

e-tips
for *A* grades



Sampler

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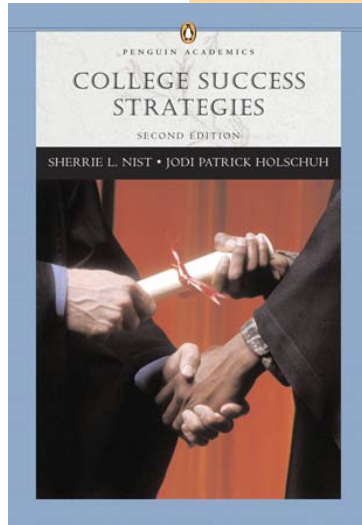
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You're in college. Now what?

Face it — college can be daunting without some overall strategies to help guide you. Check out this book to learn more about your learning style and how you can adapt your study behaviors as a result. You'll also get great advice on:

- Improving your organizational skills
- Dealing with stress
- Using your textbooks properly
- Preparing for exams
- And more!

The tips featured in the following section of the *e-tips for A grades* ebook were graciously provided by Jodi Patrick Holschuh, Assistant Professor at the University of Georgia. As an award-winning teacher, Jodi has helped thousands of students make the sometimes difficult transition from high school to college. To purchase copies of one of Jodi's books, *College Success Strategies*, visit <http://www.etipsforgrades.com/shop>.

Cozy Up

Think about the place where you currently read and study. Just as a productive learning environment can help when you read or study, a distracting one can get in the way of your learning. You need to create a place that is free from distraction and allows you to maximize your studying time. If you find that you are losing concentration for reading within the first 10 minutes, consider the following points:

- ♦ Noise level. Some students say that they need complete quiet to read and study. Others study best in a crowded, noisy room because the noise actually helps them concentrate. Some students like quiet music playing; others do not. The point is, you should know the level of noise that is optimal for your own studying. However, one general rule for all students is that the television seems to be more of a distraction than music or other background noise, so leave the TV off when you are reading or studying. Also, don't let yourself become distracted by computer games, email, or Internet surfing.
 - ♦ Get out of bed. You will concentrate better when you read or study in a straight-backed chair – such as a desk or kitchen chair - than in your bed. Many students find that studying in bed lead to more napping than learning. In addition, your ideal learning place is one where the only thing you do in that place is study. If you have a desk, set it up so that you have everything handy-pens and pencils, a tablet of paper, calculator, your books and notes, or anything else you need to study. If you find that you cannot create an effective learning environment in your home because there are too many distractions, try to find a quiet place on campus to study, such as the library.
 - ♦ Get rid of distractions. The next time you study, think about the things that might get in your way. Is your cell phone ringing? Your Instant messenger chiming? Are the neighbors making too much noise? Are your roommates taking your attention? Once you recognize what is getting in the way of your studying, you can take steps to making the necessary changes. For some students, this is as simple as turning off their phones for an hour.
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Keep Up!

The average freshman is assigned over 250 pages of reading each week, so clearly you're going to need to keep up with your reading assignments. If you do not read during week one, that means that you will need to read 500 pages the next week – just to stay caught up! If you choose not to read during the second week either . . . well you can see how the work can just snowball. Here are some tips on managing your reading:

- ♦ Set a Reading Schedule. This is where you need to start. Each week, take a look at the syllabi for all of your courses to determine your reading assignments. Break down the work accordingly. For example, lets say you have the following assignments:
 - ✓ 75 pages in your English literature course
 - ✓ 45 pages in psychology
 - ✓ 38 pages in biology
 - ✓ 47 pages in economics
 - ✓ 45 pages in calculus

That is a total of 250 pages of reading this week. Here's what you need to do:

- ♦ Flip through your assigned reading to create a schedule that makes sense according to the topics you need to cover. Remember, you do not want to stop reading in the middle of an important concept, so be sure your reading schedule is sensitive to how the material is presented in your text. You might break down the task.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
<u>English</u> 20 pages (A Rose for Emily-Faulkner)	<u>English</u> 15 pages (Interpreting Faulkner)	<u>English</u> 20 pages (Analyzing fiction)	<u>Psychology</u> 20 pages (politics of intelligence, creativity, chapter summary)	<u>English</u> 20 pages (An upheaval-Chekhov)	<u>Economics</u> 15 pages (maximizing profits)	
<u>Psychology</u> 10 pages (Intro to intelligence)	<u>Psychology</u> 15 pages (Assessment, IQ, theories)	<u>Biology</u> 15 pages (energy and the cell)	<u>Biology</u> 10 pages (how enzymes work)	<u>Biology</u> 23 pages (membrane structure and function)		
<u>Calculus</u> 15 pages (Tangent lines)	<u>Calculus</u> 10 pages (Def of derivative)	<u>Calculus</u> 10 pages (Techniques of differentiation)	<u>Economics</u> 20 pages (from factory to shelves)	<u>Calculus</u> 10 pages (implicit differentiation)		
<u>Economics</u> 12 pages (Production process)						

According to this reading schedule, you will have most of Friday and all of Saturday off from reading. If you choose to read those days as well, you can break down the task even further.

- ♦ Set Reading Goals. Before you begin, take a look at the text's headings and subheading in the sections you will be reading and set some goals. For example, "by the time I am finished reading, I will understand the functions of the endocrine system." Or, "by the time I am finished reading, I will understand the three main principles of a market economy."
- ♦ Figure out your reading tolerance level. For all of us, it is easier to read some subjects than others. Your reading tolerance for history may be greater than for biology. For each of your classes try the following:
 - ✓ Look at the clock or use a stopwatch to track your time.
 - ✓ Read until you begin to lose concentration.
 - ✓ How long has it been? 5 minutes? 20 minutes? 2 minutes?
 - ✓ Use this as your baseline reading tolerance level-that is, how long you can go without losing concentration?

Your reading tolerance probably differs depending on your interest and level of knowledge about the topic. No matter where you are in your personal tolerance, you can build it up. Lets say you had a reading tolerance of 8 minutes in your history class. Tonight, read for 8 minutes, take a short break and then read another two sets at 8 minutes apiece. Tomorrow aim for three rounds of 10 minutes and so on. Keep building until you can read 45-50 minutes without losing concentration-you can do it!

Take Charge

In high school, you may have been able to get good grades without reading much of the text. Now that you're in college, professors will expect you to read the textbook and may test you on information not discussed in class but covered in the reading. In fact, many professors test on assigned readings as a check to make sure students are using their texts.

Reading your text is important because:

- ♦ **Text information may build.** This is especially true in math and science. If you don't understand what is discussed in Chapter 2 you will be completely lost by Chapter 5. Even in courses in history and psychology where the information does not necessarily build, terms that were used and explained in one chapter might be assumed in another.
- ♦ **Your text will help you remember the course material for a longer time.** You will find that in college you will not have tests as often as you did in high school. You will need to remember more information for longer periods of time. Even if you don't have an exam on Friday, it doesn't mean you don't have anything to do. In college, you need to know ways to remember course material for an extended time. This means that you need to read and keep up with the material.

