For many undergraduates, the learning techniques they relied upon in high school often do not work when they are confronted with the academic expectations of college. Further, many have not been given explicit instruction about how to read critically, study actively, write clearly, or manage their time wisely. For most of these students, learning to do these activities—essentially learning how to learn—will be crucial for their collegiate success.

Many college instructors focus almost entirely on content in their teaching, and some challenge the notion that it is their responsibility to teach students study skills. But as noted faculty developer Laurie Richlin says, “teaching without learning is just talking.” Effective teaching, therefore, can be described by what the teacher has the students do both in and out of class. It is outside of class where students do the vast majority of their reading, studying, and writing. Because of this fact, we should understand how students are using that time, and we should include specific learning strategies in our classroom instruction to help them maximize their time and effort outside of class. Below are four areas in which many of your students are likely lacking skills, as well as strategies you can use to assist them in developing effective learning skills.

### Time Management Strategies

**Raise awareness.** Explain that poor time management is the #1 issue that impedes student achievement.

**Goal-setting.** Have students consider college as a 40-hour work week and to schedule those hours accordingly. Have students sort goals (both long- and short-term) into three categories: A (high priority), B (medium priority), and C (low priority); ask them to prioritize those goals daily, concentrating on the As, not the Cs, by making a daily “to do” list.

**Term calendar.** Encourage students to write important deadlines and other information down on a calendar that they refer to daily.

**Be self-aware.** Ask students to consider their strengths, goals, time-wasters, and biological rhythms for the best work times. Remind them “to plan to work and then to work the plan” but to be realistic, not over-scheduling. Recommend that they to reward themselves when successful.

**Use all available time effectively.** Encourage them to make the most of the odd times—e.g. looking at concept cards while waiting for the bus.

**Break up work into manageable parts.** Provide a reading schedule, stressing that it is easier to read 10 pages a night than to read 70 pages in one sitting.

### Note Taking

**Teach good note taking.** Discuss the components of good note taking—organizing notes in simple paragraph or outline form, distinguishing main points from details, leaving space between key points, noting examples, numbering, using abbreviations and symbols, including examples, and being selective.

**Where to sit?** Suggest that they sit in front within the professor’s line of vision. Relate the research that indicates a relationship between students’ grades and where they sit in the room.

**Come prepared.** Emphasize the importance of doing the assigned reading before a lecture and of reviewing notes from the previous lecture.

**The Cornell Method.** Suggest that they divide their pages into two or three columns. While studying, students can use one column to predict or ask questions, make clarifications, or correlate material from the textbook.

**What is important?** Prepare your students to listen for extended comments, superlatives, and voice and volume changes as indicators of important material.

**Revisit notes afterward and often.** Stress that interacting with notes after the lecture is perhaps the most important phase of notetaking. Introduce the idea of annotating notes, preferably as soon after the lecture as possible.
Strategic Reading

**Encourage active reading strategies.** Undergraduates are notorious for passively underlining whole sections of pages without processing anything. Tell them that active reading involves more than highlighting whole sentences, paragraphs, or pages. In place of highlighting, encourage students to write substantive annotations in the margins of their books (e.g., questions, comments, summaries, paraphrases, abbreviations). Inform them that bookstores do not pay more for unmarked books.

**Pre-reading.** Encourage them to preview chapters, looking for headings, subheadings, bold words, and definitions. Encourage them to read chapter summaries first as a preview of what to look for as they read.

Study Skills

**Encourage continuous, active study strategies.** Encourage any activity that engages the students in rehearsing material, paraphrasing it in their own words, or reformulating it in a new way. Rehearsal is a way to process information in order to remember it better. Have students predict test questions and quiz one another either during class or outside of class. Emphasize the important of doing these activities often, not only right before a test.

**Describe how to study in groups effectively.** Encourage study groups, emphasizing that each member needs to come prepared to talk through a difficult idea with the group, that members should be classmates first, friends second, that groups meet in a place that is conducive to studying, and that groups have a clear goal and structure.

**Teach a variety of study techniques that generalize to many purposes.** Introduce different study techniques that complement the material being tested, such as:

- **CARDS**—write a word or phrase on one side and write an organizing term in the top right-hand corner. An organizing term helps students group like concepts together. On the other side, have students write all the material they know in their own words.

- **Concept Maps and Graphs**—show how concepts are related to one another or to peripheral ideas, especially helpful for seeing relationships between complex concepts.

- **Talk-throughs**—saying the information and monitoring your learning.

- **Timelines**—consider a timeline chart. The vertical axis delineates time, and the horizontal axis delineates different concepts (e.g., political, social, and cultural events).

- **K.W.L.**—students write down what they Know, What it is that they think they need to know, and what they need to Learn.

- **P.L.A.E.**—Pre-planning Stage (step one): Gathering information about the test and setting goals; Listing Stage (step two): Selecting and planning the best way to study for the test; Activating (step three): Forming questions to ask while student puts plan into operation; Evaluating (step four): Forming questions to ask after student sees exam score.

Further Suggestions for Teaching Students Learn How to Learn

- Assign and go over *Learning (Your First Job)* by Robert Leamnson, which can be found at [ctl.uga.edu](http://ctl.uga.edu).
- Tell them your own best strategies for studying, learning, and mastering course material.
- Ask successful students to relate how they study for exams or prepare for projects.
- Spend time discussing scholarly vs. unscholarly sources and where they can access them.

Sources


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