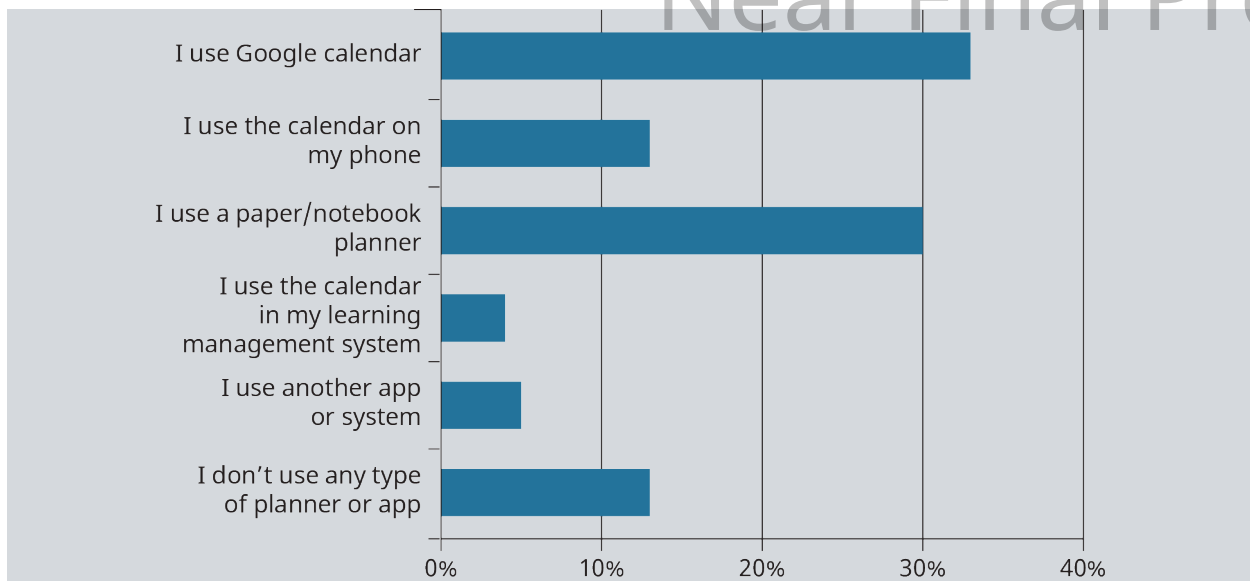
How difficult is it for you to keep track of multiple tasks over the course of a term?



**Figure 3.3**

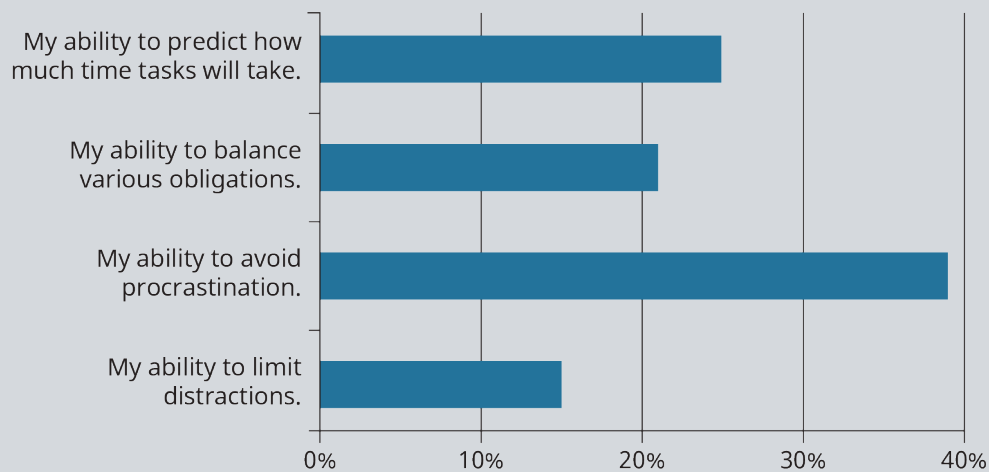
Do you use a particular app to help you manage your time?





**Figure 3.4**

Rank the following in terms of what you would most like to improve regarding your time management skills.



**Figure 3.5**

## You Have Lots of Time to Manage

For college-level learning, this approach is important enough that you can expect to spend much more time on learning activities outside the classroom than you will in the classroom. In fact, the estimated time you should spend will be at least two hours of outside learning for every one hour of lecture. Some weeks may be more intense, depending on the time of the semester and the courses you are taking. If those hours are multiplied over several courses in a given session, you can see how there is a significant amount of time to manage. Unfortunately, many students do not always take this into consideration, and they spend far less time than is needed to be successful. The results of poor time management are often a shock to them.

“In college, as an active participant in your own education, what you do and when you do it is

largely determined by you.”

## The Nature of What You Have to Do Has Changed

Returning to our example of the classroom-presentation assignment, you can see that the types of learning activities in college can be very different from what you have experienced previously. While there may have been similar assignments in high school, such as presentations or written papers, the level of expectation with length and depth is significantly different in college. This point is made very clear when comparing facts about the requirements of high school work to the type of work students produce in college. One very strong statistic that underscores this comes from a study conducted by the Pew Research Center. They found that 82 percent of teens report that their typical high school writing assignments were only a single paragraph to one page in length.<sup>[2]</sup> (Writing Technology and Teens, 2004, Pew Research Center) This is in stark contrast to a number of sources that say that writing assignments in lower-level college courses are usually 5–7 pages in length, while writing assignments in upper-level courses increase to 15–20 pages.

It is also interesting to note that the amount of writing done by a college student can differ depending on their program of study. The table below indicates the estimated average amount of writing assigned in several disciplines. To estimate the number of pages of assigned writing, the average number of writing assignments of a given page length was multiplied by an approximate number of pages for the assignment type (see **Estimating Number of Pages Written** for calculation details).

**Writing Assignments Vary in Length**

Discipline	Number of Pages Assigned in Introductory Course
Arts & Humanities	49
Biological Sciences, Agriculture, & Natural Resources	47
Physical Sciences, Mathematics, & Computer Science	44
Social Sciences	52
Business	48
Communications, Media, & Public Relations	50
Education	46
Engineering	46
Health Professions	43

**Table 3.2** Credit: Updated NSSE (Since 2013)<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/04/24/writing-technology-and-teens/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/sample\\_analyses/amount\\_of\\_writing.cfm](http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/sample_analyses/amount_of_writing.cfm)

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## Writing Assignments Vary in Length

Discipline	Number of Pages Assigned in Introductory Course
Social Service Professions	47

**Table 3.2** Credit: Updated NSSE (Since 2013)

High school homework often consists of worksheets or tasks based on reading or classroom activities. In other words, all the students are doing the same tasks, at relatively the same time, with little autonomy over their own education.

Using the earlier example of the presentation assignment, not only will what you do be larger in scale, but the depth of understanding and knowledge you will put into it will be significantly more than you may have encountered in previous assignments. This is because there are greater expectations required of college graduates in the workplace. Nearly any profession that requires a college degree has with it a level of responsibility that demands higher-level thinking and therefore higher learning. An often-cited example of this is the healthcare professional. The learning requirements for that profession are strict because we depend on those graduates for our health and, in some cases, our lives. While not every profession may require the same level of study needed for healthcare, most do require that colleges maintain a certain level of academic rigor to produce graduates who are competent in their fields.

### 3.3 Procrastination: The Enemy Within

Estimated completion time: 13 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- Why do we procrastinate?
- What are the effects of procrastination?
- How can we avoid procrastination?



**Figure 3.6** We can think of many creative ways to procrastinate, but the outcome is often detrimental. (Credit: University of the Fraser Valley / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0))

Simply put, procrastination is the act of delaying some task that needs to be completed. It is something we all do to greater and lesser degrees. For most people, a little minor procrastination is not a cause for great concern. But there are situations where procrastination can become a serious problem with a lot of risk. These include: when it becomes a chronic habit, when there are a number of tasks to complete and little time, or when the task being avoided is very important.

Because we all procrastinate from time to time, we usually do not give it much thought, let alone think about its causes or effects. Ironically, many of the psychological reasons for why we avoid a given task also keep us from using critical thinking to understand why procrastination can be extremely detrimental, and in some cases difficult to overcome.

To succeed at time management, you must understand some of the hurdles that may stand in your way. Procrastination is often one of the biggest. What follows is an overview of procrastination with a few suggestions on how to avoid it.

## The Reasons behind Procrastination

There are several reasons we procrastinate, and a few of them may be surprising. On the surface we often tell ourselves it is because the task is something we do not want to do, or we make excuses that there are other things more important to do first. In some cases this may be true, but there can be other contributors to procrastination that have their roots in our physical well-being or our own psychological motivations.

### Lack of Energy

Sometimes we just do not feel up to a certain task. It might be due to discomfort, an illness, or just a lack of energy. If this is the case, it is important to identify the cause and remedy the situation. It could be something as simple as a lack of sleep or improper diet. Regardless, if a lack of energy is continually causing you to procrastinate to the point where you are beginning to feel stress over not getting things done, you should definitely assess the situation and address it.

# Near Final Proof

## Lack of Focus

Much like having low physical energy, a lack of mental focus can be a cause of procrastination. This can be due to mental fatigue, being disorganized, or allowing yourself to be distracted by other things. Again, like low physical energy, this is something that may have farther-reaching effects in your life that go beyond the act of simply avoiding a task. If it is something that is recurring, you should properly assess the situation.

## Fear of Failure

This cause of procrastination is not one that many people are aware of, especially if they are the person avoiding tasks because of it. To put it in simple words, it is a bit of trickery we play on ourselves by avoiding a situation that makes us psychologically uncomfortable. Even though they may not be consciously aware of it, the person facing the task is afraid that they cannot do it or will not be able to do it well. If they fail at the task, it will make them appear incompetent to others or even to themselves. Where the self-trickery comes in is by avoiding the task. In the person's mind, they can rationalize that the reason they failed at the task was because they ran out of time to complete it, not that they were incapable of doing it in the first place.

It is important to note that a fear of failure may not have anything to do with the actual ability of the person suffering from it. They could be quite capable of doing the task and performing well, but it is the fear that holds them back.

### ANALYSIS QUESTION

Consider something right now that you may be procrastinating about. Are you able to identify the cause?

## The Effects of Procrastination

In addition to the causes of procrastination, you must also consider what effects it can have. Again, many of these effects are obvious and commonly understood, but some may not be so obvious and may cause other issues.

### Loss of Time

The loss of time as an effect of procrastination is the easiest to identify since the act of avoiding a task comes down to not using time wisely. Procrastination can be thought of as using the time you have to complete a task in ways that do not accomplish what needs to be done.

### Loss of Goals

Another of the more obvious potentially adverse effects of procrastination is the loss of goals. Completing a task leads to achieving a goal. These can be large or small (e.g., from doing well on an assignment to being hired for a good job). Without goals you might do more than delay work on a task—you may not complete it at all. The risk for the loss of goals is something that is very impactful.

# Near Final Proof

## Loss of Self-Esteem

Often, when we procrastinate we become frustrated and disappointed in ourselves for not getting important tasks completed. If this continues to happen, we can begin to develop a low opinion of ourselves and our own abilities. We begin to suffer from low self-esteem and might even begin to feel like there is something wrong with us. This can lead to other increasingly negative mental factors such as anger and depression. As you can see, it is important for our own well-being to avoid this kind of procrastination effect.

## Stress

Procrastination causes stress and anxiety, which may seem odd since the act of procrastination is often about avoiding a task we think will be stressful in itself! Anyone who has noticed that nagging feeling when they know there is something else they should be doing is familiar with this.

On the other hand, some students see that kind of stress as a boost of mental urgency. They put off a task until they feel that surge of motivation. While this may have worked in the past, they quickly learn that procrastinating when it comes to college work almost always includes an underestimation of the tasks to be completed— sometimes with disastrous results.

## Strategies for Psyching Ourselves Out and Managing Procrastination

Now that you understand a few of the major problems procrastination can produce, let's look at methods to manage procrastination and get you on to completing the tasks, no matter how unpleasant you think they might be.

### Get Organized

Much of this chapter is dedicated to defining and explaining the nature of time management. The most effective way to combat procrastination is to use time and project management strategies such as schedules, goal setting, and other techniques to get tasks accomplished in a timely manner.

### Put Aside Distractions

Several of the methods discussed in this chapter deal specifically with distractions. Distractions are time-killers and are the primary way people procrastinate. It is too easy to just play a video game a little while longer, check out social media, or finish watching a movie when we are avoiding a task. Putting aside distractions is one of the primary functions of setting priorities.

### Reward Yourself

Rewarding yourself for the completion of tasks or meeting goals is a good way to avoid procrastination. An example of this would be rewarding yourself with the time to watch a movie you would enjoy *after* you have finished the things you need to do, rather than using the movie to keep yourself from getting things done.

### Be Accountable—Tell Someone Else

A strong motivational tool is to hold ourselves accountable by telling someone else we are going to do something and when we are going to do it. This may not seem like it would be very effective, but on a psychological level we feel more compelled to do something if we tell someone else. It may be related to our need for approval from others, or it might just serve to set a level of commitment. Either way, it can help us

stay on task and avoid procrastination—especially if we take our accountability to another person seriously enough to warrant contacting that person and apologizing for not doing what we said we were going to do.

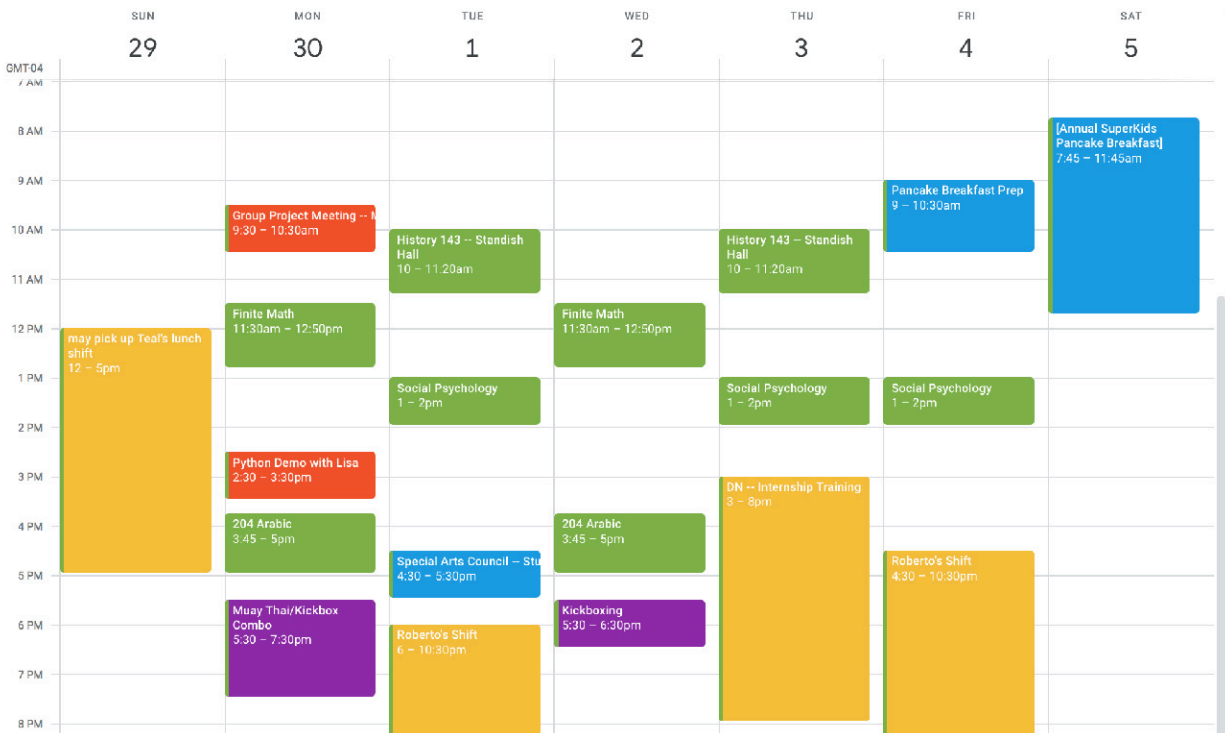
### 3.4 How to Manage Time

Estimated completion time: 25 minutes.

Questions to consider...

- How can I use time-on-task estimates to improve time management?
- What behaviors can help or hinder when it comes to managing time?

In this next section you will learn about managing time and prioritizing tasks. This is not only a valuable skill for pursuing an education, but it can become an ability that follows you through the rest of your life, especially if your career takes you into a leadership role.



**Figure 3.7** An online calendar is a very useful tool for keeping track of classes, meetings, and other events. Most learning management systems contain these features, or you can use a calendar application.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

Read each statement in the brief self-evaluation tool below, and check the answer that best applies to you. There are no right or wrong answers.

## Near Final Proof

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I like to be given strict deadlines for each task. It helps me stay organized and on track.					
I would rather be 15 minutes early than 1 minute late.					
I like to improvise instead of planning everything out ahead of time.					
I prefer to be able to manage when and how I do each task.					
I have a difficult time estimating how long a task will take.					
I have more motivation when there is an upcoming deadline. It helps me focus.					
I have difficulty keeping priorities in the most beneficial order.					

**Table 3.3**

This exercise is intended to help you recognize some things about your own time management style. The important part is for you to identify any areas where you might be able to improve and to find solutions for them. This chapter will provide some solutions, but there are many others that can be found by researching time management strategies.

After you have decided your best response to each statement, think about what they may mean in regard to potential strengths and/or challenges for you when it comes to time management in college. If you are a person that likes strict deadlines, what would you do if you took a course that only had one large paper due at the end? Would you set yourself a series of mini deadlines that made you more comfortable and that kept things moving along for you? Or, if you have difficulty prioritizing tasks, would it help you to make a list of the tasks to do and order them, so you know which ones must be finished first?

## How to Manage Time

The simplest way to manage your time is to accurately plan for how much time it will take to do each task, and then set aside that amount of time. How you divide the time is up to you. If it is going to take you five hours to study for a final exam, you can plan to spread it over five days, with an hour each night, or you can plan on two hours one night and three hours the next. What you would not want to do is plan on studying only a few hours the night before the exam and find that you fell very short on the time you estimated you would need. If that were to happen, you would have run out of time before finishing, with no way to go back and change your decision. In this kind of situation, you might even be tempted to “pull an all-nighter,” which is a phrase that



has been used among college students for decades. In essence it means going without sleep for the entire night and using that time to finish an assignment. While this method of trying to make up for poor planning is common enough to have a name, rarely does it produce the best work.