One way to get the most out of your texts is to preview your reading assignments. Previewing will help you focus on your reading and consists of the following steps:

- ♦ **Read the chapter title.** It tells you about the overall topic covered in the chapter and may even give insight into the author's intent.
- ♦ **Read the headings and subheadings.** The headings and subheadings will explain the chapter's focus and the author's approach to the topic. For example, a heading in your history text called "The Agony of Reconstruction" would introduce very different material from a heading called "Reconstruction: Benefits and Advances."
- ♦ **Read the boldfaced and italicized terms.** These terms will point out new vocabulary or content-specific terms that will be discussed in the chapter.
- ♦ **Note the typographical aids.** Many texts use graphs, charts, tables, or illustrations to emphasize key ideas. These sections can often clarify complex concepts.
- ♦ **Read the introduction.** If your textbook offers chapter introductions, it is a good idea to read this section when you preview the chapter to get an idea of what the topic is about.
- ♦ **Read the summary.** If your textbook contains chapter summaries, read this section BEFORE you actually read the chapter. The summary outlines the key information you should learn while reading the chapter. By reading it before reading the chapter, you will be able to identify the key points in the chapter.
- ♦ **Read the end of the chapter material.** This may include study questions, vocabulary lists, or application exercises. These resources can be used to quiz yourself over the material once you have completed your reading.

Write it Down

- ♦ **Read to learn.** Read with the intent to learn (not just to finish the assigned pages). People remember best when they have a purpose, so set some goals for each reading session.
- ♦ **Don't rely on highlighting.** Highlighting is often a passive activity because students typically are not reading to remember; they are marking the material so they can come back and learn it later. But in college you have so much reading to do that you hardly have time to read the material once, much less come back to reread. What you need to do is use a strategy, such as text annotation, that will help you to learn as you go.
- ♦ **Use text annotation.** Text annotation is where you take notes in the margins of your text – pulling out the key ideas you need to remember. Here is what you need to know about text annotation:

- ✓ You might want to think about annotation this way – if you had to teach this material to a classmate, what would be important to tell her? That is the material you should note.
- ✓ Annotation is effective because you read a few paragraphs (one subheading if possible), think, and then write the key information in your own words. If you find that you cannot put it in your own words, then you just might not understand what you are reading. You should then reread the material or ask about this topic in class.
- ✓ Annotate definitions, examples, lists or characteristics, names/dates/events, and other important text information. Be sure to annotate important graphs, charts, diagrams, and text boxes as well.
- ✓ Try to condense the information as you annotate - no need to write in full sentences. Just get the gist.

Kennedy Intensifies the Cold War • 967

Oct. 1962—Cuban missile crisis

USSR built up arms in Cuba

IFK warns Castro

BUT
Soviets secretly built sites for med and inter. range missiles

Khrushchev claimed it was defensive; not really so

Soviets wanted to close strategic advantage b/w USSR and US

CONTAINING CASTRO: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The climax of Kennedy's crusade came in October 1962 with the Cuban missile crisis. Throughout the summer and early fall, the Soviets engaged in a massive arms buildup in Cuba, ostensibly to protect Castro from an American invasion. In the United States, Republican candidates in the 1962 congressional elections called for a firm American response; Kennedy contented himself with a stern warning against the introduction of any offensive weapons, believing their presence would directly threaten American security. Khrushchev publicly denied any such intent, but secretly he took a daring gamble, building sites for twenty-four medium-range (1000 mile) and eighteen intermediate range (2000 mile) missiles in Cuba. Later he claimed his purpose was purely defensive, but most likely he was responding to the pressures from his own military to close the enormous strategic gap in nuclear striking power that Kennedy had opened.

Excerpted from: Divine, R. A., Breen, T.H., Fredrickson, G.M., & Williams, R. H. (©2002). *The American Story*. NY: Longman Publishers.

Know-It-All

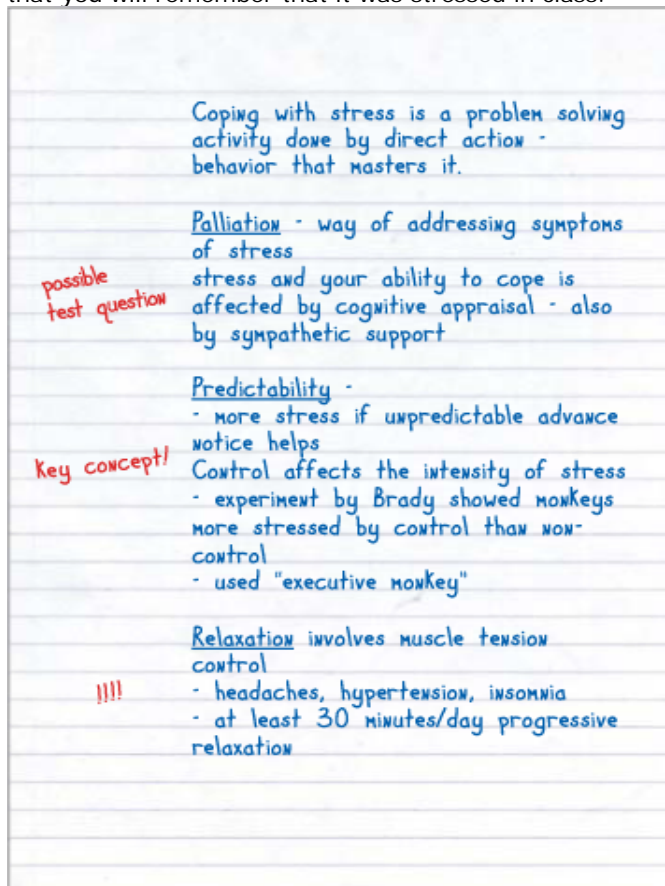
- ♦ **Read the introductory material.** Most students don't realize that there is lots of good information in their text besides the content contained in each chapter. Reading the Preface will help you get the most out of the text. It will explain how the text is organized, point out the features in the text (sidebars, review questions, etc.), and may even give you some tips for studying. Often, the author will explain his/her philosophy in writing the book, which will be a good frame of reference for reading the chapters.
- ♦ **Read the text boxes.** In high school, you may have skipped over these boxes. For example, if you were reading about Pilgrims, the text box may have featured something about "Sarah the Model Pilgrim." But in college, the text boxes are used differently. They often contain key information not found elsewhere in the text or they may consolidate key text points in an organized way. Use the text boxes when studying for exams, also.
- ♦ **Use the figures, charts, diagrams, and other visuals.** Often these summarize the material or explain how the concepts work in the real world. For example, you may be reading a section of your biology text on Mendel's principles of inheritance. It will most likely contain a figure explaining how meiosis occurs and how chromosomes behave according to the principles. To check your understanding of this science process, try to 'talk through' the process that the figure is explaining without looking at the text explanation. If

- you can say it completely and accurately, you know you have learned it. If not, you should refer to the sections of the text again.
- ♦ **Read the chapter summaries and answer any review or practice questions.** The chapter summaries can be used as a way to check your knowledge. If you can talk about each of the topics and explain the key points without looking back at the text, you know that you have got it! If not, you should review those sections. By answering review questions, you will become more familiar with the types of questions that can be asked about the topic.

