



College Survival Skills

DO-IT

Tips for students with disabilities to increase college success

Congratulations! You have decided to go to college—excellent decision. A college education can increase your opportunities for success. However, you will find the college learning environment different from that of high school. You will need more self-monitoring skills than you needed in high school. Teachers and parents will be making fewer decisions for you. Be prepared to face an increased level of academic competition and to have less contact with your instructors. You will be more responsible for your learning and for acquiring support services.

If you have a disability this includes dealing with a new and more complex process for securing accommodations you may need for success.

As a student with a disability, it is critical that you understand your disability and how it affects your ability to learn and participate in the college experience. Understanding your rights and, equally important, your responsibilities as a college student with a disability are also critical to your success. The office of disability support services at the college you plan to attend can help you reach these goals. This office can play a key role in your success and will refer you to other areas on campus where support services are available.

Many students believe that if they are interested in college and motivated to learn, they will be successful—this is not enough! You need skills in reading, writing, listening, and studying. Many students, however, have not developed a systematic approach to study skills. In college, your instructors will take for granted that you have these skills, that you can read, write, listen, take notes, and complete exams and assignments effectively. Plan to be a successful student—start college with survival skills!

No two people learn in exactly the same manner. Everyone has unique ways of processing information. It is vital that you understand your own learning style and use this knowledge to create strategies tailored to your personal strengths and information processing skills. Although some tech-

niques may apply to a specific area, it is important to develop strategic problem solving skills that transfer across the curriculum.



Tips for Success

What follows is a list of suggested study skills and strategies that may be helpful to you as you make the transition from high school to college. These tips are paraphrased from interviews of *Mentors*, *Scholars*, and *Ambassadors* in DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) programs at the University of Washington. As participants in DO-IT, they are either preparing for college, participating in college, or sharing their past college experiences as youth with disabilities. Consider these suggestions as you build your own study skills inventory.

- Selecting an appropriate set of classes is an important first step. Talk to your academic advisor, disabled student services personnel, faculty members, and other students about classes that you are considering. Ask questions about the class format; class requirements such as amount of reading, papers assigned, type of tests given; and the instructor's teaching style.
- When you are deciding which classes to take remember to take a less demanding class along with more demanding classes each quarter or semester. This will help you balance your workload.



- Complete classes required for graduation early in your program, especially if they are subjects you are not fond of. Don't get stuck in your final year of school needing classes that create scheduling conflicts or are full.
- Try to get a copy of the class syllabus so you can see exactly what the requirements will be for a specific class.
- Purchase your textbooks a couple of weeks before the class starts if possible.
- Organize a study notebook for each class. If your notebook is sloppy and disorganized, visualize your grades in the same vein.
- Attend ALL classes! Don't sign up for a class during a time that you know other activities, such as work, will overlap or encroach upon your study time. Learning how to manage your time lowers the stress you will feel as your course work increases.
- Buy a calendar and record what you need to do each day. Write in exam dates, when papers are due, reading assignments, and scheduled study times. How much time you will need for each assignment will depend upon the length and difficulty of the assignment. Look at the assignment the day that it is assigned and start breaking it down into manageable chunks. For example, break a research paper assignment down into smaller parts, e.g., library research, read materials, develop outline, create rough draft. Schedule each task on the calendar as a daily assignment that must be completed. Allow extra time in the schedule. That way if you hit a snag you have time to deal with it. Don't procrastinate. Work within your scheduled timeframe, and stay ahead of homework assignments.
- Schedule a specific time each day for studying. Plan this time during your "alert" times of the day, not the times when you are ready to go to sleep or are hungry. Study your most difficult or least favorite subject first.
- Take study breaks. Avoid marathon study sessions and cramming.
- Grab stolen moments of time to study or review material. You can read or study flash cards in the waiting room at the doctor's office or while you are on the bus.
- Try to study when you are relaxed and not when you are upset or unable to concentrate on the work you have to do.
- The environment in which you study is important. Choose a location where you feel comfortable, that is quiet, and that is free from distractions. It is often helpful to study in the same conditions in which you will be tested. This means that if you can't eat, drink or listen to music during the exam, try to study under similar constraints.
- Study groups are great for clarifying some concepts but they should be used to complement personal study time—not replace it. Study groups can digress into discussions about the instructor or other students; try to stay on track. Be sure to read all the necessary material before a study group meeting so that you can contribute to the discussions and maximize your benefit from the meeting.
- Become familiar with the book and begin reading the first chapters before the class starts. This way, when the instructor assigns chapters one through three to be read by the end of the first week you will be ahead of schedule. If you have received a copy of the syllabus early this will help in determining which chapter to begin with as not all texts are read straight through.
- Keep up with the assigned readings, being sure to read the information that will be reviewed in class prior to that class session. By doing this you will be familiar with the vocabulary and the concepts about which the lecturer is speaking, and you can bring up any questions from the reading that the professor may not have addressed during the lecture. Reading ahead will also help you take better notes on the material.
- When you start reading a text, first scan or survey the chapter you are about to read. Look at the pictures, graphs, and headings. Write down vocabulary words that are foreign to you. Look the words up in the glossary or a dictionary