## ACTIVITY



Many people are not truly aware of how they actually spend their time. They make assumptions about how much time it takes to do certain things, but they never really take an accurate account.

In this activity, write down all the things you think you will do tomorrow, and estimate the time you will spend doing each. Then track each thing you have written down to see how accurate your estimates were.

Obviously, you will not want to get caught up in too much tedious detail, but you will want to cover the main activities of your day—for example, working, eating, driving, shopping, gaming, being engaged in entertainment, etc.

After you have completed this activity for a single day, you may consider doing it for an entire week so that you are certain to include all of your activities.

Many people that take this sort of personal assessment of their time are often surprised by the results. Some even make lifestyle changes based on it.

Activity	Estimated Time	Actual Time
Practice Quiz	5 minutes	15 minutes
Lab Conclusions	20 minutes	35 minutes
Food shopping	45 minutes	30 minutes
Drive to work	20 minutes	20 minutes
Physical Therapy	1 hour	50 minutes

**Table 3.4** Sample Time Estimate Table

Of all the parts of time management, accurately predicting how long a task will take is usually the most difficult—and the most elusive. Part of the problem comes from the fact that most of us are not very accurate timekeepers, especially when we are busy applying ourselves to a task. The other issue that makes it so difficult to accurately estimate time on task is that our estimations must also account for things like interruptions or unforeseen problems that cause delays.?

When it comes to academic activities, many tasks can be dependent upon the completion of other things first, or the time a task takes can vary from one instance to another, both of which add to the complexity and difficulty of estimating how much time and effort are required.

For example, if an instructor assigned three chapters of reading, you would not really have any idea how long

each chapter might take to read until you looked at them. The first chapter might be 30 pages long while the second is 45. The third chapter could be only 20 pages but made up mostly of charts and graphs for you to compare. By page count, it might seem that the third chapter would take the least amount of time, but actually studying charts and graphs to gather information can take longer than regular reading.?

To make matters even more difficult, when it comes to estimating time on task for something as common as reading, not all reading takes the same amount of time. Fiction, for example, is usually a faster read than a technical manual. But something like the novel *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce is considered so difficult that most readers never finish it.

## ACTIVITY



To better understand how much time different kinds of material can take to read, try this experiment. You will use two examples of famous texts that are very close to being the same number of words: *The Gettysburg Address* and the opening paragraphs from *A Christmas Carol*. Before you begin, estimate how long it will take you to read each, and predict which you think will take longer. When you do the reading, use a stopwatch function on a device such as a phone or some other timer to see how long it actually takes.

Make certain that you are reading for understanding, not just skimming over words. If you must reread a section to better comprehend what is being said, that is appropriate. The goal here is to compare reading of different texts, not to see how fast you can sight-read the words on a page.

After you have finished *The Gettysburg Address*, read and time *A Christmas Carol* and compare both of your times.

### **The Gettysburg Address**

**Abraham Lincoln**

**Gettysburg, Pennsylvania November 19, 1863**

**Word count: 278**

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government

of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

**A Christmas Carol**

**Charles Dickens**

**Chapman & Hall, 1843**

**Word count: 260**

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the dearest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

In comparing the two, was one or the other easier to understand or faster to read? Was it the piece you predicted you would read faster?

It is important to note that in this case both readings were only three paragraphs long. While there may have only been half a minute or so between the reading of each, that amount of time would multiply greatly over an entire chapter.

## Knowing Yourself

While you can find all sorts of estimates online as to how long a certain task may take, it is important to know these are only averages. People read at different speeds, people write at different speeds, and those numbers even change for each individual depending on the environment.

If you are trying to read in surroundings that have distractions (e.g., conversations, phone calls, etc.), reading 10 pages can take you a lot longer than if you are reading in a quiet area. By the same token, you may be reading in a quiet environment (e.g., in bed after everyone in the house has gone to sleep), but if you are tired, your attention and retention may not be what it would be if you were refreshed.

In essence, the only way you are going to be able to manage your time accurately is to know yourself and to know how long it takes you to do each task. But where to begin?

Below, you will find a table of common college academic activities. This list has been compiled from a large

number of different sources, including colleges, publishers, and professional educators, to help students estimate their own time on tasks. The purpose of this table is to both give you a place to begin in your estimates and to illustrate how different factors can impact the actual time spent.

You will notice that beside each task there is a column for the *unit*, followed by the average *time on task*, and a column for notes. The *unit* is whatever is being measured (e.g., pages read, pages written, etc.), and the *time on task* is an average time it takes students to do these tasks. It is important to pay attention to the notes column, because there you will find factors that influence the time on task. These factors can dramatically change the amount of time the activity takes.

Time on Task			
Activity	Unit	Time on task	Notes
General academic reading (textbook, professional journals)	1 page	5–7 minutes	Be aware that your personal reading speed may differ and may change over time.
Technical reading (math, charts and data)	1 page	10–15 minutes	Be aware that your personal reading speed may differ and may change over time.
Simple Quiz or homework question: short answer—oriented toward recall or identification type answers	Per question	1–2 minutes	Complexity of question will greatly influence the time required.
Complex Quiz or homework question: short answer—oriented toward application, evaluation, or synthesis of knowledge	Per question	2–3 minutes	Complexity of question will greatly influence the time required.
Math problem sets, complex	Per question	15 minutes	For example, algebra, complex equations, financial calculations
Writing: short, no research	Per page	60 minutes	Short essays, single-topic writing assignments, summaries, freewriting assignments, journaling—includes drafting, writing, proofing, and finalizing
Writing: research paper	Per page	105 minutes	Includes research time, drafting, editing, proofing, and finalizing (built into per-page calculation)
Study for quiz	Per chapter	60 minutes	45–90 minutes per chapter, depending upon complexity of material

**Table 3.5** Time on task for common college activities.

Time on Task			
Activity	Unit	Time on task	Notes
Study for exam	Per exam	90 minutes	1–2 hours, depending upon complexity of material

**Table 3.5** Time on task for common college activities.

Again, these are averages, and it does not mean anything if your times are a little slower or a little faster. There is no “right amount of time,” only the time that it takes you to do something so you can accurately plan and manage your time.

There is also another element to look for in the table. These are differentiations in the similar activities that will also affect the time you spend. A good example of this can be found in the first four rows. Each of these activities involves reading, but you can see that depending on the material being read and its complexity, the time spent can vary greatly. Not only do these differences in time account for the different types of materials you might read (as you found in the comparative reading exercise earlier in this chapter), but also the you also take into consideration the time needed to think about what you are reading to truly understand and comprehend what it is saying.

## GET CONNECTED



Which apps help you best prepare for success when managing your time?

Do you have trouble keeping track of multiple tasks over the course of a term?

[Trello \(http://www.trello.com\)](http://www.trello.com) lets you organize all your obligations in helpful boards. You can share them with others (project collaborators), set alerts as reminders, and mark tasks off as you complete them.

Do you use a particular app to help you manage your time?

Sticky note apps are available for PC, Mac, and mobile devices. They let you post quick reminders, reorganize them as needed, and view them separately or as a full to-do list.

What do you wish you could improve about your time management skills?

[Toggl \(https://toggl.com\)](https://toggl.com) helps you keep track of how and where you are spending your time so you can budget better and make time management changes that free you up for the really important stuff.

### 3.5 Prioritization: Self-Management of What You Do and When You Do It

Estimated completion time: 21 minutes.



**Figure 3.8** Numbered lists are useful and easy tools to create.

Questions to consider:

- Why is prioritization important?
- What are the steps involved in prioritization?
- How do I deal with situation where others' priorities are not the same as my own?
- What do I do when priorities conflict?
- What are the best ways to make sure I complete tasks?

## Prioritization: Self-Management of What You Do and When You Do It

Another key component in time management is that of prioritization. Prioritization can be thought of as ordering tasks and allotting time for them based on their identified needs or value.

This next section provides some insight into not only helping prioritize tasks and actions based on need and value, but also how to better understand the factors that contribute to prioritization.

## How to Prioritize

The enemy of good prioritization is panic, or at least making decisions based on strictly emotional reactions. It can be all too easy to immediately respond to a problem as soon as it pops up without thinking of the consequences of your reaction and how it might impact other priorities. It is very natural for us to want to remove a stressful situation as soon as we can. We want the adverse emotions out of the way as quickly as possible. But when it comes to juggling multiple problems or tasks to complete, prioritizing them first may mean the difference between completing everything satisfactorily and completing nothing at all.

## Make Certain You Understand the Requirements of Each Task

One of the best ways to make good decisions about the prioritization of tasks is to understand the requirements of each. If you have multiple assignments to complete and you assume one of those assignments will only take an hour, you may decide to put it off until the others are finished. Your assumption could be disastrous if you find, once you begin the assignment, that there are several extra components that you did not account for and the time to complete will be four times as long as you estimated. Or, one of the assignments may be dependent on the results of another—like participating in a study and then writing a report on the results. If you are not aware that one assignment depends upon the completion of the other before you begin, you could inadvertently do the assignments out of order and have to start over. Because of

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situations like this, it is critically important to understand exactly what needs to be done to complete a task before you determine its priority.

## Make Decisions on Importance, Impact on Other Priorities, and Urgency

After you are aware of the requirements for each task, you can then decide your priorities based on the importance of the task and what things need to be finished in which order.

To summarize: *the key components to prioritization are making certain you understand each task and making decisions based on importance, impact, and urgency.*

### ACTIVITY



To better see how things may need to be prioritized, some people make a list of the tasks they need to complete and then arrange them in a quadrant map based on importance and urgency. Traditionally this is called the Eisenhower Decision Matrix. Before becoming the 34th president of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower served as the Allied forces supreme commander during World War II and said he used this technique to better prioritize the things he needed to get done.

In this activity you will begin by making a list of things you need or want to do today and then draw your own version of the grid below. Write each item in one of the four squares; choose the square that best describes it based on its urgency and its importance. When you have completed writing each the tasks in its appropriate square, you will see a prioritization order of your tasks. Obviously, those listed in the Important and Urgent square will be the things you need to finish first. After that will come things that are “important but not urgent,” followed by “not important, but urgent,” and finally “not urgent and not important.”

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<b>Urgent and Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper due tomorrow</li> <li>• Apply for internship by deadline</li> </ul>	<b>Not Urgent but Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exam next week</li> <li>• Flu shot</li> </ul>
Not Important	<b>Urgent but Not Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amazon sale</li> <li>• Laundry</li> </ul>	<b>Not Urgent and Not Important</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check social</li> <li>• TV show</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.9** The Eisenhower Matrix can help organize priorities and ensure that you focus on the correct tasks.

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## Who Is Driving Your Tasks?

Another thing to keep in mind when approaching time management is that while you may have greater autonomy in managing your own time, many of your tasks are being driven by a number of different individuals. These individuals are not only unaware of the other things you need to do, but they often have goals that are in conflict with your other tasks. This means that different instructors, your manager at work, or even your friends may be trying to assert their needs into your priorities. An example of this might be a boss that would like for you to work a few hours of overtime, but you were planning on using that time to do research for a paper.

Just like assessing the requirements and needs for each priority, doing the same with how others may be influencing your available time can be an important part of time management. In some cases, keeping others informed about your priorities may help avert possible conflicts (e.g., letting your boss know you will need time on a certain evening to study, letting your friends know you plan to do a journal project on Saturday but can do something on Sunday, etc.).

It will be important to be aware of how others can drive your priorities and for you to listen to your own good judgment. In essence, time management in college is as much about managing all the elements of your life as it is about managing time for class and to complete assignments.

## Making the Tough Decision When It Is Needed

Occasionally, regardless of how much you have planned or how well you have managed your time, events arise where it becomes almost impossible to accomplish everything you need to by the time required. While this is very unfortunate, it simply cannot be helped. As the saying goes, “things happen.”

Finding yourself in this kind of situation is when prioritization becomes most important. You may find yourself in the uncomfortable position of only being able to complete one task or another in the time given. When this occurs with college assignments, the dilemma can be extremely stressful, but it is important to not feel overwhelmed by the anxiety of the situation so that you can make a carefully calculated decision based on the value and impact of your choice.

“What do you do when faced with priority conflicts?”

As an illustration, imagine a situation where you think you can only complete one of two assignments that are both important and urgent, and you must make a choice of which one you will finish and which one you will not. This is when it becomes critical to understand all the factors involved. While it may seem that whichever assignment is worth the most points to your grade is how you make the choice, there are actually a number of other attributes that can influence your decision in order to make the most of a bad situation. For example, one of the assignments may only be worth a minimal number of points toward your total grade, but it may be foundational to the rest of the course. Not finishing it, or finishing it late, may put other future assignments in jeopardy as well. Or the instructor for one of the courses might have a “late assignment” policy that is more forgiving—something that would allow you to turn in the work a little late without too much of a penalty.

If you find yourself in a similar predicament, the first step is to try to find a way to get everything finished, regardless of the challenges. If that simply cannot happen, the next immediate step would be to communicate with your instructors to let them know about the situation. They may be able to help you decide on a course of action, or they may have options you had not thought of. Only then can you make the choices about prioritizing in a tough situation.



The key here is to make certain you are aware of and understand all the ramifications to help make the best decision when the situation dictates you make a hard choice among priorities.

## Completing the Tasks

Another important part of time management is to develop approaches that will help you complete tasks in a manner that is efficient and works for you. Most of this comes down to a little planning and being as informed about the specifics of each task as you can be.

## Knowing What You Need to Do

As discussed in previous parts of this chapter, many learning activities have multiple components, and sometimes they must occur in a specific order. Additionally, some elements may not only be dependent on the order they are completed, but can also be dependent on how they are completed. To illustrate this we will analyze a task that is usually considered to be a simple one: *attending a class session*. In this analysis we will look at not only what must be accomplished to get the most out of the experience, but also at how each element is dependent upon others and must be done in a specific order. The graphic below shows the interrelationship between the different activities, many of which might not initially seem significant enough to warrant mention, but it becomes obvious that other elements depend upon them when they are listed out this way.

Element or Task Needed for Success	Task it Depends on
<b>Pre-class Prep</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing previous homework</li> <li>• Reading appropriate material for lecture</li> <li>• Taking notes on areas that need clarification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding homework assigned from previous class</li> <li>• Making certain appropriate reading material is identified</li> <li>• Reading appropriate material for lecture</li> </ul>
↓	
<b>During Class</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding lecture</li> <li>• Taking notes on lecture</li> <li>• Asking questions for clarification</li> <li>• Taking part in class discussion</li> <li>• Receive assignments for next class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading appropriate material</li> <li>• Understanding lecture</li> <li>• Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture</li> <li>• Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture</li> </ul>
↓	
<b>Post-Class</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding homework assigned</li> <li>• Making certain appropriate reading material is identified</li> <li>• Ask questions for clarification</li> <li>• Reviewing and rewriting notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive assignments for next class</li> <li>• Receive assignments for next class</li> <li>• Receive assignments for next class</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.10** Many of your learning activities are dependent on others, and some are the gateways to other steps.

As you can see from the graphic above, even a task as simple as “going to class” can be broken down into a number of different elements that have a good deal of dependency on other tasks. One example of this is preparing for the class lecture by reading materials ahead of time in order to make the lecture and any complex concepts easier to follow. If you did it the other way around, you might miss opportunities to ask questions or receive clarification on the information presented during the lecture.

Understanding what you need to do and when you need to do it can be applied to any task, no matter how simple or how complex. Knowing what you need to do and planning for it can go a long way toward success and preventing unpleasant surprises.

### Knowing How You Will Get It Done

After you have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to complete a task (or the component parts of

a task), the next step is to create a plan for completing everything.

This may not be as easy or as simple as declaring that you will finish part one, then move on to part two, and so on. Each component may need different resources or skills to complete, and it is in your best interest to identify those ahead of time and include them as part of your plan.

A good analogy for this sort of planning is to think about it in much the same way you would preparing for a lengthy trip. With a long journey you probably would not walk out the front door and then decide how you were going to get where you were going. There are too many other decisions to be made and tasks to be completed around each choice. If you decided you were going by plane, you would need to purchase tickets, and you would have to schedule your trip around flight times. If you decided to go by car, you would need gas money and possibly a map or GPS device. What about clothes? The clothes you will need are dependent on how long will you be gone and what the climate will be like. If it far enough away that you will need to speak another language, you may need to either acquire that skill or at least come with something or someone to help you translate.

What follows is a planning list that can help you think about and prepare for the tasks you are about to begin.

### **What Resources Will You Need?**

The first part of this list may appear to be so obvious that it should go without mention, but it is by far one of the most critical and one of the most overlooked. Have you ever planned a trip but forgotten your most comfortable pair of shoes or neglected to book a hotel room? If a missing resource is important, the entire project can come to a complete halt. Even if the missing resource is a minor component, it may still dramatically alter the end result.

Learning activities are much the same in this way, and it is also important to keep in mind that resources may not be limited to physical objects such as paper or ink. Information can be a critical resource as well. In fact, one of the most often overlooked aspects in planning by new college students is just how much research, reading, and information they will need to complete assignments.



**Figure 3.11** Allowing time to think is an important part of learning. Credit: Juhan Sonin / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

For example, if you had an assignment in which you were supposed to compare and contrast a novel with a

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film adapted from that novel, it would be important to have access to both the movie and the book as resources. Your plans for completing the work could quickly fall apart if you learned that on the evening you planned to watch the film, it was no longer available.

## What Skills Will You Need?

Poor planning or a bad assumption in this area can be disastrous, especially if some part of the task has a steep learning curve. No matter how well you planned the other parts of the project, if there is some skill needed that you do not have and you have no idea how long it will take to learn, it can be a bad situation.

Imagine a scenario where one of your class projects is to create a poster. It is your intent to use some kind of imaging software to produce professional-looking graphics and charts for the poster, but you have never used the software in that way before. It seems easy enough, but once you begin, you find the charts keep printing out in the wrong resolution. You search online for a solution, but the only thing you can find requires you to recreate them all over again in a different setting. Unfortunately, that part of the project will now take twice as long.

It can be extremely difficult to recover from a situation like that, and it could have been prevented by taking the time to learn how to do it correctly before you began or by at least including in your schedule some time to learn and practice.

## Set Deadlines

Of course, the best way to approach time management is to set realistic deadlines that take into account which elements are dependent on which others and the order in which they should be completed. Giving yourself two days to write a 20- page work of fiction is not very realistic when even many professional authors average only 6 pages per day. Your intentions may be well founded, but your use of unrealistic deadlines will not be very successful.

