Composition I: Join the Conversation

COMPOSITION I: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

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CONTENTS

PART I

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

1

HABITS FOR SUCCESS

A Personal Definition for Success

How do you define college success? The definition really depends on you. You might think that "success" is earning an associate's degree or attending classes at a four-year college. Maybe success is a bachelor's or master's degree or a Ph.D. Maybe success means receiving a certificate of completion or finishing skill-based training.

Person writing on pink sticky notes by Bruno Bueno / Pexels

You might be thinking of other measures of college success, too—like grades. For instance, you might be unhappy with anything less than an A in a course, although maybe this depends on the difficulty of the subject. As long as you pass with a C, you might be perfectly content.

To help you start to define what success means to you, take this quick self-assessment about your college goals and beyond. How many of these items are important to you?

My Goals For College Success:	YES	NO
Change my major during my college years		
Have good relationships with my professors		
Learn if I am eligible for financial aid		
Be eligible for scholarships		
Win awards for maintaining a high GPA		
Get reductions on my car insurance		
Prove to my employer that I can work hard		
Keep my family proud of me		
Make social or professional connections		
Get a better job after graduation		

Each of us has a different combination of answers to the questions above, but nearly every student in college answers yes to at least one of these questions. At the same time, we cannot be successful all the time at everything. We have to balance our energy and our focus.

Deciding to go to college has an **opportunity cost**. An opportunity cost is based on the economic principle that there are limited resources available and choices must be made. Examples of resources would be things like time and money. If you are spending time doing something, you must give up doing something else you want to do. That is the opportunity cost of your choice. Going to college will have an opportunity cost in your life. An important question to ask at the beginning of your college venture is: what are you willing to trade-off temporarily for the time that it takes to attend college?

Opportunity costs are tied to the idea of return on investment. Once you make an investment of your time and money in college, what investment are you hoping to get in return? How you define success in relation to your college experience impacts how you see the concept of return on investment. Some ways to gauge the return on your college investment include the following: job opportunities after college, financial benefits, social network/connections made while attending college, development of communication and other "soft skills," and personal enrichment and/or happiness.

What kinds of trade-offs do you think succeeding in college will require of you? How do you think you might explain these trade-offs to someone who isn't in college or never attended college?

Strategies to Achieve Success

Most students want to be successful in their courses, yet not all college students are. We've talked already about common misconceptions about not being "smart enough" for college. Some students suffer from **imposter syndrome**, or a feeling that they are impostors and don't belong in college. Impostor syndrome is real and challenging.

In this short video, learn more about imposter syndrome and how it can affect college students.

> One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://open.ocolearnok.org/lstuckeycomp1/?p=117#oembed-1

Instead of worrying about whether you are smart enough or belong in college, you might focus on some concrete strategies you can employ to increase your success in college. We suggest you embrace and master the following eight strategies:

1. Learn how to take effective notes in class.
2. Review the text and your reading notes prior to class.
3. Participate in class discussions.
4. Go to **office hours** and ask your instructor questions.
5. Give yourself enough time to research, write, and edit your essays in manageable stages.
6. Take advantage of online or on-campus academic support resources.
7. Spend sufficient time studying.
8. Join a study group or find a study buddy.

If you find yourself worrying about succeeding in college, ask yourself instead if you can implement or improve your use of some of these strategies.

Can you make more time for learning? One approach is to create a regular study schedule and make sure you allow yourself ample time. Only break away from your committed schedule if an extreme situation prevents you from sticking to it.

Another strategy to consider implementing is group study. For example, rather than relying just on your own knowledge, notes, and skills, try studying with other students in your classes. Studying in a group or with a buddy gives you a chance to ask questions and talk about concepts.

You can also add a tutor to your personal study or to your study group. Tutoring is generally free in college, and the strategies and knowledge you gain will be invaluable. Usually, tutors have taken the class you are currently enrolled in, and they are trained to get the best out of you.

Overall, students struggle in college not because of natural intellect or smarts, but because of poor time management, disorganization, and lack of quality study time. The good news is that there are ways to combat this, specifically by doing things like creating a regular study schedule, studying in groups, and taking advantage of your school's academic resources, such as tutoring centers, instructor office hours, and online help.

Figure 1. Studying with a group is a great way to make friends, but also talk through concepts and solidify your understanding of course material.

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2

KNOWING YOURSELF AS A LEARNER

Clever lady with curly hair reading book by Andrea Piacquadio / Pexels

About This Chapter

In this chapter you will learn about the art of learning itself, as well as how to employ strategies that enable you to learn more efficiently.

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Discover the different types of learning and your learning practices.
- Make informed and effective learning choices in regards to personal engagement and motivation.
- Identify and apply the learning benefits of a growth mindset.
- Evaluate and make informed decisions about learning styles and learning skills.
- Recognize how personality type models influence learning and utilize that knowledge to improve your own learning.
- Identify the impact of outside circumstances on personal learning experiences and develop strategies to compensate for them.
- Recognize the presence of the "hidden curriculum" and how to navigate it.

5.1 The Power to Learn

Questions to consider:

- What actually happens to me when I learn something?
- Am I aware of different types of learning?
- Do I approach studying or practicing differently depending on the desired outcome?

Welcome to one of the most empowering chapters in this book! While each chapter focuses on showing you clear paths to success as a student, this one deals specifically with what is at the core of being a student: the act of learning.

We humans have been obsessed with how we learn and understand things since ancient times. Because of

this, some of our earliest recorded philosophies have tried to explain how we take in information about the world around us, how we acquire new knowledge, and even how we can be certain what we learn is correct. This obsession has produced a large number of theories, ideas, and research into how we learn. There is a great deal of information out there on the subject—some of it is very good, and some of it, while well intentioned, has been a bit misguided.

Because of this obsession with learning, over the centuries, people have continually come up with new ideas about how we acquire knowledge. The result has been that commonly held "facts" about education have been known to change frequently. Often, what was once thought to be the newest, greatest discovery about learning was debunked later on. One well-known example of this is that of corporal punishment. For most of the time formal education has existed in our society, educators truly believed that beating students when they made a mistake actually helped them learn faster. Thankfully, *birching* (striking someone with a rod made from a birch tree) has fallen out of favor in education circles, and our institutions of learning have adopted different approaches. In this chapter, not only will you learn about current learning theories that are backed by neuroscience (something we did not have back in the days of birching), but you will also learn other learning theories that did not turn out to be as effective or as thoroughly researched as once thought. That does not mean those ideas about learning are useless. Instead, in these cases you find ways to separate the valuable parts from the myths to make good learning choices.

> **"Research has shown that one of the most influential aids in learning is an understanding about learning itself."**

What Is the Nature of Learning?

To begin with, it is important to recognize that learning is work. Sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is difficult, but there is always work involved. For many years people made the error of assuming that learning was a passive activity that involved little more than just absorbing information. Learning was thought to be a lot like copying and pasting words in a document; the student's mind was blank and ready for an instructor to teach them facts that they could quickly take in. As it turns out, learning is much more than that. In fact, at its most rudimentary level, it is an actual process that physically changes our brains. Even something as simple as learning the meaning of a new word requires the physical alteration of neurons and the creation of new paths to receptors. These new electrochemical pathways are formed and strengthened as we utilize, practice, or remember what we have learned. If the new skill or knowledge is used in conjunction with other things we have already learned, completely different sections of the brain, our nerves, or our muscles may be tied in as a part of the process. A good example of this would be studying a painting or drawing that depicts a scene from a story or play you are already familiar with. Adding additional connections, memories, and mental associations to things you already know something about expands your knowledge and understanding in a way that cannot be reversed. In essence, it can be said that every time we learn something new we are no longer the same.

In addition to the physical transformation that takes place during learning, there are also a number of other factors that can influence how easy or how difficult learning something can be. While most people would assume that the ease or difficulty would really depend on what is being learned, there are actually several other factors that play a greater role.

In fact, research has shown that one of the most influential factors in learning is a clear understanding about learning itself. This is not to say that you need to become neuroscientists in order to do well in school, but instead, knowing a thing or two about learning and how we learn in general can have strong, positive results for your own learning. This is called *metacognition* (i.e., thinking about thinking).

Some of the benefits to how we learn can be broken down into different areas such as

- attitude and motivation toward learning,
- types of learning,
- methods of learning, and
- your own preferences for learning.

In this chapter you will explore these different areas to better understand how they may influence your own learning, as well as how to make conscious decisions about your own learning process to maximize positive outcomes.

All Learning Is Not the Same

The first, fundamental point to understand about learning is that there are several types of learning. Different kinds of knowledge are learned in different ways. Each of these different types of learning can require different processes that may take place in completely different parts of our brain.

For example, simple memorization is a form of learning that does not always require deeper understanding. Children often learn this way when they memorize poems or verses they recite. An interesting example of this can be found in the music industry, where there have been several hit songs sung in English by vocalists who do not speak English. In these cases, the singers did not truly understand what they were singing, but instead they were taught to memorize the sounds of the words in the proper order.
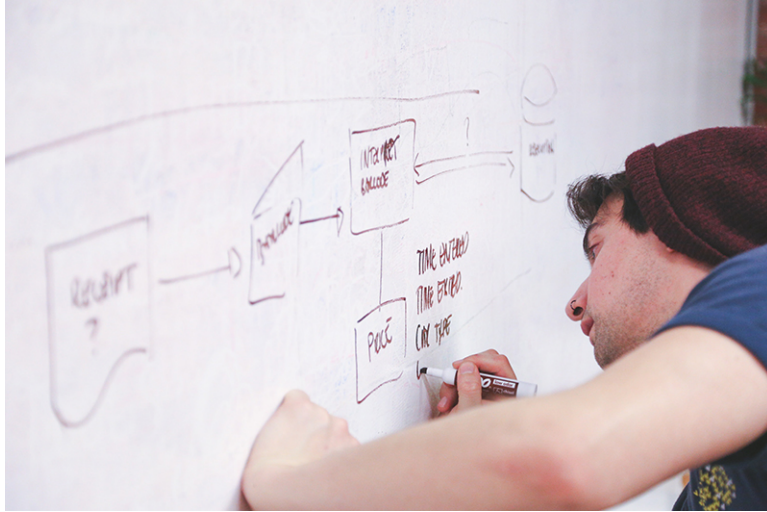

Figure 5.2 Learning has many levels and forms. For example, collaborative learning and showing your work require different skills and produce different results than reading or notetaking on your own. (Credit: StartUpStockPhotos / Pexels)

Memorizing sounds is a very different type of learning than, say, acquiring a deep understanding of Einstein's general theory of relativity.

Notice in the comparative examples of music and physics that the different levels of learning are being defined by what they allow you to know or do. When classifying learning in this way, people usually agree on six different levels of learning. In this next section we will take a detailed look at each of these.

In the table below, the cells in the left column each contain one of the main levels of learning, categorized by what the learning allows you to do. To the right of each category are the "skill acquired" and a set of real-world examples of what those skills might be as applied to a specific topic. This set of categories is called Bloom's Taxonomy, and it is often used as a guide for educators when they are determining what students should learn within a course.

Category of Learning	Skill acquired	Example 1: Musical ability	Example 2: Historical information on Charles the Bald
Create	Produce new or original work	Compose a piece of music	Write a paper on Charles that draws a new conclusion about his reign
Evaluate	Justify or support an idea or decision	Make critical decisions about the notes that make up a melody—what works, what doesn't, and why	Make arguments that support the idea that Charles was a good ruler
Analyze	Draw connections	Play the specific notes that are found in the key of A	Compare and contrast the historical differences between the reign of Charles and his grandfather, Charlemagne
Apply	Use information in new ways	Use knowledge to play several notes that sound good together	Use the information to write a historical account on the reign of Charles
Understand/ Comprehend	Explain ideas or concepts	Understand the relationship between the musical notes and how to play each on a musical instrument	Explain the historical events that enabled Charles to become Emperor
Remember	Recall facts and basic concepts	Memorize notes on a musical scale	Recall that Charles the Bald was Holy Roman Emperor from 875–877 CE

Table 5.1

A review of the above table shows that actions in the left column (or what you will be able to do with the new knowledge) has a direct influence over what needs to be learned and can even dictate the type of learning approach that is best. For example, *remembering* requires a type of learning that allows the person basic memorization. In the case of Charles the Bald and his reign, it is simply a matter of committing the dates to memory. When it comes to *understanding and comprehension,* being able to explain how Charles came to power requires not only the ability to recall several events, but also for the learner to be able to understand the cause and effect of those events and how they worked together to make Charles emperor. Another example would be the ability to *analyze.* In this particular instance the information learned would not only be about Charles, but also about other rulers, such as Charlemagne. The information would have to be of such a depth that the learner could compare the events and facts about each ruler.

When you engage in any learning activity, take the time to understand what you will do with the knowledge once you have attained it. This can help a great deal when it comes to making decisions on how to go about it. Using flashcards to help memorize angles does not really help you solve problems using geometry formulas. Instead, practicing problem-solving with the actual formulas is a much better approach. The key is to make certain the learning activity fits your needs.

5.2 The Motivated Learner

Questions to consider:

- How do different types of motivation affect my learning?
- What is resilience and grit?
- How can I apply the Uses and Gratification Theory to make decisions about my learning?
- How do I prevent negative bias from hindering learning?

In this section, you will continue to increase your ability as an informed learner. Here you will explore how much of an influence motivation has on learning, as well as how to use motivation to purposefully take an active role in any learning activity. Rather than passively attempting to absorb new information, you will learn how to make conscious decisions about the methods of learning you will use (based on what you intend to do with the information), how you will select and use learning materials that are appropriate for your needs, and how persistent you will be in the learning activity.

There are three main motivation concepts that have been found to directly relate to learning. Each of these has been proven to mean the difference between success and failure. You will find that each of these is a strong tool that will enable you to engage with learning material in a way that not only suits your needs, but also gives you ownership over your own learning processes.

Resilience and Grit

While much of this chapter will cover very specific aspects about the act of learning, in this section, we will present different information that may at first seem unrelated. Some people would consider it more of a personal outlook than a learning practice, and yet it has a significant influence on the ability to learn.

What we are talking about here is called grit or resilience. Grit can be defined as personal perseverance toward a task or goal. In learning, it can be thought of as a trait that drives a person to keep trying until they succeed. It is not tied to talent or ability, but is simply a tendency to not give up until something is finished or accomplished.

Figure 5.3 U.S. Army veteran and captain of the U.S. Invictus team, Will Reynolds, races to the finish line. (Credit: DoD News / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

The study showed that grit and perseverance were better predictors of academic success and achievement than talent or IQ.

This personality trait was defined as "grit" by the psychologist Angela Duckworth.[1] In a 2007 study Duckworth and colleagues found that individuals with high grit were able to maintain motivation in learning tasks despite failures. The study examined a cross section of learning environments, such as GPA scores in Ivy League universities, dropout rates at West Point, rankings in the National Spelling Bee, and general educational attainment for adults. What the results showed was that grit and perseverance were better predictors of academic success and achievement than talent or IQ.

Applying Grit

The concept of grit is an easy one to dismiss as something taken for granted. In our culture, we have a number

1. Duckworth, A.L.; Peterson, C.; Matthews, M.D.; Kelly, D.R. (June 2007). "Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals". Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 92 (6): 1087–1101. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087. PMID 17547490.

of sayings and aphorisms that capture the essence of grit: "If at first you do not succeed, try, try again," or the famous quote by Thomas Edison: "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration."

The problem is we all understand the concept, but actually applying it takes work. If the task we are trying to complete is a difficult one, it can take a lot of work.

The first step in applying grit is to adopt an attitude that looks directly to the end goal as the only acceptable outcome. With this attitude comes an acceptance that you may not succeed on the first attempt—or the nineteenth attempt. Failed attempts are viewed as merely part of the process and seen as a very useful way to gain knowledge that moves you toward success. An example of this would be studying for an exam. In your first attempt at studying you simply reread the chapters of your textbook covered in the exam. You find that while this reinforces some of the knowledge you have gained, it does not ensure you have all the information you will need to do well on the test. You know that if you simply read the chapters yet again, there is no guarantee you are going to be any more successful. You determine that you need to find a different approach. In other words, your first attempt was not a complete failure, but it did not achieve the end goal, so you try again with a different method.

