***How To Win At College***

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**Introduction**

There is no question that college is a lot of fun. It's four years of freedom and excitement and growth. It's also the launching pad for the rest of your life. The truth is that getting a good job these days is hard. Getting accepted to a good law school, graduate school, or medical school is also hard. You have just four years to prepare yourself for the world beyond your college campus. If you play your cards right, you will have the ability to engage in any pursuit that inspires you. If you don't make the most of these four years, getting started on an exciting and fulfilling life path will be much more difficult.

I began to track down and interview top students across the country-not just the academic stars, but students who fully embodied this unique brand of multi-faceted success. From the Ivy League- Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Dartmouth, and Cornell- to Stanford, Kansas State, Wake Forest, Clemson, the University of Wyoming, the University of Virginia, and the University of Arizona, I located some incredible students, and I asked them about the habits, systems, and mind-sets that had aided them in their accomplishments. I had them write to-do lists for incoming college freshmen interested in doing well at college, and I pressed them for details about specific approaches to time management, studying, and balancing a social life with working hard. Essentially, I wanted to find out everything that made these superstars tick.

To be honest, when I first started these interviews, I was a little intimidated. I worried that I would discover that the key to winning at college was a genius-level I.Q., an ability to go for days without sleep, or maybe even a photographic memory. But my fears were unfounded. I discovered from my research that **anyone can become a standout student!** You don't have to be a genius, you are allowed to get a healthy amount of sleep, and your memory doesn't have to be anything special. All you really need is some expert guidance from those who have done it before.

How should you prepare for exams and papers? What extracurricular opportunities should you look into? How should you deal with professors? What's the best way to keep your intellect stimulated and your mood upbeat? How do you balance a fun social life with an ambitious schedule?

In this book you'll find seventy-five rules drawn from the experiences of some of the country's most phenomenal students. No one chapter will turn you into a Rhodes Scholar, and you certainly don't need to follow all seventy-five. However, if you select a group of rules that really captures your attention, and then take the time to implement them in your everyday college life, you will notice remarkable results. Half the battle is becoming a standout student- in fact, to becoming a standout individual- is making the decision to actively try to succeed. If you follow the advice in this book, you will be well on your way toward taking advantage of all that college has to offer, and ensuring yourself the strongest possible start in the real world that follows. *How to Win at College* will help you find that perfect balance needed to jumpstart a life filled with interesting enthusiasms, impressive achievements, and wonderful acquaintances and friends.

1. **Don’t Do All of Your Reading**

You will be assigned a lot of reading at college. Probably more reading than seems humanly possible for any one person to complete. All you need to remember is one simple rule: Don't do all your reading.

To a hard working student, ignoring assigned reading probably seems blasphemous. But as unusual as this may sound at first, covering every page of reading listed in a course syllabus is rarely necessary. Here is what you should do instead:

For reading that covers the topic of an upcoming lecture, it's often sufficient to just skim the main points ahead of time and then fill in the gaps during class by taking very good notes. Students are sometimes afraid of skimming, but you shouldn't be. You need to master the skill of covering hundreds of pages of text very quickly. The secret is to read chapter introductions and conclusions carefully, and then skim everything else. Make tick marks next to sentences that catch your attention- this is faster than highlighting. Don't get bogged down trying to understand the significance of every paragraph. Instead, note only the passages that seem to obviously support the thesis. You will definitely miss some key points, but your professor won't. So pay attention in class when the work is discussed, and you will pick up the arguments that you overlooked. Come exam time, your lecture notes, plus a review of the sentences you marked, will bring you up to speed on the material.

This approach to completing class work is admittedly an acquired skill. At first you should err on the side of caution, doing as much reading as possible. But as you gain a feel for your professors, and the structure of your courses, you can begin to back off on your assigned reading until you find that perfect balance between being prepared and being efficient. If you have ever wondered how top students can accomplish so much work in such limited amounts of time, this rule is a large part of the answer.

1. **Create a Sunday Ritual**

For an *ambitious* college student, Sunday is the most important day of the week. **Sunday sets the tone for the week that follows**. If you attack the day on Sunday, you will start your week with momentum behind you. The secret is to engage in the same focusing ritual every Sunday morning- something that wakes up your mind and gets your day moving. Drink a strong cup of coffee, take a walk with a friend, or go for a jog followed by a hot shower. Then, with your intellectual energy peaked, and your focus strong, settle into a quiet spot at the library and start working. While the other students slumber, you will have a full, undisturbed day to get ahead of your work obligations.

1. **Drop Classes Every Semester**

Good courses, with engaging professors and reasonable requirements, are the key to a great educational experience. Bad courses, with incompatible professors and unreasonable requirements, are the key to developing an ulcer. **You must avoid bad courses at all costs**. They will make you unhappy, they will upset your academic momentum, they will sap your will to achieve, and they will hurt your grades.