Setting appropriate deadlines and sticking to them is very important—so much so that several sections in the rest of this chapter touch on effective deadline practices.

## Be Flexible

It is ironic that the item on this list that comes just after a strong encouragement to make deadlines and stick to them is the suggestion to be flexible. The reason that *being flexible* has made this list is because even the best-laid plans and most accurate time management efforts can take an unexpected turn. The idea behind being flexible is to readjust your plans and deadlines when something does happen to throw things off. The worst thing you could do in such a situation is panic or just stop working because the next step in your careful planning has suddenly become a roadblock. The moment when you see that something in your plan may become an issue is when to begin readjusting your plan.

Adjusting a plan along the way is incredibly common. In fact, many professional project managers have learned that it seems something *always* happens or there is always some delay, and they have developed an approach to deal with the inevitable need for some flexibility. In essence, you could say that they are even planning for problems, mistakes, or delays from the very beginning, and they will often add a little extra time for each task to help ensure an issue does not derail the entire project or that the completion of the project does not miss the final due date.

“As you work through tasks, make certain you are always monitoring and adapting to ensure you complete them.”

## STUDENT PROFILE

While in college, I recall an instance where I was awake for two nights in a row trying to cram for upcoming midterms. I quickly learned that trying to navigate through college while working full time posed a significant challenge. Because of inability to manage my responsibilities, my first year of college was quite miserable. I went through a lot of trial and error to find out that *time management* was the key. From my experiences, I have extrapolated three important components to this skill. First, knowing your *values* is imperative. Values will serve as a guide, which will help you to determine which actions bring you closer to your goals and those that don't. Second, know your *constraints*. Constraints (in form of time or other responsibilities) can help you set the parameter within which you can function efficiently. The last component is *action*. This component was the hardest for me to master, but it was the most fruitful. Because knowing values and limitations without engaging in appropriate actions does not serve any meaningful purpose. I strongly believe that learning time management can contribute greatly towards positive university experience.

-**Firdavs Khaydarov**, Psychology Major, Minnesota State University, Mankato

## The Importance of Where You Do Your Work



**Figure 3.12** Where you do work can be as important as when. (Credit: Mads Bodker / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0))

A large part of ensuring that you can complete tasks on time comes to setting up conditions that will allow you to do the work well. Much of this has to do with the environment where you will do your work. This not only

includes physical space such as a work area, but other conditions like being free from distractions and your physical well-being and mental attitude.

### **The Right Space**

Simple things, like where you are set up to do your work, can not only aid in your efficiency but also affect how well you can work or even if you can get the work completed at all. One example of this might be typing on a laptop. While it might seem more comfortable to lie back on a couch and type a long paper, sitting up at a desk or table actually increases your typing speed and reduces the number of mistakes. Even the kind of mouse you use can impact how you work, and using one you are comfortable with can make a big difference.

There are a host of other factors that can come into play as well. Do you have enough space? Is the space cluttered, or do you have the room to keep reference materials and other things you might need within arm's reach? Are there other ways you could work that might be even more efficient? For example, buying an inexpensive second monitor—even secondhand—might be the key to decreasing the amount of time you spend when you can have more than one document displayed at a time.

The key is to find what works for you and to treat your work space as another important resource needed to get the task finished.

### **Distraction Free**

Few things are more frustrating than trying to do work while distractions are going on around you. If other people are continually interrupting you or there are things that keep pulling your attention from the task at hand, everything takes longer and you are more prone to mistakes.<sup>[4]</sup>

Many people say they work better with distractions—they prefer to leave the television or the radio on—but the truth is that an environment with too many interruptions is rarely helpful when focus is required. Before deciding that the television or talkative roommates do not bother you when you work, take an honest accounting of the work you produce with interruptions compared to work you do without.

If you find that your work is better without distractions, it is a good idea to create an environment that reduces interruptions. This may mean you have to go to a private room, use headphones, or go somewhere like a library to work. Regardless, the importance of a distraction-free environment cannot be emphasized enough.

### **Working at the Right Time**

Most people are subject to their own rhythms, cycles, and preferences throughout their day. Some are alert and energetic in the mornings, while others are considered “night owls” and prefer to work after everyone else has gone to sleep. It can be important to be aware of your own cycles and to use them to your advantage. Rarely does anyone do their best work when they are exhausted, either physically or mentally. Just as it can be difficult to work when you are physically ill, it can also be a hindrance to try to learn or do mental work when you are tired or emotionally upset.

Your working environment definitely includes your own state of mind and physical well-being. Both have a significant influence on your learning and production ability. Because of this, it is not only important to be aware of your own condition and work preferences, but to actually try to create conditions that help you in these areas. One approach is to set aside a specific time to do certain kinds of work. You might find that you concentrate better after you have eaten a meal. If that is the case, make it a habit of doing homework every night after dinner. Or you might enjoy reading more after you are ready for bed, so you do your reading

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4 <https://en.calameo.com/read/00009178915b8f5b352ba>

assignments just before you go to sleep at night. Some people find that they are more creative during a certain time of the day or that they are more comfortable writing with subtle lighting. It is worth taking the time to find the conditions that work best for you so that you can take advantage of them.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

### Student Survey on Work Environment

**Analysis:** Take the time to think about where you will do your work and when. What can you do to help ensure your working environment will be helpful rather than harmful? What do you know doesn't work for you? What will you do to prevent those adverse conditions from creeping into your work environment?

Below is a quick survey to help you determine your own preferences in regard to your work space, the time you work, and distractions. Rank each option: 1–4, 1 meaning “least like me” and 4 meaning “most like me.”

- I like my workspace to be organized and clean.
- There are certain places where I am more comfortable when I work.
- I prefer to be alone when I work on certain things.
- I find it difficult to read with other sounds or voices around me.
- There are certain times of the day when I can be more focused.
- My moods or emotions can interfere with my ability to concentrate

## 3.6 Goal Setting and Motivation

Estimated completion time: 11 minutes.

Questions to consider:

- How do I set motivational goals?
- What are SMART goals?
- What's the importance of an action plan?
- How do I keep to my plan?

Motivation often means the difference between success and failure. That applies to school, to specific tasks, and to life in general. One of the most effective ways to keep motivated is to set goals.

Goals can be big or small. A goal can range from *I am going to write one extra page tonight*, to *I am going to work to get an A in this course*, all the way to *I am going to graduate in the top of my class so I can start my career with a really good position*. The great thing about goals is that they can include and influence a number of other things that all work toward a much bigger picture. For example, if your goal is to get an A in a certain course, all the reading, studying, and every assignment you do for that course contributes to the larger goal. You have motivation to do each of those things and to do them well.

Setting goals is something that is frequently talked about, but it is often treated as something abstract. Like

time management, goal setting is best done with careful thought and planning. This next section will explain how you can apply tested techniques to goal setting and what the benefits of each can be.

## Set Goals That Motivate You

The first thing to know about goal setting is that a goal is a specific end result you desire. If the goal is not something you are really interested in, there is little motivational drive to achieve it. Think back to when you were much younger and some well-meaning adult set a goal for you—something that didn't really appeal to you at all. How motivated were you to achieve the goal? More than likely, if you were successful at all in meeting the goal, it was because you were motivated by earning the approval of someone or receiving a possible reward, or you were concerned with avoiding something adverse that might happen if you did not do what you were told. From an honest perspective in that situation, your real goal was based on something else, not the meeting of the goal set for you. To get the most from the goals you set, make sure they are things that you are interested in achieving.

That is not to say you shouldn't set goals that are supported by other motivations (e.g., If I finish studying by Friday, I can go out on Saturday), but the idea is to be intellectually honest with your goals.

## Set SMART Goals

Goals should also be SMART. In this case, the word *smart* is not only a clever description of the type of goal, but it is also an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The reason these are all desirable traits for your goals is because they not only help you plan how to meet the goal, but they can also contribute to your decision-making processes during the planning stage.

What does it mean to create SMART goals?

- **Specific**—For a goal to be specific, it must be defined enough to actually determine the goal. A goal of *get a good job when I graduate* is too general. It doesn't define what a good job is. In fact, it doesn't even necessarily include a job in your chosen profession. A more specific goal would be something like *be hired as a nurse in a place of employment where it is enjoyable to work and that has room for promotion*.
- **Measurable**—The concept of *measurable* is one that is often overlooked when setting goals. What this means is that the goal should have clearly defined outcomes that are detailed enough to measure and can be used for planning of how you will achieve the goal. For example, setting a goal of *doing well in school* is a bit undefined, but making a goal of *graduating with a GPA above 3.0* is measurable and something you can work with. If your goal is measurable, you can know ahead of time how many points you will have to earn on a specific assignment to stay in that range or how many points you will need to make up in the next assignment if you do not do as well as you planned.
- **Attainable**—*Attainable* or *achievable* goals means they are reasonable and within your ability to accomplish. While a goal of *make an extra one million dollars by the end of the week* is something that would be nice to achieve, the odds that you could make that happen in a single week are not very realistic.
- **Relevant**—For goal setting, *relevant* means it applies to the situation. In relation to college, a goal of *getting a horse to ride* is not very relevant, but *getting dependable transportation* is something that would contribute to your success in school.
- **Time-bound**—Time-bound means you set a specific time frame to achieve the goal. *I will get my paper written by Wednesday* is time-bound. You know when you have to meet the goal. *I will get my paper written sometime soon* does not help you plan how and when you will accomplish the goal.



In the following table you can see some examples of goals that do and do not follow the SMART system. As you read each one, think about what elements make them SMART or how you might change those that are not.

Goal	Is it SMART?	
I am going to be rich someday.	No	There is nothing really specific, measurable, or time-bound in this goal.
I will graduate with my degree, on time.	Yes	The statement calls out specific, measurable, and time-bound details. The other attributes of attainable and relevant are implied.
I am going to save enough money to buy a newer car by June.	Yes	All SMART attributes are covered in this goal.
I would like to do well in all my courses next semester.	No	While this is clearly time-bound and meets most of the SMART goal attributes, it is not specific or measurable without defining what “do well” means.
I am going to start being a nicer person.	No	While most of the SMART attributes are implied, there is nothing really measurable in this goal.
I will earn at least a 3.0 GPA in all my courses next semester.	Yes	All of the SMART attributes are present in this goal.
I am going to start being more organized.	No	While most of the SMART attributes are implied, there is nothing really measurable in this goal.

**Table 3.6**

## APPLICATION



Try writing two SMART goals—something with a one-week time frame and something that you will accomplish over the next year. Make certain that you include all the appropriate elements—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

## Make an Action Plan

Like anything else, making a step-by-step action plan of how you will attain your goals is the best way to make certain you achieve them. It doesn't matter if it is a smaller goal with immediate results (e.g., finish all your

homework due by Friday) or something bigger that takes several years to accomplish (graduate with my degree in the proper amount of time).

The planning techniques you use for time management and achieving goals can be similar. In fact, accurate goal setting is very much a part of time management if you treat the completion of each task as a goal.

What follows is an example of a simple action plan that lists the steps for writing a short paper. You can use something like this or modify it in a way that would better suit your own preferences.

**Action Plan**

Task	Objective	When
Choose topic.	Select something interesting.	Needs to be done by Monday!
Write outline, look for references.	Create structure of paper and outline each part.	Monday, 6:00 p.m.
Research references to support outline, look for good quotes.	Strengthen paper and resources.	Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.
Write paper introduction and first page draft.	Get main ideas and thesis statement down.	Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.
Write second page and closing draft.	Finish main content and tie it all together.	Thursday, 6:00 p.m.
Rewrite and polish final draft.	Clean up for grammar, writing style, and effective communication.	Friday, 5:00 p.m.

**Table 3.7**

Another useful approach to goal setting is to create SMART goals and then write them down. For most people there is a higher level of commitment when we write something down. If you have your goals written out, you can refer to each component of the SMART acronym and make certain you are on track to achieve it.

### Stick with It!

As with anything else, the key to reaching goals is to keep at it, keep yourself motivated, and overcome any obstacles along the way. In the following graphic you will find seven methods that highly successful people use to accomplish this.



**Figure 3.13** These seven ways to stay motivated are good suggestions from highly successful people. What other strategies would you suggest?

3.7

## Enhanced Strategies for Time and Task Management

Estimated completion time: 18 minutes.

Questions to consider:

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- What strategy helps me prioritize my top tasks?
- How do I make the best use of my time when prioritizing?
- How do I make sure I tackle unpleasant tasks instead of putting them off?
- What's the best way to plan for long-term tasks?
- How do I find time in a busy schedule?

Over the years, people have developed a number of different strategies to manage time and tasks. Some of the strategies have proven to be effective and helpful, while others have been deemed not as useful.

The good news is that the approaches that do not work very well or do not really help in managing time do not get passed along very often. But others, those which people find of value, do. What follows here are three unique strategies that have become staples of time management. While not everyone will find that all three work for them in every situation, enough people have found them beneficial to pass them along with high recommendations.

## Daily Top Three

The idea behind the *daily top three* approach is that you determine which three things are the most important to finish that day, and these become the tasks that you complete. It is a very simple technique that is effective because each day you are finishing tasks and removing them from your list. Even if you took one day off a week and completed no tasks on that particular day, a *daily top three* strategy would have you finishing 18 tasks in the course of a single week. That is a good amount of things crossed off your list.

### ANALYSIS QUESTION

Analysis: Think about what would be your top three tasks for today? What would you have on the list tomorrow?

## Pomodoro Technique

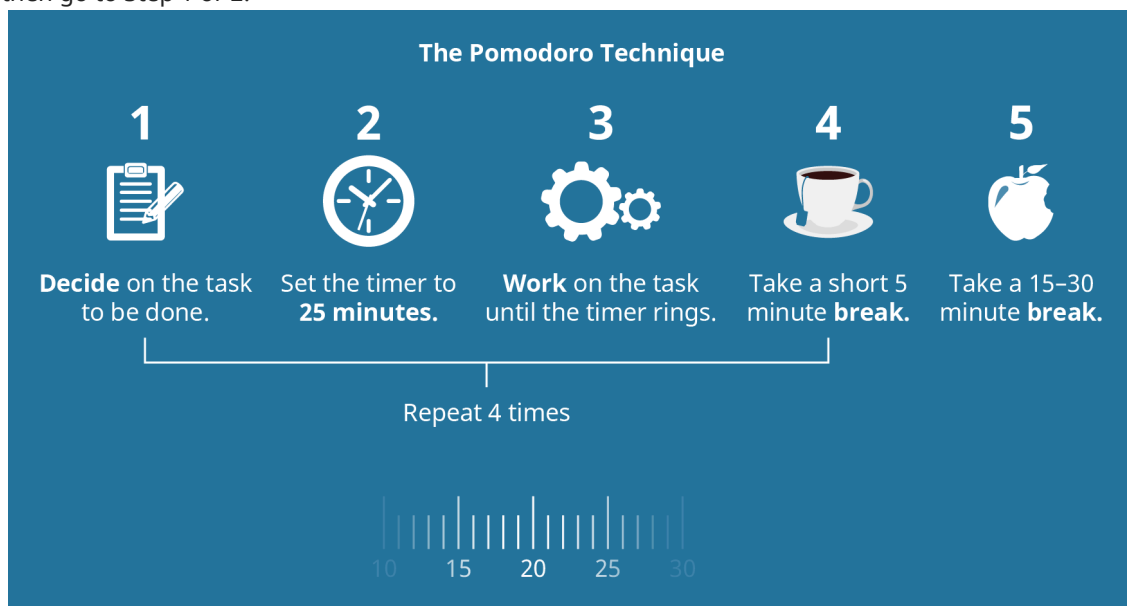


**Figure 3.14** The Pomodoro Technique is named after a type of kitchen timer, but you can use any clock or countdown timer. (Marco Verch /Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0))

The Pomodoro Technique was developed by Francesco Cirillo. The basic concept is to use a timer to set work intervals that are followed by a short break. The intervals are usually about 25 minutes long and are called *pomodoros*, which comes from the Italian word for tomato because Cirillo used a tomato-shaped kitchen timer to keep track of the intervals.

In the original technique there are six steps:

1. Decide on the task to be done.
2. Set the timer to the desired interval.
3. Work on the task.
4. When the timer goes off, put a check mark on a piece of paper.
5. If you have fewer than four check marks, take a short break (3–5 minutes), then go to Step 1 or 2 (whichever is appropriate).
6. After four pomodoros, take a longer break (15–30 minutes), reset your check mark count to zero, and then go to Step 1 or 2.



**Figure 3.15** The Pomodoro Technique contains five defined steps.

There are several reasons this technique is deemed effective for many people. One is the benefit that is derived from quick cycles of work and short breaks. This helps reduce mental fatigue and the lack of productivity caused by it. Another is that it tends to encourage practitioners to break tasks down to things that can be completed in about 25 minutes, which is something that is usually manageable from the perspective of time available. It is much easier to squeeze in three 25-minute sessions of work time during the day than it is to set aside a 75-minute block of time.

## Eat the Frog

Of our three quick strategies, *eat the frog* probably has the strangest name and may not sound the most inviting. The name comes from a famous quote, attributed to Mark Twain: “Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.” *Eat the Frog* is also the title of a best-selling book by Brian Tracy that deals with time management and avoiding procrastination.

How this applies to time and task management is based on the concept that if a person takes care of the biggest or most unpleasant task first, everything else will be easier after that.

Although stated in a humorous way, there is a good deal of truth in this. First, we greatly underestimate how much worry can impact our performance. If you are continually distracted by anxiety over a task you are dreading, it can affect the task you are working on at the time. Second, not only will you have a sense of accomplishment and relief when the task you are concerned with is finished and out of the way, but other tasks will seem lighter and not as difficult.

## APPLICATION



### Try Three Time Management Strategies

Over the next two weeks, try each of these three methods to see which ones might work for you. Is there one you favor over the others? Might each of these three approaches serve you better in different situations or with different tasks? Do you have a creative alternative or possibly a way to use some combination of these techniques?

In addition to these three strategies, you could also develop whole new approaches from suggestions found earlier in this chapter. For example, you could apply some of the strategies for avoiding procrastination or for setting appropriate priorities and see how they work in combination with these techniques or on their own.

The key is to find which system works best for you.

## Breaking Down the Steps and Spreading Them over Shorter Work Periods

Above, you read about several different tried-and-tested strategies for effective time management—approaches that have become staples in the professional world. In this section you will read about two more creative techniques that combine elements from these other methods to handle tasks when time is scarce and long periods of time are a luxury you just do not have.

