

The Perfect 10:

10 Easy and Essential Tips for Students Entering College

Congratulations, you're officially a college student! All those years of hard work, dedication and persistence have brought you to this time of independence in living and learning. Now that you have arrived at your home for the next several years, you need to make it *yours*.

To help you adjust to this new environment and to get grounded in the next phase of your life, here's a list of tips to help with your transition.

These *10 easy and essential tips* are based on the feedback of college students who have looked back on their experiences and offered their insight. These tips are designed to make your college experience successful, rewarding, and as free of stress as possible.

1. **Explore your new environment.** You're entering a brand new world filled with dorms, lecture halls, student centers and a range of research and support resources. One of the first things you should do is find your comfort zones. You know, those places where you can eat, study, meet friends, exercise and have moments of general solitude. It's time to explore! Look for places where you can unwind. Learn where to go in a health emergency. Find the bike or running path that suits you best. Bottom line, this is your new home. Check it out!

TIP: Once you're more familiar with your new environment, it will start to feel less scary and more like home.

2. **Have the "roommate talk."** Some people would rather have an emergency appendectomy than discuss hard issues. Lucky for you, the "roommate talk" isn't a confrontation — it's a conversation. What's more, it's a great way to get to know your new roommate and learn what makes him or her tick. Discuss your preferences regarding sleeping, studying, visitors, eating and cleaning. How do you handle clutter? Will you share a refrigerator? What will you do if conflicts arise? Make rules (and take them seriously).

TIP: By discussing these things in the beginning, you're more likely to avoid problems later on.

3. **Balance your load.** Life is all about balance — particularly in college. You may think you have the perfect course schedule until the day when suddenly, out of nowhere, you're bombarded by multiple projects, papers and exams. Fortunately, some of the surprise can be avoided early on. Choose your course load wisely by seeking help from your faculty advisor, a professor, a dean or the advising office. Then, after the first week of classes, reevaluate your load. Did you make good choices? If not, use the drop-add period to rebalance.

TIP: Take advantage of the expertise of advisors and professors. After all, these people are there to help you achieve your goals.

4. **Discover your best practices for learning.** Everyone is different, right? So it only makes sense that everyone learns differently. The demands of college will be great, so to meet those demands, you will be required to work efficiently. To understand how you learn, take a learning style inventory (there are many free ones on the web), learn your strengths and use them. Where problems emerge, you can turn to resources like the campus writing center, peer tutors, faculty review sessions and informal study groups.

TIP: Once you understand how you learn, you'll be able to maximize your study power.

5. **Find and prepare your study space.** Some people do their best work in coffee shops. Some demand 100% peace and quiet and find libraries and out of the way nooks in buildings on campus. Some need the comfort of their rooms. Wherever you choose to study, it's important you find a space that's right for you.

TIP: Be sure to keep a good supply of materials (paper, pens, printer cartridges, flash drives, note cards, calendars, highlighters, etc.) on hand so that, when you are ready, there are no delays.

6. **Find your niche.** It is not a secret that this is your time! Sure, you have goals and you take your responsibilities seriously, but the undergraduate years are perfect times for you to explore different opportunities and try new things. Never tried crew but always thought it looked like fun? Want to act in a play? Why not direct one? How about ballroom dancing? And then there's fencing, music, dance, writing for the school paper or literary magazine, tutoring, becoming a peer counselor or participating in some of the countless other activities that are at your disposal.

TIP: Try an assortment of different activities. You may be surprised at what you enjoy and where your talents lie.

7. **Resources, resources, resources.** Just because you've entered a new world doesn't mean you're all on your own. Every college has a wealth of resources available. From entertainment to sports to creative expression to religious practice to academic and emotional support, it's all right there on your new campus. Find out what's available to you by reading the school paper, talking to your fellow students, checking bulletin boards or signing up for e-mailing lists. Feeling stressed? Enlist the help of one of your resources.

TIP: There are countless resources available to you on college campus. Use them.

8. **Talk to your professors.** You're not in high school anymore. Teachers have office hours for a reason. Truth is, your college faculty, lecturers and TAs are all there to help you. Take advantage of office hours and get to know your professors. By

meeting you in their offices, professors will get to know you and recognize your motivation. This type of connection can lead to good rapport, better understanding of the material and other opportunities.

TIP: Talking to your professors outside of class is a great way to make a connection and stand out from the pack.

- 9. Maintain healthy habits.** Right now you're thinking "*healthy?!? Whatever. Pass the pizza!*" College is stressful at times so, while it is important to have fun, it is also important to be kind to your body, which means regular diet, exercise and sleep. Sleep deprivation leads to inefficient work, fatigue and, over long periods, can translate into unstable moods. And because memories are consolidated during sleep, all-nighters are not effective ways to prepare for exams. A balanced sleeping schedule, along with steady diet and exercise, will help your brain focus and give you energy.

TIP: Your ability to maintain healthy habits will make all the difference during times of stress.

- 10. Build friendships.** At the risk of sounding like a mushy greeting card, college friendships can last a lifetime. After all, friendships are built from sharing experiences, helping one another through tough times and by making memories together. Since college is your new "home away from home," the people you meet will become your "family away from family." Don't be discouraged if you do not find those "lifelong friends" immediately; they are there. In time, you will meet those individuals whose friendships you will cherish.

TIP: Seek opportunities to spend time with people with whom you have common interests and goals. Build a community that suits you.

So there you have it, ten tips to help make your college experience successful. And for those of you are worried, remember that college is just like everything else in life: scary until you get the hang of it. Also remember that you are not alone. In fact, at this very moment, millions of other students *just like you* are preparing to take on the same challenge.

As you embark on your exciting journey, take confidence knowing you are ready to make this new experience as success. Use the tips to get yourself off to a good start.

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