**Take advantage of the fact that most colleges allow students to drop, or withdraw without penalty, from any class as long as they do so by a certain deadline each semester**. You don't have to pay for dropped classes, and they are never recorded on your transcript. Use this system to your advantage. At the beginning of every term, sign up for one or two extra courses, and then after the first week drop your least favorite(s).

1. **Start Long-Term Projects the Day They Are Assigned**

The lure of procrastination is powerful, but you can conquer it by employing one very simple technique: **When assigned a long-term project, finish some amount of work toward its completion that very same day**. This doesn't have to be a major chunk of work. Thirty minutes is enough. Do something simple: jot down a research schedule on your calendar; sketch out and outline; check out and skim the introduction of several relevant books; write a series of potential thesis statements. This is all it takes.

1. **Make Your Bed**

These are the basic conditions for keeping a clean and organized dorm room, and they are essential. How could something as simple as making your bed have a dramatic impact on your college success? Because a clean room creates a focused mind; a messy room creates a distracted mind. You want a focused mind. The more focused you are, the more effectively you can handle the challenges of being a student.

1. **Apply to Ten Scholarships a Year**

Contact your dean’s office, Career Services Center, and departments relating to your field of study. Ask them for information on scholarships, fellowships, and awards. Talk to the companies where your parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings work; find out if they offer any student scholarships. And finally, look for scholarships from companies or organizations in any industry of interest to you. From this large hit list, choose up to ten scholarships that best fit your abilities, passions, and accomplishments. Mark the deadlines on your calendar and apply to every single one of them when the time is right. Do this every year.

1. **Build Study Systems**

**You should never begin studying without a systemized plan for what you were going to review, and what format, and how many times**. Building very specific study systems breaks a formidable task into accomplishable chunks, and frees up your energy to focus on learning rather than worrying about your state of preparation. Without a study system, you end up wandering haphazardly through the material, staring at a tall stack of books with woe in your heart and resignation on your mind. With a study system, your task becomes tolerable.

When it comes to studying, the planning is as important as the process. Without a study system, you can end up wasting your time, energy, and potential grade.

1. **Befriend a Professor**

**If you want to become a standout student, you must befriend a professor**. Make him or her a mentor, someone who is aware of your overall academic plan, your life goals, your concerns, and your triumphs.

A close relationship with a professor will help motivate you to achieve ambitious academic goals and will expose you to exciting new possibilities. Professors are the gatekeepers to student success. They provide the letters of recommendation, informal introductions, and experienced advice that are necessary to win major scholarships, get accepted into competitive programs, land dream internships, be nominated for awards, and, in general, enable you to take advantage of all the opportunities typically offered only to top students. In short, professors provide the fuel for the academic success machine.

1. **Become a Club President**

To put it bluntly, losing students don't think they have enough time to be involved with extracurricular organizations. Average students join extracurricular organizations. And winning students *run* extracurricular organizations. You heard it here first: **You absolutely have the ability to run a campus organization**.

Find a club on campus that excites you and join as soon as possible. Work hard, attend all meetings, take positions of responsibility whenever they are available, and follow a path into a leadership position

Spend one year working with an existing club to gain an understanding of how student organizations operate at your college. Then petition your school for the resources necessary to start your own.

You'll meet people who share your common interests and bond over your shared goals in a way you rarely do in an academic classroom. And of course, when applying for jobs, awards, or competitive programs, being a club president helps you rise above other applicants.

1. **Read a Newspaper Every Day**

If your brain is a muscle, then reading a newspaper is like mental calisthenics. In order to succeed in an academic environment your mind has to be constantly energized, confident, and ready to engage. With this in mind, you should read a newspaper every day.

Reading a major newspaper at the same time every day is a perfect way to juice up your mental energy and prepare you to take on intellectual challenges. Make it a habit. If they're available, alternate between the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. They are both excellent, and when combined will give you a balanced world view.

1. **Do One Thing Better Than Anyone Else You Know**

If you want to succeed at college, you have to develop a healthy sense of self-confidence. One good technique for bolstering your confidence is mastering a skill. Everyone is good at something. All you need to do is to find out what this something is for you, and then practice until you are better at it than any of your friends at school. Be it playing the guitar, writing fiction, shooting hoops, or cooking, **develop a skill you can be known for**.

By mastering one activity in your life, you are putting a stake into the ground, giving yourself one thing to feel sure of, and making a declaration about who you are. Don't let others dictate how you should feel about yourself; strengthen your identity- then go conquer your world.

1. **Avoid Daily To-Do Lists**

**Daily to-do lists do not work at college**. Your schedule is too complicated and too unpredictable.

Every morning, before your class, rip a sheet of paper out of your notebook. Go down the left- hand margin marking the waking hours of the day using every other line as a guide. Now block out the hours you will be in class. Then block out the hours you will be eating meals, and when you will be in meetings or other scheduled events. The white space that remains represents the free time that you have available to work with for the day. This is a great way to visualize your schedule. Now, start partitioning this free time into one-hour increments, and assign these blocks to specific projects and assignments. Set aside at least one block for accomplishing small chores or errands. Next to this space write a small to-do list on the little tasks you need to get done that day. This ensures that even when you have huge projects to work on, the little tasks that keep your world running- buying toothpaste or returning library books- will not be neglected.