The concept behind this strategy is to break tasks into smaller, more manageable units that do not require as much time to complete. As an illustration of how this might work, imagine that you are assigned a two-page paper that is to include references. You estimate that to complete the paper—start to finish—would take you between four and a half and five hours. You look at your calendar over the next week and see that there simply are no open five-hour blocks (unless you decided to only get three hours of sleep one night). Rightly so, you decide that going without sleep is not a good option. While looking at your calendar, you do see that you can squeeze in an hour or so every night. Instead of trying to write the entire paper in one sitting, you break it up into much smaller components as shown in the table below:

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Breaking Down Projects into Manageable-Sized Tasks

Day/Time	Task	Time
Monday, 6:00 p.m.	Write outline; look for references.	60 minutes
Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.	Research references to support outline; look for good quotes.	60 minutes
Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.	Write paper introduction and first page draft.	60 minutes
Thursday, 6:00 p.m.	Write second page and closing draft.	60 minutes
Friday, 5:00 p.m.	Rewrite and polish final draft.	60 minutes
Saturday, 10:00 a.m.	<i>Only if needed—finish or polish final draft.</i>	60 minutes?

Table 3.8

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00–10:00		Work		Work			
10:00–12:00	Algebra	Work	Algebra	Work	Algebra	10 a.m.–11 a.m. <i>Only if needed</i>	Work
12:00–2:00	Lunch/ study	1 p.m. English Comp	Lunch/study	1 p.m. English Comp	Lunch/study	Family picnic	Work
2:00–4:00	History	English Comp	History	English Comp	History	Family picnic	
4:00–6:00	Study for Algebra quiz.	Grocery	Study for History exam.	Study for History exam.	5 p.m.–6 p.m. Rewrite and polish final draft.	Family picnic	Laundry

Table 3.9

## Near Final Proof

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00–7:00	Write outline; look for references.	Research references to support outline; look for good quotes.	Research presentation project.	Write second page and closing draft	Create presentation.	Meet with Darcy.	Prepare school stuff for next week.
7:00–8:00	Free time	Free time	Write paper introduction and first page draft.	Research presentation project.	Create presentation.		Free time

**Table 3.9**

While this is a simple example, you can see how it would redistribute tasks to fit your available time in a way that would make completing the paper possible. In fact, if your time constraints were even more rigid, it would be possible to break these divided tasks down even further. You could use a variation of the Pomodoro Technique and write for three 20-minute segments each day at different times. The key is to look for ways to break down the entire task into smaller steps and spread them out to fit your schedule.

## STUDENT PROFILE

Time management is probably one of the hardest things I had to pick up when I got to college. For starters, I didn't have anyone to come wake me up if I forgot to set an alarm or to tell me to get out of bed so that I wouldn't be late. I had to start placing my phone far away from my bed; so that way, I would have to get out of bed in order to turn the alarm off. Accomplishing work on time can also be difficult. It's tough to find the fine balance between when you have to stay in and work on assignments and when is acceptable to go out and do leisure activities.

I learned the 8-8-8 rule. Every day you spend eight hours working on school work or going to class, eight hours of free time to do what you want, and then eight hours to sleep at night so that you will get enough rest. Sleep is crucial for time management. I learned very quickly that you cannot focus or be productive if you are struggling to keep your head from falling over because you are so tired. Basically, I've learned that if you want to be successful in college, then you have to be on top of your game when it comes to time. It's something thing you cannot make up once it's gone.

**-Preston Allen**, University of Central Arkansas



## Analyzing Your Schedule and Creating Time to Work

Of all the strategies covered in this chapter, this one may require the most discipline, but it can also be the most beneficial in time management. The fact is most of us waste time throughout the day. Some of it is due to a lack of awareness, but it can also be caused by the constraints of our current schedules. An example of this is when we have 15 to 20 minutes before we must leave to go somewhere. We don't do anything with that time because we are focused on leaving or where we are going, and we might not be organized enough to accomplish something in that short of a time period. In fact, a good deal of our 24-hour days are spent a few minutes at a time waiting for the next thing scheduled to occur. These small units of time add up to a fair amount each day.

The intent of this strategy is to recapture those lost moments and use them to your advantage. This may take careful observation and consideration on your part, but the results of using this as a method of time management are more than worth it.

The first step is to look for those periods of time that are wasted or that can be repurposed. In order to identify them, you will need to pay attention to what you do throughout the day and how much time you spend doing it. The example of waiting for the next thing in your schedule has already been given, but there are many others. How much time do you spend in activities after you have really finished doing them but are still lingering because you have not begun to do something else (e.g., letting the next episode play while binge-watching, reading social media posts or waiting for someone to reply, surfing the Internet, etc.)? You might be surprised to learn how much time you use up each day by just adding a few unproductive minutes here and there.

If you set a limit on how much time you spend on each activity, you might find that you can recapture time to do other things. An example of this would be limiting yourself to reading news for 30 minutes. Instead of reading the main things that interest you and then spending an additional amount of time just looking at things that you are only casually interested in because that is what you are doing at the moment, you could stop after a certain allotted period and use the extra time you have gained on something else.

After you identify periods of lost time, the next step will be to envision how you might restructure your activities to bring those extra minutes together into useful blocks of time. Using the following scenario as an illustration, we will see how this could be accomplished.



**Figure 3.16** Sarah has to balance a lot of obligations.

On Tuesday nights, Sarah has a routine: After work, she does her shopping for the week (2 hours driving and shopping) and then prepares and eats dinner (1 hour). After dinner, she spends time on home work (1 hour) and catching up with friends, reading the news, and other Internet activities (1 hour), and then she watches television or reads before going to bed (1 hour). While it may seem that there is very little room for improvement in her schedule without cutting out something she enjoys, limiting the amount of time she spends on each activity and rethinking how she goes about each task can make a significant difference.

In this story, Sarah's Tuesday-night routine includes coming home from work, taking stock of which items in her home she might need to purchase, and then driving to the store. While at the store, she spends time picking out and selecting groceries as she plans for meals she will eat during the rest of the week. Then, after making her purchases, she drives home. Instead, if she took the time to make a list and plan for what she needed at the store before she arrived, she would not spend as much time looking for inspiration in each aisle. Also, if she had a prepared list, not only could she quickly pick up each item, but she could stop at the store on the way home from work, thus cutting out the extra travel time. If purchasing what she needed took 30 minutes less because she was more organized and she cut out an additional 20 minutes of travel time by saving the extra trip to the store from her house, she could recapture a significant amount of her Tuesday evening. If she then limited the time she spent catching up with friends and such to 30 minutes or maybe did some of that while she prepared dinner, she would find that she had added almost an extra hour and a half to the time available to her on that evening, without cutting out anything she needed to do or enjoys. If she decided to spend her time on study or homework, this would more than double the time she previously had available in her schedule for homework.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

### Reflection

**Analysis:** Identify areas in the way you spend your day where you may be able to recapture and repurpose time. Are there things you can move around to gain more time? Are there ways you can combine tasks or reduce travel time?

### Summary

This chapter began by pointing out the dangers of poor time management, both in cost and even the potential risk to graduation. After presenting why time management is important, sections of the text covered how time management for college can be different from what students may have experienced before. Following this, the chapter contained several sections on how to effectively manage time (including predicting time on task), how to use technology to your advantage, and how to prioritize tasks. Other topics included goal setting and motivation, some specific strategies for time and task management, and avoiding procrastination.

### Career Connection

**Rick says:** I've wanted to work in radio since I was in high school and had great opportunities in college to learn at the campus station. I interned for a semester at a local Top 40 station and, after graduation, was offered a position as the producer of the station's morning show.

The only problem: I had to be at the radio station by 4:45 a.m. I couldn't do it. I tried everything—alarms on my phone, clock radio alarms, friends calling me. This is not a job you can be late for—dead air is a radio DJ's greatest nightmare. But no matter what I tried, I could not wake up on time. The third time I arrived late, the radio station let me go.

**Reflection question:** How might you have handled the situation differently? How might this aspiring radio DJ have managed his time differently to ensure he was not late for work?

**For discussion:** Is the Internet responsible for most of our wasted work time? Read through this article. What do you think?

<https://openstax.org/l/whowastestime>

### Rethinking

Revisit the questions you answered at the beginning of the chapter, and consider one option you learned in this chapter that might change your answer to one of them.

1. I regularly procrastinate completing tasks that don't interest me or seem challenging.
2. I use specific time management strategies to complete tasks.
3. I find it difficult to prioritize tasks because I am not sure what is really important.

4. I am pleased with my ability to manage my time.



### Where do you go from here?

Refining your time management skills based on an honest assessment is something that should never stop. The benefits of good time management skills are something that will apply to the rest of your life. What would you like to learn more about? Choose a topic from the list below, and create an annotated bibliography that would direct further research.

- Psychological reasons for procrastinating
- Technology and social media as distractions
- Additional time management strategies
- Time management strategies that successful people use

## Reading and Notetaking



**Figure 5.1** Each of us reads and records information in our own way.

### Chapter Outline

- 5.1 The Nature and Types of Reading
- 5.2 Effective Reading Strategies
- 5.3 Taking Notes



### Introduction

These questions will help you determine how the chapter concepts relate to you right now. As we are introduced to new concepts and practices, it can be informative to reflect on how your understanding changes over time. We'll revisit these questions at the end of the chapter to see whether your feelings have changed.

On a scale of 1 (I need significant improvement) to 4 (I'm doing great), reflect on how you're doing right now on these statements:

1. I am reading on a college level.
2. I take good notes that help me study for exams.
3. I understand how to manage all the reading I need to do for college.
4. I recognize the need for different note-taking strategies for different college subjects.

You can also take the [Chapter 5 survey \(https://openstax.org/l/relateconcepts\)](https://openstax.org/l/relateconcepts) anonymously online.

## STUDENT PROFILE

Before I came to college, I always loathed reading from the textbook, taking notes during class, and even listening to lectures. I've since learned that in most cases I should do what my teacher suggests. I have a course that requires me to read two textbook chapters each week. Taking notes on the chapters is optional, making it easy to brush off these assignments. But there are reasons that professors tell students to read and do other classwork. They believe it is valuable information for a student to learn. Note taking in class may become tedious and, in some cases, feel redundant. But you can't recall a whole class from memory. There is not much time to learn the contents of a class in one semester, and it can feel overwhelming. It's important to take notes because writing them helps you remember.

**-Christopher Naldini, Westchester Community College**

### About this Chapter

In this chapter we will explore two skills you probably think you already understand—reading and note-taking. But the goal is to make sure you've honed these skills well enough to lead you to success in college. By the time you finish this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Discuss the way reading differs in college and how to successfully adapt to that change.
- Demonstrate the usefulness of strong note-taking for college students.

Reading and consuming information are increasingly important today because of the amount of information we encounter. Not only do we need to read critically and carefully, but we also need to read with an eye to distinguishing fact from opinion and identifying solid sources. Reading helps us make sense of the world—from simple reminders to pick up milk to complex treatises on global concerns, we read to comprehend, and in so doing, our brains expand. An interesting study from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, used MRI scans to track the brain conductivity while participants were reading. The researchers assert that a biological change to your brain actually happens when you read, and it lingers. If you want to read the study, published in the journal *Brain Connectivity*, you can find it online at <https://doi.org/10.1089/brain.2013.0166> (<https://doi.org/10.1089/brain.2013.0166>) .

In academic settings, as we deliberately work to become stronger readers and better notetakers, we are both helping our current situation and enhancing our abilities to be successful in the future. Seems like a win-win. Take advantage of all the study aids you have at hand, including human, electronic, and physical resources, to increase your performance in these crucial skill sets.

Why? You need to read. It improves your thinking, your vocabulary, and your ability to make connections between disparate parts, which are all parts of critical thinking. Educational researchers Anne Cunningham and Keith Stanovich discovered after extensive study with college students that “reading volume [how much you read] made a significant contribution to multiple measures of vocabulary, general knowledge, spelling, and verbal fluency.”

Research continues to assess and support the fact that one of the most significant learning skills necessary for success in any field is reading. You may have performed this skill for decades already, but learning to do it more effectively and practicing the skill consistently is critical to how well you do in all subjects. If reading *isn't your thing*, strive to make that your challenge. Your academic journey, your personal well-being, and your

professional endeavors will all benefit from your reading. Put forth the effort and make it your thing. The long-term benefits will far outweigh the sacrifices you make now.

## 5.1 The Nature and Types of Reading

Estimated completion time: 16 minutes.

Questions to consider...

- What are the pros and cons of online reading?
- How can distinguishing between reading types help you academically and personally?
- How can you best prepare to read for college?

Research supports the idea that reading is good for you. Students who read at or above reading level throughout elementary and secondary school have a higher chance of starting—and more importantly, finishing—college. Educational researchers convincingly claim that reading improves everything from grades to vocabulary (Cunningham 2).

If you don't particularly enjoy reading, don't despair. We read for a variety of reasons, and you may just have to step back and take a bigger picture of your reading habits to understand why you avoid engaging in this important skill. The myriad distractions we now face as well as the intense information overload we can suffer on a daily basis in all aspects of our lives can combine to make it difficult to slow down to read, an activity that demands at least a modicum of attention in a way that most television and music do not. You may need to adjust your schedule for more reading time, especially in college, because every class you take will expect you to read more pages than you probably have in the past.

### Types of Reading

We may read small items purely for immediate information, such as notes, e-mails, or directions to an unfamiliar location. You can find all sorts of information online about how to fix a faucet or tie a secure knot. You won't have to spend too much time reading these sorts of texts because you have a specific goal in mind for them, and once you have accomplished that goal, you do not need to prolong the reading experience. These encounters with texts may not be memorable or stunning, but they don't need to be. When we consider why we read longer pieces—outside of reading for pleasure—we can usually categorize the reasons into about two categories: 1) reading to introduce ourselves to new content, and 2) reading to more fully comprehend familiar content.



**Figure 5.2** A bookstore or library can be a great place to explore. Aside from books and resources you need, you may find something that interests you or helps with your course work.

### Reading to Introduce New Content

Glenn felt uncomfortable talking with his new roommates because he realized very quickly that he didn't know anything about their major—architecture. Of course he knew that it had something to do with buildings and construction sites, but the field was so different from his discipline of biology that he decided he needed to find out more so he could at least engage in friendly conversation with his roommates. Since he would likely not go into their field, he didn't need to go into full research mode. When we read to introduce new content, we can start off small and increase to better and more sophisticated sources. Much of our further study and reading depends on the sources we originally read, our purpose for finding out about this new topic, and our interest level.

Chances are, you have done this sort of exploratory reading before. You may read reviews of a new restaurant or look at what people say about a movie you aren't sure you want to spend the money to see at the theater. This reading helps you decide. In academic settings, much of what you read in your courses may be relatively new content to you. You may have heard the word *volcano* and have a general notion of what it means, but until you study geology and other sciences in depth, you may not have a full understanding of the environmental origins, ecological impacts, and societal and historic responses to volcanoes. These perspectives will come from reading and digesting various material. When you are working with new content, you may need to schedule more time for reading and comprehending the information because you may need to look up unfamiliar terminology and you may have to stop more frequently to make sure you are truly grasping what the material means. When you have few ways to connect new material to your own prior knowledge, you have to work more diligently to comprehend it.



## APPLICATION



Try an experiment with a group of classmates. Without looking on the Internet, try to brainstorm a list of 10 topics about which all of you may be interested but for which you know very little or nothing at all. Try to make the topics somewhat obscure rather than ordinary—for example, the possibility of the non-planet Pluto being reclassified again as opposed to something like why we need to drink water.

After you have this random list, think of ways you could find information to read about these weird topics. Our short answer is always: Google. But think of other ways as well. How else could you read about these topics if you don't know anything about them? You may well be in a similar circumstance in some of your college classes, so you should listen carefully to your classmates on this one. Think beyond pat answers such as "I'd go to the library," and press for what that researcher would do once at the library. What types of articles or books would you try to find? One reason that you should not always ignore the idea of doing research at the physical library is because once you are there and looking for information, you have a vast number of other sources readily available to you in a highly organized location. You also can tap into the human resources represented by the research librarians who likely can redirect you if you cannot find appropriate sources.

### Reading to Comprehend Familiar Content

Reading about unfamiliar content is one thing, but what if you do know something about a topic already? Do you really still need to keep reading about it? Probably. For example, what if during the brainstorming activity in the previous section, you secretly felt rather smug because you know about the demotion of the one-time planet Pluto and that there is currently quite the scientific debate going on about that whole de-planet-ation thing. Of course, you didn't say anything during the study session, mostly to spare your classmates any embarrassment, but you are pretty familiar with Pluto-gate. So now what? Can you learn anything new?

Again—probably. When did Pluto's qualifications to be considered a planet come into question? What are the qualifications for being considered a planet? Why? Who even gets to decide these things? Why was it called *Pluto* in the first place? On Amazon alone, you can find hundreds of books about the once-planet Pluto (not to be confused with the Disney dog also named Pluto). A Google search brings up over 34 million options for your reading pleasure. You'll have plenty to read, even if you do know something or quite a bit about a topic, but you'll approach reading about a familiar topic and an unfamiliar one differently.

With familiar content, you can do some initial skimming to determine what you already know in the book or article, and mark what may be new information or a different perspective. You may not have to give your full attention to the information you know, but you will spend more time on the new viewpoints so you can determine how this new data meshes with what you already know. Is this writer claiming a radical new definition for the topic or an entirely opposite way to consider the subject matter, connecting it to other topics or disciplines in ways you have never considered?

When college students encounter material in a discipline-specific context and have some familiarity with the topic, they sometimes can allow themselves to become a bit overconfident about their knowledge level. Just because a student may have read an article or two or may have seen a TV documentary on a subject such as

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the criminal mind, that does not make them an expert. What makes an expert is a person who thoroughly studies a subject, usually for years, and understands all the possible perspectives of a subject as well as the potential for misunderstanding due to personal biases and the availability of false information about the topic.

## 5.2 Effective Reading Strategies

Estimated completion time: 25 minutes.

Questions to consider...

- What methods can you incorporate into your routine to allow adequate time for reading?
- What are the benefits and approaches to active reading?
- Do your courses or major have specific reading requirements?