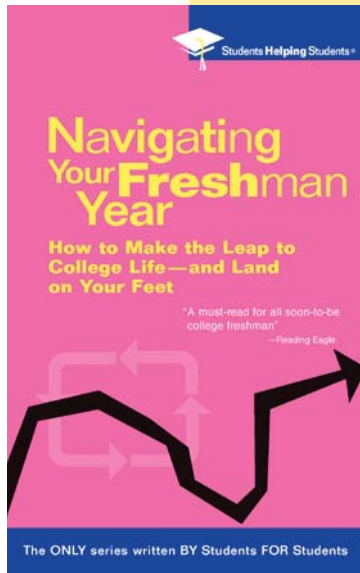
Blending In

Using the notes you took in class along with your text will give you the greatest understanding of the subject. Your class notes are your record of what your professor highlighted in class. Sometimes your notes will parallel your text reading; other times they will expand the information. Either way, your best bet is to take the best notes you can and use them with your text reading.

- ♦ **Before you go to class, do the assigned reading.** This will help you better understand the material presented in class.
- ♦ **Review your notes from your last class while you are waiting for class to begin.** This will help you remember where your professor left off last time.
- ♦ **During class, listen for cues to important information.** These cues include repetition of information or change in the professor's volume or speed. Your professor may even tell you that the information is important. Write this information down, and mark it in some way so that you will remember that it was stressed in class.



- ♦ **Listen for information that is similar to your text reading and, more importantly, listen for information that differs.** Often the professor will test you on the differences to be sure that you paid attention to both sources.
- ♦ **Take your own notes.** Even when the professor supplies the notes on the Internet or in a course packet, it is a good idea to take notes on your own as well. Putting notes in your own words can help you better understand the material and may even help you pay closer attention in class.
- ♦ **As soon as possible after class, review your notes and summarize the key points in the margin of your notebook.** This way you are creating a study guide to test yourself later.
- ♦ **Try to connect lecture and text material. When you review your notes, flip through the corresponding text chapter.** When you review your text, have your lecture notes open to the appropriate topics. This way you can review the information from the text and professor's lectures at the same time.



Handle freshman year with the smarts of a senior!

Only the true experts can give students the real lowdown on college life. From making peace with a roommate to choosing the right classes, college students and recent grads tell all freshmen need to know to get through the first year with flying colors, including how to survive the first few weeks on campus, master the social scene, ace finals, papers, and exams, deal with college stress, stay healthy and avoid the “freshman 15,” and more.

The tips featured in this section of the *e-tips for A grades* ebook were graciously provided by the authors and editors of the **Students Helping Students®** guide books. All **Students Helping Students®** books are written and edited by college students and recent grads — and are full of brutally honest advice that you can put into practice immediately.

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Hey Stranger!

"In the beginning of the year everyone is in the same boat, knowing no one, so go out of your way and introduce yourself to a variety of people-it will make your year more enjoyable."

**Sophomore,
Fairfield University**

We might sound like a broken record, but the best way to make friends is to be yourself. You want to find people who you like to hang out with and who like the real you. If you felt pressured to put up a front in high school, college is the time to be honest with yourself and find a community you enjoy. There's a niche for everyone--find yours and don't be afraid to be open about it.

Making friends is not an overnight process and introductions after introductions can make you feel overwhelmed. Be friendly, strike up a conversation, and ask questions-people love to talk about themselves. Don't feel sheepish if you need to ask for someone's name again. It's understandable, and you're better off doing it now than three months later. Even if you're generally shy, try to be slightly social for the first couple weeks so that you don't isolate yourself.

Here are a few fun ideas for meeting people:

- ♦ Embarrass yourself--no one will be intimidated by you and some people may be intrigued.
- ♦ Invite a few people to eat an informal lunch or dinner in the cafeteria. It's free, it fosters conversation, and everybody has to eat.
- ♦ Introduce people you've met to other people and ask to meet your friends' friends. The more people you meet, the greater your chances of finding the few that will become your closest friends.
- ♦ Free food and games draw college students like flies to that sticky paper stuff. No one can resist a homemade cookie or a good party, so give both.
- ♦ Keep your room door open when you're in and don't mind being disturbed--you'll be welcoming conversation and your hall mates will be glad to stop by.
- ♦ Make an effort to get to know people outside of your dorm by not hanging out there all the time. Stay back after class and talk to your classmates, share a table at the cafeteria, and strike up a conversation near your mailbox.
- ♦ Go to open mike nights, help sessions, and organizational club meetings. You might not enjoy the actual activity, but it's a great way to meet people.

This whole process can be intimidating, but don't worry--everyone is in the same boat and will appreciate your efforts to be nice. Don't put pressure on yourself to form lasting friendships right away; those take time. Just find people with whom you have fun and are comfortable, and the rest will come.

"The first few days of school were orientation, and everyone was with his or her family. My family couldn't be there, so I was twice as alone! I started to feel like I had made a mistake about going away from my friends and family to school. But then I saw a girl who was sitting by herself and also didn't seem to have her family there. I went up to her and explained my situation, and I'm not sure who was more grateful to find a friend, she or I. So we stuck to each other like glue for the next few weeks, slowly meeting other people with whom we had interests in common, and then introducing them to one another. By the end of the first month we had a great group of friends."

**Senior,
New York University**

House Rules

For those of you without siblings, your roommate will be the first person with whom you'll truly have to share. This might seem like an elementary skill, but it's hard to totally immerse yourself in the culture of dual-use if you've never shared a small room before. The most important thing to do in the first weeks of school is to make general rules with your roommate about how you want your room to be so that you can both be happy. If your roommate and you are compatible, this will be easy; if not, this will be necessary to your mutual sanity.

Once things start to go badly, try to grin and bear it. That works until your roommate breaks out his turntables and plays the most mind-stabbingly bad "music" you've ever heard. That's when you pretend you are asleep. Once your roommate does things that are not silenced by sleep (smoking, eating smelly foods, singing, etc.), you must politely request a few rules."

**Sophomore,
University of Hartford**

The most basic rules deal with hours. There's a time for music and dancing and a time for the sound of silence. Try to work out some simple rules, such as Monday through Thursday after eight your room will be for studying only. Or, if you both like to party, agree to blast your music well into the night. If you like to study in your room, assert yourself and make sure your roommate knows that you need quiet time. At the same time, remember that you can also study in the library, so be reasonable.

Visitors can also be an issue. If your roommate's friends like to gab at two in the morning while you're sleeping, you should politely ask them to be quiet and should talk to your roommate about having people over late at night. Along the same lines, bedtime is an essential discussion. Hopefully you'll both have honestly filled out your rooming questionnaire and can agree on what time the lights go out. Even if you don't go to bed at the same time, one of you can always use your desk lamp or even go to the library.

The most important thing is to be respectful and compromise-this is a home for both of you. You have the right to be comfortable in your own room but need to give that same freedom to your roomie.

"Show as much respect as you can to your roomie, and always consider how he or she might view the things that you do. Just be assertive and talk openly about things that bug you. Even if you try to show that something bothers you, your roommate may have absolutely no idea."

**Sophomore,
Rutgers University**

The phone has the dubious distinction of being at the core of many disagreements and fights between roommates, especially if you only have one line in your room. Who uses it, when and how often, and with how much privacy are all issues that will invariably come up.

If you know that your roommate religiously calls his girlfriend every night at eight, be nice and don't hang on the phone during that time. And if you need privacy to talk to someone, just ask. No need to make it a huge deal, but you should recognize that unless you're both considerate, there will be conflicts.