Keep this sheet with you and reference it throughout the day to guide your work habits. If you get knocked off schedule, which will happen frequently, simply take out your sheet at the next available calm moment and spend half a minute reorganizing your time for the remaining hours of the day.

1. **Learn to Give Up**

**Giving up is a tactical skill, not a weakness**. When you are faced with a project or commitment that threatens to swallow up your entire life, give up. That's right, give up. Of course, this probably sounds a little unusual to the many talented students out there who strongly believe in the power of determination and willpower.

In the intense environment of higher education it's not enough to just grind away at your problems until they are solved. You have to be smart about how you parcel out your precious time. When faced with a difficult problem or demanding commitment, try to handle it in a reasonable manner- keeping in mind that important tasks often require important amounts of time. However, if a problem seems unsolvable no matter how hard you try, or a commitment begins taking up a destructively large amount of your schedule no matter how much you delegate, give up.

This doesn't mean you should walk away without a second thought. Instead, make an appointment with your professor or a classmate to help you solve your unsolvable problem. Or, over a reasonable period of time, reduce your involvement with your demanding commitment to free up your schedule appropriately.

1. **Never Nap**

While at college, **do not nap**. Sleeping in the afternoon or early evening takes up large amounts of your limited time, it makes you drowsy and unfocused, and it throws off your regular sleep schedule. Not to mention that this behavior can quickly become an addictive bad habit, where you are regularly losing hours to sleep every afternoon, nights pass fitfully, and staying awake during class becomes a Herculean challenge.

If you are feeling just slightly sluggish in the afternoon, go outside and do some light exercise.

1. **Sign Up for Something Your First Week**

Instead of hunkering down and letting your freshman Fall pass by harmlessly, embrace it wholeheartedly by signing up for something your first week. It could be an intramural sports team, a publication, an affinity group, the campus radio station, a musical ensemble, or a club that gathers regularly to discuss world issues.

The happiest students are also the most involved students. When it comes to crafting your slate of collegiate pursuits, the sooner you get involved, the better.

1. **Always Be Working on a “Grand Project”**

Successful, interesting college students are definitely a varied bunch. Yet there is one thing many of them have in common: a wonderful sense of possibility. Whereas most students are content to stay the course, winning students love to get excited about big goals.

An average student sends a letter to the school newspaper; a winning student writes a regular column. An average student wants to join a club; a winning student starts a national organization. **If you want to stand out at college you should foster an attitude of “anything is possible**.” And one of the best ways to develop this attitude is to constantly be working on a “Grand Project.”

To begin with, reflect on your most heartfelt aspirations. If you could be doing anything five years from now, what would it be? Then design and follow an ambitious Grand Project that moves you toward your answer.

Your Grand Project should consist of a group of achievable, nonacademic accomplishments that, when combined, move you closer to an exciting aspiration.

1. **Take Art History and Astronomy**

**Take art history and astronomy before you graduate**. Of all the courses you could possibly take outside of your major, these two are among the most important.

In the case of art history, take an introductory course that covers the modern period. In addition to learning the difference between Manet and Monet, study Picasso's formalist innovations and become familiar with the pioneers of the Conceptual Art Movement. Contrary to popular belief, art history is surprisingly difficult to learn on your own, and taking a course at college may be your last chance to become culturally literate in the fine arts.

For astronomy, take an introductory course that covers cosmology and the universe. Current understanding of the origins of matter, the expanding cosmos, and the shape of space-time are perhaps some of the most exciting scientific discoveries of all time. Fortunately, when taught in the style of an intro course, these theories are surprisingly easy to understand and unavoidably all awe-inspiring.

1. **Blow the Curve Once a Term**

The advantages of blowing the curve on an assignment are obvious. It will help your grade, the professor will remember and support you with great recommendations and advice, and it will just plain make you feel good about yourself.

Every semester you should choose one class that you like, and within that class choose one interesting project, and then knock it out of the ballpark. Get started very early, work diligently, go above and beyond the stated specifications, and add on extra work to show true intellectual curiosity.

1. **Ask One Question at Every Lecture**

**Make sure that you always ask at least one question at every lecture.** The night before, when you are doing the reading that will be covered in the lecture, jot down a quick list of questions that seem relevant. Then, once in class, follow the professor's material carefully, modifying and honing your questions as appropriate. Finally, when you feel you have a question that is meaningful, and will clarify an important point of the discussion, ask away.