### Allowing Adequate Time for Reading

You should determine the reading requirements and expectations for every class very early in the semester. You also need to understand why you are reading the particular text you are assigned. Do you need to read closely for minute details that determine cause and effect? Or is your instructor asking you to skim several sources so you become more familiar with the topic? Knowing this reasoning will help you decide your timing, what notes to take, and how best to undertake the reading assignment.



**Figure 5.3** If you plan to make time for reading while you commute, remember that unexpected events like delays and cancellations could impact your concentration.

Depending on the makeup of your schedule, you may end up reading both primary sources—such as legal documents, historic letters, or diaries—as well as textbooks, articles, and secondary sources, such as summaries or argumentative essays that use primary sources to stake a claim. You may also need to read current journalistic texts to stay current in local or global affairs. A realistic approach to scheduling your time to allow you to read and review all the reading you have for the semester will help you accomplish what can

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sometimes seem like an overwhelming task.

When you allow adequate time in your hectic schedule for reading, you are investing in your own success. Reading isn't a magic pill, but it may seem like it when you consider all the benefits people reap from this ordinary practice. Famous successful people throughout history have been voracious readers. In fact, former U.S. president Harry Truman once said, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers." Writer of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, inventor, and also former U.S. president Thomas Jefferson claimed "I cannot live without books" at a time when keeping and reading books was an expensive pastime. Knowing what it meant to be kept from the joys of reading, 19th-century abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." And finally, George R. R. Martin, the prolific author of the wildly successful *Game of Thrones* empire, declared, "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies . . . The man who never reads lives only one."

You can make time for reading in a number of ways that include determining your usual reading pace and speed, scheduling active reading sessions, and practicing recursive reading strategies.

## Determining Reading Speed and Pacing

To determine your reading speed, select a section of text—passages in a textbook or pages in a novel. Time yourself reading that material for exactly 5 minutes, and note how much reading you accomplished in those 5 minutes. Multiply the amount of reading you accomplished in 5 minutes by 12 to determine your average reading pace (5 times 12 equals the 60 minutes of an hour). Of course, your reading pace will be different and take longer if you are taking notes while you read, but this calculation of reading pace gives you a good way to estimate your reading speed that you can adapt to other forms of reading.

**Example Reading Times**

Reader	Pages Read in 5 Minutes	Pages per Hour	Approximate Hours to Read 500 Pages
Marta	4	48	10 hours, 30 minutes
Jordi	3	36	13 hours
Estevan	5	60	8 hours, 20 minutes

So, for instance, if Marta was able to read 4 pages of a dense novel for her English class in 5 minutes, she should be able to read about 48 pages in one hour. Knowing this, Marta can accurately determine how much time she needs to devote to finishing the novel within a set amount of time, instead of just guessing. If the novel Marta is reading is 497 pages, then Marta would take the total page count (497) and divide that by her hourly reading rate (48 pages/hour) to determine that she needs about 10 to 11 hours overall. To finish the novel spread out over two weeks, Marta needs to read a little under an hour a day to accomplish this goal.

Calculating your reading rate in this manner does not take into account days where you're too distracted and you have to reread passages or days when you just aren't in the mood to read. And your reading rate will likely vary depending on how dense the content you're reading is (e.g., a complex textbook vs. a comic book). Your pace may slow down somewhat if you are not very interested in what the text is about. What this method *will* help you do is be realistic about your reading time as opposed to waging a guess based on nothing and then becoming worried when you have far more reading to finish than the time available.

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Chapter 3, “Time Management and Prioritization,” offers more detail on how best to determine your speed from one type of reading to the next so you are better able to schedule your reading.

## Scheduling Set Times for Active Reading

Active reading takes longer than reading through passages without stopping. You may not need to read your latest sci-fi series actively while you’re lounging on the beach, but many other reading situations demand more attention from you. Active reading is particularly important for college courses. You are a scholar actively engaging with the text by posing questions, seeking answers, and clarifying any confusing elements. Plan to spend at least twice as long to read actively than to read passages without taking notes or otherwise marking select elements of the text.

To determine the time you need for active reading, use the same calculations you use to determine your traditional reading speed and double it. Remember that you need to determine your reading pace for all the classes you have in a particular semester and multiply your speed by the number of classes you have that require different types of reading.

**Example Active Reading Times**

Reader	Pages Read in 5 Minutes	Pages per Hour	Approximate Hours to Read 500 Pages	Approximate Hours to Actively Read 500 Pages
Marta	4	48	10 hours, 30 minutes	21 hours
Jordi	3	36	13 hours	26 hours
Estevan	5	60	8 hours, 20 minutes	16 hours, 40 minutes

## Practicing Recursive Reading Strategies

One fact about reading for college courses that may become frustrating is that, in a way, it never ends. For all the reading you do, you end up doing even more rereading. It may be the same content, but you may be reading the passage more than once to detect the emphasis the writer places on one aspect of the topic or how frequently the writer dismisses a significant counterargument. This rereading is called recursive reading.

For most of what you read at the college level, you are trying to make sense of the text for a specific purpose—not just because the topic interests or entertains you. You need your full attention to decipher everything that’s going on in complex reading material—and you even need to be considering what the writer of the piece may *not* be including and why. This is why reading for comprehension is recursive.

Specifically, this boils down to seeing reading not as a formula but as a process that is far more circular than linear. You may read a selection from beginning to end, which is an excellent starting point, but for comprehension, you’ll need to go back and reread passages to determine meaning and make connections between the reading and the bigger learning environment that led you to the selection—that may be a single course or a program in your college, or it may be the larger discipline, such as all biologists or the community of scholars studying beach erosion.

People often say writing is rewriting. For college courses, reading is rereading.

Strong readers engage in numerous steps, sometimes combining more than one step simultaneously, but knowing the steps nonetheless. They include, not always in this order:

- bringing any prior knowledge about the topic to the reading session,
- asking yourself pertinent questions, both orally and in writing, about the content you are reading,
- inferring and/or implying information from what you read,
- learning unfamiliar discipline-specific terms,
- evaluating what you are reading, and eventually,
- applying what you're reading to other learning and life situations you encounter.

Let's break these steps into manageable chunks, because you are actually doing quite a lot when you read.



**Figure 5.4** The six elements of recursive reading should be considered as a circular, not linear, process.

### Accessing Prior Knowledge

When you read, you naturally think of anything else you may know about the topic, but when you read deliberately and actively, you make yourself more aware of accessing this prior knowledge. Have you ever watched a documentary about this topic? Did you study some aspect of it in another class? Do you have a hobby that is somehow connected to this material? All of this thinking will help you make sense of what you are reading.

### APPLICATION



Imagining that you were given a chapter to read in your American history class about the Gettysburg Address, write down what you already know about this historic document. How might thinking through this prior knowledge help you better understand the text?

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## Asking Questions

Humans are naturally curious beings. As you read actively, you should be asking questions about the topic you are reading. Don't just say the questions in your mind; write them down. You may ask: Why is this topic important? What is the relevance of this topic currently? Was this topic important a long time ago but irrelevant now? Why did my professor assign this reading?

You need a place where you can actually write down these questions; a separate page in your notes is a good place to begin. If you are taking notes on your computer, start a new document and write down the questions. Leave some room to answer the questions when you begin and again after you read.

## Inferring and Implying

When you read, you can take the information on the page and *infer*, or conclude responses to related challenges from evidence or from your own reasoning. A student will likely be able to infer what material the professor will include on an exam by taking good notes throughout the classes leading up to the test.

Writers may *imply* information without directly stating a fact for a variety of reasons. Sometimes a writer may not want to come out explicitly and state a bias, but may imply or hint at his or her preference for one political party or another. You have to read carefully to find implications because they are indirect, but watching for them will help you comprehend the whole meaning of a passage.

## Learning Vocabulary

Vocabulary specific to certain disciplines helps practitioners in that field engage and communicate with each other. Few people beyond undertakers and archeologists likely use the term *sarcophagus* in everyday communications, but for those disciplines, it is a meaningful distinction. Looking at the example, you can use context clues to figure out the meaning of the term *sarcophagus* because it is something undertakers and/or archeologists would recognize. At the very least, you can guess that it has something to do with death. As a potential professional in the field you're studying, you need to know the lingo. You may already have a system in place to learn discipline-specific vocabulary, so use what you know works for you. Two strong strategies are to look up words in a dictionary (online or hard copy) to ensure you have the exact meaning for your discipline and to keep a dedicated list of words you see often in your reading. You can list the words with a short definition so you have a quick reference guide to help you learn the vocabulary.

## Evaluating

Intelligent people always question and evaluate. This doesn't mean they don't trust others; they just need verification of facts to understand a topic well. It doesn't make sense to learn incomplete or incorrect information about a subject just because you didn't take the time to evaluate all the sources at your disposal. When early explorers were afraid to sail the world for fear of falling off the edge, they weren't stupid; they just didn't have all the necessary data to evaluate the situation.

When you evaluate a text, you are seeking to understand the presented topic. Depending on how long the text is, you will perform a number of steps and repeat many of these steps to evaluate all the elements the author presents. When you evaluate a text, you need to do the following:

- Scan the title and all headings.
- Read through the entire passage fully.
- Question what main point the author is making.
- Decide who the audience is.

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- Identify what evidence/support the author uses.
- Consider if the author presents a balanced perspective on the main point.
- Recognize if the author introduced any biases in the text.

When you go through a text looking for each of these elements, you need to go beyond just answering the surface question; for instance, the audience may be a specific field of scientists, but could anyone else understand the text with some explanation? Why would that be important?

## ANALYSIS QUESTION



Think of an article you need to read for a class. Take the steps above on how to evaluate a text, and apply the steps to the article. When you accomplish the task in each step, ask yourself and take notes to answer the question: Why is this important? For example, when you read the title, does that give you any additional information that will help you comprehend the text? If the text were written for a different audience, what might the author need to change to accommodate that group? How does an author's bias distort an argument? This deep evaluation allows you to fully understand the main ideas and place the text in context with other material on the same subject, with current events, and within the discipline.

### Applying

When you learn something new, it always connects to other knowledge you already have. One challenge we have is applying new information. It may be interesting to know the distance to the moon, but how do we apply it to something we need to do? If your biology instructor asked you to list several challenges of colonizing Mars and you do not know much about that planet's exploration, you may be able to use your knowledge of how far Earth is from the moon to apply it to the new task. You may have to read several other texts in addition to reading graphs and charts to find this information.

That was the challenge the early space explorers faced along with myriad unknowns before space travel was a more regular occurrence. They had to take what they already knew and could study and read about and apply it to an unknown situation. These explorers wrote down their challenges, failures, and successes, and now scientists read those texts as a part of the ever-growing body of text about space travel. Application is a sophisticated level of thinking that helps turn theory into practice and challenges into successes.

## Preparing to Read for Specific Disciplines in College

Different disciplines in college may have specific expectations, but you can depend on all subjects asking you to read to some degree. In this college reading requirement, you can succeed by learning to read actively, researching the topic and author, and recognizing how your own preconceived notions affect your reading. Reading for college isn't the same as reading for pleasure or even just reading to learn something on your own because you are casually interested.

In college courses, your instructor may ask you to read articles, chapters, books, or *primary sources* (those original documents about which we write and study, such as letters between historic figures or the Declaration of Independence). Your instructor may want you to have a general background on a topic before you dive into

that subject in class, so that you know the history of a topic, can start thinking about it, and can engage in a class discussion with more than a passing knowledge of the issue.

If you are about to participate in an in-depth six-week consideration of the U.S. Constitution but have never read it or anything written about it, you will have a hard time looking at anything in detail or understanding how and why it is significant. As you can imagine, a great deal has been written about the Constitution by scholars and citizens since the late 1700s when it was first put to paper (that's how they did it then). While the actual document isn't that long (about 12–15 pages depending on how it is presented), learning the details on how it came about, who was involved, and why it was and still is a significant document would take a considerable amount of time to read and digest. So, how do you do it all? Especially when you may have an instructor who drops hints that you may also *love* to read a historic novel covering the same time period . . . in your *spare time*, not required, of course! It can be daunting, especially if you are taking more than one course that has time-consuming reading lists. With a few strategic techniques, you can manage it all, but know that you must have a plan and schedule your required reading so you *are* also able to pick up that recommended historic novel—it may give you an entirely new perspective on the issue.

### Strategies for Reading in College Disciplines

No universal law exists for how much reading instructors and institutions expect college students to undertake for various disciplines. Suffice it to say, it's a LOT.

For most students, it is the volume of reading that catches them most off guard when they begin their college careers. A full course load might require 10–15 hours of reading per week, some of that covering content that will be more difficult than the reading for other courses.

You cannot possibly read word-for-word every single document you need to read for all your classes. That doesn't mean you give up or decide to only read for your favorite classes or concoct a scheme to read 17 percent for each class and see how that works for you. You need to learn to skim, annotate, and take notes. All of these techniques will help you comprehend more of what you read, which is why we read in the first place. We'll talk more later about annotating and note-taking, but for now consider what you know about skimming as opposed to active reading.

### Skimming

Skimming is not just glancing over the words on a page (or screen) to see if any of it sticks. Effective skimming allows you to take in the major points of a passage without the need for a time-consuming reading session that involves your active use of notations and annotations. Often you will need to engage in that painstaking level of active reading, but skimming is the first step—not an alternative to deep reading. The fact remains that neither do you need to read everything nor could you possibly accomplish that given your limited time. So learn this valuable skill of skimming as an accompaniment to your overall study tool kit, and with practice and experience, you will fully understand how valuable it is.

When you skim, look for guides to your understanding: headings, definitions, pull quotes, tables, and context clues. Textbooks are often helpful for skimming—they may already have made some of these skimming guides in bold or a different color, and chapters often follow a predictable outline. Some even provide an overview and summary for sections or chapters. Use whatever you can get, but don't stop there. In textbooks that have some reading guides, or especially in text that does not, look for introductory words such as *First* or *The purpose of this article* . . . or summary words such as *In conclusion* . . . or *Finally*. These guides will help you read only those sentences or paragraphs that will give you the overall meaning or gist of a passage or book.



Now move to the meat of the passage. You want to take in the reading as a whole. For a book, look at the titles of each chapter if available. Read each chapter's introductory paragraph and determine why the writer chose this particular order. Depending on what you're reading, the chapters may be only informational, but often you're looking for a specific argument. What position is the writer claiming? What support, counterarguments, and conclusions is the writer presenting?

Don't think of skimming as a way to buzz through a boring reading assignment. It is a skill you should master so you can engage, at various levels, with all the reading you need to accomplish in college. End your skimming session with a few notes—terms to look up, questions you still have, and an overall summary. And recognize that you likely will return to that book or article for a more thorough reading if the material is useful.

## Active Reading Strategies

Active reading differs significantly from skimming or reading for pleasure. You can think of active reading as a sort of conversation between you and the text (maybe between you and the author, but you don't want to get the author's personality too involved in this metaphor because that may skew your engagement with the text).

When you sit down to determine what your different classes expect you to read and you create a reading schedule to ensure you complete all the reading, think about when you should read the material strategically, not just how to *get it all done*. You should read textbook chapters and other reading assignments *before* you go into a lecture about that information. Don't wait to see how the lecture goes before you read the material, or you may not understand the information in the lecture. Reading before class helps you put ideas together between your reading and the information you hear and discuss in class.

Different disciplines naturally have different types of texts, and you need to take this into account when you schedule your time for reading class material. For example, you may look at a poem for your world literature class and assume that it will not take you long to read because it is relatively short compared to the dense textbook you have for your economics class. But reading and understanding a poem can take a considerable amount of time when you realize you may need to stop numerous times to review the separate word meanings and how the words form images and connections throughout the poem.

### The SQ3R Reading Strategy

You may have heard of the **SQ3R** method for active reading in your early education. This valuable technique is perfect for college reading. The title stands for **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecite, **R**eview, and you can use the steps on virtually any assigned passage. Designed by Francis Pleasant Robinson in his 1961 book *Effective Study*, the active reading strategy gives readers a systematic way to work through any reading material.

**Survey** is similar to skimming. You look for clues to meaning by reading the titles, headings, introductions, summary, captions for graphics, and keywords. You can survey almost anything connected to the reading selection, including the copyright information, the date of the journal article, or the names and qualifications of the author(s). In this step, you decide what the general meaning is for the reading selection.

**Question** is your creation of questions to seek the main ideas, support, examples, and conclusions of the reading selection. Ask yourself these questions separately. Try to create valid questions about what you are about to read that have come into your mind as you engaged in the Survey step. Try turning the headings of the sections in the chapter into questions. Next, how does what you're reading relate to you, your school, your community, and the world?

**Read** is when you actually read the passage. Try to find the answers to questions you developed in the

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previous step. Decide how much you are reading in chunks, either by paragraph for more complex readings or by section or even by an entire chapter. When you finish reading the selection, stop to make notes. Answer the questions by writing a note in the margin or other white space of the text.

You may also carefully underline or highlight text in addition to your notes. Use caution here that you don't try to rush this step by haphazardly circling terms or the other extreme of underlining huge chunks of text. Don't over-mark. You aren't likely to remember what these cryptic marks mean later when you come back to use this active reading session to study. The text is the source of information—your marks and notes are just a way to organize and make sense of that information.

**Recite** means to speak out loud. By reciting, you are engaging other senses to remember the material—you read it (visual) and you said it (auditory). Stop reading momentarily in the step to answer your questions or clarify confusing sentences or paragraphs. You can recite a summary of what the text means to you. If you are not in a place where you can verbalize, such as a library or classroom, you can accomplish this step adequately by *saying* it in your head; however, to get the biggest bang for your buck, try to find a place where you can speak aloud. You may even want to try explaining the content to a friend.

**Review** is a recap. Go back over what you read and add more notes, ensuring you have captured the main points of the passage, identified the supporting evidence and examples, and understood the overall meaning. You may need to repeat some or all of the SQR3 steps during your review depending on the length and complexity of the material. Before you end your active reading session, write a short (no more than one page is optimal) summary of the text you read.

## Reading Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources are original documents we study and from which we glean information; primary sources include letters, first editions of books, legal documents, and a variety of other texts. When scholars look at these documents to understand a period in history or a scientific challenge and then write about their findings, the scholar's article is considered a secondary source. Readers have to keep several factors in mind when reading both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources may contain dated material we now know is inaccurate. It may contain personal beliefs and biases the original writer didn't intend to be openly published, and it may even present fanciful or creative ideas that do not support current knowledge. Readers can still gain great insight from primary sources, but readers need to understand the context from which the writer of the primary source wrote the text.