Another way to avoid phone quarrels is to have a cell phone. You can get one pretty inexpensively--a basic plan, usually with free long distance, can run you from \$40 to \$60 a month--and maybe save yourself a lot of trouble.

"The only phone jack in our room was near my roommate's bed. It was awful because I always felt like I was borrowing her phone, even though it was for both of us. I ended up making a lot of calls from the pay phone in the campus center."

**Recent Grad,
Wesleyan University**

Give Your Roommate a Chance

Whatever your roommate situation might be, here are a few initial rules of engagement to keep in mind:

- ♦ **Be friendly.** Whether you're usually outgoing or keep to yourself, make an effort initially to talk to your roommate, to relate, and to just hang out together. You don't have to try to be friends, but making an effort to be nice will pay off.
- ♦ **Give each other space.** This is tough if you're literally sharing one room rather than a small apartment where each of you can have some privacy. If your roommate comes back from a shower, maybe you can step out for a few minutes so that he or she can change. Or if you need to make a private phone call, ask if your roommate won't mind giving you a few minutes. These are small gestures, but the effort counts, and your roommate might follow suit.
- ♦ **Don't try to do everything together.** If you click with your roommate, then by all means, hang out, go to orientation, and sit together in the dining hall. But don't force it—you'll have a long time to get used to and to get to know each other. Too much time together initially can potentially backfire.

In general, recognize that you don't need to be best friends, or even friends, with your roommate. If you are, great, but if not, all you need is someone you can get along with.

Prioritize

In high school you were probably able to get all or most of your work done without much of a problem. In college, there's so much material to read and absorb, and papers and exams take longer to finish and study for. Sometimes it feels like you can hardly keep your head above this pool of work.

The only way to get through it is by mastering the art of prioritization. Some work is more important than other assignments and you have to get it done first. For example, if you have a paper due tomorrow and a reading assignment for another class, you have to tackle the paper first, and see how much time you have left for the reading.

Here are some tips that we've found useful:

- ♦ Buy one of those weekly planners and write down your assignments as soon as you get them. This will give you a good picture of what you have to get done by when. You'll also see when there's an avalanche of work coming your way and be able to prepare by finishing up other assignments before then. If you know what you have to get done it's much easier to prioritize your work.

"Most courses will have a syllabus that tells you when big papers and exams are coming up. This makes it easier for you to plan out your semester and know when your sleep time is about to dwindle."

**Recent Grad,
Wesleyan University**

- ♦ You might not like it, but when you have tons of work for classes, you might have to cut back on your extracurricular activities. Even if you're ultra efficient, it's difficult to get ready for several major exams while still being fully committed to your student newspaper, theater group, or intramural basketball team. There's no need to drop out completely, but see if you can take on a lighter load when you have tons of academic work to do.

If you know in advance that there's just no way that you can get all of your "must do" assignments done on time, talk to your professors. Be reasonable and don't make this a habit, but explain your situation and ask for a modest extension. Not all profs are this kind, but some will give in.

Help Wanted?

Going to college is a full-time job and then some. Before you get a part-time job during the year, think about whether you really need the money and how it will impact your ability to study, get good grades, socialize, and get the most out of your college experience. If you don't have to work during school to pay bills, you have the ability to really focus on your college studies and experiences, and that's a huge benefit. Consider working during the summer instead of during the year.

"I decided I wasn't going to work first semester so that I could get adjusted to school and have time to explore other activities. This worked out well for me because I earned enough money in the summer to support that decision. I did take on temporary jobs such as doing interviews for the public policy center and being a participant in cognitive science experiments on campus. I'd earn quick cash and could schedule when I wanted to work."

**Sophomore,
Brown University**

If you do have to work during college, look for a job with flexible hours and a location on or close to campus. If you can find a job that pays you to do something you like--tutoring, for example--go for it. You might also be able to get paid for helping a professor with research, which can be a great way to get to know a certain academic discipline in more depth.

If you're on financial aid and can get work-study jobs, you're in luck. Many are easy and allow you to study while you work, and they're on campus, saving you travel time. Go to the financial aid office as soon as you get to campus and check job listings--the best (read: easiest) ones go quickly.

"Desks jobs are the greatest because the school really helps you out by paying you to do minimal work. Although shelving things makes you feel like you're wasting your time it's a great way to meet other students and bond over your labor."

**Sophomore,
Vassar College**

Garbage In?

"A little card to swipe whenever you want to eat is a terrible conspiracy against those who want to maintain a healthy weight. This magical card makes it okay to get a cookie because you're not directly paying for it. It is also your token to the all-you-can-eat buffet. Beware!"

**Sophomore,
University of Vermont**

Eating at college is usually a social activity and it's easy to not notice what you're putting in your mouth. Consuming large amounts of alcohol, eating fried cafeteria food, and eating at random times during the day is not great for your gut. Try to remember that and try to eat healthily to stay healthy and maintain a healthy body. You need to feel well on the inside and outside, and what you eat affects both.

"I came to college set on proving the "freshman fifteen" thing wrong. But I learned that it's hard to stay healthy when every night you're surrounded by pizza, Chinese food, and donuts. My trick? The fridge is always filled with tons of fruit to help resist the late night pizza order."

**Freshman,
Emory University**

The basic idea you should try to stick to is trying to eat as healthily as possible as often as possible. There's really no need for strict diets or padlocks on your dorm room fridge.

Here are a few practical suggestions for how to accomplish the above:

- ♦ **Drink water constantly!** It's weird, there's nothing in it, just clear wet stuff, but water is something we need to consume in large quantities. It keeps you hydrated, washes out things that have no business settling in your body, and can even satisfy hunger--often when you think you're hungry, you're actually thirsty. Buy a large water bottle and keep refilling it throughout the day. Put it next to your computer and take a sip every few minutes. Drink some before going to class and when you come back to your room.
- ♦ **Try to eat one healthy meal a day.** If you have pancakes for breakfast and are going out for burgers for dinner, have a salad and soup, or a turkey sandwich, minus a ton of mayo, for lunch.
- ♦ **Don't deny yourself all fun food.** It's hard to pass up those cheese fries at lunch, but try to limit them to once a week. If you have to have ice cream, stop at one scoop or try frozen yogurt instead. If you deny yourself what you love, you'll obsess about it constantly and might end up binge eating it later. Instead, have some, but just not in huge quantities or all the time.
- ♦ **Don't eat as a procrastination method.** Do something else instead-go for a walk, call a friend, surf the Internet, talk to your roommate, whatever. If you're prone to eating when you're bored or frustrated, get out of the area where food is readily available.
- ♦ **Keep snack food in your room out of sight.** Temptation is often stronger than the strongest of will powers.
- ♦ **Remember that alcohol is empty calories.** An average beer has about 100-150 calories. Just keep that in mind.
- ♦ **Avoid overeating the five Cs.** Watch out for cookies, cake, chocolate, chips, and candy.

Explore...

You might be the most focused person in the world and have known from age five what you want to do with your life. Or you might be someone who is interested in many things and disciplines. Or perhaps you haven't yet found that one subject or activity that makes you impassioned. Regardless, freshman year should be your time to explore and really step out of your comfort zone. Don't worry about your career or even your major at this point. You have plenty of time to decide on each.