On your second try, you copy down all of the main points onto a piece of paper using the section headlines from the chapters. After a short break you come back to your list and write down a summary of what you know about each item on your list. This accomplishes two things: first, you are able to immediately spot areas where you need to learn more, and second, you can check your summaries against the text to make certain what you know is correct and adequate. In this example, while you may not have yet achieved complete success, you will have learned what you need to do next.

In true grit fashion, for your next try, you study those items on your list where you found you needed a bit more information, and then you go through your list again. This time you are able to write down summaries of all the important points, and you are confident you have the knowledge you need to do well on the exam. After this, you still do not stop, but instead you change your approach to use other methods that keep what you have learned fresh in your mind.

Keeping Grit in Mind: Grit to GRIT

The concept of grit has been taken beyond the original studies of successful learning. While the concept of grit as a personality trait was originally recognized as something positive in all areas of activity, encouraging grit became very popular in education circles as a way to help students become more successful. In fact, many of those that were first introduced to grit through education have begun applying it to business, professional development, and their personal lives. Using a grit approach and working until the goal is achieved has been found to be very effective in not only academics, but in many other areas.[2]

The *New York Times* best-selling author Paul G. Stoltz has taken grit and turned it into an acronym (GRIT) to help people remember and use the attributes of a grit mindset.[3] His acronym is Growth, Resilience, Instinct, and Tenacity. Each of these elements is explained in the table below.

Growth	Your propensity to seek and consider new ideas, additional alternatives, different approaches, and fresh perspectives
Resilience	Your capacity to respond constructively and ideally make use of all kinds of adversity
Instinct	Your gut-level capacity to pursue the right goals in the best and smartest ways
Tenacity	The degree to which you persist, commit to, stick with, and go after whatever you choose to achieve

Table 5.2 The GRIT acronym as outlined by Paul G. Stoltz

There is one other thing to keep in mind when it comes to applying grit (or GRIT) to college success. The same sort of persevering approach can not only be used for individual learning activities, but can be applied

2. Neisser, U.; Boodoo, G.; Bouchard, T.J.; Boykin, A.W.; Brody, N.; et al. (1996). "Intelligence: Knowns and unknowns" (PDF). American Psychologist. 51 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.51.2.77.
3. Stoltz, Paul G. (2014). "GRIT The New Science of What It Takes To Persevere, Flourish, Succeed". ClimbStrong Press

to your entire degree. An attitude of tenacity and "sticking with it" until you reach the desired results works just as well for graduation as it does for studying for an exam.

How Do You Get Grit?

A quick Internet search will reveal that there are a large number of articles out there on grit and how to get it. While these sources may vary in their lists, most cover about five basic ideas that all touch upon concepts emphasized by Duckworth. What follows is a brief introduction to each. Note that each thing listed here begins with a verb. In other words, it is an activity for you to do and keep doing in order to build grit.

1. Pursue what interests you.
Personal interest is a great motivator! People tend to have more grit when pursuing things that they have developed an interest in.
2. Practice until you can do it, and then keep practicing.
The idea of practicing has been applied to every skill in human experience. The reason everyone seems to be so fixated with practice is because it is effective and there is no "grittier" activity.
3. Find a purpose in what you do.
Purpose is truly the driver for anything we pursue. If you have a strong purpose in any activity, you have reason to persist at it. Think in terms of end goals and why doing something is worth it. Purpose answers the question of "Why should I accomplish this?"
4. Have hope in what you are doing.
Have hope in what you are doing and in how it will make things different for you or others. While this is somewhat related to purpose, it should be viewed as a separate and positive overall outlook in regard to what you are trying to achieve. Hope gives value to purpose. If purpose is the goal, hope is why the goal is worth attaining at all.
5. Surround yourself with gritty people.
Persistence and tenacity tend to rub off on others, and the opposite does as well. As social creatures we often adopt the behaviors we find in the groups we hang out with. If you are surrounded by people that quit early, before achieving their goals, you may find it acceptable to give up early as well. On the other hand, if your peers are all achievers with grit, you will tend to exhibit grit yourself.

Application
Get a Grit Partner
It is an unfortunate statistic that far too many students who begin college never complete their degree. Over the years a tremendous amount of research has gone into why some students succeed while others do not. After reading about grit, you will probably not be surprised to learn that the research has shown it to not only be a major contributor of learning but to be one of the strongest factors contributing to student graduation.
While that may seem obvious since, by definition, grit is a tendency to keep going until you reach your goal, there was something very significant that turned up in the details of a study conducted by American College Testing (also known as ACT). ACT is a nonprofit organization that administers the college admissions test by the same name, and they have been looking at over 50 years of student persistence data to figure out why some students complete college while others do not. What they have found is that the probability a student will stay in college is tied directly to social connections.[4] In other words, students that found someone they connected with and that provided a sense of accountability dramatically increased their grit. It did not matter if the person was another student, an instructor, or someone else. What did matter is that they felt a strong motivation to keep working, even when their college experience was at its most difficult. It has been surmised that from a psychological perspective, the extra grit comes from not wanting to disappoint the person they have connected with. Regardless of the reason, the data show that having a grit partner is one of the most effective ways to statistically increase your chances of graduation.
A grit partner does not have to be a formal relationship. Your partner can simply be a classmate—someone that you can talk with. It can be an instructor you admire or someone else that you establish a connection

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4. King, David R., NduM, Edwin, Can Psychosocial Factors Predict First-to Second Year College Retention Above and Beyond Standard Variables, ACT (2017) https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1656-psychosocial-factors-retention-2017-12.pdf

with. It can even be a family member who will encourage you—someone you do not want to disappoint. What you are looking for is someone who will help motivate you, either by their example or by their willingness to give you a pep talk when you need it. The key is that it is someone you respect and who will encourage you to do well in school.

Right now, think about someone who could be your grit partner. Keep in mind that you may not have the same grit partner throughout your entire college experience. You may begin with another classmate but later find that a school staff member steps into the role. Later, as you near graduation, you may find that your favorite instructor motivates you more to do well in school than anyone else. Regardless, the importance of finding the social connection that helps your grit is important.

Uses and Gratification Theory and Learning

In the middle of the last century, experts held some odd beliefs that we might find exceptionally strange in our present age. For example, many scholars were convinced that not only was learning a passive activity, but that mass media such as movies, television, and newspapers held significant control over us as individuals. The thinking at that time was that we were helpless to think for ourselves or make choices about learning or the media we consumed. The idea was that we just simply ingested information fed to us and we were almost completely manipulated by it.

What changed this way of thinking was a significant study on audience motivations for watching different political television programs.[5] The study found that not only did people make decisions about what information they consumed, but they also had preferences in content and how it was delivered. In other words, people were active in their choices about information. What is more important is that the research began to show that our own needs, goals, and personal opinions are bigger drivers for our choices in information than anything else. This gave rise to what became known as the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT).

Figure 5.4 Concept maps, or idea clusters, are used to gather and connect ideas. The exercise of creating, recreating, and improving them can be an excellent way to build and internalize a deeper knowledge of subjects. (Credit: Johnny Goldstien / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

At first, personal choices about television programs might seem a strange topic for a chapter on learning, but if you think about it, learning at its simplest is the consumption of information to meet a specific need. You choose to learn something so you can attain certain goals. This makes education and UGT a natural fit.

Applying UGT to education is a *learner-centered* approach that focuses on helping you take control of how and what you learn. Not only that, but it gives you a framework as an informed learner and allows you to

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5. Blumler, J. G., & McQuail, D. (1969). Television in politics: Its uses and influence. University of Chicago Press.

choose information and learning activities with the end results in mind. The next section examines UGT a little more closely and shows how it can be directly applied to learning.

The Uses and Gratification Model

The Uses and Gratification model is how people are thought to react according to UGT. It considers individual behavior and motivation as the primary driver for media consumption. In education this means that the needs of the learner are what determine the interaction with learning content such as textbooks, lectures, and other information sources. Since any educational program is essentially content and delivery (the same as with any media), the Uses and Gratification model can be applied to meet student needs, student satisfaction, and student academic success. This is something that is not recognized in many other learning theories since they begin with the premise that it is learning content and how it is delivered that influences the learner more than the learner's own wants and expectations.

The main assumption of the Uses and Gratification model is that media consumers will seek out and return to specific media sources based on a personal need. For learners this is exceptionally useful since it gives an insight and the ability to positively influence their own motivations, expectations, and the perceived value of their education.

Figure 5.5 The Uses and Gratification model indicates that people will actively seek out and integrate specific media into their lives. (Credit: Garry Knight / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

If you understand the key concepts of the Uses and Gratification model, you can make informed decisions about your own learning: how you learn, which materials you use to learn, and what motivates you to learn. An illustration of this was found in the example given in the previous section on grit. There, a series of exam study activities were presented—first reading the appropriate chapters, then making a list of chapter concepts and reviewing what was known, then returning to learn the information needed to fill the gaps. Each activity was chosen by the learner based on how well it fit their needs to help reach the goal of doing well on an exam.

Here we should offer a brief word of caution about being wary when choosing materials and media. There is a great deal of misleading and inaccurate information presented via the Internet and social media. Making informed decisions about your learning and the material you consume includes checking sources and avoiding information that is not credible.

> **"We are able to consciously make learning choices based on our own identified needs and what we hope to gain by that learning."**

In his book *Key Themes in Media Theory*,[6] Dan Laughey presents the UGT model according to its original authors as a single sentence that divides each area of influence into the following concerns:
   Social and psychological origins of …

   - needs, which generate …
   - expectations of …
   - the mass media or other sources, which lead to …
   - differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in …
   - needs gratification and …
   - other unintended consequences.

Taken as a list or a single sentence, this can be a bit overwhelming to digest. There are many things being said at the same time, and they may not all be immediately clear. To better understand what each of the "areas of concern" are and how they can impact learning, each has been separated and explained in the table below.

Area of Concern	What it means for you	How it applies to learning	Real-world example
1. Social and psychological origins of …	Your motivations, not only as a student but as a person, and both the social and psychological factors that influence you	This can be everything from the original motivation behind enrolling in school in the first place, down to more specific goals like why you want to learn to write and communicate well.	A drive to be self-supporting and to take on a productive role in society.
2. needs, which generate …	Better job, increased income, satisfying career, prestige	This can include the area of study you select and the school you choose to attend.	Pursuing a degree to seek a career in a field you enjoy.
3. expectations of …	Expectation and perception (preconceived and continuing) of educational material	What you expect to learn to fulfill goals and meet needs.	Understanding what you need to accomplish the smaller goals. An example would be "study for an exam."
4. the mass media or other sources, which lead to…	The content and learning activities of the program	Selection of content aimed at fulfilling needs. Results are student satisfaction, perceived value, and continued enrollment.	Choosing which learning activities to use (e.g., texts, watch videos, research alternative content, etc.).
5. differential patterns of media exposure, resulting in …	Frequency and level of participation	How you engage with learning activities and how often. Results are student satisfaction and perceived value, and continued enrollment.	When, how often, and how much time you spend in learning activities.
6. needs gratification and …	Better job, increased income, satisfying career, prestige, more immediate goals like pass an exam, earn a good grade, etc.	Needs fulfillment and completion of goals.	Learning activities that meet your learning needs, including fulfillment of your original goals.
7. other unintended consequences.	Increased skills and knowledge, entertainment, social involvement and networking	Causes positive loop-back into 4, 5, and 6, reinforcing those positive outcomes.	Things you learn beyond your initial goals.

   Table 5.3

6. Dan Laughey, (2007). Key Themes in Media Theory, Open University Press.

What to Do with UGT

On the surface, UGT may seem overly complex, but this is due to its attempt to capture everything that influences how and why we take in information. At this point in your understanding, the main thing to focus on is the bigger idea that our motivations, our end goals, and our expectations are what drive us to learn. If we are aware of these motivations, we can use them to make influential decisions about what we learn and how we learn.

One of the things that will become apparent as you continue reading this chapter and doing the included activities is that all of it fits within the UGT model. Everything about learning styles, your own attitude about learning, how you prefer to learn, and what you get out of it are covered in UGT. Being familiar with it gives you a way to identify and apply everything else you will learn about learning. As you continue in this chapter, rather than looking at each topic as a stand-alone idea, think about where each fits in the Uses and Gratification model. Does it influence your motivations, or does it help you make decisions about the way you learn? This way UGT can provide a way for you to see the value and how to apply everything you learn from this point forward and for every learning experience along the way.

If you were going to define how UGT applies to learning with a few quick statements, it would look something like this:

UGT asks:

- What is it that motivates you to learn something?
- What need does it fulfill?
- What do you expect to have happen with certain learning activities?
- How can you choose the right learning activities to better ensure you meet your needs and expectations?
- What other things might result from your choices?

Analysis Question

Take a moment to think about your own choices when it comes to consuming media. Are there certain sources you prefer? Why? What needs or gratifications do those particular sources fulfill in a way that others do not? Now, use the same process to analyze your current college experience. Are there certain classes or activities you like more than others? Why? Do any of your reasons have to do with the needs or gratifications the classes or learning activities fulfill?

After you have answered those questions, you can always step beyond mere analysis and determine what you could change to make the classes or activities you enjoy less better fulfill your needs.

Combating Negative Bias

In addition to being a motivated learner through the use of grit and UGT, there is a third natural psychological tendency you should be aware of. It is a tendency that you should guard against. Ignoring the fact that it exists can not only adversely affect learning, but it can set up roadblocks that may prevent you from achieving many goals. This tendency is called *negative bias.*

Negative bias is the psychological trait of focusing on the negative aspects of a situation rather than the positive. An example of this in a learning environment would be earning a 95 percent score on an assignment but obsessing over the 5 percent of the points that were missed. Another example would be worrying and thinking negative thoughts about yourself over a handful of courses where you did not do as well as in others—so much so that you begin to doubt your abilities altogether.

Figure 5.6 Some level of worry and concern is natural, but an overwhelming amount of negative thoughts about yourself, including doubt in your abilities and place in school, can impede your learning and stifle your success. You can develop strategies to recognize and overcome these feelings. (Credit: Inzmam Kahn / Pexels)

Unfortunately, this is a human tendency that can often overwhelm a student. As a pure survival mechanism it does have its usefulness in that it reminds us to be wary of behaviors that can result in undesirable outcomes. Imagine that as a child playing outside, you have seen dozens if not hundreds of bees over the years. But once, out of all those other times, you were stung by a single bee. Now, every time you see a bee you recall the sting, and you now have a negative bias toward bees in general. Whenever possible you avoid bees altogether.

It is easy to see how this psychological system could be beneficial in those types of situations, but it can be a hindrance in learning since a large part of the learning process often involves failure on early attempts. Recognizing this is a key to overcoming negative bias. Another way to combat negative bias is to purposefully focus on successes and to acknowledge earlier attempts that fail as just a part of the learning.

What follows are a few methods for overcoming negative bias and negative self-talk. Each focuses on being aware of any negative attitude or emphasizing the positive aspects in a situation.

Be aware of any negative bias. Keep an eye out for any time you find yourself focusing on some negative aspect, whether toward your own abilities or on some specific situation. Whenever you recognize that you are exhibiting a negative bias toward something, stop and look for the positive parts of the experience. Think back to what you have learned about grit, how any lack of success is only temporary, and what you have learned that gets you closer to your goal.

Focus on the positive before you begin. While reversing the impact of negative bias on your learning is helpful, it can be even more useful to prevent it in the first place. One way to do this is to look for the positives before you begin a task. An example of this would be receiving early feedback for an assignment you are working on. To accomplish this, you can often ask your instructor or one of your classmates to look over your work and provide some informal comments. If the feedback is positive then you know you are on the right track. That is useful information. If the feedback seems to indicate that you need to make a number of corrections and adjustments, then that is even more valuable information, and you can use it to greatly improve the assignment for a much better final grade. In either case, accurate feedback is what you really want most, and both outcomes are positive for you.

