Can’t wait to break out of high school and dash off to college?

College is a lot of fun. Late nights, parties, sporting events with thousands of people, on-campus concerts and thousands of potential new friends combine to make college some of the best years of a person's life.

Yet, in the midst of all of the fun, the most successful students squeeze an education out of college that prepares them for a satisfying career. Earning higher salaries than their high school graduate counterparts.

But it’s not easy. Many students with decent grades in high school find themselves struggling in college. The classes move faster, delve deeper, and the instructors expect you to do more on your own. There’s a small cost for the freedom you’ve been dreaming about.

You can do it, though. It doesn’t have to be so hard to play at the college level. To be successful, you just need to build a few key study habits.

What study habits make a student successful in college?

Marissa Hartwig and John Dunlosky of Kent State University conducted a study that sheds a little light on habits the most successful students use to not only get top grades, but to learn the material that is necessary for their long-term success. Their paper, "Study strategies of college students: Are self-testing and scheduling related to achievement?" was published in Psychonomic Bulletin & Review.

The researchers found 3 study habits of successful students that were significantly related to college GPA.

1. **Successful students plan study time and know what to study next.**

While it isn't as much fun as planning a party or late-night pizza run, successful college students with the highest GPA's regularly scheduled their study time.

This means that, rather than delaying studying until they felt like they were behind, great students used regularly scheduled blocks of time to get their coursework done.

And, (key) they studied what they’d scheduled.

College students generally have the luxury of a course syllabus. This document tells you exactly what material you will be covering over the semester, along with any applicable due dates. Successful students know how to use this information to their advantage.
Instead of constantly scrambling to finish whatever’s due next in class, or just going back to topics they find most interesting, successful students use their plan to stay on top of assignments.

And avoiding the all too pervasive last minute rush lets them relax more fully when the day is done.

2. Successful students test themselves habitually.

As if it wasn't enough to be tested by a teacher, successful students learn how to test themselves on the material they are learning.

They might make lists of vocabulary words and have someone quiz them on their meanings. They may pull out important points from a textbook and create sample test questions based on these concepts or facts. They may even take blank charts, pictures, or maps and fill in all of the information they know.

Interestingly, most of the students who used some form of self-testing did it to see how well they had learned the material.

Yet, lots of research shows that testing yourself is also a powerful way to forge that knowledge in your head. It's one of the top study skills backed by science.

Testing yourself isn’t just a diagnostic. It helps you “get it.”

3. Successful students read and reread their course material.

Just after picking yourself up from the sticker shock of college costs, you glance at your syllabus and discover another heart stopper.

Do they really expect you to read all that stuff? Even the math?

Yep, they really do. Remember that bit about the profs expecting you to learn on your own? This is how they figure you’ll do it.

The good news is that you won’t be confined to one class after another doing exactly what the teacher dictates from moment to moment. You can set your own agenda, work at your own pace, and read a lot.

The most successful learners read the material. And later on, they read it again. When done strategically, rereading can be an efficient way to improve retention and boost test performance.

You can also step up your reading game further by using an advanced method, such as the SQ3R reading strategy. Even a simplified version of SQ3R helps when you're up against a challenging text or need to be ready for open ended tests, like essays.

Stack your study habits for college success

Is it starting to feel like too much? No worries. When you stitch these techniques together and practice your skills a bit, it all works pretty smoothly.
You spend less time frantically trying to figure out what’s going on in class, avoiding assignments because the lecture didn’t make sense, and cramming at the last minute when it’s all too late.

For example, one approach is to create a weekly study schedule. Fit in specific times to read, so you complete your assigned readings before class. Then, you show up to class relaxed and familiar with the ideas.

When it’s time to prepare for a quiz or exam, start by testing yourself using your favorite method. You’ll find your mistakes and points of confusion.

Finally, go back and reread the sections you don’t quite have down.

With that core stack in place, you can consider other study tips to take you further. All the while knowing you’ve constructed a granite foundation to build from.

Don’t wait for college to build your study habits

Learning how to self-test and reread now means you will be an expert by the time you are staring down the barrel of Biology 101.

Building a habit of planning study times now (and sticking to them) means you’ll have the technique and discipline to do it when you make your break.

Leaving you more time for those late-night college pizza runs.

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