1. **Jump into Research as Soon as Possible**

While most professors enjoy teaching undergraduates, their professional obligations go far beyond the classroom. The primary responsibility of a professor at any university or research institution is the vaguely defined goal of “advancing knowledge” in their field. And the bulk of this knowledge advancement takes place in the form of original research and academic publication. To put it simply: **Research is where all the action is**. If you really want to stand out at your college, you need to be in the middle of this action. You need to be involved with the machinery of original research that is going on all around you. You need to tap into the incredible opportunities offered to you, the undergraduate, to actually make a difference in the world of academia.

Why? First of all, working on real research is like strength training for your intellect. It's challenging, enlightening, and rewarding all at the same time. Once you have worked on writing a peer-reviewed journal article, your paper for government 101 will seem trivial. Second, it's impressive. Regardless of what you want to do after college, the fact that you did original research sends all the right messages- you're smart, you're driven, you're cut above the rest. And third, there is no way to become closer to a professor than to spend a weekend in a biology lab with him or her. If you make yourself indispensable in a research setting, that professor will return the favor in the form of recommendations and support.

1. **Pay Your Dues**

The reason you begin research work early in your college career is so you have time to learn and time to prove yourself. **During your first year assisting on a research project, you have to pay your dues**. Don't expect anything. Just be as helpful as possible. Be available. Get work done on time. Make life easier for your research team.

1. **Study in Fifty-Minute Chunks**

When you do schoolwork, be it reading, taking notes, working on a lab, or memorizing verbs, try to do everything in fifty-minute chunks. Take ten-minute breaks in between each fifty-minute chunk. This is key for any successful student.

Why fifty minutes? For one thing, there are compelling scientific rationales. Those who study cognition can draw maps of memory retention overtime, and demonstrate how periods of roughly fifty minutes, divided by short breaks, will maximize the amount of material you can successfully learn and remember in a given sitting. But just as important, breaking down all your work into distinct, known periods of time provides structure for your studying.

1. **Schedule Your Free Time**

**Schedule your free time**. Most people consider free time to be any time when they are not explicitly working. All you need to do is flip this understanding, and say that work time is any time that you are not explicitly relaxing. When you create your schedule each morning, you need to do two things. First, choose an endpoint for the day. For example, you might say that ten P.M. is the end of your workday, and from that point on you will just relax and go to sleep. Second, decide exactly when you are going to relax throughout the day. For example, you might decide that you will spend a half hour after lunch watching TV, two hours in the afternoon to go to the gym and hang out with friends, and an hour or two surrounding dinner to unwind. The rest of your time you will be working. As you move through your day, there will never be any question as to whether you should be relaxing. Either you are in one of your scheduled break periods, or you are working. Not only does this cut down on impromptu breaks, but it can also increase your work ethic- everyone works harder right before a scheduled reprieve.

By reversing the way you think about free time, not only will you work more, but when you do relax, you will relax better. There is no fear that you were being irresponsible, or neglecting something important.

1. **Dress Nicely for Class**

You should always take the time to brush your teeth, shower, tame your hair, and put on a good-looking outfit every morning before heading to class. When you look like you just rolled out of bed, it's all too easy to imagine rolling back in. If you dress nicely, you are sending yourself the message that you are ready to get started and attack the day.

1. **Decorate Your Room**

**Your room decor should create a space that is both comfortable and a healthy reflection of your personality**.

Why decorate? Because it will have a positive effect on your mood and energy. To wake up, go to sleep, and take breaks throughout the day in a personalized and comfortable room is refreshing. Going to classes, studying for tests, and writing papers is stressful, and having a comforting environment to retreat to is a great way to release tension.

1. **Start Studying Two Weeks in Advance**

**You have to start studying well in advance.** Your schedule is busier than you think, and if you leave a large chunk of studying until the last days before an exam, you will be forced to sacrifice.

To avoid unnecessary pain, a good rule of thumb is to begin studying two weeks in advance. Now, before you accuse me of being certifiably insane, let me make this clear: I do not mean that you should start hard core all-day study sessions fourteen days before the exam. Instead, I'm suggesting that you conduct no hard core all-day study sessions ever again. Break up those fifteen hours of studying into many painless one or two hour chunks, and you'll dominate the exam without any headaches. Of course, the only way for this to work is to spread out all of those harmless little chunks over a longer period of time. Hence the two weeks.

1. **Write Outside of Class**

**Writing is really, really important for a college student.** You will succeed academically only if you have the ability to express your thoughts clearly and convincingly. This means that if you want to win at college, you need to be good at writing. *Really* good at writing.

If you want to be a standout college student, you have to stick around after you are done with your assignments and do some extra writing. You can accomplish this by joining the staff of a publication on campus. It could be the daily newspaper, a writing magazine, a science journal, or a political paper. It doesn't matter what publication you choose as long as it requires you to write well and write often.

1. **Eat Alone Twice a Day**

At college, meals tend to be like an organizational black hole- they unexpectedly suck hours of free time out of your day. By the time you gather a group of friends, find a table at a dining hall, eat a meal, shoot the breeze, finally break away from the group, and rebuild your focus enough to get back to work, your simple meal has transformed into a major time commitment. Don't get the wrong idea, **taking the time to eat a social meal with your friends is a great idea; just don't do it more than once a day**.