Keep a gratitude and accomplishment journal. Again, the tendency to recall and overemphasize the negative instances while ignoring or forgetting about the positive outcomes is the nature of negative bias. Sometimes we need a little help remembering the positives, and we can prompt our memories by keeping a journal. Just as in a diary, the idea is to keep a flowing record of the positive things that happen, the lessons you learned from instances that were "less than successful," and all accomplishments you make toward learning. In your journal you can write or paste anything that you appreciated or that has positive outcomes. Whenever you are not feeling up to a challenge or when negative bias is starting to wear on you, you can look over your journal to remind yourself of previous accomplishments in the face of adversity.

Analysis Question
Building the Foundation
In this section you read about three major factors that contribute to your motivation as a learner: grit and perseverance, your own motivations for learning (UGT), and the pitfalls of negative bias. Now it is time to do a little self-analysis and reflection.

Which of these three areas do you feel strongest in? Are you a person that naturally has grit, or do you better understand your own motivations for learning (using UGT)? Do you struggle with negativity bias, or is it something that you rarely have to deal with?

Determine in which of these areas you are strongest, and think about what things make you so strong. Is it a positive attitude (you always see the glass as half full as opposed to half empty), or do you know exactly why you are in college and exactly what you expect to learn?

After you have analyzed your strongest area, then do the same for the two weaker ones. What makes you susceptible to challenges in these areas? Do you have a difficult time sticking with things or possibly focus too much on the negative? Look back at the sections on your two weakest areas, and put together a plan for overcoming them. For each one, choose a behavior you intend to change and think of some way you will change it.

5.3 It's All in the Mindset

Questions to consider:

- What is a growth mindset, and how does it affect my learning?
- What are performance goals versus learning goals?

In the previous sections of this chapter you have focused on a number of concepts and models about learning. One of the things they all have in common is that they utilize different approaches to education by presenting new ways to think about learning. In each of these, the common element has been a better understanding of yourself as a learner and how to apply what you know about yourself to your own learning experience. If you were to distill all that you have learned in this chapter so far down to a single factor, it would be about using your mindset to your best advantage. In this next section, you will examine how all of this works in a broader sense by learning about the significance of certain mindsets and how they can hinder or promote your own learning efforts.

Figure 5.7 Many fields of study and work create intersections of growth and fixed mindset. People may feel great ability to grow and learn in some areas, like art and communication, but feel more limited in others, such as planning and financials. Recognizing these intersections will help you approach new topics and tasks. (Credit: mentatdgt / Pexels)

Performance vs. Learning Goals

As you have discovered in this chapter, much of our ability to learn is governed by our motivations and goals. What has not yet been covered in detail has been how sometimes hidden goals or mindsets can impact the learning process. In truth, we all have goals that we might not be fully aware of, or if we are aware of them, we might not understand how they help or restrict our ability to learn. An illustration of this can be seen in a comparison of a student that has *performance*-based goals with a student that has *learning*-based goals.

If you are a student with strict performance goals, your primary psychological concern might be to appear intelligent to others. At first, this might not seem to be a bad thing for college, but it can truly limit your ability to move forward in your own learning. Instead, you would tend to play it safe without even realizing it. For example, a student who is strictly performance-goal-oriented will often only says things in a class-room discussion when they think it will make them look knowledgeable to the instructor or their classmates. For example, a performance-oriented student might ask a question that she knows is beyond the topic being covered (e.g., asking about the economics of Japanese whaling while discussing the book *Moby Dick* in an American literature course). Rarely will they ask a question in class because they actually do not understand a concept. Instead they will ask questions that make them look intelligent to others or in an effort to "stump the teacher." When they do finally ask an honest question, it may be because they are more afraid that their lack of understanding will result in a poor performance on an exam rather than simply wanting to learn.

If you are a student who is driven by learning goals, your interactions in classroom discussions are usually quite different. You see the opportunity to share ideas and ask questions as a way to gain knowledge quickly. In a classroom discussion you can ask for clarification immediately if you don't quite understand what is being discussed. If you are a person guided by learning goals, you are less worried about what others think since you are there to learn and you see that as the most important goal.

Another example where the difference between the two mindsets is clear can be found in assignments and other coursework. If you are a student who is more concerned about performance, you may avoid work that is challenging. You will take the "easy A" route by relying on what you already know. You will not step out of your comfort zone because your psychological goals are based on approval of your performance instead of being motivated by learning.

This is very different from a student with a learning-based psychology. If you are a student who is motivated by learning goals, you may actively seek challenging assignments, and you will put a great deal of effort into using the assignment to expand on what you already know. While getting a good grade is important to you, what is even more important is the learning itself.

If you find that you sometimes lean toward performance-based goals, do not feel discouraged. Many of the best students tend to initially focus on performance until they begin to see the ways it can restrict their learning. The key to switching to learning-based goals is often simply a matter of first recognizing the difference and seeing how making a change can positively impact your own learning.

What follows in this section is a more in-depth look at the difference between performance- and learning-based goals. This is followed by an exercise that will give you the opportunity to identify, analyze, and determine a positive course of action in a situation where you believe you could improve in this area.

What Students Say

- In the past, did you feel like you had control over your own learning?
    ◦ No. Someone has always dictated how and what I learned.
    ◦ Yes. I always look for ways to take control of what and how I learned.
    ◦ I am uncertain. I never thought about it before.
- Have you ever heard of learning styles or do you know your own learning style?
    ◦ No. I have never heard of learning styles.
    ◦ Yes. I have heard of learning styles and know my own.
    ◦ Yes. I have heard of learning styles, but I don't think they're accurate or relate to me.
- Which factors other than intelligence do you think have the greatest influence on learning?
    ◦ Motivation
    ◦ Perseverance
    ◦ Understanding how I learn
    ◦ Good teachers and support

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

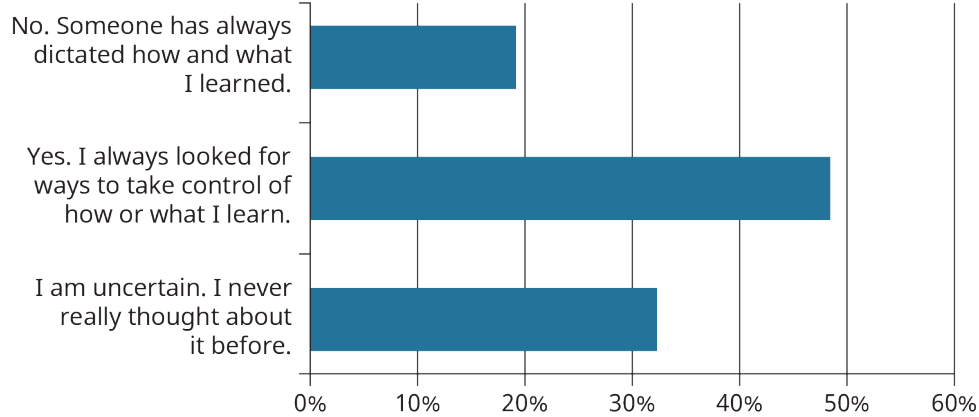In the past, did you feel like you had control over your own learning?

Figure 5.8

Have you ever heard of learning styles or do you know your own learning style?
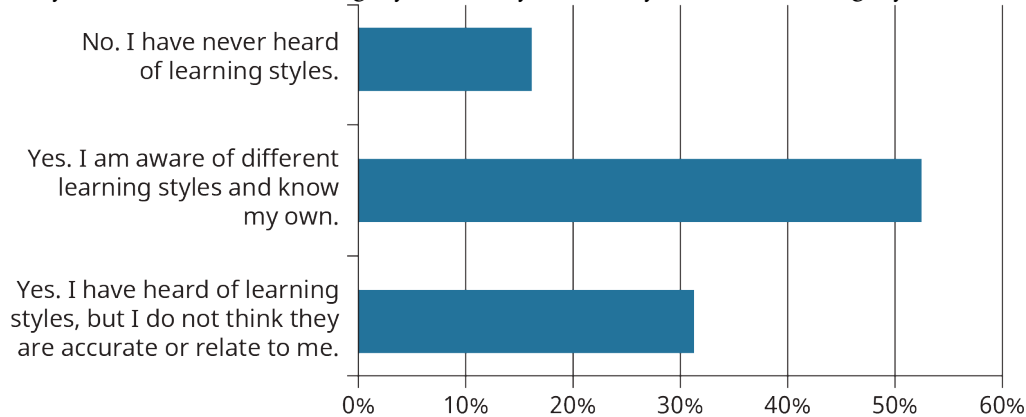

Figure 5.9

Which factors other than intelligence do you think have the greatest influence on learning?
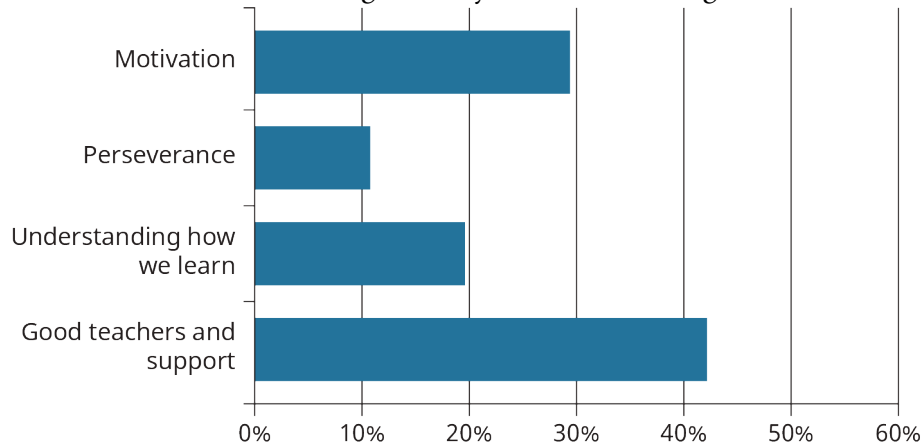

Figure 5.10

Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

The research-based model of these two mindsets and their influence on learning was presented in 1988 by

Carol Dweck.[7] In Dr. Dweck's work, she determined that a student's perception about their own learning accompanied by a broader goal of learning had a significant influence on their ability to overcome challenges and grow in knowledge and ability. This has become known as the Fixed vs. Growth Mindset model. In this model, the *performance*-goal-oriented student is represented by the *fixed* mindset, while the *learning*-goal-oriented student is represented by the *growth* mindset.

In the following graphic, based on Dr. Dweck's research, you can see how many of the components associated with learning are impacted by these two mindsets.

Fixed Mindset **Growth Mindset**

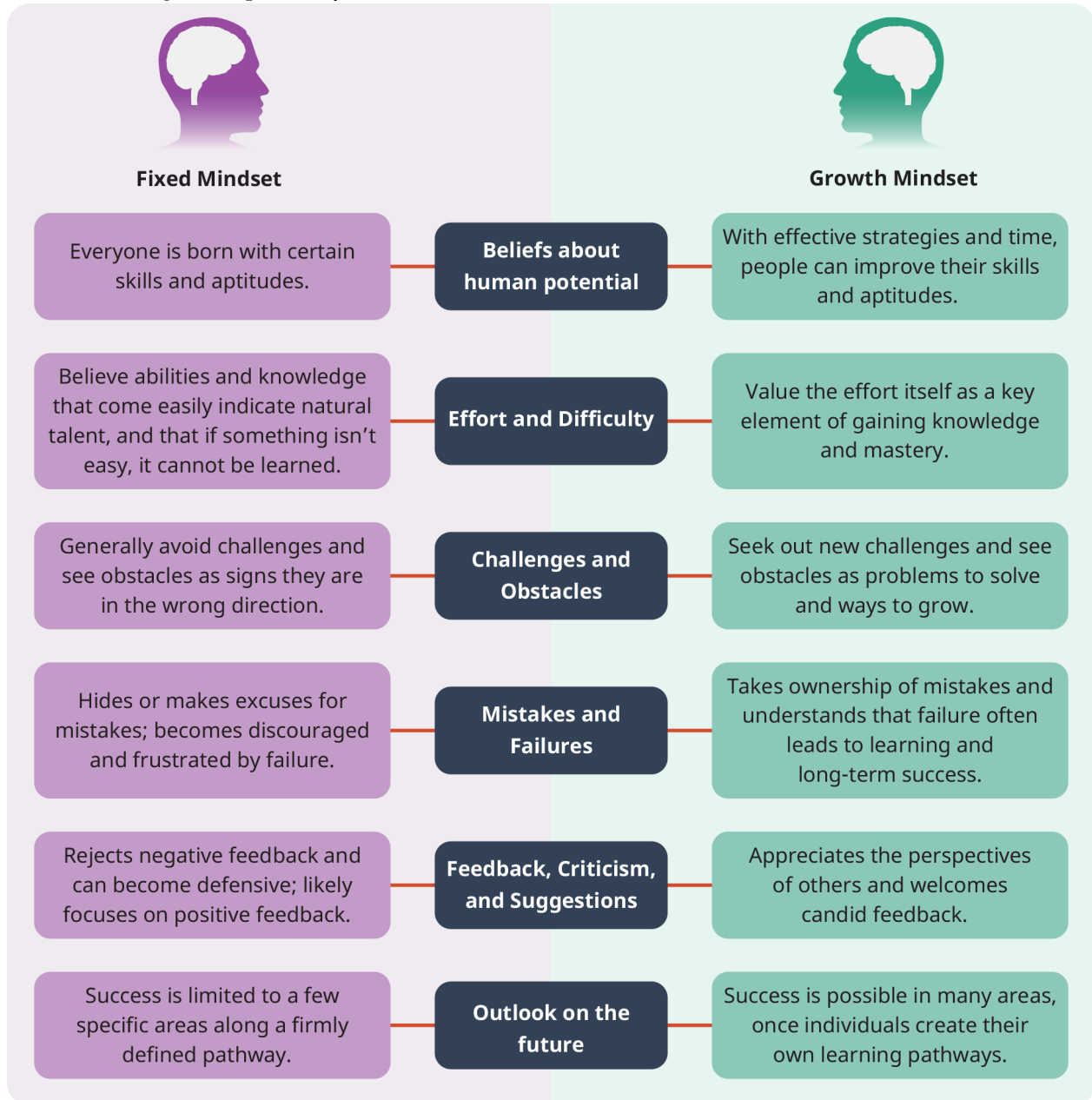| Fixed Mindset		Growth Mindset
Everyone is born with certain skills and aptitudes.	**Beliefs about human potential**	With effective strategies and time, people can improve their skills and aptitudes.
Believe abilities and knowledge that come easily indicate natural talent, and that if something isn't easy, it cannot be learned.	**Effort and Difficulty**	Value the effort itself as a key element of gaining knowledge and mastery.
Generally avoid challenges and see obstacles as signs they are in the wrong direction.	**Challenges and Obstacles**	Seek out new challenges and see obstacles as problems to solve and ways to grow.
Hides or makes excuses for mistakes; becomes discouraged and frustrated by failure.	**Mistakes and Failures**	Takes ownership of mistakes and understands that failure often leads to learning and long-term success.
Rejects negative feedback and can become defensive; likely focuses on positive feedback.	**Feedback, Criticism, and Suggestions**	Appreciates the perspectives of others and welcomes candid feedback.
Success is limited to a few specific areas along a firmly defined pathway.	**Outlook on the future**	Success is possible in many areas, once individuals create their own learning pathways.

Figure 5.11 The differences between fixed and growth mindset are clear when aligned to key elements of learning and personality. (Credit: Based on work by Dr. Carol Dweck)

The Growth Mindset and Lessons About Failing

Something you may have noticed is that a growth mindset would tend to give a learner grit and persistence.

7. Dweck, C.S. & Leggett, E.L. (1988). A Social-Cognitive Approach to Motivation and Personality.

If you had learning as your major goal, you would normally keep trying to attain that goal even if it took you multiple attempts. Not only that, but if you learned a little bit more with each try you would see each attempt as a success, even if you had not achieved complete mastery of whatever it was you were working to learn.

With that in mind, it should come as no surprise that Dr. Dweck found that those people who believed their abilities could change through learning (growth vs. a fixed mindset) readily accepted learning challenges and persisted despite early failures.

