

# **Being a Successful Student**

## **Tips for the First Day of Class**

- The first day of classes you may feel excited and nervous. This is natural for returning as well as for new students. You are beginning work on an important goal. Take slow deep breaths if you start to feel stressed and enjoy your excitement and pride!
- Feel free to ask people in administrative offices how to find your classrooms, the food vendors, and your way to the library. Leave for campus a little early so you can arrive early. Get a good seat in the room (the closer to the teacher, the easier it is to concentrate) to ensure that you will not miss any important information.
- You may want to buy a big three-ring binder with tabs marking different sections for different classes.
- This way, you can keep all your paper for each class separate. Bring to class a notebook, paper, pens, pencils, and a calendar in which you can write down due dates. (Most teachers do not like it if you eat in class, so although you may want to bring some healthy snacks to eat throughout the day, try to eat between classes).
- You may want to purchase your books, bus pass, etc. before the first day of class to avoid lines. Keep your bookstore receipt in case there are changes and you need to return a book.
- On the first day of class, the instructor will probably hand out a course syllabus which describes the course expectations, course assignments and due dates, when tests will be, and the instructor's contact information. **READ IT CAREFULLY!!** Ask questions if you do not understand any part of it. Questions may be asked during the class, before or after class, or during the instructor's office hours. Take note of the instructor's phone number and office hours.
- Write down the test dates and dates when major papers and projects are due in your calendar. Read your text and complete assignments by the due dates.
- Plan something nice for yourself (even something small) to celebrate the successful completion of your first day of classes!
- Try not to miss class. If an emergency arises, call the instructor before the class and explain why you will miss and when you will return. Get the phone number of a few other students in the class so you can share notes and ask each other questions about assignments. Consider forming a study group.
- Try to study on campus to prevent yourself from being distracted by other commitments.
- **Study every day** and take notes on what you are reading so you will have a summary to review before exams.

# How to Prepare for Exams

## Concentration and Memory

- As you read, say the words aloud. Talk to yourself saying things like, “What is the main idea? Let me write that down.” The secret to this technique is that when you are calmly “talking yourself through” an assignment, do not distract yourself with panicky thoughts like “I’ll never get through all this!”
- Break big chunks of material into smaller parts. When memorizing, don’t try to learn more than three or four new pieces of information at a time. Take breaks in your memorizing otherwise, you’ll remember the first two things, the last two things, and forget the material in the middle.
- Repeat difficult information several times, write it down, and post it on your mirror, on the refrigerator, etc.
- Color-code related information in your notes and in the textbook. Make lists of key ideas. Practice closing your eyes and visualizing the material.

## Before an Exam

- Ask the instructor what the format of the test will be: How many multiple choice questions, how many essay questions, etc.
- Review course outline, notes, and text. Summarize key information on several sheets of paper, arranging material in small groups or lists. Make these summary sheets easy to read and recall by the use of spacing or colored highlights.
- Get enough sleep, eat a light healthy meal.

## During an Exam

- Take a deep breath. Tell yourself, “what’s most important now is that I stay calm and read each question carefully.”
- Quickly jot down formulas, lists, things that you’ve memorized to use during the test but are afraid you might forget.
- Read directions and questions aloud under your breath (as described in the concentration and memory section).
- Don’t select the first multiple-choice item that sounds right. Often, there are several choices that are partially correct and another (the correct answer) that provides a fuller answer.
- Watch out for items that seem to come from the text or lectures but have been changed to be negative. For example, “three factors found to be unimportant in the development of the American West were...” Underline keywords like: never, not, always, usually.
- If you get stuck, eliminate the answers you know are wrong, make a mark next to the item and move on.

- It's better to go through a test once, carefully, than to rush through making errors in reading, just so you can "go over it again" making the same reading errors.
- Don't leave any items blank. Narrow things down and guess if you must.

#### Essay Exams

- Be sure to do what is asked: define, list, compare, and contrast.
- Answer as directly and concisely as possible.
- Outline quickly the important facts and ideas you want to include in your answer.
- Write. First sentences explain what your main points are. The following sentences provide specific examples or details to support your main points. The conclusion shows how your body text supported your opening statements.
- If you run out of time, provide an outline rather than writing in full sentences.
- Be sure your handwriting is legible.

#### Remember

- Praise and encourage yourself.
- Pay attention to deadlines.
- Start studying early, study for short periods (30-45 minutes) and give yourself (3-5 minute) breaks.
- Try not to study for more than 2 hours at a stretch.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Get enough sleep!