1. **Find an Escape**

**You need to journey to a place where you will be cut off from everyday student life**, a place that provides you with a chance to relax and regain your sense of identity. Going to Barnes and Noble, grabbing a stack of books, and reading them over a cup of gourmet coffee is a good example of a great escape. So is taking a long drive in the country, or going for a long jog at an off-campus park. Schedule an escape for yourself every single week. And do it alone. Treat it like taking medicine.

1. **Take Hard Courses Early On**

If you are interested in potentially majoring in a particular subject, you need to start taking higher-level courses as soon as possible. This is the only way to get the exposure necessary to make the right decisions about your studies. It also reduces your future course burden as you try to fulfill all the major requirements. And, in general, taking hard courses early on will help speed up your development of crucial collegiate skills- a terrific advantage for any ambitious student.

1. **Don’t Study in Your Room**

Studying in your dorm room has only one advantage going for it: convenience. Unfortunately, this doesn't count for much, as studying is not supposed to be convenient, it's supposed to be effective. And the most effective place to study is an environment that inspires you to think intelligently, an environment without any unnecessary distractions or temptations for distraction. Or, to put it more plainly, **STUDY AT THE LIBRARY**.

1. **Don’t Study in Groups**

**Don't study in groups**. At first glance, multiperson study sessions seem to have a lot of advantages: they are social; they hold you accountable for learning material; they reduce the amount of material you have to study on your own; and they provide a safety net of people to help you understand difficult topics. Unfortunately, study groups also tend to have a rather major strike against them. They don't work!

The best way to learn difficult material is to go over it by yourself, with a lot of concentration, again and again and again until the concepts become second nature.

1. **Join an Honors Program**

This rule is a little complicated because the definition of an “honors program” differs from school to school. At some colleges you are accepted into an honors program before you ever set foot on campus, and you spend your entire collegiate career living with and taking courses only with honors students. At other colleges the program describes a track of special courses you take in addition to your normal courses. And at still other colleges it's just a title bestowed upon you if you get good grades and attend some special seminars your senior year. **Regardless of the specifics at your school, if there is any possible opportunity to join an honors program, go for it!** These programs generally represent a slightly better version of your college. The classes are smaller, the professors more interested, the students more inspiring. To put it bluntly, an honors program will provide you with a better education than a regular academic program. You will be challenged more, you will learn more, and you will fulfill more of your potential as a student. In addition, having an honors designation on your diploma will go a long way when looking for post-graduation opportunities.

1. **Do Schoolwork Every Day**

**You should do some amount of school work every single day**. It doesn't matter how much schoolwork you complete; just as long as you do something every day you will have a much easier time staying in the zone.

1. **Attend Guest Lectures**

**You should try to attend at least two guest lectures every month**. If you are an art history major and you take the time to see a smart, cutting-edge speaker, you will fill inspired by the thought of excelling in your field. If you are interested in government and you go to watch a political candidate or policymaker hold court, you will walk away energized about the possibility of a future in politics. If you are an aspiring writer, and you hear a successful author describe her paths to success, you will be motivated to rush home and fire up your processor.

1. **Exercise Five Days a Week**

Exercising has an almost magical effect on students. The boost in physical energy and mental motivation that results from a quick, hard workout is better than any caffeine high. **Don't let the decision to exercise become a debatable question**. Instead, make it a habit, like going to class or brushing your teeth.

1. **Stay in Touch**

**Stay in touch with your friends from back home**. It can be surprisingly easy to lose touch with the important people in your life. Your old friends know you better than your college friends. When you go through rough times, a phone call to a friend from home will pick you back up. You will never feel lonely. Your sense of personal identity will remain strong.

1. **Take on an Extra Major or Minor**

Taking on an extra major or minor is a good thing for obvious reasons. You will come away from college with in-depth knowledge of more than one field. It will help you focus during your undergraduate years. And most important, it looks very impressive when looking for a job, applying to graduate school, or winning awards and scholarships.

1. **Meet Often with Your Adviser**

Most likely, you will be assigned an academic advisor your freshman year. The key to handling advisors is to give them the opportunity to advise. Come to your first scheduled advisor meeting with a list of questions. Press your advisor for his or her wisdom on choosing majors, handling distributive requirements, finding the best, most worthwhile courses, and learning general strategies for keeping on top of your workload. Feel free to e-mail additional questions as the term goes on. Take the time to set up an appointment at the beginning of each semester to make sure you're on the right track.

1. **Don’t Get a Normal Job**

**Try to find a strategic job at your college**. One option is to get a paid position in an academic department in which you have an interest. You will be working with professors and will become very familiar with their research projects. And you will be creating valuable faculty connections. This type of strategic job provides both money and a head start towards succeeding at college.