Improving Your Ability to Learn

As strange as it may seem, research into fixed vs. growth mindsets has shown that if you believe you can learn something new, you greatly improve your ability to learn. At first, this may seem like the sort of feel-good advice we often encounter in social media posts or quotes that are intended to inspire or motivate us (e.g., *believe in yourself!*), but in looking at the differences outlined between a fixed and a growth mindset, you can see how each part of the growth mindset path would increase your probability of success when it came to learning.

Activity

Very few people have a strict fixed or growth mindset all of the time. Often we tend to lean one way or another in certain situations. For example, a person trying to improve their ability in a sport they enjoy may exhibit all of the growth mindset traits and characteristics, but they find themselves blocked in a fixed mindset when they try to learn something in another area like computer programming or arithmetic.

In this exercise, do a little self-analysis and think of some areas where you may find yourself hindered by a fixed mindset. Using the outline presented below, in the far right column, write down how you can change your own behavior for each of the parts of the learning process. What will you do to move from a fixed to a growth mindset? For example, say you were trying to learn to play a musical instrument. In the *Challenges* row, you might pursue a growth path by trying to play increasingly more difficult songs rather than sticking to the easy ones you have already mastered. In the *Criticism* row, you might take someone's comment about a weakness in timing as a motivation for you to practice with a metronome. For *Success of others* you could take inspiration from a famous musician that is considered a master and study their techniques.

Whatever it is that you decide you want to use for your analysis, apply each of the Growth characteristics to determine a course of action to improve.

Parts of the learning process	Growth characteristic	What will you do to adopt a growth mindset?
Challenges	Embraces challenges	
Obstacles	Persists despite setbacks	
Effort	Sees effort as a path to success	
Criticism	Learns from criticism	
Success of Others	Finds learning and inspiration in the success of others	

Table 5.4

5.4 Learning Styles

Questions to consider:

- What are learning styles, and do they really work?
- How do I take advantage of learning styles in a way that works for me?
- How can I combine learning styles for better outcomes?
- What opportunities and resources are available for students with disabilities?

Several decades ago, a new way of thinking about learning became very prominent in education. It was based on the concept that each person has a preferred way to learn. It was thought that these preferences had to do with each person's natural tendencies toward one of their senses. The idea was that learning might be easier if a student sought out content that was specifically oriented to their favored sense. For example, it was thought that a student who preferred to learn visually would respond better to pictures and diagrams.

Over the years there were many variations on the basic idea, but one of the most popular theories was known as the VAK model. VAK was an acronym for the three types of learning, each linked to one of the basic senses thought to be used by students: visual, aural, and kinesthetic. What follows is an outline of each of these and the preferred method.

Visual: The student prefers pictures, images, and the graphic display of information to learn. An example would be looking at an illustration that showed how to do something.

Aural: The student prefers sound as a way to learn. Examples would be listening to a lecture or a podcast.

Kinesthetic: The student prefers using their body, hands, and sense of touch. An example would be doing something physical, such as examining an object rather than reading about it or looking at an illustration.

The Truth about Learning Styles

In many ways these ideas about learning styles made some sense. Because of this, educators encouraged students to find out about their own learning styles. They developed tests and other techniques to help students determine which particular sense they preferred to use for learning, and in some cases learning materials were produced in multiple ways that focused on each of the different senses. That way, each individual learner could participate in learning activities that were tailored to their specific preferences.

While it initially seemed that dividing everyone by learning styles provided a leap forward in education, continued research began to show that the fixation on this new model might not have been as effective as it was once thought. In fact, in some cases, the way learning styles were actually being used created roadblocks to learning. This was because the popularization of this new idea brought on a rush to use learning styles in ways that failed to take into account several important aspects that are listed below:

A person does not always prefer the same learning style all the time or for each situation. For example, some learners might enjoy lectures during the day but prefer reading in the evenings. Or they may prefer looking at diagrams when learning about mechanics but prefer reading for history topics.

There are more preferences involved in learning than just the three that became popular. These other preferences can become nearly impossible to make use of within certain styles. For example, some prefer to learn in a more social environment that includes interaction with other learners. Reading can be difficult or restrictive as a group effort. Recognized learning styles beyond the original three include: **social** (preferring to learn as a part of group activity), **solitary** (preferring to learn alone or using self-study), or **logical** (preferring to use logic, reasoning, etc.).

Students that thought they were limited to a single preferred learning style found themselves convinced that they could not do as well with content that was presented in a way that differed from their style.[8] For example, a student that had identified as a visual learner might feel they were at a significant disadvantage when listening to a lecture. Sometimes they even believed they had an even greater impairment that prevented them from learning that way at all.

Some forms of learning are extremely difficult in activities delivered in one style or another. Subjects like computer programming would be almost impossible to learn using an aural learning style. And, while it is possible to read about a subject such as how to swing a bat or how to do a medical procedure, actually applying that knowledge in a learning environment is difficult if the subject is something that requires a physical skill.

Knowing and Taking Advantage of Learning Styles in a Way That Works for You

The problem with relying on learning styles comes from thinking that just one defines your needs. Coupling what you know about learning styles with what you know about UGT can make a difference in your own learning. Rather than being constrained by a single learning style, or limiting your activities to a certain kind of media, you may choose media that best fit your needs for what you are trying to learn at a particular time.

8. Harold Pashler, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer and Robert Bjork. Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, Vol. 9, No. 3 (December 2008).

Following are a couple of ways you might combine your learning style preference with a given learning situation:

You are trying to learn how to build something but find the written instructions confusing so you watch a video online that shows someone building the same thing.

You have a long commute on the bus but reading while riding makes you dizzy. You choose an aural solution by listening to pre-recorded podcasts or a mobile device that reads your texts out loud.

These examples show that by recognizing and understanding what different learning styles have to offer, you can use the techniques that are best suited for you and that work best under the circumstances of the moment. You may also find yourself using two learning styles at the same time – as when you watch a live demonstration or video in which a person shows you how to do something while verbally explaining what you are being shown. This helps to reinforce the learning as it utilizes different aspects of your thinking. Using learning styles in an informed way can improve both the speed and the quality of your learning.

Get Connected

Finding content related to a subject or topic can be relatively easy, but you must use caution and rely on reputable sources. Relatively little of the material on the Web provides a way to ensure accuracy or balance.

Below are descriptions of common informational sites with varying degrees of reliability:

Khan Academy: This site is full of useful tutorials and videos on a wide range of subjects.

Wikipedia: Wikipedia is often frowned upon in some academic circles, because review of its content takes place *after* publication, potentially resulting in inaccurate or misleading information being available. But Wikipedia can provide a brief overview of a topic, and its lists of references is often quite extensive. You probably shouldn't rely Wikipedia as your only source, but it can be useful.

Government website:. Most items that governments administer are referenced on informational websites. In the United States, these include educational statistics, economic data, health information, and many other topics.

When choosing alternate content, it is imperative to compare it to the content that is being provided to you as a part of your course. If the alternate content does not line up, you should view it with a healthy skepticism. In those cases, it is always a good idea to share the content with your instructor and ask their opinion.

Activity

In this activity you will try an experiment by combining learning styles to see if it is something that works for you. The experiment will test the example of combining reading/writing and aural learning styles for better memorization.

To begin, you will start with a short segment of numbers. You will read the numbers only one time without saying them aloud. When you are finished, wait 10 seconds and try to remember the numbers in sequence by writing them down.

67914528

After you have finished you will repeat the experiment with a new set of numbers, but this time you will read them aloud, wait 10 seconds, and then see how easy they are to remember. During this part of the experiment you are free to say the numbers in any way you like. For example, the number 8734 could be read as eight-seven-three-four, eighty-seven thirty-four, or any combination you would like.

10387264

Did you find that there was a difference in your ability to memorize a short sequence of numbers for 10 seconds? Even if you were able to remember both, was the example that combined learning styles easier? What about if you had to wait for a full minute before attempting to rewrite the numbers? Would that make a difference?

What about Students with Disabilities?

Students with disabilities are sometimes the most informed when it comes to making decisions about their own learning. They should understand that it is in their best interest to take ownership of their own approach to education, especially when it comes to leveraging resources and opportunities. In this section, you will learn about the laws that regulate education for students with disabilities as well as look at some resources that are available to them.

Just like anyone else, under the law, qualified students with disabilities are entitled to the same education colleges and universities provide to students without disabilities. Even though a particular disability may

make attending college more difficult, awareness on the part of the government, learning institutions, and the students themselves has brought about a great deal of change over the years. Now, students with disabilities find that they have available appropriate student services, campus accessibility, and academic resources that can make school attendance and academic success possible.

Due to this increased support and advocacy, colleges have seen an increase of students with disabilities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2012, 11.1 percent of the total undergraduate population in the United States was made up of people with disabilities.[9]

The Legal Rights of Students with Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects students "with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities."[10] Learning definitely falls within the definition of major life activities.

In addition to Section 504, another set of laws that greatly help learners with disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (also known as ADA). Both of these acts have been driving forces in making certain that students with disabilities have equal access to higher education, and they have been instrumental in helping educators looking for new ways and resources to provide services that do just that.

What follows is a list of services that schools commonly provide to help students with disabilities. These are often referred to as *ADA accommodations* and are named after the American with Disabilities Act:

- Recordings of class lectures or lecture transcription by in-class note takers
- Text readers or other technologies that can deliver content in another format
- Test or assessment accommodations
- Interpreter services and Braille transcriptions
- Physical access accommodations
- Accommodations of time and due dates

Most colleges will have policies and staff that are designated to help arrange for these types of accommodations. They are often found within the Department of Student Services or in related departments within your college campus. If you are a student with disabilities protected under these acts, it is in your best interest to contact the person responsible for ADA accommodations at your school. Even if you decide that you do not need accommodations, it is a good idea to find out about any services and policies the school has in place.

Organizations

In addition to the accommodations that schools commonly provide, there are also a number of national and local organizations that can provide assistance and advice when it comes to being a student with a disability. If you fit into this category, it is recommended that you make contact with one or more of these organizations in order to find out how they can help. These can be tremendously beneficial resources that offer everything from information and support to simple social connections that can make pursuing a formal education easier.

5.5 Personality Types and Learning

Questions to consider:

- Is there any connection between personality types and learning?
- Can the Myers-Briggs test be used to identify personality traits and learning styles?
- Is there a real correlation between personality styles and learning?
- What is the impact on learning with work that you enjoy?

9. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Digest of Education Statistics, 2017 (2018-070), Chapter 3.
10. U.S. Department of Education. Protecting Students with Disabilities: Frequently Asked Questions. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html

Much like learning styles, there have been a number of theories surrounding the idea that different personality types may prefer different kinds of learning. Again, this builds on the original learning style concept that people may have a single preference toward how they learn, and then adds to it that certain personality traits may determine which learning style a person prefers.

Since it has already been determined that learning styles are more effective when selected for the subject being learned rather than the sensory preference of the learner, it might seem foolish to revisit another learning style theory. But, in this case, understanding how personality traits and learning styles are categorized can be useful in making decisions and choices for your own learning activities. In other words, we won't dismiss the theory out of hand without first seeing if there is anything useful in it.

One part of this theory that can be useful is the identification of personality traits that affect your motivation, emotions, and interests toward learning. You have already read a great deal about how these internal characteristics can influence your learning. What knowing about personality traits and learning can do for you is to help you be aware and informed about how these affect you so you can deal with them directly.

Myers-Briggs: Identifying Personality Traits and Styles

The Myers-Briggs system is one of the most popular personality tests, and it is relatively well known. It has seen a great deal of use in the business world with testing seminars and presentations on group dynamics. In fact, it is so popular that you may already be familiar with it and may have taken a test yourself to find out which of the 16 personality types you most favor.

The basic concept of Myers-Briggs is that there are four main traits. These traits are represented by two opposites, seen in the table below.

Extroverted (E)	vs.	Introverted (I)
Intuition (N)	vs.	Sensing (S)
Feeling (F)	vs.	Thinking (T)
Judging (J)	vs.	Perceiving (P)

Table 5.5

It is thought that people generally exhibit one trait or the other in each of these categories, or that they fall along a spectrum between the two opposites. For example, an individual might exhibit both Feeling and Thinking personality traits, but they will favor one more than the other.

Also note that with each of these traits there is a letter in parentheses. The letter is used to represent the specific traits when they are combined to define a personality type (e.g., Extrovert is E and Introvert is I, Intuition is N, etc.). To better understand these, each is briefly explained.

Extroverted (E) vs. Introverted (I): In the Myers-Briggs system, the traits of Extroverted and Introverted are somewhat different from the more common interpretations of the two words. The definition is more about an individual's attitude, interests, and motivation. The extrovert is primarily motivated by the outside world and social interaction, while the introvert is often more motivated by things that are internal to them—things like their own interests.

Intuition (N) vs. Sensing (S): This personality trait is classified as a preference toward one way of perceiving or another. It is concerned with how people tend to arrive at conclusions. A person on the intuitive end of the spectrum often perceives things in broader categories. A part of their process for "knowing things" is internal and is often described as *having a hunch* or *a gut feeling*. This is opposed to the preferred method of a sensing person, who often looks to direct observation as a means of perception. They prefer to arrive at a conclusion by details and facts, or by testing something with their senses.

Feeling (F) vs. Thinking (T): This trait is considered a decision-making process over the information gathered through the perception (N versus S). People that find themselves more on the Feeling end of the spectrum tend to respond based on their feelings and empathy. Examples of this would be conclusions about what is good versus bad or right versus wrong based on how they feel things should be. The Thinking per-

son, on the other hand, arrives at opinions based on reason and logic. For them, feeling has little to do with it.

Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P): This category can be thought of as a personal preference for using either the Feeling versus Thinking (decision-making) or the Intuition versus Sensing (perceiving) when forming opinions about the outside world. A person that leans toward the Judging side of the spectrum approaches things in a structured way—usually using Sensing and Thinking traits. The Perceiving person often thinks of structure as somewhat inhibiting. They tend to make more use of Intuition and Feeling in their approach to life.

The Impact of Personality Styles on Learning

To find out their own personality traits and learning styles, a person takes an approved Myers-Briggs test, which consists of a series of questions that help pinpoint their preferences. These preferences are then arranged in order to build a profile using each of the four categories.

For example, a person that answered questions in a way that favored Extroverted tendencies along with a preference toward Sensing, Thinking, and Judging would be designated as ESTJ personality type. Another person that tended more toward answers that aligned with Intuitive traits than Sensing traits would fall into the ENTJ category.

ESTJ	ISTJ	ENTJ	INTJ
ESTP	ISTP	ENTP	INTP
ESFJ	ISFJ	ENFJ	INFJ
ESFP	ISFP	ENFP	INFP

Table 5.6 Personality Types

As with other learning style models, Myers-Briggs has received a good deal of criticism based on the artificial restrictions and impairments it tends to suggest. Additionally, the claim that each person has a permanent and unwavering preference towards personality traits and learning styles has not turned out to be as concrete as it was once thought. This has been demonstrated by people taking tests like the Myers-Briggs a few weeks apart and getting different results based on their personal preferences at that time.

What this means is that, just as with the VAK and other learning style models, you should not constrain your own learning activities based on a predetermined model. Neither should you think of yourself as being limited to one set of preferences. Instead, different types of learning and different preferences can better fit your needs at different times. This and how to best apply the idea of personality types influencing learning styles is explained in the next section.

How to Use Personality Type Learning Styles

To recap, personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs can provide a great deal of insight into personal choices toward learning. Unfortunately, many people interpret them as being something that defines them as both a person and a learner. They tell themselves things like "I am an ESTJ, so I am only at my best when I learn a certain way" or "I rely on intuition, so a science course is not for me!" They limit themselves instead of understanding that while they may have particular preferences under a given situation, all of the different categories are open to them and can be put to good use.

What is important to know is that these sorts of models can serve you better as a way to think about learning. They can help you make decisions about how you will go about learning in a way that best suits your needs and goals for that particular task. As an example of how to do this, what follows are several different approaches to learning about the play *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. In each case, Myers-Briggs categories are used to define what sort of activities would help you meet your desired learning goals.