Instead, try to take a wide variety of classes, including some in which you never thought you'd be interested. How do you know that you don't like art history if you've never taken an art history class before? However diverse your high school's course selection might have been, it probably wasn't as great as your college options. Take advantage of them and explore. A math buff all your life? Try a sociology class. Always wanted to be a doctor? Consider an econ or political science class. Give your mind some new food to chew on and you never know, you might surprise yourself.

"Read the entire course book. Look into subjects in which you wouldn't naturally be interested to find random cool courses. You might discover along the way that you really don't like physics but instead want to produce records with the skills you acquired in your hip-hop class. Keep your mind and options open for the future."

**Junior,
Harvard University**

You'll probably have a few requirements to fulfill during your freshman year, and in some cases, your first semester's curriculum will be pre-determined for you. Don't necessarily view requirements as evil--they're a great tool to force you to take a variety of classes in different disciplines.

As you choose your classes, try to have a good mix of large lectures and smaller discussions. These tend to be very different and you should try out both.

Don't always go for what seems to be the easiest class. Go for what seems the most interesting or one that has a great prof.

Venture into the Unfamiliar

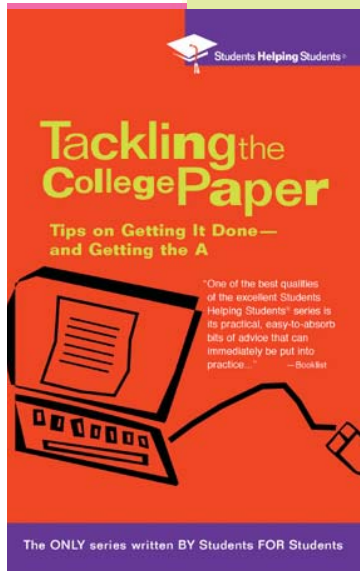
College is a time to take risks and branch out to discover what you're passionate about. It's not the time to be safe by sticking to what you're good at. Try new things! If you were too self-conscious in high school to try out for the play, take a chance now and do it. Never thought of playing a team sport? Join an intramural team—it can be great fun without being ultra-competitive. If you like juggling, go juggle in front of the library or start your own club for "Saved By the Bell" lovers.

When you come to college, you have this great chance to shed the shackles of what's in your past and start fresh. No one knows the old you and no one cares. You can like and do new things without worrying about creating or supporting some kind of an image of yourself.

Try things you've never considered. When else if not now? The worst thing that can happen is that you'll absolutely hate it and swear to never ever do it again. But that's much better than graduating and thinking: "I wish I'd done [fill in activity here] when I had the chance." The real world—or whatever you want to call the world after college—is pretty hectic, and your time to do fun things outside of work is so much more limited. You have it now, so use it!

"My main activity in high school was performing. When an injury sidelined me from the dance studio for an entire year, I was devastated. I'd spent my entire life dancing and now the idea of facing a semester with no dance was absolutely horrifying. I joined the gospel choir in an effort to fill the void in my schedule and found it to be the most rewarding decision I'd made at school. After overcoming the injury, I'm back in the dance studio, but now I have a whole new set of interests and friends that I never would have gained without that injury."

**Sophomore,
Harvard University**



Would you rather have a root canal than write a college paper?

No worries. *Tackling the College Paper* will guide you step by step through the labyrinth of intros, theses, and conclusions — and you'll be done before you know it.

In this guide, we share honest and practical advice on how to:

- Choose an interesting — and doable — topic
- Formulate and argue a strong and clear thesis
- Write a persuasive and error-free paper
- Learn how to succeed with a research assignment
- Tackle a senior thesis project
- Find help when you need it

...and do it all without pulling too many all-nighters!

The tips featured in this section of the *e-tips for A grades* ebook were graciously provided by the authors and editors of the **Students Helping Students®** guide books. All **Students Helping Students®** books are written and edited by college students and recent grads — and are full of brutally honest advice that you can put into practice immediately.

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Focus

Once you've picked a general topic for your paper, you need to come up with a thesis. Your thesis is the main and focal point of your paper and it's the position you'll take on your particular topic. Formulating a strong thesis is one of the most important things you need to do to ace your paper.

A good way to move from a topic to a thesis is to try to rephrase your topic as a question. For example, if you're writing about beer steins (mugs) in a Bavarian poem, you might ask: "What is the meaning of the beer steins in this Bavarian poem?"

Your answer to the question may very well be your thesis: "The beer steins serve as a symbol for masculine insecurity."

A thesis is a claim that you can argue for or against. It should be something that you can present persuasively and clearly in the scope of your paper, so keep in mind the page count. If possible, your thesis should also be somewhat original.

"Your thesis should make an analytical argument. That is, it should go beyond summary. To make sure this is the case, you should ask yourself whether someone could contend that your thesis is wrong. If so, you have succeeded in proposing an analytical argument."

**Astronomy Major,
Columbia University '04**

To give you a better idea, here are some examples of not-so-great theses:

- ♦ Germany lost World War II.
- ♦ Crime and Punishment is about death.
- ♦ Is the Cold War really over?

One is a fact, one is a half-baked interpretation, and one is a question. All of them have an element that sounds vaguely thesis-like, but they all fall short of being real theses. The first statement isn't really controversial and you can't make a great argument about it. The second is too vague and needs a bit more focus. The third statement doesn't make a claim, but asks a question. It's a first step to a thesis, but it's not one yet.

All of these statements have the kernel of an idea. To turn them into theses, it's important to add a touch of justification and explanation. For example, "Germany lost World War II because Hitler's expansionist vision spiraled out of control toward the end of the war." This could be a thesis. It makes a point that can be argued for and against, and it's one that can be reasonably supported with evidence.

We Talk With... Adele, Recent Grad NYU

How did you think college papers differed from papers you had to write in high school?

I figured out at some point during my sophomore year that college professors are not only trying to teach you the facts so that you memorize and regurgitate them, but rather so that you can take a bunch of facts and start putting them together in a coherent and logical manner. High school papers were all about "the right answer or writing what the teacher wanted to read; and of course, I sometimes fell into those traps in college, too. But I did realize at some point that, above all, the professors are interested in how you think.

What was the most difficult paper you wrote in college? Why was it so difficult?

The most difficult papers that I wrote in college were the ones that I really didn't want to write. Either the class was boring or the subject just wasn't my bag. I would procrastinate until the night

before, when I ended up pulling an all-nighter. The material for those kinds of papers never got more interesting at 3 AM, but the adrenaline was probably what got me through them.

What was most helpful to you in getting your college papers done?

For the papers that I really wanted to write, talking to the professor and to other students who were interested in the same subject really helped. I would go in to talk to the professor after I had written a loose draft and had some ideas that needed fleshing out. Discussion was really key in those situations. The papers that I really didn't want to write were another story... Probably it was the fear of getting an incomplete that helped me finish them. I knew that the chances of actually writing the paper would get slimmer and slimmer as time passed after the deadline.

What advice would you give to college students about writing college papers?

I would advise that you both read and write carefully. For any paper that you have to write, you need to do a lot of reading first. Take a lot of notes in the margins—that's what's going to get your paper started: the little sparks of inspiration that you get while reading. Then, of course, you have to write very carefully—professors are a lot tougher on you when they see sloppy mistakes like spelling and grammar errors, no matter how great your ideas are.

Action!

We've all heard it from our English teachers - passive voice is evil and we're to avoid it at all costs. True? Most of the time, but not always. Below are some suggestions of how to handle it in your papers.