1. **Use Three Days to Write a Paper**

There are two types of papers assigned at college: long ones and short ones. Long papers are typically of the research variety. They require quite a bit of time to complete because you have to track down sources, generate original theses, and master complicated new ideas. These papers are really hard. Fortunately, the vast majority of papers assigned at college are short papers.

**A good rule is to always use three days to write your short papers**. This doesn't mean spending three days working on the paper; it means spending these days actually writing.

1. **Don’t Undersleep, Don’t Oversleep**

What is important is that you know how much sleep you need to remain energetic throughout the day. For some people that may be exactly eight hours. For others, such as me, it's more like seven hours. If you want to succeed at college, you need to have energy and focus every single day. So figure out how much sleep you need so that you don't have to fight the siren call of your bed all afternoon.

**Once you have landed upon this magic number of sleep hours, keep it consistent**. This means not only should you avoid getting too few hours of sleep, you should also avoid getting too many hours of sleep.

1. **Relax Before Exams**

True or false: the final hour before an exam is a good time to frantically review your notes? The answer is, most decidedly, false.

This period of time is more crucial than you might imagine. The typical college exam tests two things: your ability to demonstrate an understanding of complicated material, and your ability to recall and synthesize this information under pressure. It's not just what you know, but also how well you can explain what you know in short, hectic bursts. This means that after you put in the study time needed to learn the material, you have to put in the relaxation time needed to prepare your mind to operate under pressure. The best state for your mind to be in is confident and calm. **Take the hour before an exam to relax**. Read a nonacademic book. Listen to music that makes you happy. Run a couple of errands. Have a conversation with a friend. Work on unrelated- non demanding- school work.

1. **Make Friends Your #1 Priority**

You should never take your friends for granted. They are your social safety net. When you are having a bad day, when you do poorly on an exam, when you are rejected by a member of the opposite sex, or fall flat on your face attempting to walk up to the library steps, your friends are the ones who will help you feel better.

Making friends your number one priority doesn't mean sacrificing your other obligations, but it does demand that you keep them in mind.

1. **Don’t Binge Drink**

You need to be aware of how alcohol affects your ability to perform as a student. You can't regularly binge drink and expect to succeed. Be mature and make the right decisions to keep your mind and body in a condition to perform your best.

1. **Ignore Your Classmates’ Grades**

**Different students grades on any given test or paper are not directly comparable**. There are too many factors that account for both good and mediocre academic performance on any given day, and none of these factors has anything to do with intelligence. So save yourself a lot of unjustified grief (or pride), and simply ignore your classmates’ grades. Worry about your performance and progress; let your classmates worry about their own.

1. **Seek Out Phenomenal Achievers**

**How do you upgrade your notion of personal success? One easy method is to seek out phenomenal achievers**. What is a phenomenal achiever? Every school has them. It's that rather nice math major who happens to be a Rhodes Scholar or that quiet drama major who has already produced two plays, won a bevy of creative wards, and is working seriously on his first novel. Or that student assembly officer who just formed a statewide youth mentoring program, and works on national political campaigns during his off-terms. Find these people. Meet them. Treat them to a meal and have them spill their guts. Find out how they did what they did, and what it felt like, and what they want to try next.

1. **Learn to Listen**

One of the most important skills to develop at college is the ability to really listen. **It's much more important that you spend your undergraduate years developing an ability to synthesize ideas and learn**.

1. **Never Pull an All-Nighter**

Why do all-nighters remain common? Perhaps the biggest myth surrounding this classic collegiate study technique is that all-nighters are inevitable. They only occur if you *decide* to start working the day before.

Here is the rather complicated and completely unexpected secret to avoiding this situation: **Don’t decide to start working the day before**. It's really that simple

1. **Laugh Every Day**

They say laughter is the best medicine, and this holds especially true for college students, mainly due to one particularly nasty recurring problem: stress. College-related stress has a negative impact on the body. It leads to exhaustion, a decrease in metabolism, a weakened immune system, and general unhappiness. It's hard to avoid situations that cause stress, but it's not hard to find methods to combat its negative effects. Laughing is one of these methods.

Not to get too physiologically specific, but the act of laughing releases an antibody known as IgA. This little critter releases endorphins, fights off stress-related hormones, and in general makes you feel good.

1. **Use High-Quality Notebooks**

In general, making sure to use high-quality and well-organized school supplies is an important way to reduce the stress of disorganization. It also helps structure your course material in an efficient way, and creates the right mental cues for a serious student doing serious work. Using a high-quality notebook will not guarantee you success, but it will create the right environment for it to flourish.

1. **Keep a Work-Progress Journal**

You should buy a small spiral notebook that you store in your top desk drawer. Every night, follow the very simple habit of jotting down the day's date, the long-term work you had scheduled for the day, and the work that you actually accomplished. These entries should be very brief, no more than a line each. The idea is that the actual act of keeping the journal is very easy, so you should have no problem making it an unbreakable habit.