Your assignment is to read *Julius Caesar* as a work of English literature. Your learning goal is not just to read the play, but to be able to compare it to other, more modern works of literature. To do that, it would be beneficial to use a more *introverted* approach so that you can think about the influences that may have

affected each author. You might also want to focus on a *thinking* learning style when examining and comparing the use of words and language in the 17th-century piece to more modern writing styles.

Your use of learning style approaches would be very different if you were assigned to actually perform a scene from *Julius Caesar* as a part of a class. In this case, it would be better for you to rely on an *extroverted* attitude since you will be more concerned with audience reaction than your own inner thoughts about the work. And since one of your goals would be to create a believable character for the audience, you would want to base decisions on the gestures you might make during the performance through *feeling* so that you have empathy with the character and are convincing in your portrayal.

A third, completely different assignment, such as examining the play *Julius Caesar* as a political commentary on English society during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, would have very different goals and therefore should be approached using different learning styles. In this example, you might want to begin by using a *sensing* approach to gather facts about what was happening politically in that time period and then switch to *intuition* for insight into the motivations of Shakespeare and the attitudes of his audience in England at that time.

As you can see in the examples above, the choices about each of the different approaches can be entirely dictated by what you will be doing with the learning. Because of this, being aware of the personality type learning styles you have available to you can make a tremendous difference in both how you go about it and your success.

Analysis Question

To find out more about personality types and learning styles, you can take an online personality test to experience it yourself. Several companies charge for this service, but there are a few that offer tests online for free. Click here for one such free online personality test.

Again, keep in mind that your results can change under different circumstances, but doing it for the first time will give you a place to start.

Afterwards you can click here to read more about the connections between personality and learning styles. There you can look up the results from your personality test and see how much you think it aligns with your learning style preferences. Again, this exercise is not to determine your ultimate learning style, but it is to give you a deeper understanding of what is behind the concept of connecting personality types to learning.

The Impact of Work You Enjoy

For a final word on personality types and learning styles, there is no denying that there are going to be different approaches you enjoy more than others. While you do have the ability to use each of the different approaches to meet the goals of your learning activities, some will come more easily for you in certain situations and some will be more pleasurable. As most people do, you will probably find that your work is actually better when you are doing things you like to do. Because of this, it is to your advantage to recognize your preferred methods of learning and to make use of them whenever possible. As discussed elsewhere in this book, in college you will often have opportunities to make decisions about the assignments you complete. In many instances, your instructor may allow for some creativity in what you do and in the finished product. When those opportunities arise, you have everything to gain by taking a path that will allow you to employ preferences you enjoy most. An example of this might be an assignment that requires you to give a presentation on a novel you read for class. In such a case, you might have the freedom to focus your presentation on something that interests you more and better aligns with how you like to learn. It might be more enjoyable for you to present a study on each of the characters in the book and how they relate to each other, or you might be more interested in doing a presentation on the historical accuracy of the book and the background research the author put into writing it.

Whatever the case, discuss your ideas with your instructor to make certain they will both meet the criteria of the assignment and fulfill the learning goals of the activity. There is a great potential for benefit in talking with your instructors when you have ideas about how you can personalize assignments or explore areas of the subject that interest you. In fact, it is a great practice to ask your instructors for guidance and recommendations and, above all, to demonstrate to them that you are taking a direct interest in your own learning. There is never any downside to talking with your instructors about your learning.

5.6 Applying What You Know about Learning

Questions to consider:

- How can I apply what I now know to learning?
- How can I make decisions about my own learning?
- Will doing so be different from what I have experienced before?

Another useful part of being an informed learner is recognizing that as a college student you will have many choices when it comes to learning. Looking back at the Uses and Gratification model, you'll discover that your motivations as well as your choices in how you interact with learning activities can make a significant difference in not only what you learn, but how you learn. By being aware of a few learning theories, students can take initiative and tailor their own learning so that it best benefits them and meets their main needs.

> Student Profile
>
> "My seating choice significantly affects my learning. Sitting at a desk where the professor's voice can be heard clearly helps me better understand the subject; and ensuring I have a clear view helps me take notes. Therefore, sitting in the front of the classroom should be a "go to" strategy while attending college. It will keep you focused and attentive throughout the lecture. Also, sitting towards the front of the classroom limits the tendency to be on [or] check my phone." —Luis Angel Ochoa, Westchester Community College

Making Decisions about Your Own Learning

As a learner, the kinds of materials, study activities, and assignments that work best for you will derive from your own experiences and needs (needs that are both short-term as well as those that fulfill long-term goals). In order to make your learning better suited to meet these needs, you can use the knowledge you have gained about UGT and other learning theories to make decisions concerning your own learning. These decisions can include personal choices in learning materials, how and when you study, and most importantly, taking ownership of your learning activities as an active participant and decision maker. In fact, one of the main principles emphasized in this chapter is that students not only benefit from being involved in planning their instruction, but learners also gain by continually evaluating the actual success of that instruction. In other words: *Does this work for me? Am I learning what I need to by doing it this way?*

While it may not always be possible to control every component of your learning over an entire degree program, you can take every opportunity to influence learning activities so they work to your best advantage. What follows are several examples of how this can be done by making decisions about your learning activities based on what you have already learned in this chapter.

Make Mistakes Safe

Create an environment for yourself where mistakes are safe and mistakes are expected as just another part of learning. This practice ties back to the principles you learned in the section on grit and persistence. The key is to allow yourself the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them *before* they become a part of your grades. You can do this by creating your own learning activities that you design to do just that. An example of this might be taking practice quizzes on your own, outside of the more formal course activities. The quizzes could be something you find in your textbook, something you find online, or something that you develop with a partner. In the latter case you would arrange with a classmate for each of you to produce a quiz and then exchange them. That particular exercise would serve double learning duty, since to create a good quiz you would need to learn the main concepts of the subject, and answering the questions on your partner's quiz might help you identify areas where you need more knowledge.

The main idea with this sort of practice is that you are creating a safe environment where you can make mistakes and learn from them before those mistakes can negatively impact your success in the course. Better to make mistakes on a practice run than on any kind of assignment or exam that can heavily influence your final grade in a course.

Make Everything Problem Centered

When working through a learning activity, the practical act of problem-solving is a good strategy. Problem-solving, as an approach, can give a learning activity more meaning and motivation for you, as a learner. Whenever possible it is to your advantage to turn an assignment or learning task into a problem you are trying to solve or something you are trying to accomplish.

In essence, you do this by deciding on some purpose for the assignment (other than just completing the assignment itself). An example of this would be taking the classic college term paper and writing it in a way that solves a problem you are already interested in.

Typically, many students treat a term paper as a collection of requirements that must be fulfilled—the paper must be on a certain topic; it should include an introduction section, a body, a closing, and a bibliography; it should be so many pages long, etc. With this approach, the student is simply completing a checklist of attributes and components dictated by the instructor, but other than that, there is no reason for the paper to exist.

Instead, writing it to solve a problem gives the paper purpose and meaning. For example, if you were to write a paper with the purpose of informing the reader about a topic they knew little about, that purpose would influence not only how you wrote the paper but would also help you make decisions on what information to include. It would also influence how you would structure information in the paper so that the reader might best learn what you were teaching them. Another example would be to write a paper to persuade the reader about a certain opinion or way of looking at things. In other words, your paper now has a purpose rather than just reporting facts on the subject. Obviously, you would still meet the format requirements of the paper, such as number of pages and inclusion of a bibliography, but now you do that in a way that helps to solve your problem.

Make It Occupation Related

Much like making assignments problem centered, you will also do well when your learning activities have meaning for your profession or major area of study. This can take the form of simply understanding how the things you are learning are important to your occupation, or it can include the decision to do assignments in a way that can be directly applied to your career. If an exercise seems pointless and possibly unrelated to your long-term goals, you will be much less motivated by the learning activity.

An example of understanding how a specific school topic impacts your occupation future would be that of a nursing student in an algebra course. At first, algebra might seem unrelated to the field of nursing, but if the nursing student recognizes that drug dosage calculations are critical to patient safety and that algebra can help them in that area, there is a much stronger motivation to learn the subject.

In the case of making a decision to apply assignments directly to your field, you can look for ways to use learning activities to build upon other areas or emulate tasks that would be required in your profession. Examples of this might be a communication student giving a presentation in a speech course on how the Internet has changed corporate advertising strategies, or an accounting student doing statistics research for an environmental studies course. Whenever possible, it is even better to use assignments to produce things that are much like what you will be doing in your chosen career. An example of this would be a graphic design student taking the opportunity to create an infographic or other supporting visual elements as a part of an assignment for another course. In cases where this is possible, it is always best to discuss your ideas with your instructor to make certain what you intend will still meet the requirements of the assignment.

Managing Your Time

One of the most common traits of college students is the constraint on their time. As adults, we do not always have the luxury of attending school without other demands on our time. Because of this, we must become efficient with our use of time, and it is important that we maximize our learning activities to be most effective. In fact, time management is so important that there is an entire chapter in this text dedicated to it. When you can, refer to that chapter to learn more about time management concepts and techniques that can be very useful.

Instructors as Learning Partners

In K-12 education, the instructor often has the dual role of both teacher and authority figure for students. Children come to expect their teachers to tell them what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. College learners, on the other hand, seem to work better when they begin to think of their instructors as respected experts that are partners in their education. The change in the relationship for you as a learner accomplishes several things: it gives you ownership and decision-making ability in your own learning, and it enables you to personalize your learning experience to best fit your own needs. For the instructor, it gives them the opportunity to help you meet your own needs and expectations in a rich experience, rather than focusing all of their time on trying to get information to you.

The way to develop learning partnerships is through direct communication with your instructors. If there is something you do not understand or need to know more about, go directly to them. When you have ideas about how you can personalize assignments or explore areas of the subject that interest you or better fit your needs, ask them about it. Ask your instructors for guidance and recommendations, and above all, demonstrate to them that you are taking a direct interest in your own learning. Most instructors are thrilled when they encounter students that want to take ownership of their own learning, and they will gladly become a resourceful guide for you.

Application

Applying What You Know about Learning to What You Are Doing: In this activity, you will work with an upcoming assignment from one of your courses—preferably something you might be dreading or are at least less than enthusiastic about working on. You will see if there is anything you can apply to the assignment from what you know about learning that might make it more interesting.

In the table below are several attributes that college students generally prefer in their learning activities, listed in the far left column. As you think about your assignment, consider whether or not it already possesses the attribute. If it does, go on to the next row. If it does not, see if there is some way you can approach the assignment so that it does follow preferred learning attributes; write that down in the last column, to the far right.

Does it …?	Yes	No	What you can do to turn the assignment into something that is better suited to you as a learner?
Does it allow you to make decisions about your own learning?			In essence, you are doing this right now. You are making decisions on how you can make your assignment more effective for you.
Does it allow you to make mistakes without adversely affecting your grade?			Hints: *Are there ways for you to practice? Can you create a series of drafts for the assignment and get feedback?*
Is it centered on solving a problem?			Hint: *Can you turn the assignment into something that solves a problem? An example would be making a presentation that actually educated others rather than just covered what you may have learned.*
Is it related to your chosen occupation in any way?			Hint: *Can you turn the assignment into something you might actually do as a part of your profession or make it about your profession? Examples might be creating an informative poster for the workplace or writing a paper on new trends in your profession.*
Does it allow you to manage the time you work on it?			*More than likely the answer here will be "yes," but you can plan how you will do it. For more information on this, see the chapter on time management.*
Does it allow interaction with your instructor as a learning partner?			Hint: *Talking to your instructor about the ideas you have for making this assignment more personalized accomplishes this exact thing.*

Table 5.7

5.7 The Hidden Curriculum

Questions to consider:

- What is the hidden or invisible curriculum?
- How can I work within the hidden curriculum to prevent negative results?

The *hidden curriculum* is a phrase used to cover a wide variety of circumstances at school that can influence learning and affect your experience. Sometimes called the invisible curriculum, it varies by institution and can be thought of as a set of unwritten rules or expectations.

Situation: According to your syllabus, your history professor is lecturing on the chapter that covers the stock market crash of 1929 on Tuesday of next week.

Sounds pretty straightforward and common. 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?

- What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing before attending class?
- What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing in class?
- What is an unwritten rule about what you should be doing after class?
- 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*

Table 5.8

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.

While the previous example may seem obvious once they've been pointed out, most instances of the invisible curriculum are complex and require a bit of critical thinking to uncover. What follows are some common but often overlooked examples of this invisible curriculum.

One example of a hidden curriculum could be found in the beliefs of your professor. Some professors may refuse to reveal their personal beliefs to avoid your writing toward their bias rather than presenting a cogent argument of your own. Other professors may be outspoken about their beliefs to force you to consider and possibly defend your own position. As a result, you may be influenced by those opinions which can then influence your learning, but not as an official part of your study.

Other examples of how this hidden curriculum might not always be so easily identified can be found in classroom arrangements or even scheduling. To better understand this, imagine two different classes on the exact same subject and taught by the same instructor. One class is held in a large lecture hall and has over 100 students in it, while the other meets in a small classroom and has fewer than 20 students. In the smaller class, there is time for all of the students to participate in discussions as a learning activity, and they receive the

benefit of being able to talk about their ideas and the lessons through direct interaction with each other and the professor. In the larger class, there is simply not enough time for all 100 students to each discuss their thoughts. On the flip side, most professors who teach lecture classes use technology to give them constant feedback on how well students understand a given subject. If the data suggests more time should be spent, these professors discover this in real time and can adapt the class accordingly.

Another instance where class circumstances might heavily influence student learning could be found in the class schedule. If the class was scheduled to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays and the due date for assignments was always on Monday, those students would benefit from having the weekend to finalize their work before handing it in. If the class met on a different day, students might not have as much free time just before handing in the assignment. The obvious solution would be better planning and time management to complete assignments in advance of due dates, but nonetheless, conditions caused by scheduling may still impact student learning.

Working Within the Hidden Curriculum

The first step in dealing with the hidden curriculum is to recognize it and understand how it can influence your learning. After any specific situation has been identified, the next step is to figure out how to work around the circumstances to either take advantage of any benefits or to remove any roadblocks.

To illustrate this, here are some possible solutions to the situations given as examples earlier in this section:

Prevailing Opinions—Simply put, you are going to encounter instructors and learning activities that you sometimes agree with and sometimes do not. The key is to learn from them regardless. In either case, take ownership of your learning and even make an effort to learn about other perspectives, even if it is only for your own education on the matter. There is no better time to expose yourself to other opinions and philosophies than in college. In fact, many would say that this is a significant part of the college experience. With a growth mindset, it is easy to view everything as a learning opportunity.

Classroom Circumstances—These kinds of circumstances often require a more structured approach to turn the situation to your advantage, but they also usually have the most obvious solutions. In the example of the large class, you might find yourself limited in the ability to participate in classroom discussions because of so many other students. The way around that would be to speak to several classmates and create your own discussion group. You could set up a time to meet, or you could take a different route by using technology such as an online discussion board, a Skype session, or even a group text. Several of the technologically based solutions might even be better than an in-class discussion since you do not all have to be present at the same time. The discussion can be something that occurs all week long, giving everyone the time to think through their ideas and responses.

Again, the main point is to first spot those things in the hidden curriculum that might put your learning at a disadvantage and devise a solution that either reduces the negative impact or even becomes a learning advantage.

3

MANAGING YOUR TIME AND PRIORITIES

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.

Notebook by Suzy Hazelwood / Pexels

6.1 The Benefits of Time Management

> **"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 real-

izes 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.[1]

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 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
Average total loss:	$151,115

1. Spending a Few Extra Years in College May Cost You More Than You Think, Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, June 21, 2016, 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

Table 6.1 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?