Likewise, secondary sources are inevitably another person's perspective on the primary source, so a reader of secondary sources must also be aware of potential biases or preferences the secondary source writer inserts in the writing that may persuade an incautious reader to interpret the primary source in a particular manner.

For example, if you were to read a secondary source that is examining the U.S. Declaration of Independence (the primary source), you would have a much clearer idea of how the secondary source scholar presented the information from the primary source if you also read the Declaration for yourself instead of trusting the other writer's interpretation. Most scholars are honest in writing secondary sources, but you as a reader of the source are trusting the writer to present a balanced perspective of the primary source. When possible, you should attempt to read a primary source in conjunction with the secondary source. The Internet helps immensely with this practice.

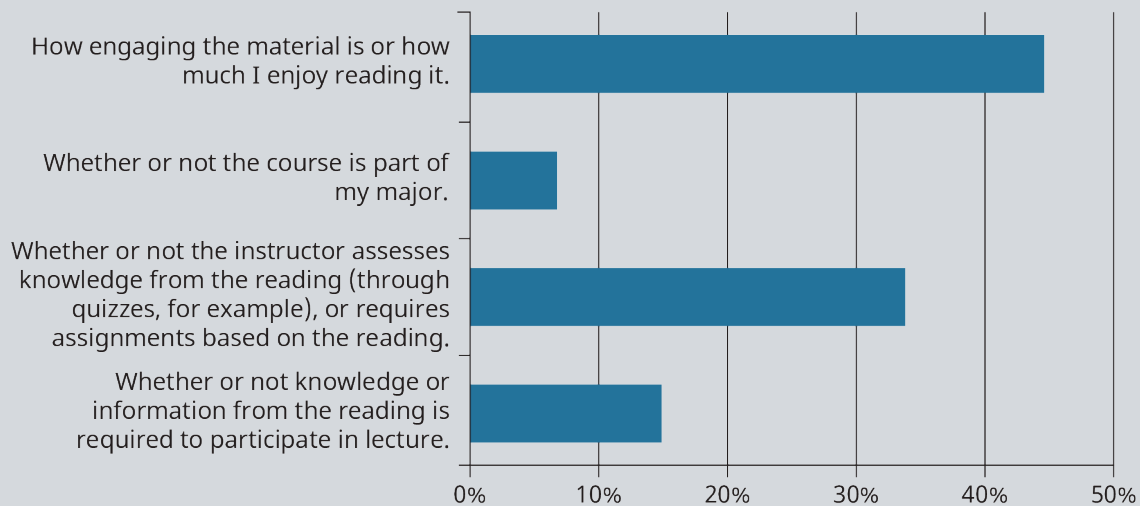
## WHAT STUDENTS SAY



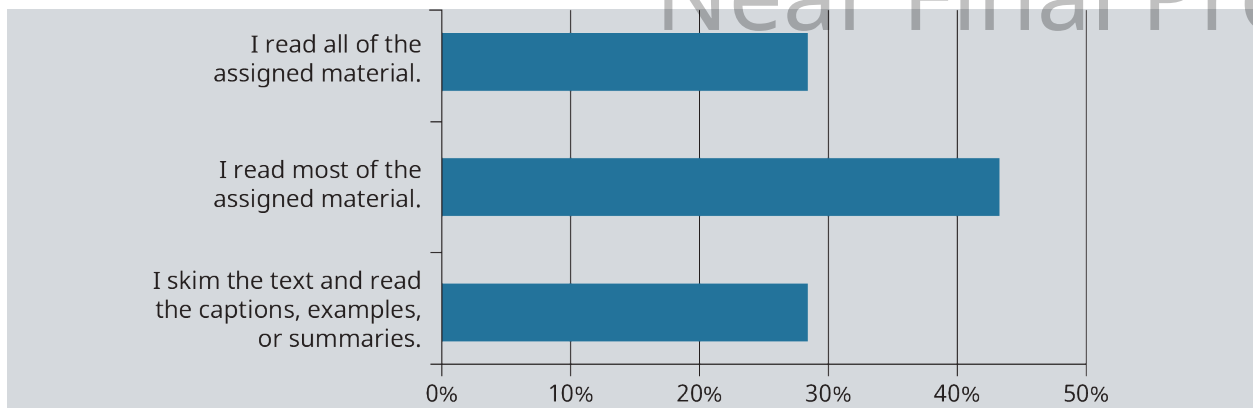
1. What is the most influential factor in how thoroughly you read the material for a given course?
  - a. How engaging the material is or how much I enjoy reading it.
  - b. Whether or not the course is part of my major.
  - c. Whether or not the instructor assesses knowledge from the reading (through quizzes, for example), or requires assignments based on the reading.
  - d. Whether or not knowledge or information from the reading is required to participate in lecture.
2. What best describes your reading approach for required texts/materials for your classes?
  - a. I read all of the assigned material.
  - b. I read most of the assigned material.
  - c. I skim the text and read the captions, examples, or summaries.
3. What best describes your note-taking style?
  - a. I use a systematic method such as the Cornell method or something similar.
  - b. I highlight or underline all the important information.
  - c. I create outlines and/or note-cards.
  - d. I use an app or program.
  - e. I write notes in my text (print or digital).
  - f. I don't have a style. I just write down what seems important.
  - g. I don't take many notes.

You can also take the anonymous [What Students Say \(https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey\)](https://openstax.org/l/collegesurvey) surveys to add your voice to this textbook. Your responses will be included in updates.

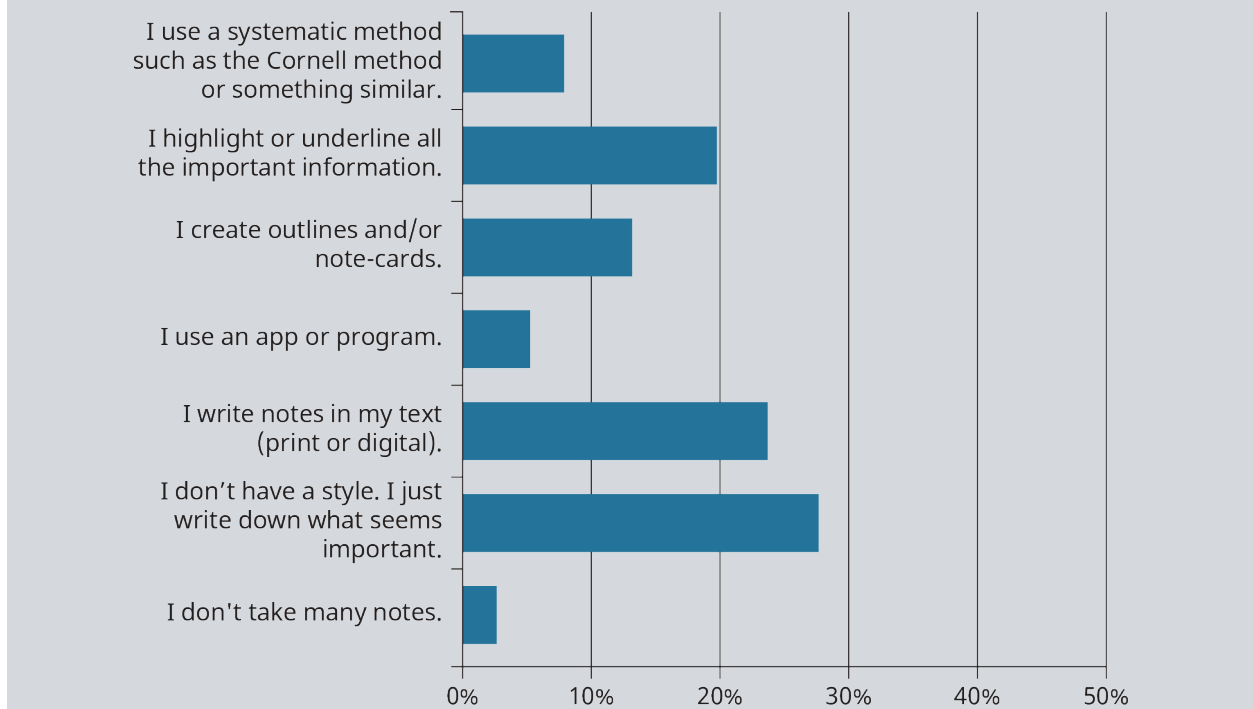
Students offered their views on these questions, and the results are displayed in the graphs below.



**Figure 5.5**



**Figure 5.6**



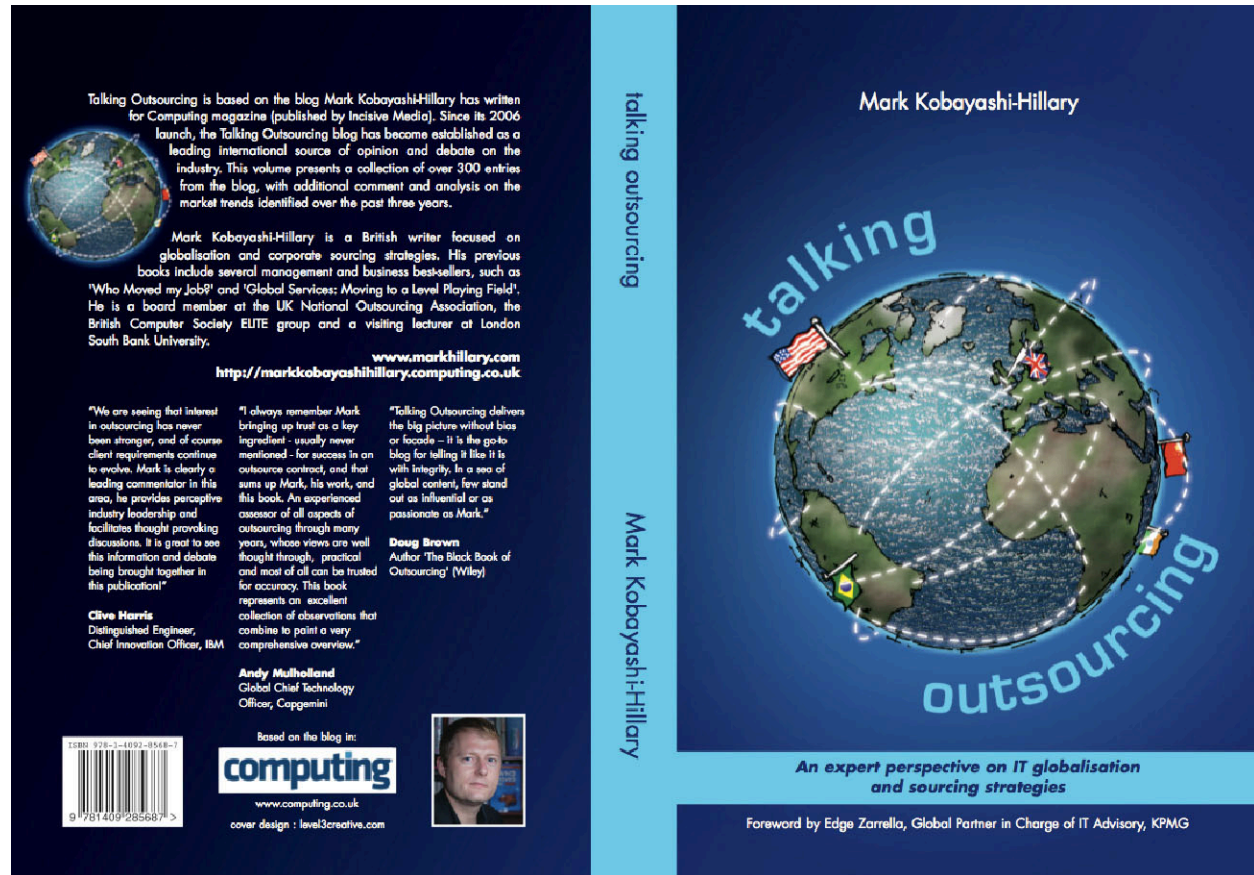
**Figure 5.7**

### Researching Topic and Author

During your preview stage, sometimes called pre-reading, you can easily pick up on information from various sources that may help you understand the material you're reading more fully or place it in context with other important works in the discipline. If your selection is a book, flip it over or turn to the back pages and look for an author's biography or note from the author. See if the book itself contains any other information about the author or the subject matter.

The main things you need to recall from your reading in college are the topics covered and how the information fits into the discipline. You can find these parts throughout the textbook chapter in the form of headings in larger and bold font, summary lists, and important quotations pulled out of the narrative. Use

these features as you read to help you determine what the most important ideas are.



**Figure 5.8** Learning about the book you're reading can provide good context and information. Look for an author's biography and forward on the back cover or in the first few pages.

Remember, many books use quotations about the book or author as testimonials in a marketing approach to sell more books, so these may not be the most reliable sources of unbiased opinions, but it's a start.

Sometimes you can find a list of other books the author has written near the front of a book. Do you recognize any of the other titles? Can you do an Internet search for the name of the book or author? Go beyond the search results that want you to buy the book and see if you can glean any other relevant information about the author or the reading selection. Beyond a standard Internet search, try the library article database. These are more relevant to academic disciplines and contain resources you typically will not find in a standard search engine. If you are unfamiliar with how to use the library database, ask a reference librarian on campus. They are often underused resources that can point you in the right direction.

### Understanding Your Own Preset Ideas on a Topic

Laura really enjoys learning about environmental issues. She has read many books and watched numerous televised documentaries on this topic and actively seeks out additional information on the environment. While Laura's interest can help her understand a new reading encounter about the environment, Laura also has to be aware that with this interest, she also brings forward her preset ideas and biases about the topic. Sometimes these prejudices against other ideas relate to religion or nationality or even just tradition. Without evidence, thinking the way we always have is not a good enough reason; evidence can change, and at the very

least it needs honest review and assessment to determine its validity. Ironically, we may not want to learn new ideas because that may mean we would have to give up old ideas we have already mastered, which can be a daunting prospect.

With every reading situation about the environment, Laura needs to remain open-minded about what she is about to read and pay careful attention if she begins to ignore certain parts of the text because of her preconceived notions. Learning new information can be very difficult if you balk at ideas that are different from what you've always thought. You may have to force yourself to listen to a different viewpoint multiple times to make sure you are not closing your mind to a viable solution your mindset does not currently allow.

## ANALYSIS QUESTION

Can you think of times you have struggled reading college content for a course? Which of these strategies might have helped you understand the content? Why do you think those strategies would work?

### 5.3 Taking Notes

Estimated completion time: 21 minutes.

Questions to consider...

- How can you prepare to take notes to maximize the effectiveness of the experience?
- What are some specific strategies you can employ for better note-taking?
- Why is annotating your notes after the note-taking session a critical step to follow?

Beyond providing a record of the information you are reading or hearing, notes help you organize the ideas and help you make meaning out of something about which you may not be familiar, so note-taking and reading are two compatible skill sets. Taking notes also helps you stay focused on the question at hand. Nanami often takes notes during presentations or class lectures so she can follow the speaker's main points and condense the material into a more readily usable format. Strong notes build on your prior knowledge of a subject, help you discuss trends or patterns present in the information, and direct you toward areas needing further research or reading.



**Figure 5.9** Strong notes build on your prior knowledge of a subject, help you discuss trends or patterns present in the information, and direct you toward areas needing further research or reading.

It is not a good habit to transcribe every single word a speaker utters—even if you have an amazing ability to do that. Most of us don't have that court-reporter-esque skill level anyway, and if we try, we would end up missing valuable information. Learn to listen for main ideas and distinguish between these main ideas and details that typically support the ideas. Include examples that explain the main ideas, but do so using understandable abbreviations.

Think of all notes as potential study guides. In fact, if you only take notes without actively working on them after the initial note-taking session, the likelihood of the notes helping you is slim. Research on this topic concludes that without active engagement after taking notes, most students forget 60–75 percent of material over which they took the notes—within two days! That sort of defeats the purpose, don't you think? This information about memory loss was first brought to light by 19th-century German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus. Fortunately, you do have the power to thwart what is sometimes called the Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve by reinforcing what you learned through review at intervals shortly after you take in the material and frequently thereafter.

If you are a musician, you'll understand this phenomenon well. When you first attempt a difficult piece of music, you may not remember the chords and notes well at all, but after frequent practice and review, you generate a certain muscle memory and cognitive recall that allows you to play the music more easily.

Note-taking may not be the most glamorous aspect of your higher-education journey, but it is a study practice you will carry throughout college and into your professional life. Setting yourself up for successful note-taking

is almost as important as the actual taking of notes, and what you do after your note-taking session is equally significant. Well-written notes help you organize your thoughts, enhance your memory, and participate in class discussion, and they prepare you to respond successfully on exams. With all that riding on your notes, it would behoove you to learn how to take notes properly and continue to improve your note-taking skills.

### ANALYSIS QUESTION

Do you currently have a preferred way to take notes? When did you start using it? Has it been effective? What other strategy might work for you?

## Preparing to Take Notes

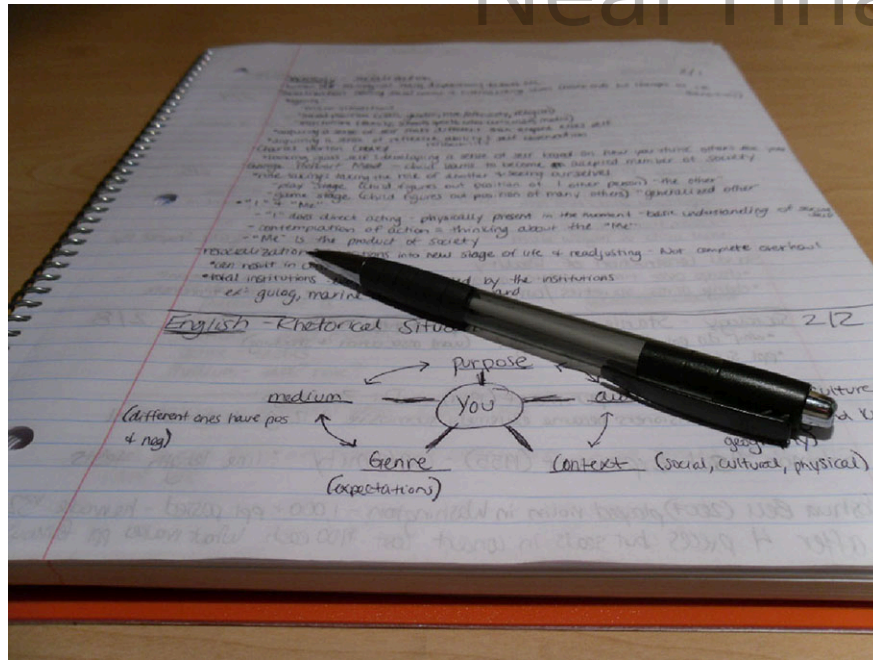
Preparing to take notes means more than just getting out your laptop or making sure you bring pen and paper to class. You'll do a much better job with your notes if you understand why we take notes, have a strong grasp on your preferred note-taking system, determine your specific priorities depending on your situation, and engage in some version of efficient shorthand.

