



Packing More than Your New Comforter: You're In College, Now What?

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Moving-in day at college: parents struggling to install the computer and holding back tears until they can make it back to the car; students checking out their roommates and making tentative negotiations as to who gets the top bunk or the outside desk; students and parents overwhelmed by the list of items to get through before departure. A tearful or joyful call home the next day, or silence that leaves parents wondering. Such is the college rite of passage for millions of freshmen and their families. The transition from high school to college can be exciting; it can also be fraught. For students with dyslexia and other learning differences, appropriate foresight and thorough planning are key. Here are some ideas:

A crucial difference between high school and college is that students are responsible for managing their time. There is much more work to do, but some more time in which to do it. Using that time properly is crucial, especially since that "extra" time is time your friends will have as well.

- Be careful about studying in groups. They can be helpful or distracting, turning study time into social time. Have the discipline to decide what works for you.
- Assignments are often made for a whole week; learn how you need to break them up to get everything done.
- Don't wait until evening to start your work; unlike in high school, you will have to study during the day to get the work done.
- Have a routine: try to get up close to the same time every morning, eat your meals at approximately the same time during the day, and plan a reasonable bedtime.
- Create a realistic class schedule: don't jam-pack all of your classes in the afternoon.
- Keep yourself on track: use paper and electronic tools that will help you stay organized. A good planner or electronic organizer has ample room to write down everything you need to do each day.
- Make a plan for organization. Dedicate an area of your room to study material. At the beginning of the semester make sure that you have the necessary materials for your classes, including folders, notebooks, and textbooks. Assign folders for each class and file everything, including old paperwork, as you'll need the materials for future exams and papers.
- You will have to carry around what you need for the day; no more lockers, and you won't want to go back to your room all the time. Have slim folders for each class and take with you just what you need and no more.

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- Much of your reading material will come to you from pdfs that your professors have scanned online. Print them all out and keep them in their correct files.
- Make a plan for studying: once a week review your assignments and plan out specific daily tasks and how much time you will need to accomplish each task. Spend time each day reviewing your notes, studying for tests, and working on long-term assignments.
- Location, location, location: find a comfortable study place, and study there. Because our brains often have associations with location, having a consistent “study place” will help you get into the study mindset.
- Walk, don’t run to class: leave enough time to get to your classes and appointments. Allocate 10 minutes at the end of each class to gather your materials and speak to the professor. Realize that your classes may be at opposite ends of campus and you don’t want to frantically run from place to place.

One of the biggest differences between high school classes and college courses is the use of lectures and the need to take notes. Here are some note-taking thoughts.

- Make sure that you attend every lecture. Although attendance may not be required, by listening and taking notes during the lecture you will begin to retain and learn the material. While using other students’ notes may be necessary if you are forced to miss a lecture, they are no substitute for being there.
- Consider buying a Life Scribe, a pen/recorder that will soon be an essential note-taking tool. It tapes the lecture as you take notes on special paper, and when you come to a spot you’ve missed, reads back just that part. (Check Amazon.com for more information.)
- Learn to identify main points. While taking notes during a lecture, do not focus on the details.
- Use as few words as possible. Do not write in full sentences; instead, make bullet points and use key words. Remember to use abbreviations; if you make up your own, make a key so you’ll remember them. And skip lines so you can add information later.

Finally, although you will have much more personal responsibility, there is still a great deal of assistance to be found on campus: the staff at the student support office, of course, but other members of the community can be helpful as well.

- Check out message boards for students who have similar issues. Meeting with a group to share common concerns and issues can be helpful and supportive.
- Librarians can assist with research and organization skills.
- Writing centers are valuable resources.
- Graduate students are often available to help with review and serve as content tutors.
- Health centers are equipped to address anxiety, stress, and other problems getting in the way of academics.

And don’t forget to have fun as well. College is a time of enormous growth and maturity. Balance is key; planning and forethought will help establish and maintain the balance that will ensure you get the most out of your experience.