6.2 Time Management in College

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 6.2 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

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

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?
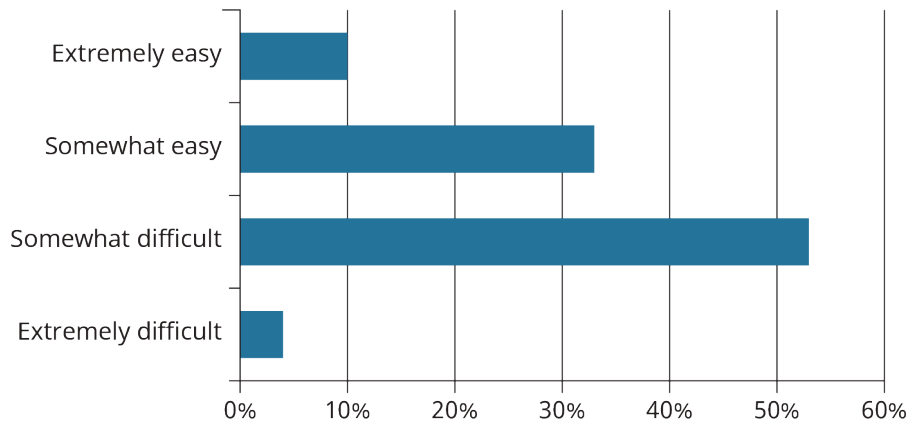
Figure 6.3

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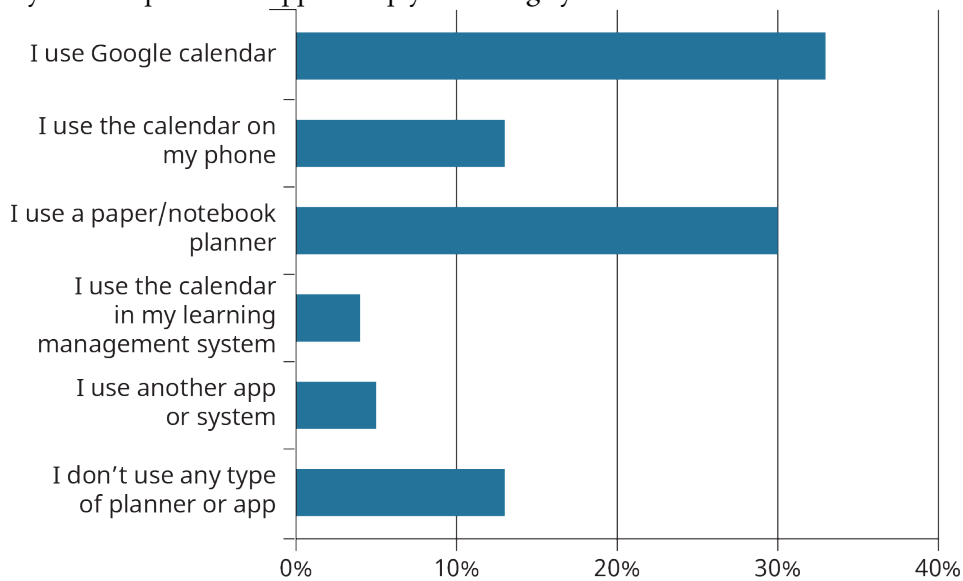

Figure 6.4

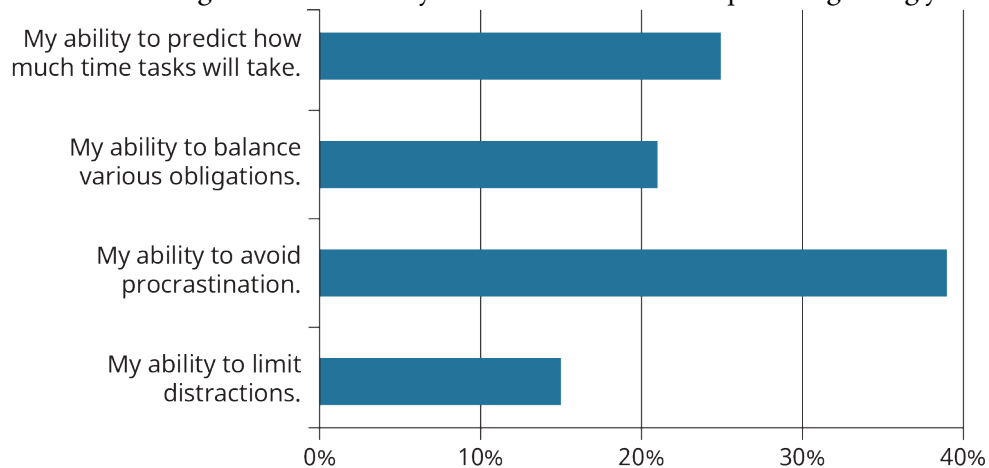Rank the following in terms of what you would most like to improve regarding your time management skills.

Figure 6.5

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.[2] 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
Social Service Professions	47

2. Writing Technology and Teens, 2004, Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/04/24/writing-technology-and-teens/

Table 6.2 Credit: Updated NSSE (Since 2013)[3]

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.

6.3 Procrastination: The Enemy Within

Questions to consider:

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

Figure 6.6 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.

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3. http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/sample_analyses/amount_of_writing.cfm

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.

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.

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.

6.4 How to Manage Time

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 6.7 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.

	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 6.3

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 6.4 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 deadest 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
Study for exam	Per exam	90 minutes	1–2 hours, depending upon complexity of material

Table 6.5 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 they 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 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 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.

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

1. ~~Email Professor Raymond~~

2. Post in poly sci discussion forum

3. Psych project

4. Kyleigh's bday!!!

Stop at financial aid – fseog

Figure 6.8 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 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	**Urgent and Important** • Paper due tomorrow • Apply for internship by deadline	**Not Urgent but Important** • Exam next week • Flu shot
Not Important	**Urgent but Not Important** • Amazon sale • Laundry	**Not Urgent and Not Important** • Check social • TV show

Figure 6.9 The Eisenhower Matrix can help organize priorities and ensure that you focus on the correct tasks.

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
Pre-class Prep	
• Completing previous homework • Reading appropriate material for lecture • Taking notes on areas that need clarification	• Understanding homework assigned from previous class • Making certain appropriate reading material is identified • Reading appropriate material for lecture
During Class	
• Understanding lecture • Taking notes on lecture • Asking questions for clarification • Taking part in class discussion • Receive assignments for next class	• Reading appropriate material • Understanding lecture • Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture • Reading appropriate material, Understanding lecture
Post-Class	
• Understanding homework assigned • Making certain appropriate reading material is identified • Ask questions for clarification • Reviewing and rewriting notes	• Receive assignments for next class • Receive assignments for next class • Receive assignments for next class

Figure 6.10 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 6.11 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 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 6.12 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.[4]

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

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

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 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

6.6 Goal Setting and Motivation

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 some-day.	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, measureable, 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 6.6

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 6.7

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.

1 **Increase Personal Responsibility** — Adopt the mindset that *you* are the only person responsible for your goals. Hindrances and roadblocks may appear along the way, but you are responsible for navigating around them and overcoming them. Take control of the journey! Issues are not other people's problems. They are for you to solve.

2 **Reward Yourself for Completing the Task** — We are all motivated by rewards. Use this to your advantage and give yourself rewards for a job well done.

3 **Make Certain They are *Your* Goals** — Again, your motivation level is not as high if the end result is not something you want to achieve.

4 **Visualize the Results** — Keeping in mind the benefits and visualizing the end results of each goal is extremely effective in keeping motivated.

5 **Break the Goal Down into Manageable Tasks** — As with any task, accomplishing the whole is easier when each part is tackled individually.

6 **Tap Into Other People's Energy** — Surround yourself with other people that are motivated. As humans, we are social creatures, which means our moods and emotions can be influenced by others. If you are around other positive people that all work toward achieving their own goals, their energy can become infectious.

7 **Remind Yourself why You Set the Goal** — This last item is of the utmost importance, especially for long term goals. Sometimes it is too easy to become mired in the drudgery of a difficult task and forget why you are doing something in the first place. Reminding yourself of the end goal helps reinforce everything you do that works toward your goal.

Figure 6.13 These seven ways to stay motivated are good suggestions from highly successful people. What other strategies would you suggest?

6.7 Enhanced Strategies for Time and Task Management

Questions to consider:

- 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 6.14 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:

- Decide on the task to be done.
- Set the timer to the desired interval.
- Work on the task.
- When the timer goes off, put a check mark on a piece of paper.
- 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).
- 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.
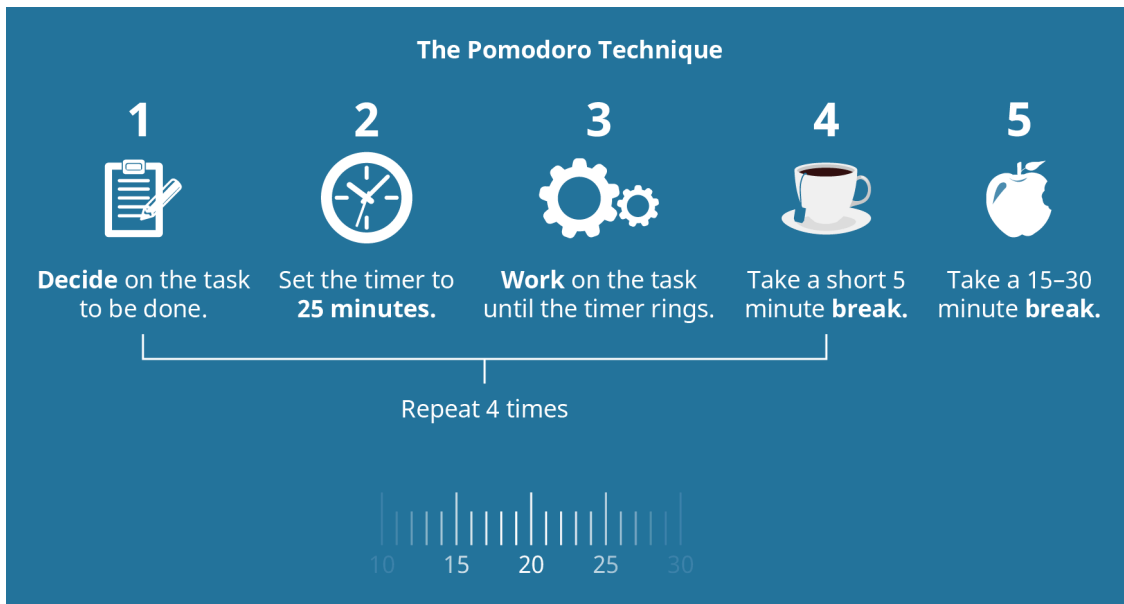
Figure 6.15 The Pomodoro Technique contains five defined steps.

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:

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.	*Only if needed—finish or polish final draft.*	60 minutes?

Table 6.8

	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. *Only if needed*	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
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 6.9

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 6.16 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 homework (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 improve-

ment 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?

4

READING AND NOTETAKING

Photo of person flipping book page by Lisa Fotios / Pexels

About this Chapter

In this chapter we will explore two skills you probably think you already understand—reading and notetaking. 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 notetaking 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://openstax.org/l/brainconnectivity.

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.

7.1 The Nature and Types of Reading

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 7.2 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 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.

7.2 Effective Reading Strategies

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 7.3 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 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.

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 7.4 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?

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.
- 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 notetaking, 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 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 intent 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

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

◦ I don't take many notes.

Students offered their views on these questions, and the results are displayed in the graphs below. What is the most influential factor in how thoroughly you read the material for a given course?
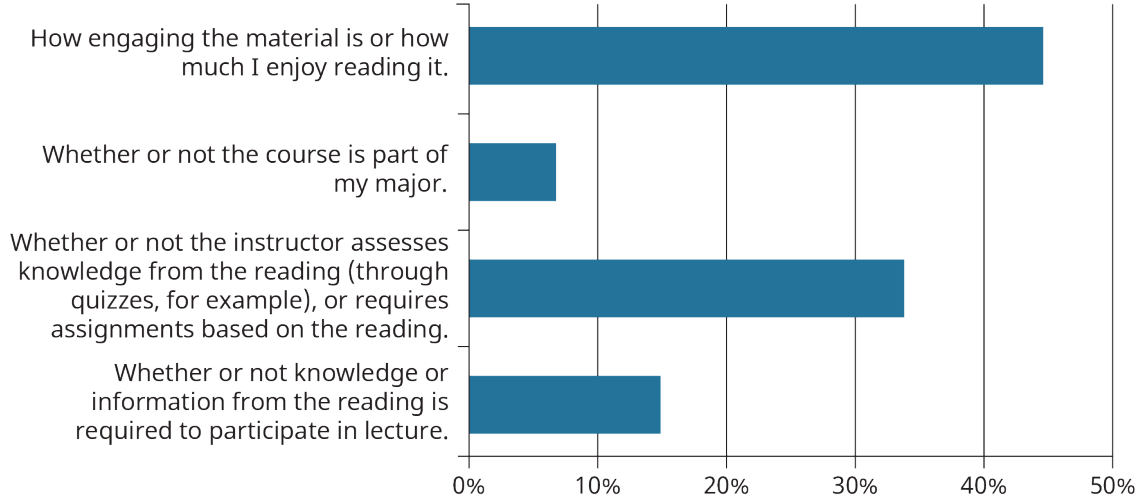
Figure 7.5

What best describes your reading approach for required texts/materials for your classes?
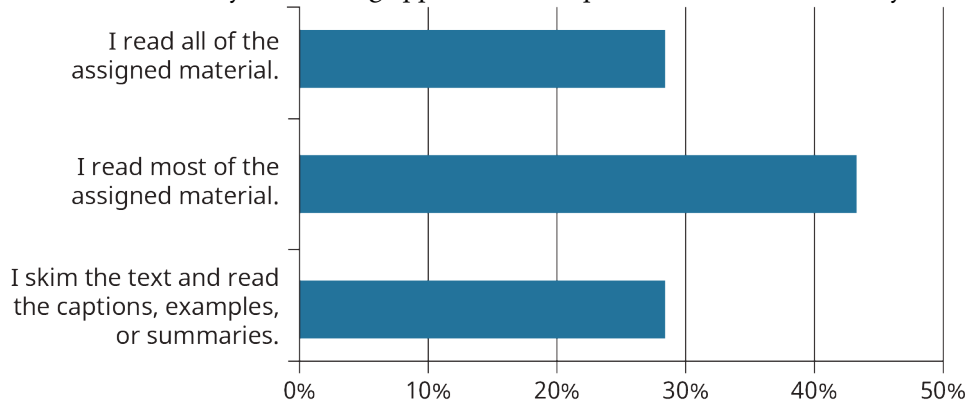
Figure 7.6

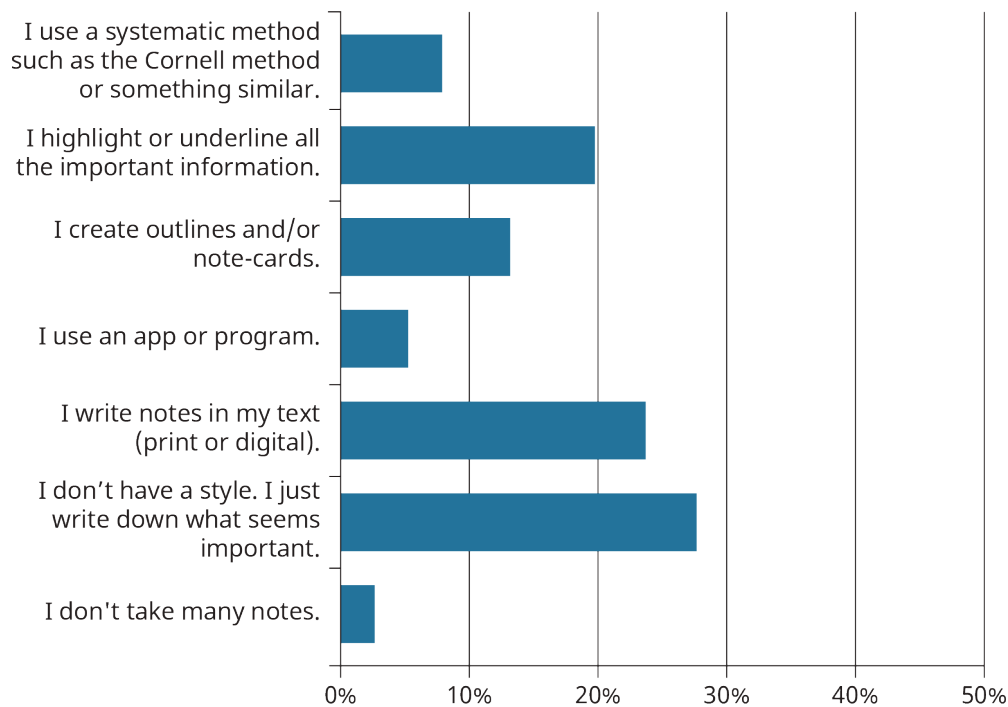What best describes your notetaking style?