Like handwriting and fingerprints, we all have unique and fiercely independent note-taking habits. These understandably and reasonably vary from one situation to the next, but you can only improve your skills by learning more about ways to take effective notes and trying different methods to find a good fit.

The very best notes are the ones you take in an organized manner that encourages frequent review and use as you progress through a topic or course of study. For this reason, you need to develop a way to organize all your notes for each class so they remain together and organized. As old-fashioned as it sounds, a clunky three-ring binder is an excellent organizational container for class notes. You can easily add to previous notes, insert handouts you may receive in class, and maintain a running collection of materials for each separate course. If the idea of carrying around a heavy binder has you rolling your eyes, then transfer that same structure into your computer files. If you don't organize your many documents into some semblance of order on your computer, you will waste significant time searching for improperly named or saved files.

You may be interested in relatively new research on what is the more effective note-taking strategy: handwriting versus typing directly into a computer. While individuals have strong personal opinions on this subject, most researchers agree that the format of student notes is less important than what students do with the notes they take afterwards. Both handwriting notes and using a computer for note-taking have pros and cons.





**Figure 5.10** The best notes are the ones you take in an organized manner. Frequent review and further annotation are important to build a deep and useful understanding of the material.

### Managing Note-Taking Systems (Computer, Paper/Pen, Note Cards, Textbook)

Whichever of the many note-taking systems you choose (and new ones seem to come out almost daily), the very best one is the one that you will use consistently. The skill and art of note-taking is not automatic for anyone; it takes a great deal of practice, patience, and continuous attention to detail. Add to that the fact that you may need to master multiple note-taking techniques for different classes, and you have some work to do. Unless you are specifically directed by your instructor, you are free to combine the best parts of different systems if you are most comfortable with that hybrid system.

Just to keep yourself organized, all your notes should start off with an identifier, including at the very least the date, the course name, the topic of the lecture/presentation, and any other information you think will help you when you return to use the notes for further study, test preparation, or assignment completion. Additional, optional information may be the number of note-taking sessions about this topic or reminders to cross-reference class handouts, textbook pages, or other course materials. It's also always a good idea to leave some blank space in your notes so you can insert additions and questions you may have as you review the material later.

### Note-Taking Strategies

You may have a standard way you take all your notes for all your classes. When you were in high school, this one-size-fits-all approach may have worked. Now that you're in college, reading and studying more advanced topics, your general method may still work some of the time, but you should have some different strategies in place if you find that your method isn't working as well with college content. You probably will need to adopt different note-taking strategies for different subjects. The strategies in this section represent various ways to take notes in such a way that you are able to study after the initial note-taking session.

# Near Final Proof

## Cornell Method

One of the most recognizable note-taking systems is called the *Cornell Method*, a relatively simple way to take effective notes devised by Cornell University education professor Dr. Walter Pauk in the 1940s. In this system, you take a standard piece of note paper and divide it into three sections by drawing a horizontal line across your paper about one to two inches from the bottom of the page (the summary area) and then drawing a vertical line to separate the rest of the page above this bottom area, making the left side about two inches (the recall column) and leaving the biggest area to the right of your vertical line (the notes column). You may want to make one page and then copy as many pages as you think you'll need for any particular class, but one advantage of this system is that you can generate the sections quickly. Because you have divided up your page, you may end up using more paper than you would if you were writing on the entire page, but the point is not to keep your notes to as few pages as possible. The Cornell Method provides you with a well-organized set of notes that will help you study and review your notes as you move through the course. If you are taking notes on your computer, you can still use the Cornell Method in Word or Excel on your own or by using a template someone else created.

## Near Final Proof

Topic/Objective:		Name:	
		Class/Period:	
		Date:	
Essential Question:			
Questions:		Notes:	
Summary:			

**Figure 5.11** The Cornell Method provides a straightforward, organized, and flexible approach

Now that you have the note-taking format generated, the beauty of the Cornell Method is its organized simplicity. Just write on one side of the page (the right-hand notes column)—this will help later when you are reviewing and revising your notes. During your note-taking session, use the notes column to record information over the main points and concepts of the lecture; try to put the ideas into your own words, which will help you not transcribe the speaker's words verbatim. Skip lines between each idea in this column.

# Near Final Proof

Practice the shortcut abbreviations covered in the next section and avoid writing in complete sentences. Don't make your notes too cryptic, but you can use bullet points or phrases equally well to convey meaning—we do it all the time in conversation. If you know you will need to expand the notes you are taking in class but don't have time, you can put reminders directly in the notes by adding and underlining the word *expand* by the ideas you need to develop more fully.

As soon as possible after your note-taking session, preferably within eight hours but no more than twenty-four hours, read over your notes column and fill in any details you missed in class, including the places where you indicated you wanted to expand your notes. Then in the recall column, write any key ideas from the corresponding notes column—you can't stuff this smaller recall column as if you're explaining or defining key ideas. Just add the one- or two-word main ideas; these words in the recall column serve as cues to help you remember the detailed information you recorded in the notes column.

Once you are satisfied with your notes and recall columns, summarize this page of notes in two or three sentences using the summary area at the bottom of the sheet. This is an excellent time to get with another classmate or a group of students who all heard the same lecture to make sure you all understood the key points. Now, before you move onto something else, cover the large notes column, and quiz yourself over the key ideas you recorded in the recall column. Repeat this step often as you go along, not just immediately before an exam, and you will help your memory make the connections between your notes, your textbook reading, your in-class work, and assignments that you need to succeed on any quizzes and exams.

## Near Final Proof

Academic Essay Elements	
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Topic</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishes context</li> <li>- Limits scope of essay</li> <li>- Introduces Issue/Problem</li> </ul>
<b>Thesis</b>	<b>Thesis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central argument or point of paper</li> <li>- Arrives early in paper—usually toward end of first paragraph (maybe a bit later in longer papers)</li> <li>- Focused, clear, and specific</li> <li>- Reflects writer's position on the topic/issue</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Details</b>	<b>Supporting Detail Paragraphs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each paragraph has a specific topic</li> <li>- Clarify, explain, illustrate, expand on topic</li> <li>- Provide EVIDENCE—quotes, data, references <i>Cite everything properly!</i></li> </ul>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tie back to Intro/thesis</li> <li>- Show how details supported the argument</li> <li>- Why is it important?</li> <li>- Point to implications/outcomes, but don't introduce entirely new ideas</li> </ul>
<p>Use the structure, but don't follow it too rigidly. The most important pieces are a strong thesis and good evidence to back it up. The conclusion should not just summarize—take it a little further.</p>	

**Figure 5.12** This sample set of notes in the Cornell Method is designed to make sense of a large amount of information. The process of organizing the notes can help you retain the information more effectively than less consistent methods.

The main advantage of the Cornell Method is that you are setting yourself up to have organized, workable notes. The neat format helps you move into study-mode without needing to re-copy less organized notes or making sense of a large mass of information you aren't sure how to process because you can't remember key ideas or what you meant. If you write notes in your classes without any sort of system and later come across something like "Napoleon—short" in the middle of a glob of notes, what can you do at this point? Is that important? Did it connect with something relevant from the lecture? How would you possibly know? You are your best advocate for setting yourself up for success in college.

### Outlining

Other note organizing systems may help you in different disciplines. You can take notes in a formal outline if you prefer, using Roman numerals for each new topic, moving down a line to capital letters indented a few spaces to the right for concepts related to the previous topic, then adding details to support the concepts indented a few more spaces over and denoted by an Arabic numeral. You can continue to add to a formal outline by following these rules.

You don't absolutely have to use the formal numerals and letter, but you have to then be careful to indent so you can tell when you move from a higher level topic to the related concepts and then to the supporting

information. The main benefit of an outline is how organized it is. You have to be on your toes when you are taking notes in class to ensure you keep up the organizational format of the outline, which can be tricky if the lecture or presentation is moving quickly or covering many diverse topics.

The following formal outline example shows the basic pattern:

- I. Dogs (*main topic—usually general*)
  - A. German Shepherd (*concept related to main topic*)
    - 1. Protection (*supporting info about the concept*)
    - 2. Assertive
    - 3. Loyal
  - B. Weimaraner (*concept related to main topic*)
    - 1. Family-friendly (*supporting info about the concept*)
    - 2. Active
    - 3. Healthy
- II. Cats (*main topic*)
  - Siamese

You would just continue on with this sort of numbering and indenting format to show the connections between main ideas, concepts, and supporting details. Whatever details you do not capture in your note-taking session, you can add after the lecture as you review your outline.

### Chart or table

Similar to creating an outline, you can develop a chart to compare and contrast main ideas in a note-taking session. Divide your paper into four or five columns with headings that include either the main topics covered in the lecture or categories such as How?, What?, When used?, Advantages/Pros, Disadvantages/Cons, or other divisions of the information. You write your notes into the appropriate columns as that information comes to light in the presentation.

**Example of a Chart to Organize Ideas and Categories**

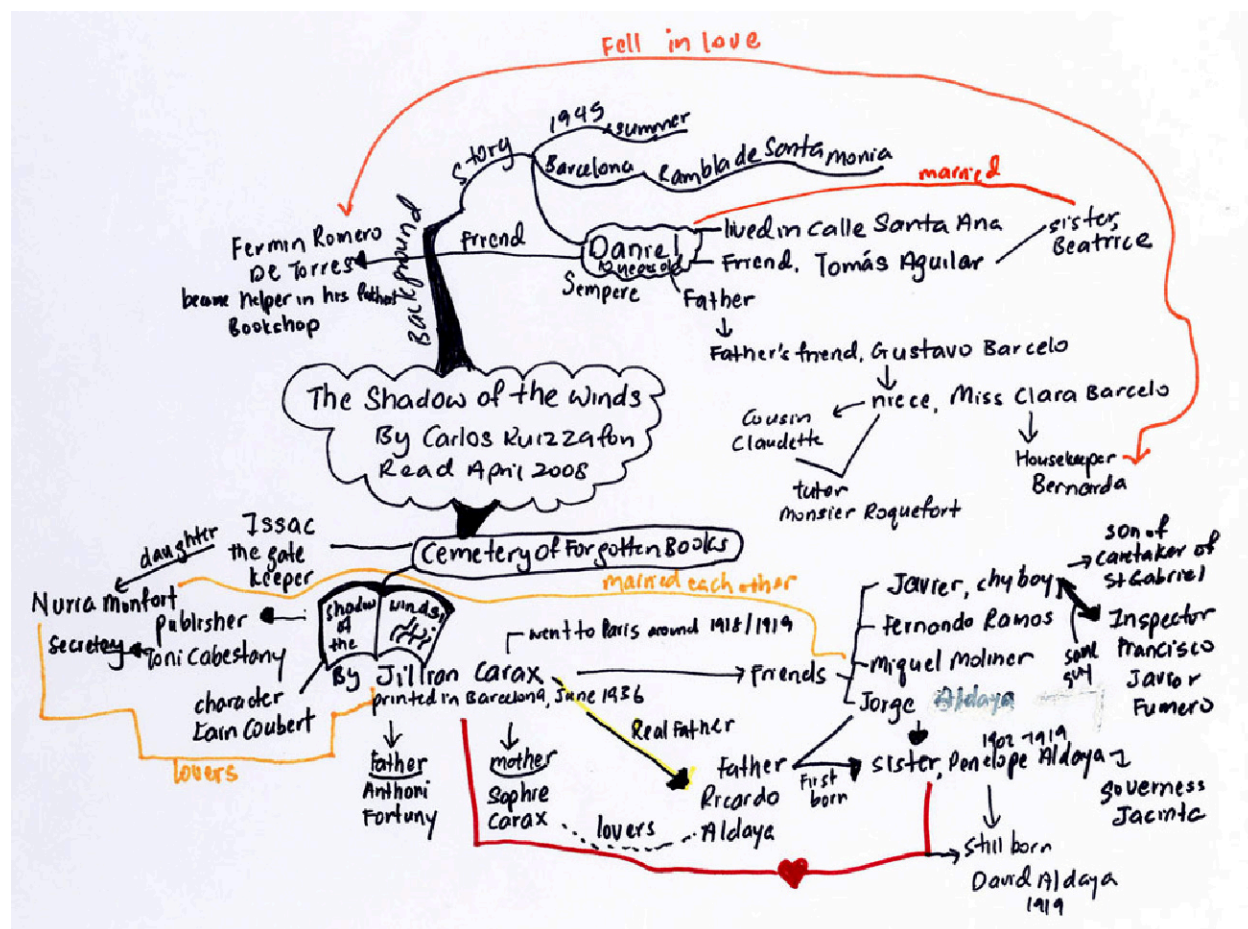
	Structure	Types	Functions in Body	Additional Notes
Carbohydrates				
Lipids				
Proteins				
Nucleic Acid				

This format helps you pull out the salient ideas and establishes an organized set of notes to study later. (If you haven't noticed that this *reviewing later* idea is a constant across all note-taking systems, you should...take note of that.) Notes by themselves that you never reference again are little more than scribbles. That would be a bit like compiling an extensive grocery list so you stay on budget when you shop, work all week on it, and then just throw it away before you get to the store. You may be able to recall a few items, but likely won't be as efficient as you could be if you had the notes to reference. Just as you cannot read all the many books, articles,

and documents you need to peruse for your college classes, you cannot remember the most important ideas of all the notes you will take as part of your courses, so you must review.

### Concept Mapping and Visual Notetaking

One final note-taking method that appeals to learners who prefer a visual representation of notes is called *mapping* or sometimes *mind mapping* or *concept mapping*, although each of these names can have slightly different uses. Variations of this method abound, so you may want to look for more versions online, but the basic principles are that you are making connections between main ideas through a graphic depiction; some can get rather elaborate with colors and shapes, but a simple version may be more useful at least to begin. Main ideas can be circled or placed in a box with supporting concepts radiating off these ideas shown with a connecting line and possibly details of the support further radiating off the concepts. You can present your main ideas vertically or horizontally, but turning your paper long-ways, or in landscape mode, may prove helpful as you add more main ideas.



**Figure 5.13** Concept mapping, sometimes referred to as mind mapping, can be an effective and very personalized approach to capturing information.

You may be interested in trying visual notetaking or adding pictures to your notes for clarity. Sometimes when you can't come up with the exact wording to explain something or you're trying to add information for complex ideas in your notes, sketching a rough image of the idea can help you remember. According to educator Sherrill Knezel in an article entitled "The Power of Visual Notetaking," this strategy is effective

because “When students use images and text in notetaking, it gives them two different ways to pull up the information, doubling their chances of recall.” Don’t shy away from this creative approach to notetaking just because you believe you aren’t an artist; the images don’t need to be perfect. You may want to watch Rachel Smith’s TEDx Talk called “Drawing in Class” to learn more about visual notetaking.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tjPeumHNLy> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tjPeumHNLy>)

You can play with different types of note-taking suggestions and find the method(s) you like best, but once you find what works for you, stick with it. You will become more efficient with the method the more you use it, and your note-taking, review, and test prep will become, if not easier, certainly more organized, which can decrease your anxiety.



# Near Final Proof

## Practicing Decipherable Shorthand

Most college students don't take a class in shorthand, once the domain of secretaries and executive assistants, but maybe they should. That almost-lost art in the age of computers could come in very handy during intense note-taking sessions. Elaborate shorthand systems do exist, but you would be better served in your college note-taking adventures to hone a more familiar, personalized form of shorthand to help you write more in a shorter amount of time. Seemingly insignificant shortcuts can add up to ease the stress note-taking can induce—especially if you ever encounter an “I’m not going to repeat this” kind of presenter! Become familiar with these useful abbreviations:

Shortcut symbol	Meaning
w/, w/o, w/in	with, without, within
&	and
#	number
b/c	because
X, ✓	incorrect, correct
Diff	different, difference
etc.	and so on
ASAP	as soon as possible
US, UK	United States, United Kingdom
info	information
Measurements: ft, in, k, m	foot, inch, thousand, million
¶	paragraph or new paragraph
Math symbols: =, +, >, <, ÷	equal, plus, greater, less, divided by
WWI, WWII	World Wars I and II
impt	important
?, !, **	denote something is very significant; don't over use

Do you have any other shortcuts or symbols that you use in your notes? Ask your parents if they remember any that you may be able to learn.

## Annotating Notes After Initial Note-Taking Session

Annotating notes after the initial note-taking session may be one of the most valuable study skills you can

master. Whether you are highlighting, underlining, or adding additional notes, you are reinforcing the material in your mind and memory.

Admit it—who can resist highlighting markers? Gone are the days when yellow was the star of the show, and you had to be very careful not to press too firmly for fear of obliterating the words you were attempting to emphasize. Students now have a veritable rainbow of highlighting options and can color-code notes and text passages to their hearts' content. Technological advances may be important, but highlighter color choice is monumental! Maybe.

The only reason to highlight anything is to draw attention to it, so you can easily pick out that ever-so-important information later for further study or reflection. One problem many students have is not knowing when to stop. If what you need to recall from the passage is a particularly apt and succinct definition of the term important to your discipline, highlighting the entire paragraph is less effective than highlighting just the actual term. And if you don't rein in this tendency to color long passages (possibly in multiple colors) you can end up with a whole page of highlighted text. Ironically, that is no different from a page that is not highlighted at all, so you have wasted your time. Your mantra for highlighting text should be *less is more*. Always read your text selection first before you start highlighting anything. You need to know what the overall message is before you start placing emphasis in the text with highlighting.

Another way to annotate notes after initial note-taking is underlying significant words or passages. Albeit not quite as much fun as its colorful cousin highlighting, underlining provides precision to your emphasis.

Some people think of annotations as only using a colored highlighter to mark certain words or phrases for emphasis. Actually, annotations can refer to anything you do with a text to enhance it for your particular use (either a printed text, handwritten notes, or other sort of document you are using to learn concepts). The annotations may include highlighting passages or vocabulary, defining those unfamiliar terms once you look them up, writing questions in the margin of a book, underlining or circling key terms, or otherwise marking a text for future reference. You can also annotate some electronic texts.