The passive voice is a combination of a form of the verb "to be" (is, was) and a verb.

The active voice eliminates the "to be" verb and places the verb in the past, present, or future tense. In other words:

PASSIVE: was running/were being chased

Biff was running from the giant poodle.

The Backstreet Boys were being chased by giant poodles.

ACTIVE: ran/chased

Biff ran from the giant poodle.

Giant poodles chased the Backstreet Boys.

It's not necessarily wrong to use the passive voice. Sometimes it works and might be the only way to make a point. But in general, stick to its active counterpart. It makes your writing sound powerful and more direct. The active voice is easier to understand and more clearly expresses your point. Many professors say that the passive voice sounds more abstract and tentative, and abstract and tentative is not what you want to sound like in your college papers.

"I think people sometimes overcompensate by avoiding the passive voice completely. Focus on varying your sentence structure instead."

**English Major,
Carleton College '04**

Ready, Set, Go

We've all been there - sitting in front of a computer screen, the clock counting down precious minutes, and the cursor blinking impatiently at the top of a blank page. Beginning to write your paper can be tough, kind of like starting to run after standing still for a while - it's much harder to get going than to keep going.

To get passed the empty screen, try writing your introduction twice. The first time, just try to get something down on paper. Don't worry about how it sounds or if it works as the perfect introduction to your paper. It probably doesn't. After you finish your paper, go back and rewrite your introduction. You'll find that it's much easier to handle because your entire paper is laid out in your mind.

A good introduction catches the reader's interest, clearly states the paper's thesis, and briefly suggests what arguments and analyses you'll use to support your main claim. Although it doesn't have to be, your thesis is usually stated in the last sentence of your introduction. Most students prefer to put it last and use it as a launching pad for the rest of the paper.

The introduction is one of the most creative parts of your paper, and there is no formula for writing a good one. Try to be original, but don't be too gimmicky. Don't start with a fictional narrative unless you're really comfortable writing fiction. Begin with a quote if you want, but make sure that it's relevant to your topic and is there for a purpose.

Many of us learned the "funnel" model for the introduction in high school: It starts with a broad claim and moves to a clear and specific thesis statement. There's some validity to this idea. Especially on the first draft of your paper, it can help to start with some general ideas about your topic and move to the focus of your paper-your thesis.

Some students take the idea of a funnel way too seriously. We've heard a few professors joke about the "primordial ooze" introduction in first-year papers: "Since he emerged from the primordial ooze, man has always wondered about (insert topic here)..." This kind of introduction doesn't get you very far. Whatever general statements you write at the beginning of your introduction, make sure that they're related to your topic and that you use them to set up your thesis.

Break Free

"I used the word "indeed" 15 times in one of my papers. The paper was four pages long. It was an obsession that I had to kick, but it wasn't easy. Once you like a word it just seems to type itself on the keyboard."

**Junior,
Wesleyan University**

In the same way that most of us talk in recognizable speech patterns, we tend to fall into patterns in our writing. Some of us write a lot of long, winding sentences. Others tend to write short, choppy sentences. Some of us tend to overuse qualifications like "but" and "however," while others don't use them enough.

Read your paper and make sure that your sentences don't all sound alike.

- ♦ Do you use the same words again and again?
- ♦ Do you start every sentence with a preposition?
- ♦ Do you use the word "however" in the first sentence of every paragraph?
- ♦ Do you use the word "holistic" on every page?

Some consistency of style is important because it leads to a distinctive, personal voice. Without making your writing too inconstant, though, you should try to vary your sentence structure. Mix longer sentences with shorter ones. Look for repetitive words and substitute different ones. Make your writing interesting to read and your professor will breeze through your paper rather than become bored by it.

Scott's Corner

▼

In my papers, I have a tendency to write really long sentences. When I'm revising my writing, I look carefully for places where I write too many of them in a row. If a section seems difficult to understand, I add a short sentence, or rewrite parts of the paragraph to include one or two short sentences. I had an English teacher in high school who told me to "punctuate my prose" with short sentences. That's not a rule that I hold to all the time, but it sometimes helps to make my writing sound more direct and forceful.

▲

Spice it Up

Many papers you write in college will require you to include quotes from one or more sources. Even if you don't have to do it, integrating a few quotes into your writing can add life and persuasiveness to your arguments. The key is to use quotes to support a point you're trying to make rather than just include them to fill space.

"Quotes are like the evidence a lawyer presents to a judge. They are the only concrete things you have. You should use them to support your arguments."

**History Major,
Cornell University '04**

There are a few simple ways to use quotes in your paper. The first is not to quote at all and instead summarize the main points of a source. This approach works well for sources where the particular language of the quote is not especially important. If you're writing about history, paraphrasing is sometimes a great way to use secondary materials (the work of other historians and scholars) in your paper.

Another way to use source material is to quote a key word, phrase, or sentence that captures the essence of the text you're writing about. For example, if your paper is an attempt to explain the popularity of George W. Bush, and you're quoting a book by a very liberal writer, you might use the phrases "dynastic succession" and "crack monkey" in your paper. Carefully chosen words and phrases can really bring out your own arguments.

A third way to use quotes is to quote directly a whole block of text. These are called block-quotes and are usually single-spaced, placed in smaller font, and indented from the margins of the page. These are useful if there is a very rich passage in a source that is essential to your argument.

Make sure to connect quotes to your own arguments and to use each one to make your own points stronger. Analyze each quote you include, explain why it's significant and how it affects your own point. Professors hate seeing a bunch of quotes in a paper without understanding why they're there or what you intend to do with them beyond filling some space. Don't fall into this trap.

You should also make sure that the phrases and sentences you quote from other sources fit grammatically into your prose. For example:

The Backstreet Boys were an oasis in the cultural desert that was the late nineteen-nineties. Always modest, they never bragged about the impact they had on the development of a whole new genre of boy band music. In an MTV interview, they said that they merely hoped to "making beautiful songs."

See the problem? The writer didn't adjust the quote to fit grammatically into the last sentence. The quote should have been adjusted to read:

"They merely hoped to "mak[e] beautiful songs."

Use brackets to change verb tenses and clarify ambiguous pronouns (an undefined "he" or "she"). You can also adjust your own sentences to better align with the quotes. Whatever you do, make sure that you use quotes in a way that works grammatically with the rest of the sentence.

From the Source

Chances are, you're not going to have enough time, patience, or interest to read through each of your sources in detail. And there's really no need to do this. What you do need to do is find information in your research that reveals something about your topic and your thesis.

There will be many sources from which you read just a few pages, or even just a paragraph. To make sure that you can find the critical information without wasting time, develop a system for how you'll work with each source. Here are a few suggestions:

- ♦ Check the book's table of contents to find the most relevant sections.
- ♦ Skim through the introduction. This is usually the roadmap to the book or article, and it will help you focus on the source's key sections.
- ♦ After you find relevant chapters or sections, read them and take notes. Write down enough information so that it will make sense to you when you read it later, but avoid taking down sentences word for word.
- ♦ Check out the footnotes in the relevant sections and the bibliography as discussed earlier.

You can use these steps as your guidelines and add your own, but just remember to have a plan of attack for each source rather than spending your valuable time browsing through pages after pages without a clear direction.