Figure 7.7

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.
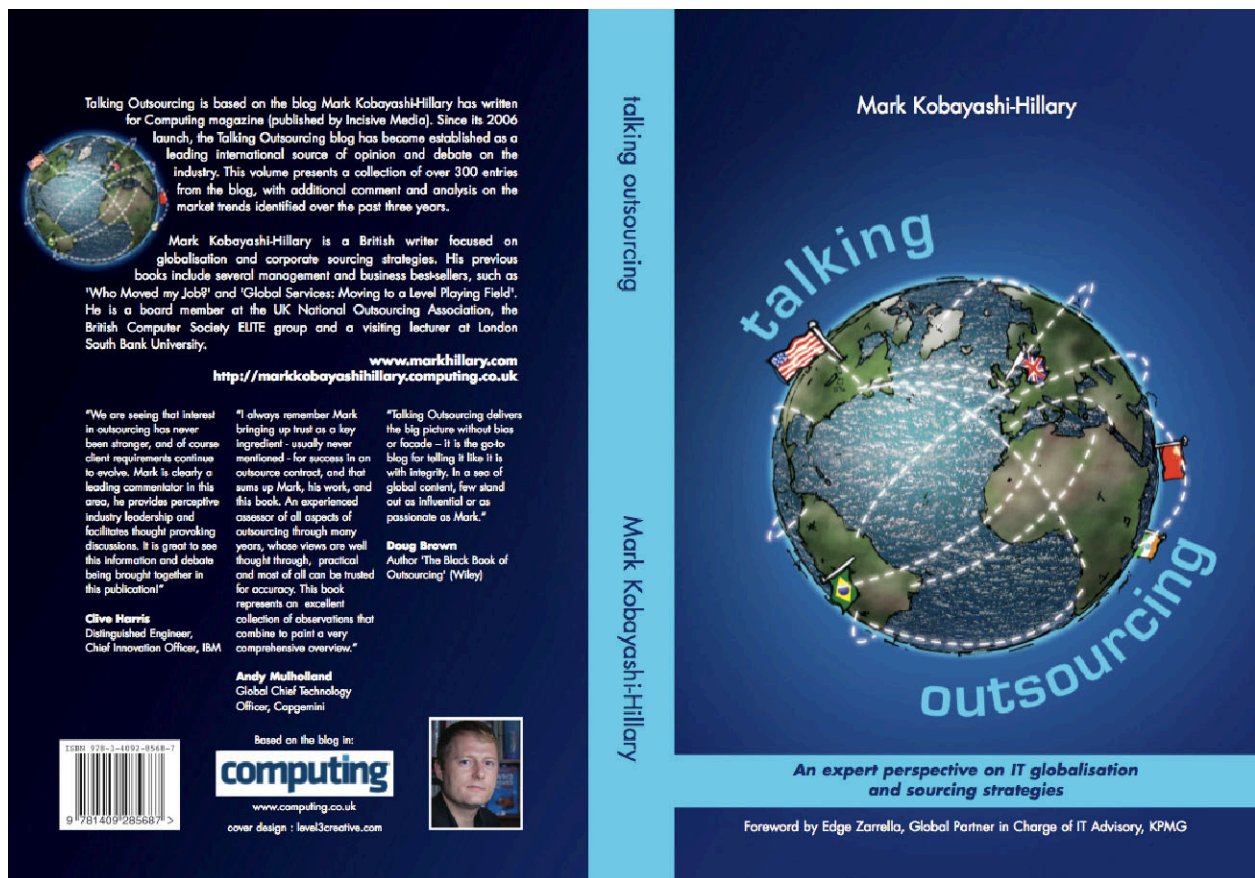
Figure 7.8 Learning about the book you're reading can provide good context and information. Look for an author's biography and forward on the back cover or in the first few pages. (Credit: Mark Hillary / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

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 pre-

conceived 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?

7.3 Taking Notes

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 notetaking?
- Why is annotating your notes after the notetaking 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 notetaking 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 7.9 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 notetaking 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.

Notetaking 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 notetaking is almost as important as the actual taking of notes, and what you do after your notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking have pros and cons.
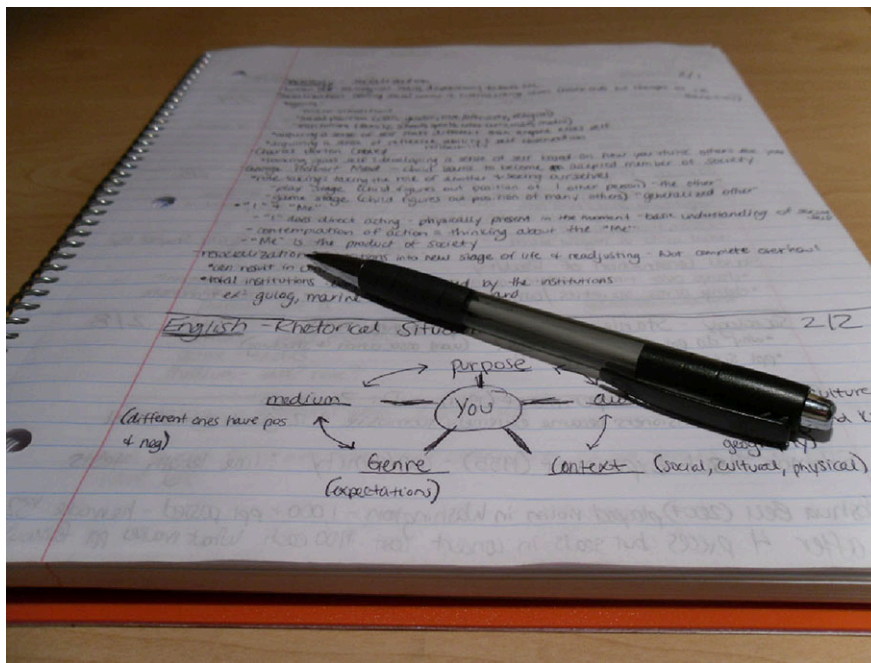
Figure 7.10 The best notes are the ones you take in an organized manner. Frequent review and further annotation are important to build a deep and useful understanding of the material. (Credit: English106 / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

Managing Notetaking Systems (Computer, Paper/Pen, Note Cards, Textbook)

Whichever of the many notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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.

Notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking session.

Cornell Method

One of the most recognizable notetaking 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.

Topic/Objective:	Name:
	Class/Period:
	Date:
Essential Question:	

Questions:	Notes:

Summary:

Figure 7.11 The Cornell Method provides a straightforward, organized, and flexible approach

Now that you have the notetaking 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 notetaking 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. 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 notetaking 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.

Academic Essay Elements	
Topic	**Topic** – Establishes context – Limits scope of essay – Introduces Issue/Problem
Thesis	**Thesis** – Central argument or point of paper – Arrives early in paper—usually toward end of first paragraph (maybe a bit later in longer papers) – Focused, clear, and specific – Reflects writer's position on the topic/issue
Supporting Details	**Supporting Detail Paragraphs** – Each paragraph has a specific topic – Clarify, explain, illustrate, expand on topic – Provide EVIDENCE—quotes, data, references Cite everything properly!
Conclusion	**Conclusion** – Tie back to intro/thesis – Show how details supported the argument – Why is it important? – Point to implications/outcomes, but don't introduce entirely new ideas
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.	

Figure 7.12 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:

- Dogs *(main topic–usually general)*
    - German Shepherd *(concept related to main topic)*
        - Protection *(supporting info about the concept)*
        - Assertive
        - Loyal
    - Weimaraner *(concept related to main topic)*
        - Family-friendly *(supporting info about the concept)*
        - Active
        - Healthy
- 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 notetaking 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 notetaking 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 notetaking systems, you should…take note of that.) Notes by themselves that you never reference again are little more than scribblings. 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 notetaking 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.
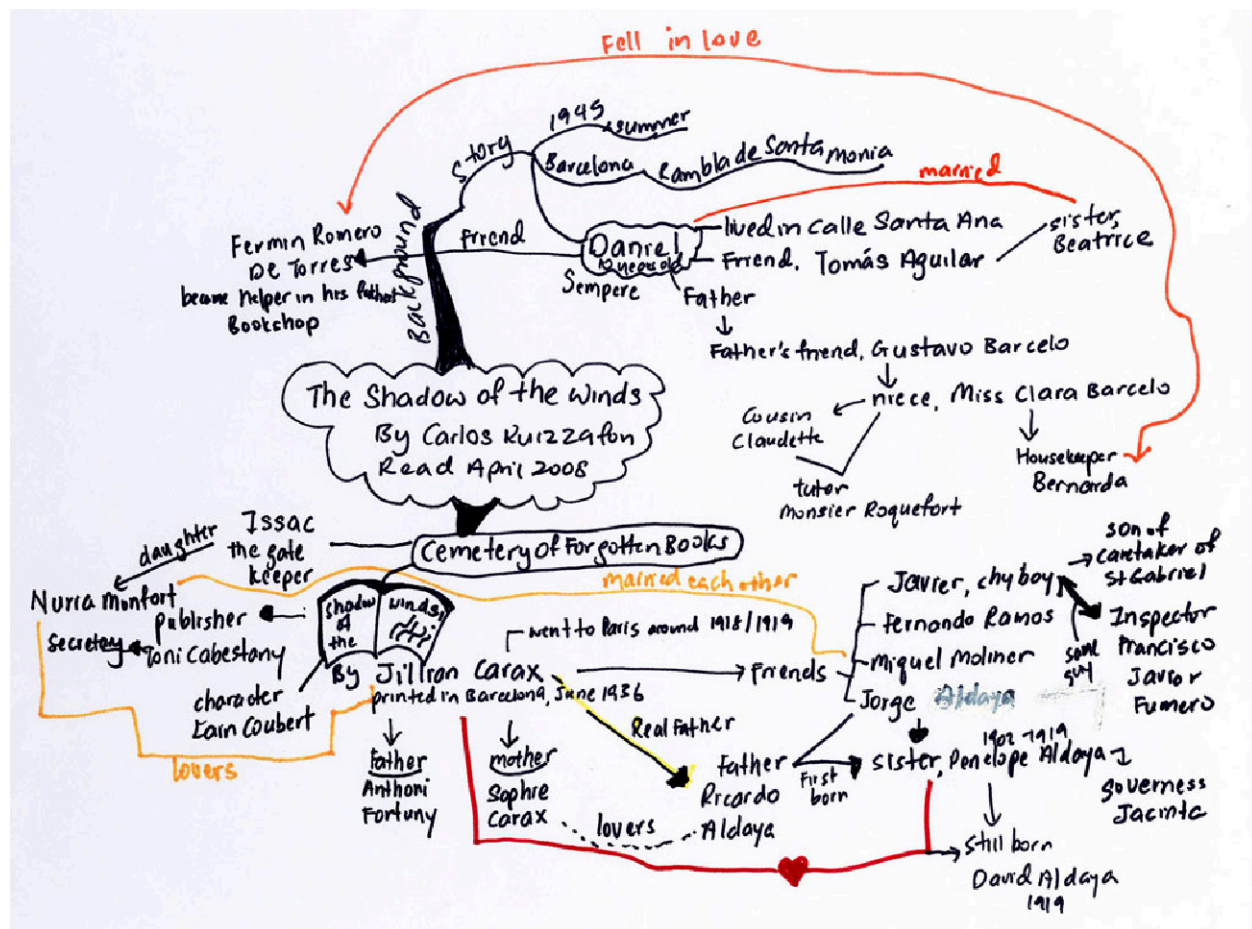
Figure 7.13 Concept mapping, sometimes referred to as mind mapping, can be an effective and very personalized approach to capturing information. (Credit: ArtistIvanChew / Flickr / Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC-BY 2.0))

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.

You can play with different types of notetaking 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 notetaking, review, and test prep will become, if not easier, certainly more organized, which can delete decrease your anxiety.

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 notetaking sessions. Elaborate shorthand systems do exist, but you would be better served in your college notetaking 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 notetaking 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 Notetaking Session

Annotating notes after the initial notetaking 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 notetaking 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.

The Gettysburg Address

President Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863

[Handwritten annotations: "When did Lincoln die? April 15, 1865"; "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"]

[Handwritten: 80 (4x20) + 7 = 87; 1776]

"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. *[from US Constitution? No – Dec of Independence]* *[proposal]*

[1861-65]

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived *[formed]* and so dedicated, can long endure *[last]*. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place *[cemetery]* 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 *[repetition]* cannot consecrate *[make holy]* — we cannot hallow *[make holy]* — 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. *[IRONY]* 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 *[like royalty]*. 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 *[death]* of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain *[for no reason]* — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that *[phrases from Constitution?]* government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not *[repetition]* perish from the earth." *[die]*

Figure 7.14 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.

The Gettysburg Address

President Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863

"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.

"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 battlefield 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 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. 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."
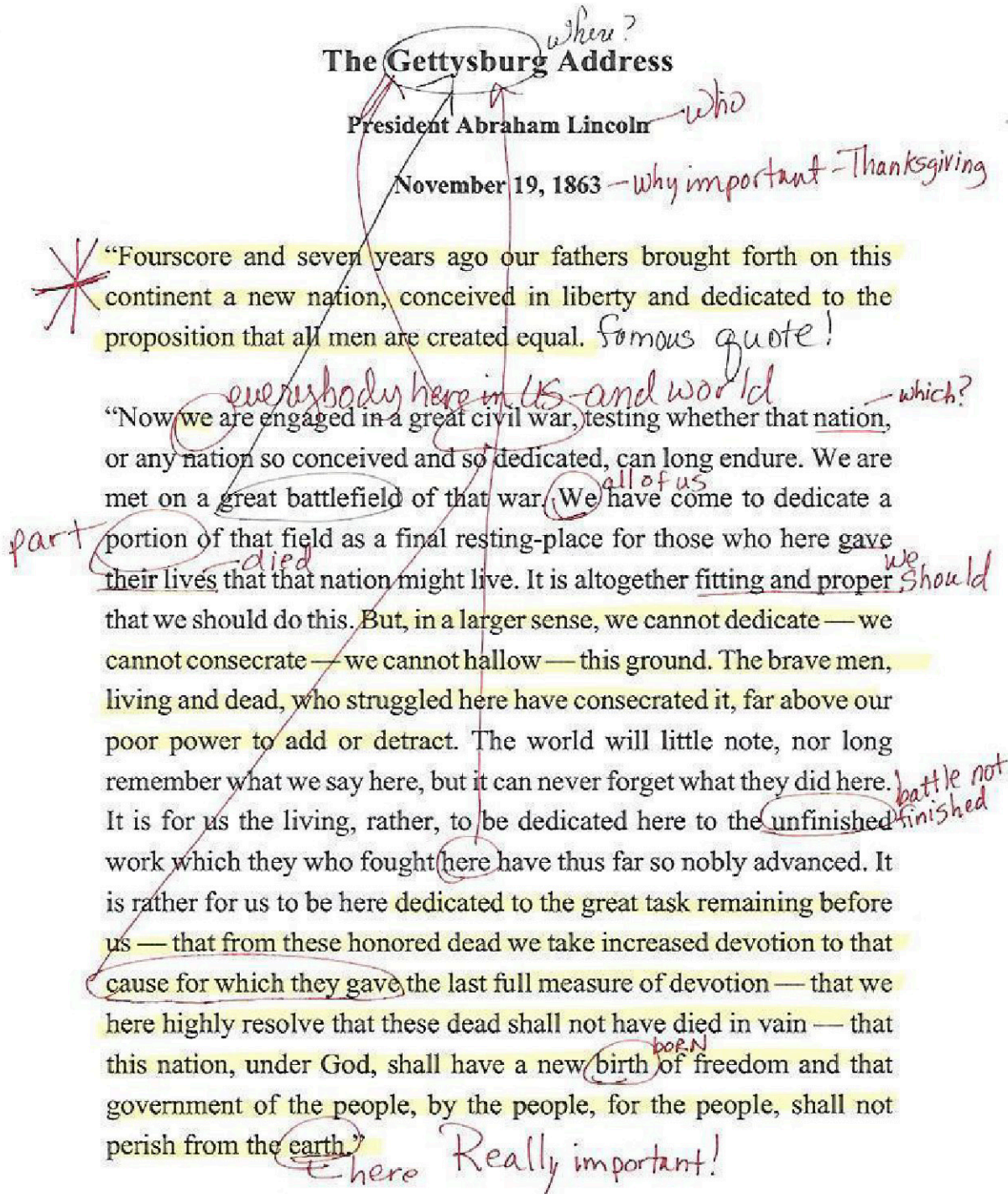
Figure 7.15 While these notes may be meaningful to the person who took them, they are neither organized nor consistent. For example, note that some of the more commonly used terms, like "we" and "unfinished," are defined, but less common ones — "consecrate" and "hallow" — are not.