This little act of recording any discrepancy between work scheduled and work accomplished is amazingly effective in keeping your mind in the game. The reason it seems so easy to ignore long-term work obligations is because no one holds you accountable. No one wants a permanent record of their temporary laziness, so you'll sigh loudly, pour another cup of coffee, and grind out what needs to get done.

1. **Seek Out Fun**

**If you don't actively seek out fun, it won't actively seek out you**. The key to avoiding this tedious fate is to actively plan unpredictability and adventure into your life. Seek out fun, and your college experience will be greatly enhanced.

1. **Inflate Your Ambition**

The difference between a successful student and a regular student is that the former is always on the lookout for situations where they can really push a talent to its limits. This is the essence of inflating your ambition. **Take the most important projects or commitments with which you are involved, and pump up your criteria for success**.

1. **Get Involved with Your Major Department**

You need to get involved with your major department. Showing up at optional events and becoming a recognized face among the faculty is a way to do this. The recommendations and personal contacts you need for your future will come mainly from professors in your major departments, so they need to know you.

1. **Care About Your Grades, Ignore Your G.P.A.**

Does a standout student get good grades? Sure, for the most part. They study smart and engage the material, so they tend to do well. But what is more important is that they treat each class as an intellectual challenge to conquer. Sometimes things don't turn out the way they want, and this is unavoidable. Bad grades happen, and this shouldn't be a big deal. As long as you put in the effort, who cares about one bad day?

If you begin to obsess about your G.P.A., much of the excitement of college is lost. Every test stops being an opportunity to show off your ability to engage the material, and instead becomes a potential devastation to your overall academic standing.

1. **Always Go To Class**

Lectures are the source of the most important material covered by any class. The professor is telling you what he or she feels is necessary to know about a subject, what is not necessary to know about a subject, and what is the right way to approach, analyze, or discuss a subject.

Attending class is not the same as reviewing the PowerPoint slides you downloaded from the Internet, or going through the barely legible notes of a friend. The specific cadence of the professor's speech, how he or she structures and clarifies the information during the lecture, the collective answers to the questions asked during class, these are all important elements for helping you cement an understanding of this crucial material.

1. **Set Arbitrary Deadlines**

“If this paper isn't due for another ten days, it's not like I have to work on it right now.” “It would be nice if I started researching this afternoon, but it's not absolutely necessary, so why bother?” “If that final project is three weeks from being due, there is really no good reason why I shouldn't be watching TV.” These are the insidious thoughts that pervades the mind of a student when a deadline seems harmlessly far away. This is why you need to force yourself to always be scheduling your time as if a deadline is near. The key to doing this: **Set arbitrary deadlines**.

1. **Eat Healthy**

**The most important reason to eat healthy is to maximize your energy**. Fatty foods, refined sugar, and large amounts of refined carbohydrates will all lead you to becoming increasingly sluggish.

1. **Volunteer Quietly**

Not only is it important to get perspective on the world beyond the confines of college, but it's good for your soul to dedicate time to improving the lives of others. **But don't just volunteer, volunteer quietly**.

If you want to really derive the full personal benefit from your community service work, don't talk about it much. Don't gripe to your friends about the time commitment. In short, keep the experience personal. When you volunteer quietly you are purifying your motivations. To be helping people without the benefit of outside praise and validation is a wonderful way to increase your sense of self-worth, strengthen your identity, and solidify your core values.

1. **Write as if Going for a Pulitzer**

Good writing sparkles, not just in content but also in form. When you read good writing, the varied rhythm of the sentences, the careful choices of words, and the descriptive phrases grab your attention and pull you through the topic toward inevitable conclusions.

One good way to remember to focus on form as well as content is to **approach every paper as if you were trying to win a Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting**.

1. **Attend Political Rallies**

Political activism is important. It speaks to your inherent idealism, it gives you a sense of purpose, and it elevates your sense of self-worth as you begin to realize that you can have it impact. To become active in a causes is a powerful strategy for helping you feel fulfilled at college.

1. **Maximize Your Summers**

**Summer vacation is not really a vacation**. Instead, it should be viewed as an annually occurring grace period when you get to put classes aside for two months and fully focus on nonacademic ambitions and experiences.

If you are a budding writer, try for as many paid publication internships as possible and, failing that, look for small jobs at local publications. (You would be surprised how many small town newspapers are in need of a general-use intern/copy-editor to lighten the load.) If you are a biology major, inquire at every lab of every university and research institution within a twenty-mile radius of your home as to whether they have a lab assistant job available. If Grisham is your Shakespeare, personally contact two dozen different law firms to attest your dedication for gaining a summer internship. Your advisors at college are another good source of both ideas and connections for interesting opportunities, so keep them in the loop as well.