before you start reading the chapter. Read the chapter summary and any study questions the author has provided. Ask yourself what you already know about the material to be covered in the chapter.

- When you read a chapter, mark important information as you read. Use a highlighter, underline, or place a check mark in the margins next to the information. If you mark the entire page you are marking too much information; mark just enough to jog your memory.
- Read in short time blocks. You will remember more of what you read than if you undertake marathon reading sessions.
- After you have completed reading and marking the chapter go back and write concise notes about the material you have marked. Stick with the basic facts and information that was new to you.
- When taking notes in class use short phrases rather than whole sentences. Develop your own set of abbreviations or shorthand. Leave some room in the margins for additional information the lecturer may add later. If you become confused or miss some information mark it with a question mark and ask to have the information clarified then or after class or look up the topic in the text later.
- If you have trouble taking notes, find someone in the class who takes good notes and ask if they would be willing to give you a copy of them. Continue to take your own notes because listening to the lecture and writing notes at the same time helps you remember the information better. Then check them against the other set of notes after class. Look at the information your classmate is recording and use this example to improve your note-taking skills. You may also want to consider tape recording lectures, and then listening to the tapes while reviewing both sets of notes. Be sure to obtain the lecturer's permission before taping a lecture.
- If you need assistance, ask the instructor for help right away, not after you are failing a class.

- Contact the office of disability support services on your campus.

In summary, to maximize your success in college:

1. Develop strategies, study skills, and a network of support!
2. Attend class.
3. Arrive on time, pay attention, and participate in class discussions and activities.
4. Talk to the instructor. Ask questions.
5. Complete and check all work. Turn in neat and clear assignments.
6. Monitor your progress. If you begin to fall behind, ask for help.
7. Stay in contact with the office of disability support services and your professors.

Adapt these tips to fit your unique learning style and needs. Ask friends and classmates about the techniques they use. Never be afraid to try a new method. And, remember that *you* are ultimately responsible for your success.

Additional Resources

- Electronic materials are abundant on the Internet. A good starting point is *The Student Lounge* at www.uw.edu/doi/Student/.
- If you are a teenager with a disability who wants to attend college, join the *DO-IT Pals* program. Find further instruction at www.uw.edu/doi/programs/pals.html. In this vibrant online community, you'll meet other students with similar goals as well as mentors and DO-IT Staff members for guidance and referral to resources.

Videos

DO-IT's short videos and accompanying brochures help you prepare for and succeed in college and may be freely viewed online at www.uw.edu/doi/Video/.

Titles of particular relevance include

- *College: You Can DO-IT!*
- *Moving On: The Two-Four Step*
- *Taking Charge 2: Two Stories of Success and Self-Determination*
- *DO-IT Pals*

Videos may also be purchased in DVD format.



About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education. For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, or to request materials in alternative format, contact:

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