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.

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.

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 notetaking.

As much as we may want to hurry and get it over with, notetaking 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? 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?
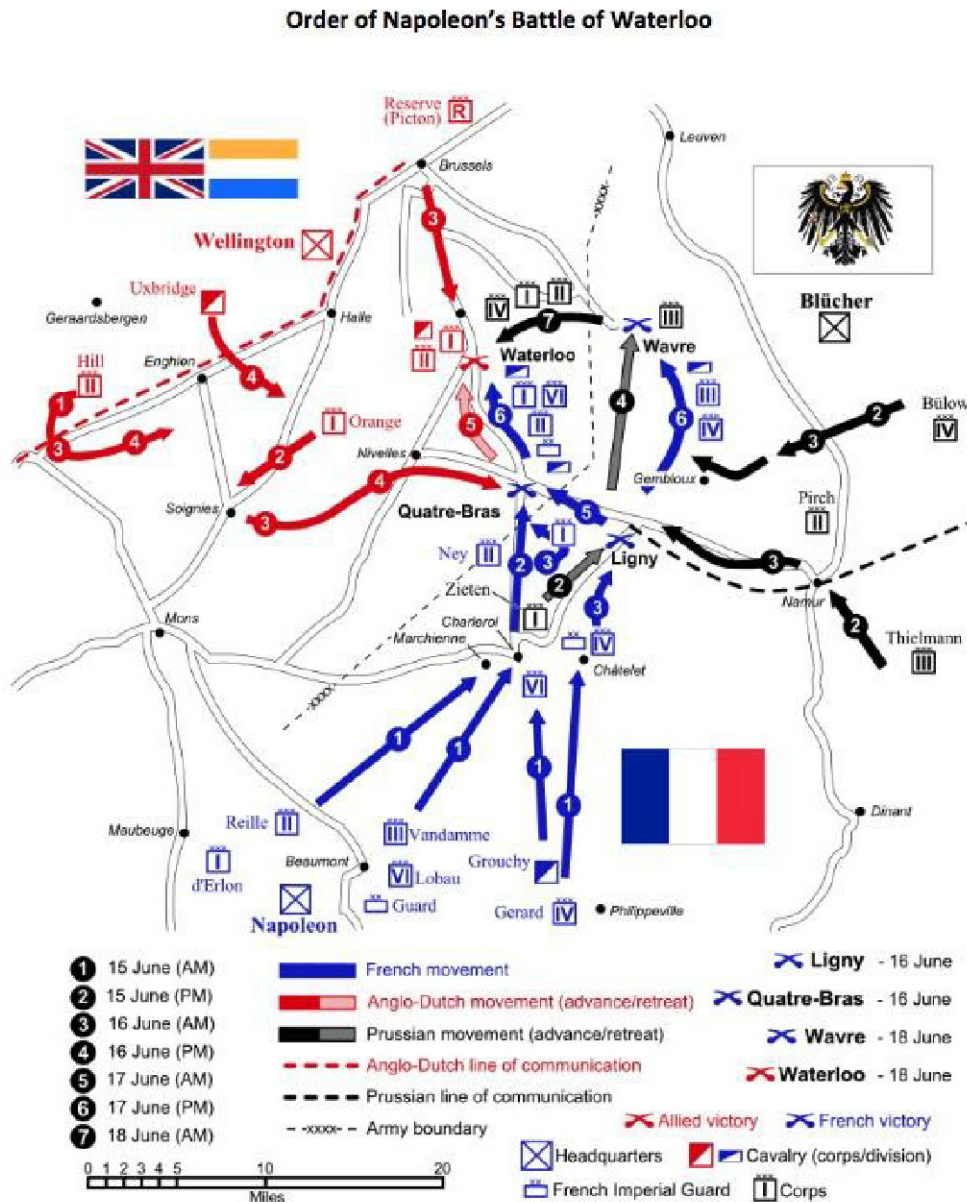
Figure 7.16 Graphics, charts, graphs, and other visual items are also important to annotate. Not only do they often convey important information, but they may appear on exams or in other situations where you'll need to use or demonstrate knowledge. Credit: "Lpankonin" / Wikipedia Commons / Attribution 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.

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; must 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, notetaking 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 notetaking that will actually help you with these crucial skills? How do you go about deciding what resources are valuable for improving your reading and notetaking skills?

The selection and relative value of study guides and books about notetaking 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 notetaking in college.

College Rules!: How to Study, Survive, and Succeed in College, by Sherri Nist-Olejnik and Jodi Patrick Holschuh. More than just notetaking, 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 notetaking sessions.

How to Study in College, by Walter Pauk. This is the book that introduced Pauk's notetaking 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 notetaking, 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

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

5

OVERCOMING WRITING ANXIETY AND WRITER'S BLOCK

Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

You may be thinking, "You could give me all the writing advice in the world, but sometimes I just get stuck! What I normally do just isn't working!" That's a familiar feeling for all writers. Sometimes the writing just seems to flow as if by magic, but then the flow stops cold. Your brain seems to have run out of things to say. If you just wait for the magic to come back, you might wait a long time. What professional writers know is that writing takes consistent effort. Writing comes out of a regular practice—a habit.

Professional writers also know that not everything they write ends up in the final draft. Sometimes we have to write what Anne Lamott calls a "shitty first draft." One of my favorite writing professors, Duncan Carter, used to say that he was a terrible writer but a great reviser, and that's what helped him write when inspiration wasn't available. So how do writers get going when they feel stuck or uninspired? They develop a set of habits and have more than one way to write to get the words flowing again.

Woman sitting in front of Macbook by Energepic.com / Pexels

You might associate the idea of writing anxiety or writer's block with procrastination, and procrastination certainly can be either a cause or an effect of writing anxiety. But writing anxiety or writer's block is more of a condition or state of being. We'll start by defining the term—so that you can figure out if you have it—and then cover some ways to work through it.

What Is Writing Anxiety and How Do You Know If You Have It?

Do you worry excessively about writing assignments? Do they make you feel uneasy or agitated? Do you have negative feelings about certain types of writing? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you might be

dealing with writing anxiety. Writing anxiety simply means that a writer is experiencing negative feelings about a given writing task.

Writing anxiety is often more about the audience and/or purpose for a given writing task than it is about the mere act of writing itself. Say you just bought a new pair of headphones. You brought them home, removed all the packaging, and connected them to your phone, and they're amazing! So you decide to visit the company website, and you write a stellar review of the product, giving it a five-star rating and including descriptive details about the headphones' comfortable fit, excellent sound quality, ability to cancel outside noise, and reasonable price.

Now let's say that the next day in biology class, your instructor covers the topic of biomes, and you learn about animal habitats and biodiversity and the interrelation and interdependence of species within biomes. You find it fascinating and can't wait to learn more. But then something terrible happens. Your instructor assigns a term project on the subject. As your instructor begins to describe the length and other specifications for the report, complete with formatting guidelines, citation requirements, and a bibliography at the end, your palms start to sweat, your stomach feels uneasy, and you begin to have trouble focusing on anything else your instructor has to say. You're experiencing writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety is the condition of feeling uneasy about writing, and writer's block is what you experience when you can't manage to put words on the page. But these conditions aren't about the act of writing. Just yesterday, you wrote a great review for those cool new headphones. So why do you suddenly feel paralyzed by the thought of writing the biology essay? Let's consider some possible causes.

What Causes Writing Anxiety?

The causes of writing anxiety are many. Here are just a few:

- Inexperience with the type of writing task
- Previous negative experiences with writing (e.g., someone, maybe a teacher, has given you negative feedback or said negative things about your writing)
- Negative feelings about writing (e.g., "I'm not a good writer," "I hate writing")
- Immediate deadline
- Distant deadline
- Lack of interest in the topic
- Personal problems or life events

Your level of experience may explain why you felt comfortable writing the headphone review yet broke out in a sweat at the thought of the biology paper. If you've never written anything similar to a specific assignment, maybe you're unsure about whether you can meet the assignment requirements or the teacher's expectations. Or maybe the last time you turned in a written report for school you received negative feedback or a bad grade from the teacher. Maybe you procrastinated most of the term, and now the paper is due next week, and you feel overwhelmed. Or maybe it's the second week of the term and the deadline seems so far away that you're not motivated to write.

Knowing the cause of your writing anxiety can help you move beyond it and get writing, even if you can't completely eliminate the problem. If the topic doesn't interest you or if you're having problems at home, those probably aren't issues that will just disappear, but if you try some of the following strategies, I think you'll find that you can at least move forward with even the most anxiety inducing of writing assignments.

Strategies for Overcoming or Managing Writing Anxiety

There are a number of strategies that you can draw on to help you move past the feeling of being lost or stuck. Consider the following strategies to help you start writing again.

Just Start Writing

It might sound like it's oversimplifying the matter, but it's true. Half the battle is to just start writing. Try some strategies like freewriting or note-taking to get your writing muscles moving. Give yourself permission to write badly at this stage! Bruce Ballenger, a writer and professor of English at Boise State, explains why

writing badly is an important part of the writing process: "Giving myself permission to write badly makes it much more likely that I will write what I don't expect to write, and from those surprises will come some of my best writing. Writing badly is also a convenient alternative to staring off into space and waiting for inspiration."

Sometimes the biggest problem writers have with getting started is that they feel like the writing needs to be good or well organized, or they feel like they need to start at the beginning. None of that is true. All you need to do is start.

Have you ever seen a potter make a clay pot? Before a potter can start shaping or throwing a pot, they have to bring the big wet blob of clay and slap it down on the table. It's heavy and wet and messy, but it's the essential raw material. No clay? No pot.

"Bad writing" is a lot like that. You have to dump all the words and ideas onto the table. Just get them out. Only then do you have the raw material you need to start shaping the words into something beautiful and lasting. You can wait until the revision stages to worry about shaping your writing to be its best. For now, just get the ideas on the table.

Create Smaller Tasks and Short-Term Goals

One of the biggest barriers to writing can be that the task just seems too large, and perhaps the due date is weeks away. Each of these conditions can contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed or to the tendency to procrastinate. But the remedy is simple and will help you keep writing something each week toward your deadline and toward the finished product: divide larger writing tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks, and set intermediate deadlines.

The process that the authors used for writing this text provides a good example. As authors, we had to divide the text into sections, but we also had to plan the process for a first draft, peer reviews, and revisions, along with adding images, links, and other resources, not to mention the final publication of the text online. Had we not divided up the larger tasks into smaller ones and set short-term goals and deadlines, the process of writing the text would have been overwhelming. We didn't meet every single intermediate deadline right on time, but they helped move us along and helped us meet the most important deadline—the final one—with a complete text that was ready to publish on schedule.

Imagine that you have a term paper that's assigned during Week 1 of an eleven-week term, and it's due during finals week. Make a list of all the tasks you can think of that need to be completed, from beginning to end, to accomplish all that the assignment requires. List the tasks, and assign yourself due dates for each task. Consider taking it a step further, and create a task table that allows you to include a column for additional notes. Here's an example:

Table 4.1 An example of a writing schedule. A modifiable and accessible download can be accessed here.

Task	Complete by	Notes
Brainstorm topics and select a topic.	Wed., Week 2	**Notes:**
Do some preliminary research on the web to learn about the topic.	Wed., Week 3	**Notes:**
Develop list of search terms for some more focused research.	Fri., Week 3	**Notes:** Ask instructor to look over my search terms.
Spend some time at the library searching library holdings, databases, more focused research on the web.	Mon., Week 4	**Notes:** Plan ahead to make sure I have time and transportation.
Read sources and take notes.	Mon., Week 5	**Notes:** Consult note-taking examples in my textbook.
Create an outline for the term paper.	Fri., Week 5	**Notes:**
Begin drafting.	Mon., Week 6	**Notes:** Remember to try some freewriting.
Complete first rough draft.	Wed., Week 7	**Notes:**
Ask a couple of classmates to read draft and comment; meet with instructor and ask questions.	Fri., Week 7	**Notes:** Ask classmates week before if they want to meet and exchange papers.
Do some additional research if needed.	Mon., Week 8	**Notes:**
Revise first draft and complete second draft with conclusion.	Mon., Week 9	**Notes:** Try revision strategies we learned about in class.
Meet with tutor in the Writing Center to go over my essay.	Fri., Week 9	**Notes:** Call the writing center the week before for appt.
Check for perfection: citations, formatting, and works cited are in place and correct; final revisions completed.	Fri., Week 10	**Notes:** Have someone new give it a final read-through.
Print, staple, and turn in (or save and upload) essay.	Mon., Finals Week	**Notes:** Celebrate!

Collaborate

Talk to your friends or family or to a tutor in your college writing center about your ideas for your essay. Sometimes talking about your ideas is the best way to flesh them out and get more ideas flowing. Write down notes during or just after your conversation.

Classmates are a great resource because they're studying the same subjects as you and working on the same assignments. Talk to them often, and form study groups. Ask people to look at your ideas or writing and to give you feedback. Set goals and hold each other accountable for meeting deadlines (a little friendly competition can be motivating!).

Talk to other potential readers. Ask them what they would expect from this type of writing. Meet with a tutor in your campus writing center. Be sure to come to the appointment prepared with a printed copy of the assignment and a short list of what you want to work on, along with a printed copy of your essay.

Embrace Reality

Don't imagine the situation of your writing assignment to be any better or worse than it really is. There are some important truths for you to recognize:

- Focus on what you do best rather than fretting about your perceived weaknesses.

- Acknowledge that writing can be difficult and that all you need to do is do your best.
- Recognize what might be new or unfamiliar about the type of writing that you're doing.
- Remember that you're a student and that you're supposed to be experiencing things that are new and unfamiliar (new formats, new audiences, new subject matter, new processes, new approaches, etc.).
- Repeat the mantra "It doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to be *done*."

Seek Out Experts

If you can, find more experienced writers (especially related to the type of writing that you're doing) and ask them questions. Sometimes, this might just mean a friend or family member who's already taken a couple of years of college courses. Maybe it's a fellow student who has already taken the class you're in now. Also, the tutors in your college writing center can be a big help at any stage in the writing process. Give them a call and make an appointment. And don't forget the expert you see all the time throughout any class that you take: your instructor. Ask your instructor for suggestions. That's what they're there for.

Another way to learn from the experience of others is to look at examples of other pieces of writing of the type that you're working on. How is this piece organized? Does it make use of source material? What sort of tone does it use? If you don't know where to find examples, ask your instructor. If they don't have them at the ready, they'll likely be able to give you some suggestions about where to find some.

> The original chapter, Overcoming Writing Anxiety and Writer's Block by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear, is from The Word on College Reading and Writing