Realistically, you may end up doing all of these types of annotations at different times. We know that repetition in studying and reviewing is critical to learning, so you may come back to the same passage and annotate it separately. These various markings can be invaluable to you as a study guide and as a way to see the evolution of your learning about a topic. If you regularly begin a reading session writing down any questions you may have about the topic of that chapter or section and also write out answers to those questions at the end of the reading selection, you will have a good start to what that chapter covered when you eventually need to study for an exam. At that point, you likely will not have time to reread the entire selection especially if it is a long reading selection, but with strong annotations in conjunction with your class notes, you won't need to do that. With experience in reading discipline-specific texts and writing essays or taking exams in that field, you will know better what sort of questions to ask in your annotations.

## Near Final Proof

When did Lincoln die? April 15, 1865

## The Gettysburg Address

Where is Gettysburg?  
 Pennsylvania  
 What happened there?  
 Civil War battle of Gettysburg,  
 July 1-3, 1863 - union victory, but  
 largest # of dead in entire war

President Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863

$80(4 \times 20) + 7 = 87$

“Fourscore and seven years ago <sup>1776</sup> our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. <sup>from US Constitution?</sup> <sup>No - Dec of Independence</sup>

proposal

“Now we are engaged in a great civil war, <sup>(1861-65)</sup> testing whether that nation, or any nation so <sup>formed</sup> conceived and so dedicated, can long <sup>last</sup> endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final <sup>cemetery</sup> resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we <sup>repetition</sup> cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so <sup>like royalty</sup> nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the <sup>death</sup> last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these <sup>for no reason!</sup> dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

<sup>phrases from Constitution?</sup>

<sup>die</sup>

<sup>irony</sup>

<sup>repetition</sup>

**Figure 5.14** Annotations may include highlighting important topics, defining unfamiliar terms, writing questions in, underlining or circling key terms, or otherwise marking a text for future reference. Whichever

approach you choose, try not to overdo it; neat, organized, and efficient notes are more effective than crowded or overdone notes.

What you have to keep in the front of your mind while you are annotating, especially if you are going to conduct multiple annotation sessions, is to not overdo whatever method you use. Be judicious about what you annotate and how you do it on the page, which means you must be neat about it. Otherwise, you end up with a mess of either color or symbols combined with some cryptic notes that probably took you quite a long time to create, but won't be worth as much to you as a study aid as they could be. This is simply a waste of time and effort.

## Near Final Proof

<sup>where?</sup>  
**The Gettysburg Address**

President Abraham Lincoln <sup>who</sup>

November 19, 1863 <sup>— why important — Thanksgiving</sup>

\* “Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. <sup>famous quote!</sup>

“Now <sup>everybody here in US and world</sup> we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that <sup>which?</sup> nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. <sup>all of us</sup> We have come to dedicate a <sup>part</sup> portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here <sup>died</sup> gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper <sup>we should</sup> that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. <sup>battle not finished</sup> It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought <sup>here</sup> have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new <sup>born</sup> birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the <sup>here</sup> earth.” <sup>Really important!</sup>

**Figure 5.15** While these notes may be meaningful to the person who took them, they are neither organized nor consistent. For example, note that some of the more commonly used terms, like “we” and “unfinished,”

are defined, but less common ones -- “consecrate” and “hallow” -- are not.

You cannot eat up every smidgen of white space on the page writing out questions or summaries and still have a way to read the original text. If you are lucky enough to have a blank page next to the beginning of the chapter or section you are annotating, use this, but keep in mind that when you start writing notes, you aren't exactly sure how much space you'll need. Use a decipherable shorthand and write only what you need to convey the meaning in very small print. If you are annotating your own notes, you can make a habit of using only one side of the paper in class, so that if you need to add more notes later, you could use the other side. You can also add a blank page to your notes before beginning the next class date in your notebook so you'll end up with extra paper for annotations when you study.

Professional resources may come with annotations that can be helpful to you as you work through the various documentation requirements you'll encounter in college as well. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides an annotated sample for how to format a college paper according to guidelines in the Modern Language Association (MLA) manual that you can see, along with other annotations, at link [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/documents/20180702110400\\_747-2.pdf](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/documents/20180702110400_747-2.pdf) ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/documents/20180702110400\\_747-2.pdf](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/documents/20180702110400_747-2.pdf))

### Adding Needed Additional Explanations to Notes

Marlon was totally organized and ready to take notes in a designated course notebook at the beginning of every philosophy class session. He always dated his page and indicated what the topic of discussion was. He had various colored highlighters ready to denote the different note purposes he had defined: vocabulary in pink, confusing concepts in green, and note sections that would need additional explanations later in yellow. He also used his own shorthand and an impressive array of symbols to indicate questions (red question mark), highly probable test material (he used a tiny bomb exploding here), additional reading suggestions, and specific topics he would ask his instructor before the next class. Doing everything so precisely, Marlon's methods seemed like a perfect example of how to take notes for success. Inevitably though, by the end of the hour-and-a-half class session, Marlon was frantically switching between writing tools, near to tears, and scouring his notes as waves of yellow teased him with uncertainty. What went wrong?

As with many of us who try diligently to do everything we know how to do for success or what we think we know because we read books and articles on success in between our course work, Marlon is suffering from trying to do too much simultaneously. It's an honest mistake we can make when we are trying to save a little time or think we can multitask and kill two birds with one stone.

Unfortunately, this particular error in judgement can add to your stress level exponentially if you don't step back and see it for what it is. Marlon attempted to take notes in class as well as annotate his notes to get them ready for his test preparation. It was too much to do at one time, but even if he could have done all those things during class, he's missing one critical point about note-taking.

As much as we may want to hurry and get it over with, note-taking in class is just the beginning. Your instructor likely gave you a pre-class assignment to read or complete before coming to that session. The intention of that preparatory lesson is for you to come in with some level of familiarity for the topic under consideration and questions of your own. Once you're in class, you may also need to participate in a group discussion, work with your classmates, or perform some other sort of lesson-directed activity that would necessarily take you away from taking notes. Does that mean you should ignore taking notes for that day?

# Near Final Proof

Most likely not. You may just need to indicate in your notes that you worked on a project or whatever other in-class event you experienced that date.

Very rarely in a college classroom will you engage in an activity that is not directly related to what you are studying in that course. Even if you enjoyed every minute of the class session and it was an unusual format for that course, you still need to take some notes. Maybe your first note could be to ask yourself why you think the instructor used that unique teaching strategy for the class that day. Was it effective? Was it worth using the whole class time? How will that experience enhance what you are learning in that course?

If you use an ereader or ebooks to read texts for class or read articles from the Internet on your laptop or tablet, you can still take effective notes. Depending on the features of your device, you have many choices. Almost all electronic reading platforms allow readers to highlight and underline text. Some devices allow you to add a written text in addition to marking a word or passage that you can collect at the end of your notetaking session. Look into the specific tools for your device and learn how to use the features that allow you to take notes electronically. You can also find apps on devices to help with taking notes, some of which you may automatically have installed when you buy the product. Microsoft's OneNote, Google Keep, and the Notes feature on phones are relatively easy to use, and you may already have free access to those.

## Taking Notes on Non-Text Items (i.e., Tables, Maps, Figures, etc.)

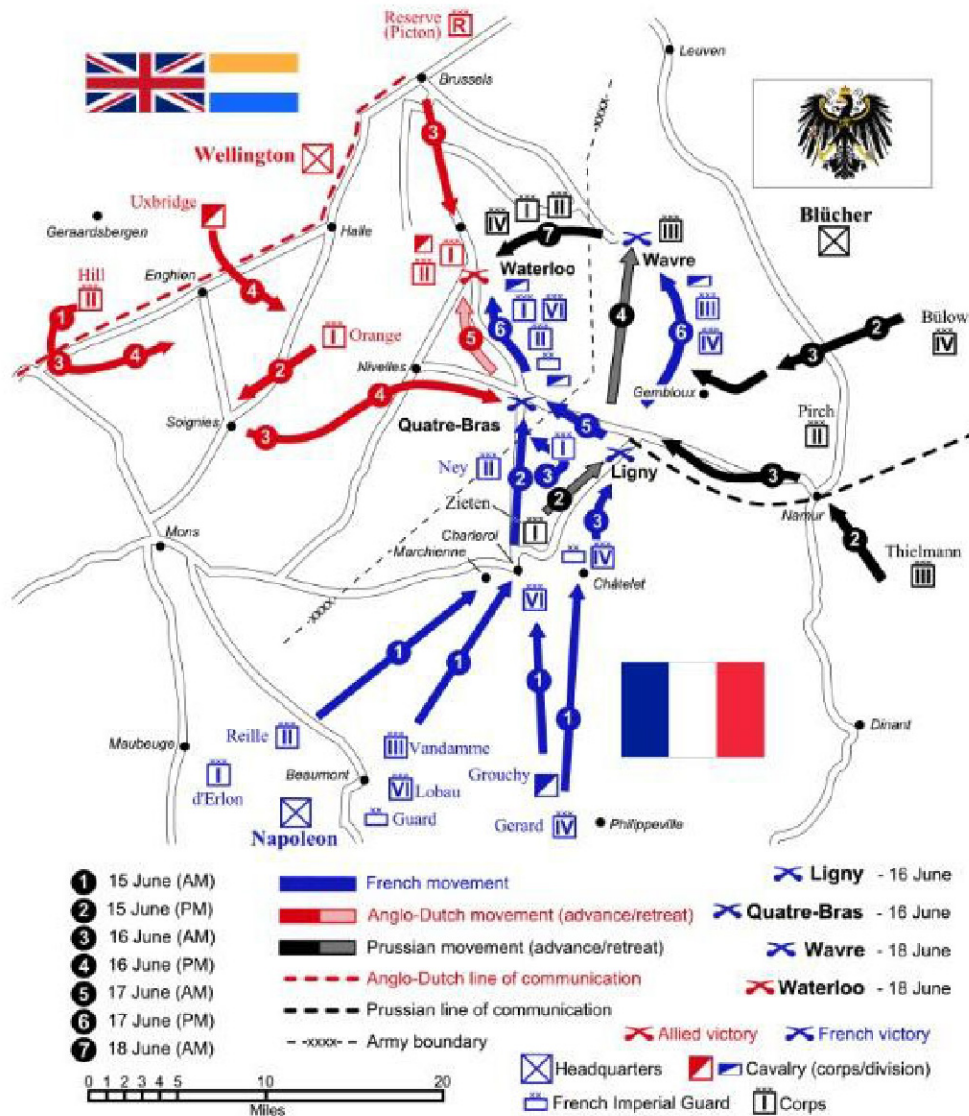
You may also encounter situations as you study and read textbooks, primary sources, and other resources for your classes that are not actually texts. You can still take notes on maps, charts, graphs, images, and tables, and your approach to these non-text features is similar to when you prepare to take notes over a passage of text. For example, if you are looking at the following map, you may immediately come up with several questions. Or it may initially appear overwhelming. Start by asking yourself these questions:

### What is the main point of this map?

- Who is the intended audience?
- Where is it?
- What time period does it depict?
- What does the map's legend (the explanation of symbols) include?
- What other information do I need to make sense of this map?

## Near Final Proof

## Order of Napoleon's Battle of Waterloo



Source: Wikipedia Creative Commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order\\_of\\_battle\\_of\\_the\\_Waterloo\\_campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_battle_of_the_Waterloo_campaign)

**Figure 5.16** Graphics, charts, graphs, and other visual items are also important to annotate. Not only do they often convey important information, but they may appear on exams or in other situations where you'll need to use or demonstrate knowledge. Credit: "Lpankonin" / Wikipedia Commons / Attribution 3.0 Generic (CC BY 3.0)

You may want to make an extra copy of a graphic or table before you add annotations if you are dealing with a lot of information. Making sense of all the elements will take time, and you don't want to add to the confusion.



# Near Final Proof

## Returning to Your Notes

Later, as soon as possible after the class, you can go back to your notes and add in missing parts. Just as you may generate questions as you're reading new material, you may leave a class session or lecture or activities with many questions. Write those down in a place where they won't get lost in all your other notes.

The exact timing of when you get back to the notes you take in class or while you are reading an assignment will vary depending on how many other classes you have or what other obligations you have in your daily schedule. A good starting place that is also easy to remember is to make every effort to review your notes within 24 hours of first taking them. Longer than that and you are likely to have forgotten some key features you need to include; much less time than that, and you may not think you need to review the information you so recently wrote down, and you may postpone the task too long.

Use your phone or computer to set reminders for all your note review sessions so that it becomes a habit and you keep on top of the schedule.

Your personal notes play a significant role in your test preparation. They should enhance how you understand the lessons, textbooks, lab sessions, and assignments. All the time and effort you put into first taking the notes and then annotating and organizing the notes will be for naught if you do not formulate an effective and efficient way to use them before sectional exams or comprehensive tests.

The whole cycle of reading, note-taking in class, reviewing and enhancing your notes, and preparing for exams is part of a continuum you ideally will carry into your professional life. Don't try to take short cuts; recognize each step in the cycle as a building block. Learning doesn't end, which shouldn't fill you with dread; it should help you recognize that all this work you're doing in the classroom and during your own study and review sessions is ongoing and cumulative. Practicing effective strategies now will help you be a stronger professional.

### ACTIVITY



What resources can you find about reading and note-taking that will actually help you with these crucial skills? How do you go about deciding what resources are valuable for improving your reading and note-taking skills?

The selection and relative value of study guides and books about note-taking vary dramatically. Ask your instructors for recommendations and see what the library has available on this topic. The following list is not comprehensive, but will give you a starting point for books and articles on note-taking in college.

- *College Rules!: How to Study, Survive, and Succeed in College*, by Sherri Nist-Olejnik and Jodi Patrick Holschuh. More than just note-taking, this book covers many aspects of transitioning into the rigors of college life and studying.
- *Effective Notetaking*, by Fiona McPherson. This small volume has suggestions for using your limited time wisely before, during, and after note-taking sessions.
- *How to Study in College*, by Walter Pauk. This is the book that introduced Pauk's note-taking suggestions we now call the Cornell Method. It is a bit dated (from the 1940s), but still contains some valuable information.
- *Learn to Listen, Listen to Learn 2: Academic Listening and Note-Taking*, by Roni S. Lebauer. The main

point of this book is to help students get the most from college lectures by watching for clues to lecture organization and adapting this information into strong notes.

- *Study Skills: Do I Really Need this Stuff?*, by Steve Piscitelli. Written in a consistently down-to-earth manner, this book will help you with the foundations of strong study skills, including time management, effective note-taking, and seeing the big picture.
- “What Reading Does for the Mind,” by Anne Cunningham and Keith Stanovich, 1998, <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/cunningham.pdf> (<https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/cunningham.pdf>)
- Adler, Mortimer J. and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1940.
- Berns, Gregory S., Kristina Blaine, Michael J. Prietula, and Brandon E. Pye. *Brain Connectivity*. Dec 2013. ahead of print <http://doi.org/10.1089/brain.2013.0166> (<http://doi.org/10.1089/brain.2013.0166>)



## Summary

Reading and note-taking are major elements of college studying and learning. The expectations in college is that you read considerable amounts of text for each subject. You may encounter reading situations, such as professional journal articles and long textbook chapters, that are more difficult to understand than texts you have read previously. As you progress through your college courses, you can employ reading strategies to help you complete your college reading assignments. Likewise, you will take notes in college that need to be complete so you can study and recall the information you learn in lectures and lab sessions. With so much significant information that you need to collect, study, and recall for your college courses, you need to be deliberate in your reading and note-taking.



## Career Connection

Sanvi is a pre-nursing student who is having trouble between all the reading she is expected to complete, her general dislike of reading, and her need to comprehend both her reading assignments and her own notes to be successful in nursing school. She has spoken with several of her instructors and a tutor at the Student Success Center on campus, and their advice centers around Sanvi’s reluctance to read in general. She is working on how to manage her time so she has more dedicated time to read her assignments in between her classes and her work schedule.

That is helping some, but Sanvi is still worried because she knows one problem is that she doesn’t exactly know what types of reading or note-taking she would need to know how to do as a professional nurse. This confusion makes her doubt that the extra reading she is doing now is really beneficial. After some reflection on what was holding her back, Sanvi mentioned this aspect of her studying to one of her instructors who had been a hospital RN for years before coming to the college to teach. She recalled that the first time she read a patient chart in the hospital, she had to think quickly about how to get all the meaning out of the chart in the same way she would have read a complex textbook chapter.

Sanvi’s nursing instructor reminded her that all professions need their personnel to read. They may not all need to read books or articles, but all jobs involve reading to some extent. For example, consider this list of

disciplines and the typical types of reading they do. You may be surprised that not all reading is in text form.

Nurses/doctors	Patient charts, prescription side effects, medical articles
Teachers	Student work, lesson plans, educational best practices
Architects	Blueprints, construction contracts, permit manuals
Accountants	Financial spreadsheets, tax guidelines, invoices, trend diagrams
Beauticians	Client hair and facial features, best practices articles, product information
Civil engineers	Work site maps, government regulations, financial spreadsheets
Auto mechanics	Car engines, auto manuals, government regulations

As this incomplete list shows, not every job you pursue will require you to read text-based documents, but all jobs require some reading.

- How could Sanvi and her instructor use this list to make more sense of how college reading will prepare Sanvi to be a stronger nurse?
- How would understanding the types of professional reading help you complete your reading assignments?
- If your chosen field of study is not listed above, can you think of what sort of reading those professionals would need to do?

Think about the questions that opened this chapter and what you have read. How do you feel about your reading and note-taking skills now that you have some more strategies?



## Rethinking

Revisit the questions you answered at the beginning of the chapter, and consider one option you learned in this chapter that might change your answer to one of them.

1. I am reading on a college level
2. I take good notes that help me study for exams
3. I understand how to manage all the reading I need to do for college
4. I recognize the need for different note-taking strategies for different college subjects



## Where do you go from here?

Reading is such a part of our everyday lives that we sometimes take it for granted. And even we don't formally write down our thoughts, we take notes in our heads far more often than we use our note-taking skills to make sense of a textbook passage or a graphic. Honing these fundamental skills can only help you succeed in college and beyond. What else about reading and note taking would you like to learn more about? Choose topics from the list below to research more.

# Near Final Proof

- How to maximize e-readers to comprehend texts.
- How professional use reading and note taking in their careers.
- Is speed-reading a myth or a viable strategy?
- Compare reading and note-taking strategies from different countries to those you use