Choose Wisely

As you think about possible books, authors, or issues to write about, try to pick something you find interesting. If you don't care at all about your topic, the hours you spend at the keyboard or in the library will be unnecessarily painful. And you're much more likely to write a great paper and do well if you're writing about something that you find at least moderately interesting.

The wonderful thing about college is that you can usually choose what you write about, even if you have to choose from a list. Take advantage of that. Each topic can be approached in a dozen different ways and you should be able to find a way that interests you the most.

Think about it this way: You have to write the paper anyway, so why not be interested in what you're writing about.

"You'll always write better when you're interested in what you're writing, interested in learning about the topic, and interested in explaining it to others. Try to find a topic that really brings into focus the crux of the subject matter or the course. Writing about myths about George Washington's false teeth may sound more interesting to research, but you'll get more out of that American history class-and you'll find more relevant material-if you write about his relationship with the other founders."

**Senior,
Northwestern University**

The Writing Process

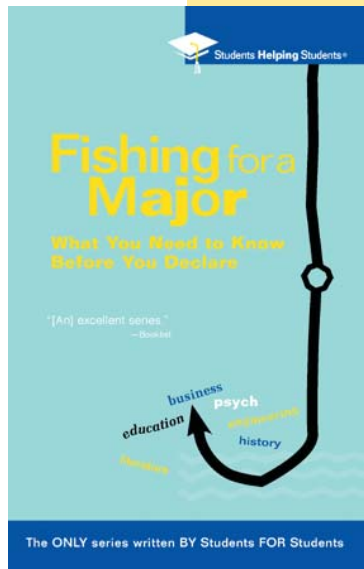
What has been most helpful to me in writing papers for college has been to develop some sort of process. In high school I used to write papers in one big push, which basically consisted of me sitting down the night before the paper was due and just writing, doing research as I went. Back then, my goal was simply to write the best paper I could in the shortest time possible. While this worked quite well at the time, I've found that as I progressed to higher level classes and gotten deeper into subject matter, this approach to writing is not only ineffective, but very stressful as well.

These days, I leave plenty of time to research the subject of the paper as much as necessary, and make sure I have a thorough understanding of what the paper is about. I find that looking into what I'm going to write about is well worth the time, because it makes the entire writing process

much smoother. It allows me to gain a better sense of the material, not only objectively, but what my own opinions are as well.

After researching, I like to write a brief outline, or at least think a little about what I am trying to prove, and what my main points and arguments are. Then I'll usually just sit down and write as much as I can, and worry about editing and revising later. For a paper of seven pages, I'll usually spend a day researching and developing ideas, two days writing, and one day revising and editing. That's how I do it, but it's important for each person to develop a process they feel comfortable with, and in a time frame that allows their writing to come naturally.

**Robert, Junior,
University of Oregon**



So you're definitely going to major in literature. Either that or physics. Or maybe psych...

You've gone from anthro to zoology and back. Now it's actually time to declare your major and you're stumped. Is French speaking to you? Are you thinking philosophically? How does music sound? Check out this guide and get tips from college students and recent grads on how to go about choosing your major, including how to:

- Match your interests with your major
- Use internships and extracurriculars to find your true passion
- Seek out the best sources for advice and info about majors
- Choose a variety of great classes and find the best professors
- Figure out how to mold your major into a future career
- Deal with double majors, minors and concentrations

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For a limited time, visitors placing online orders can type in the promo code STUDENT to receive a 20% discount on the purchase of any of the books in this series.

Look Around You

As you think about your most likely majors, keep in mind that there are many, many fields that you've never really had time to explore. Where else are you going to get that chance if not in college?

"If I had to choose now, I probably would have studied Economics. I hated Economics at the time I was choosing my major, but I didn't really know a whole lot about it."

**Computer Science Major,
Harvard University '03**

You may think you understand every field out there but you won't know unless you make the effort to venture into unfamiliar territory and explore all of your options. At worst, you'll spend a few credits; at best, you'll discover a potentially life-altering new passion.

Pay particular attention to fields that you didn't have the chance to explore in high school. Colleges tend to offer much broader variety than most high schools, and you may have never had the opportunity to study things like Sanskrit or neurobiology until now.

Use your school's course catalogue as your first research tool. Browse through the listings and force your eyes to pause on pages you'd never thought to consider. Are you an artist at heart? Peruse the computer science or economics section for more than ten seconds, if you can take it. Are you a hardcore statistics buff? Check out history or philosophy courses. You might surprise yourself.

As you explore new fields of study, keep track of what appeals to you. A newly found interest might not turn into a major, but you might choose it as a minor, or it might turn into a special project within your major. As you go through the process of choosing your major be sure to keep with you your list of "never-thought-I'd-like-this-but-I-might majors." If your college experience is at all typical, you'll probably end up choosing something you never expected.

Thinking About Your Major

For most of us, choosing a major is a somewhat daunting task. One day you're thinking marketing, the next day you take a philosophy class and suddenly, you've uncovered a new life passion. Your parents keep bugging you to do something practical with your college years and your life and to start doing it right away. And on top of this, you're so busy with classes, activities and your work study job that you hardly have any time to think about your major.

Here are our two cents on choosing a major: In many ways, it's a process of self-discovery. It's the search for what you're truly interested in, for what you feel you can happily study for the few years you spend in college. Don't worry too much at this point about whether someone will actually pay you money to do what you love or if your major will make your parents proud. If you're happy and learning about something you genuinely find interesting, you'll find a way to make it work.

Choosing a major can often be frustrating. There will be days when you simply refuse to think about your future as it rushes toward you like a locomotive. You'll want to tear your student handbook to pieces as you wonder again and again, "Why do I have to choose a major?" Totally normal, and yes, most of us have been there. The key is to start early, explore as much as possible, and listen to your gut.

Like many other big decisions, choosing a major is usually as fruitful a process as you're willing to make it. If you're honest with yourself—if you finally admit that you hate chemistry and would much rather spend your time reading about American history, for example—then your chances of having a great college experience will be pretty high. If you shy away from facing reality, or just simply don't put too much thought into finding a major that makes you happy, you'll run the risk of making yourself miserable. We definitely vote for the former.

We Talk With...
Lee, Television Writer
Recent Grad
Connecticut College

What was your major in college?

English, with a concentration in creative writing.

Why did you choose it as your major?

I've always been interested in a writer's motivation—why a writer writes what he writes. As a fledgling writer myself, I figured what better way to improve my own work than to closely examine the works of others.

Were you happy with your choice?

I feel that starting to write as much as I did in college—both creatively and analytically—made me much more comfortable after graduation to sit in a room by myself and 'create.'

What did you end up doing after graduation?

I moved out to L.A. to pursue a career as a television and feature film writer.

Did your major help you or hurt you in your search for a job?

I think it helped me. It showed an aptitude for reading and writing, perhaps the two most underrated skills in the work force.

Did your major give you the skills to succeed at your first job?

Well, my first job was as an administrative assistant, so I'm fairly convinced that a well-trained chimp could have handled those duties. As I progressed beyond those initial menial tasks, I feel that my ability to write clearly and quickly set me apart from my contemporaries.

The Big Picture

Unless you go to a vocational college - in which case you're clearly there to learn specific skills for a certain career - you shouldn't think of your major as a way to prepare for a certain job after you graduate. Think about it as a way to explore a particular field in depth, to learn something, and to gain skills you can use in any career.

