

Part III

Upgrading Your Reading & Skills

Demands on college students are often overwhelming. If you find yourself unable to cope with not only the sheer volume of reading in college but also the difficulty of comprehending the information you are given, you are not alone. Read on.

According to Pugh, S. L., Pawean, F., & Antommarchi, C. (2000), "It is a truism to say that the 21st century is bringing more to read, more ways to read it, and more reasons to be an effective reader than ever before. Two trends in particular affect postsecondary learners: (a) the accelerated evolution of knowledge in all fields, which implies the necessity of extensive reading to keep up; and (b) growing awareness of the importance of multiple perspectives and dialogical reasoning (Paul, 1987), which necessitates the reading of multiple texts on a given issue. In addition, the changing nature of work and the likelihood of several career changes in a working life emphasize the importance of facility in acquiring and synthesizing new information and concepts. Compounding all of these realities is the technology revolution, which has made the proliferation of information, most of it in written form, an issue for everyone" (p. 25).

Work Cited

Pugh, S. L., Pawan, F., & Antommarchi, C. Academic literacy and the new college learner. In D. Caverly & R. Flippo (Eds.) *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategy Research* (p. 25-42). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Study Habits Which Maximize Learning

There are several skills and strategies you can use to cope with the demands of college. Here are some suggestions for upgrading your study habits and for making the most of the time you spend studying.

1. Taking control of your immediate environment
2. Taking control of your "self"
3. Taking effective lecture notes
4. Working with technology
5. Studying for tests

Taking control of your immediate environment

Time Management:

Choose your priorities, commit to a set of study times, allocate a practical amount of time for social activities, and make up a formal weekly schedule.

Social Concerns:

Choose friends who will enhance your success as a student and as a member of the community, not ones who will disregard your need to study and to succeed in your college career.

Health:

Eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise daily.

Avoid Overload:

Take on only as many units as you can handle, given the confines of job, family, other demands and obligations. Rushing to get through college and be done with it isn't fair to you, your teachers, family and friends. Enjoy the experience and do what you can do well.

When and where to get help:

Know where to get counseling, tutoring, campus support systems; know where the instructor's office is located and when his/her office hours are scheduled.

Finding the best environment for studying:

Find out whether you work best with or without music, alone, in groups, in the library, or confined to quarters in your room.

Taking control of your "self"

Attitude:

Maintain a positive attitude toward education, classes, peers, and professors. Think critically. Try to avoid leaping to conclusions, stereotyping and bias.

Listening skills:

Learn to concentrate and not redirect the conversation in your own mind as someone else talks.

Coping with failure:

Realize that perfection is impossible, and disappointments can be used as learning tools.

Coping with success:

Learn to go on to the next task without fear of inability to repeat a success. Surround yourself with a friends who support your success, not denigrate it.

Ways to get started, motivated

Don't let past experiences destroy present challenges; make connections within assignments and tasks; make connections to other assignments and concepts. Take on the first small task, and then move to the next one. Don't wait to get started when the task becomes insurmountable.

Know that college is more difficult, more demanding than high school:

The work will accumulate no matter how hard we try to keep up, so the best strategy is to start the first week by thinking it is exam week. The following advice goes without saying, but it is worth repeating: do your assignments as they come along and don't get behind. Take that extra half hour to review your lecture notes before you go out for a social occasion.

Class participation:

Get over the fear of speaking up in class. Make an effort to contribute to group work and class conversations.

Taking effective lecture notes

Effective note-taking is active, not passive.

Stay alert as you "translate" the lecture into intelligible text for use later on. Devise shorthand notes such as "ch" for church, "gov" for government, and text-messaging notations such as "u" for you. Use symbols like flags, stars and crosses to earmark important passages. Add notes to the side that might help connect you to other ideas in the course and even other courses. Review your notes, and type the notes for your files.

Working with technology

Become comfortable with at least the basics of computer technology. *Know your search engines, use Blackboard if needed, and use e-mail and chatrooms. Research is required in most college courses: become familiar with the college library online sites. Attend a library workshop if possible. Learn to evaluate sources and discern between scholarly, substantive, popular and sensational sources. (Go to Cornell University Library and "Research and Subject Guides" for help.) Know how to use sources properly and avoid plagiarism.*

Studying for tests

Know what is being asked, and understand the directions.