1. **Choose Goals, Explore Routes**

This is a key concept for succeeding with ambitious pursuits: **Once you have decided on a destination, explore many routes to get you there**. And once you begin exploring many routes, combine the approaches that seem successful, discard the attempts that fail, and constantly take the time to reevaluate what new opportunities may have just become recently available.

1. **Don't Take Breaks Between Classes**

It's probably no surprise to hear that once you enter college, your educational experience will no longer be conducted in seven-hour continuous stretches of back-to-back classes. Depending on how your school handles its semester system, you will probably never have more than three classes on most days. This means you will frequently be faced with long stretches of time in-between class periods. It might be ten minutes, or it might be a couple of hours, but in an environment where scheduling is crucial, how you handle this break time is important.

**Don't take breaks between classes!** Use this time to keep active and to accomplish tasks that need to get done. Don't give your mind the chance to begin shutting itself back down.

1. **Don’t Network**

Networking is the act of purposely expanding your circle of acquaintances so that one day you can call upon these “friends” to put in a good word for you when the time is right. This skill has long been a staple of the professional business world. That being said, as far as you are concerned: **Leave networking to business professionals**. If you actively try to network as a college student you will annoy people.

Networking works best when it's an arrangement of mutual benefit. This is not to say that you should avoid making connections; you just have to find a better approach. One such approach is to anti-network. Anti-networking is the art of getting what you want by never coming close to asking for it. This technique is simple and almost paradoxically effective.

The key to the anti-networking approach is to impress without imploring. The goal is that one day the contact, who has grown fond of you and is impressed by you and your integrity, will notify you that he or she knows of a job opening, and will be willing to recommend you if you are interested. Don't network. But keep your connections strong.

1. **Publish Op-Eds**

The Op-Ed pages are by far the most entertaining section of any student newspaper. **Write an Op-Ed piece once every semester.** Choose a topic you know a lot about, polish your prose and arguments, and aim to make a difference in the minds of your fellow students. There is an even bigger thrill to seeing your ideas published for all to read. There is an even bigger thrill to seeing letters to the editor and rebuttal pieces start to form a dialogue based on your seedling of an idea.

1. **Use A Filing Cabinet**

Though seemingly trivial, a simple act of buying- and using- a filing cabinet can have a big impact on your stress levels and effectiveness as a college student. At college, living alone for the first time, you have to deal with a surprising amount of paperwork and important documents.

Using a simple filing system is just plain practical. Worry about the big problems of academic life; don't let organization issues steal too much of your attention or energy.

1. **Find a Secret Study Space**

Because there are so many distractions at college, studying in a quiet, somber, distraction-free location such as the library is very important. **You need to find your own secret study place**. A location that you know will almost always be available; a monastic corner where silence is complete, deep concentration a given, and all distractions are deflected. Time to explore the odd corners and depths of your favorite buildings on campus, and you will certainly find a hidden jewel of a a study space to call your own.

1. **Study with the Quiz-and-Recall Method**

**You should build your entire approach to studying around the concept that making yourself recall specific information is the absolute best way to learn.** When quizzing yourself, you don't necessarily have to write down your answers. This might be necessary for solving math problems, but for discussion-style questions, feel free to formulate your response out loud. You can cover topics much easier when you just have to talk as opposed to write.

The act of pulling the information from your memory and articulating the main points cements knowledge much stronger than just reading it over a couple of times.

1. **Empty Your In-Box**

**Organize the messages in your e-mail inbox like you would your paper files**. Create a separate electronic folder for specific class-related emails, family e-mails, and friend e-mails. Also create a generic important folder to hold messages containing any random information you need to hang onto. Treat your e-mail and inbox like you do the rest of your life, with an eye toward organization, ease, and efficiency.

1. **Relax Before Sleep**

**Relax for at least half an hour before you go to sleep**. If you go to bed with the stresses of the day fresh on your mind, you will have a harder time falling asleep, and psychologically you deny your mind the chance to recover from the pleasures of the day.

1. **Start Fast, End Slow**

The typical student strategy for writing a paper, studying for a test, researching a project, completing an application, or working on any other big assignment is to figure out the absolute latest point at which they can start working and still finish by the deadline. **To be a successful student, you must abandon the start-slow, end-fast mindset, and instead approach all projects by aiming to start fast, end slow.**

1. **Spend a Semester Studying Abroad**

Almost every college has study abroad programs. Some are language-focused, where you live with the family and try to build fluency in their native language through cultural immersion. Others are focused on specific academic concentrations, like art history, where students can travel to Florence to study Italian renaissance art and architecture.

It's a sad but true fact that unless you become independently wealthy, there will be few opportunities later in life to drop everything and spend a whole season exploring a foreign country.

1. “**No Regrets**”

To have “no regrets” is to approach life with a sense of excitement and possibility. It's to be happy about your opportunities, not your successes. The fact that you are able to have the experience of going for a major award, pursuing an interesting research project, or starting a student organization is a great affirmation of your zest for life. If you fail, why waste time with regrets? Be thankful for the experience and ask what's next?