Read the directions for each section carefully to avoid mistakes. Often, rephrasing the question will help with comprehension. You may lose entire letter grades if you veer away from the topic or the directions.

Know the material

Be prepared by studying on a consistent basis before the test. Use the study strategies to accumulate the information needed. Review well before the test. Never cram or stay up all night before the test.

Multiple-choice questions and standardized tests

If there is no penalty for wrong answers, don't leave any answer blank. Eliminate (cross out) obviously wrong answers to narrow down the search. Annotate in the textbook itself to indicate questions you need to come back to and to make notes for future reference. If you are stuck, go on. If there is time remaining, you can go back to that question. Finally, read all the answers in the order they are given.

Contrary to popular opinion, changing answers is not second guessing yourself.

Many times after finishing the test, going back to the sections the test-taker is unsure of can result in a better answer. The test-taker has had time to reconsider and remember.

Eliminating test anxiety:

*Try relaxation exercises.
Picture yourself in a test situation, before, during and after the test.
Practice taking tests in stressful, timed situations.
Avoid worrying and carrying on negative conversations with yourself.
Be pragmatic: stop wasting time being nervous and get on with the work.*

Use Mnemonic devices (ways to remember what you need to know)

A simple google search will lead you to various mnemonic devices: use of acronyms, acrostics, rhymes, and organizing (chunking).

Using reading strategies to get the most out of your reading time.

Bring prior knowledge into the reading.

Think about what you already know about the subject. What previous information will help you make meaning out of the current reading task?

Skim first

Note especially the first and last paragraphs, topic sentences, bold headings.

Highlight (or underline):

Avoid the tendency to highlight everything. Underline or highlight only major pertinent points to be used or referred to later. Know the main point of a paragraph before highlighting.

Annotate:

The danger in just reading an assignment and relying on memory is that we find ourselves losing interest and thinking about other things such as the grocery list, work, and other more pressing problems. At any give point we look up and realize we haven't "read" anything. So to use our time wisely and not waste it, we can annotate as we read. In short, this process synthesizes the mechanical strokes of the highlighter and the intricate details of the note taker. Simply read with a pen in hand, check off places you'd like to get back to, underline passages that seem significant, and write notes in the margin. You might want to annotate with a specific purpose (find information needed for a project), or you might want to react to the reading in general (ask questions, highlight major points, agree or disagree with the author). Whatever your purpose, read with a pen in hand, and actively engage in the reading.



Take effective notes

Writing summaries in your own words and extracting the main points will help with comprehension. SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite and review) will help also help with comprehension and retention. Mapping will provide an overview of the content of the reading (thesis, topics and supports). Write down the meanings of words you don't know.

Break the reading into smaller parts:

Do the reading in smaller chunks if it is too long and/or too difficult to read in one sitting.

Preview the textbook:

Note table of contents, chapter headings, index, visual aids, sections partitioned off in boxes, bold headings, appendices, glossary, copyright date, and publisher.

Vocabulary

Most of your college courses will introduce you to a wealth of new vocabulary, and it will be essential to know what these key words mean. Often you can get the meaning from the context by way of examples, and definition. Other times you will need to look up the words in a small paperback or mechanical dictionary that you should carry with you. Memorize these words by using journals, word maps or 3x5 cards with the definition, the parts of speech and the words used in your own sentences.

Calculating your reading rate in words per minute

1. Compute the average number of words per line

- a. *Count down 10 lines*
- b. *Count the words in the section of 10 lines.*
- c. *Divide by 10 (move decimal place one to the left).*
- d. *Your answer is the average # words per line.*

2. Compute the number of words in the passage.

- a. *Count the number of lines in the section you skimmed.*
- b. *Multiply by the average # words per line.*
- c. *Your answer is # of words in the passage.*

3. Compute the number of seconds you read.

- a. *Convert minutes and seconds to just seconds.
(Multiply # minutes x 60 and add seconds.)*
- b. *Your answer is # of seconds.*

4. Calculate reading rate in words per minute.

- a. *Divide the # of words by the # of seconds and multiply by 60.*