"Don't think that because you want to go into business that you have to study business. If you want to be an artist, you don't necessarily have to study art. When I look at a resume, I don't look for a particular degree. I ask myself, what can this person bring to the job that no one else can? I can teach you to use business software; I can't duplicate the kind of growth you get from four years of college."

Branch Manager, Ford Motors, Inc.,
Music Major,
Alabama State University '71

Just because you take and love every psychology class offered in the curriculum doesn't mean that you'll love being a psychologist. And not doing well in your econ class doesn't mean that your dream to become an entrepreneur is any less real. (In fact, many people working in business today don't have business or economics degrees. Music and history majors often end up as branch managers or entrepreneurs, and they thrive in their positions.)

Try not to worry about knowing what you want to do after college, at least for a few years. You'll have all the time in the world—including the last few years of college—to think about and figure out what your post-college job might be. But you won't have another opportunity like this to really explore different academic fields, learn the different skills that they offer, and train your mind to think about things as different as art history and statistics. An English class won't completely prepare you for a career in publishing, but it will teach you how to write well, and that's a skill that you definitely want to acquire.

If you choose a major that truly interests you and pushes you to learn, you'll gain a huge set of skills that you can then use in any career. It sounds so idealistic, but it's true. Employers don't expect you to start your first job knowing exactly how to do it—on-the-job training is a core learning component that almost all careers offer. But employers do expect you to be a well-rounded person, have solid writing and communication skills, and the ability and training to learn new things and excel at them.

We Talk With...
Laura, Junior
Santa Clara University

What is your major?

I'm a marketing major with a double minor in retail studies and international business.

Are you happy with it?

Yes, I am, definitely. I wanted to be a business major because I thought it would help with job opportunities after college, and marketing fit my personality traits the best—it definitely gave me a chance to use my strengths, like creativity.

What helped you decide on your major?

Talking to other students was most influential. Advisors don't do too much, and don't offer as much guidance as they do in high school. The problem is that they don't really know you or much about you. But professors can be helpful too—my first international business professor was so dynamic and interesting, so that definitely guided me.

What advice would you give to other students trying to choose a major?

Definitely talk to older students that you share other interests with. If you're similar to them personality or interest-wise, they can help guide you academically and help you figure out what you want to go into specifically. It helps to talk to students at your university, like business school for instance. But don't choose a major just because you think its going to help you get a job after you graduate. It should be something that you're interested in, but will allow you more freedom to take other paths. I feel like many people choose majors based on job opportunities. For instance, my friend is a computer science major and is really bored, because she hates it and decided that as a major because she thought it would help her get a job. You'll just be unhappy for four years.

Seek Counsel

Don't try to make a decision about your major without getting some input from trusted professors and advisors. Take advantage of the help you can get—you can always stick to your own instincts at the end.

"I was assigned an advisor right off the bat, but I didn't talk to her for months. I'm sorry I didn't go earlier, though. She was so helpful."

**Economics Major,
 Boston University '03**

When you begin your freshman year, you'll probably be assigned an academic advisor. Depending on your school's advising policy, this person may be a professor, a dean, or a full-time counselor. In many cases, your advisor will not belong to the academic department that you're hoping to explore. This doesn't mean, however, that you can't get useful information from him or her. Rather, you should understand the limitations of your advisor's knowledge and seek outside help when necessary.

Although your advisor might not know everything about your particular fields of interest, he or she can be quite helpful in a general sense. You can discuss your ambitions, your concerns, and anything else that might be affecting your major-selection process. If nothing else, your assigned advisor can point you to the right places to go for more detailed and specific advice, and can be a

good source for logistical information-when you must declare your major, what forms need to be filled out, etc.

Another resource that too few students seem to take advantage of is departmental advising. There are usually two or three people within every department whose primary duties are to help prospective students within that major/field. These people will help you get to know the department before you join, which will give you plenty of time to avoid leaping into unfriendly waters. They can also help you sort out the mess of credit-hour requirements that will undoubtedly haunt you for the rest of your college days. Not sure if that government class counts toward your political science track? Wondering if you can substitute your AP scores for introductory science classes? Departmental advisors can give you answers to these kinds of questions, but you're going to have to ask them first.

Once you choose a major, you'll probably be assigned to an advisor from that department. While policy on this varies from school to school, you should try to make sure that your advisor's specialty is as close to your intended program as possible. As your academic years progress, the issues you face become more and more complex-where to concentrate within your major, what to write your thesis about, where to apply to graduate school-and you'll need to have an advisor who knows a great deal about very particular problems.

Whatever you do, don't settle for sub-par advising. If your advisor seems confused or uninformed, pay a few discreet visits to other advisors in the department. You might find someone who's more willing to help, or is more receptive to your way of doing things. If your school allows it, switch to this advisor as soon as possible. Above all, be honest about your needs and concerns. Let your old advisor know why you're going elsewhere and give specific reasons whenever you can. He or she may not appreciate being dumped (who would?), but you won't leave room for argument if you come prepared.

These Mouths Don't Lie

"If it hadn't been for my roommates, I wouldn't have taken some of my favorite classes. If you're lucky enough to know a few people who share your outlook, you can learn from their mistakes and profit from their discoveries."

**Sophomore,
University of California - Berkley**

A great place to go for brutally honest advice about your potential major is your fellow classmates, particularly upperclassmen who've been through just about everything you're about to experience. They tend to be more approachable than professors or graduate students, and they're more likely to understand your particular concerns. Just remember that everyone has subjective tastes and biases, and you should take opinions and complaints with a grain of salt.

One of the best pieces of information your fellow students can share is the quality of different classes and professors. It's tough to judge what a class might be like from its description in the course catalogue, so ask students who've taken it. What material is covered? How interesting is it? How involved are the students in class discussion? Make sure to also get honest opinions about professors—their quality of teaching, how enthusiastic and accessible they are, and so on. Some schools even have websites where students rate professors and courses. If yours does, definitely check it out.

When asking fellow students about a particular class, remember that there are many reasons for disliking a course—and not all of them are easy to admit. Some students will complain about a professor's teaching style or the irrelevance of the readings, when in fact they attended only a few of the lectures and did only a fraction of the reading. You'll find that the slacker is a perennial source of misinformation, and that it's almost impossible to get a straight answer from the ultra-competitive crowd. Aim for students with similar interests and priorities to your own—they're more likely to give you useful information.

Get to the Core

You might not like all of the courses you have to take as part of a core curriculum, but it has its benefits too. It forces you to explore different disciplines and gives you a chance to find an unexpected interest.

"If I hadn't had to take a history core course, I'd be studying engineering right now. My parents are pissed, but I'm happy."
**American History Major,
Stanford University '02**

In the last fifty years, many schools have adopted a "Core System" in order to give their students a well-rounded liberal education. The most common version consists of specialized introductory courses in several broad fields-literature, history, physical science, etc. Within this system, we're required to take at least a few courses in each of these fields before we graduate.

For many of us, the core curriculum might be an irritating distraction in an already difficult and confusing environment (if you feel this way, you're not alone, as a new wave of education scholars has come to question the utility of liberal arts requirements). Whatever your view on this might be, chances are that your school will have some kind of a requirement system in place.

If you're stuck with requirements, you might as well take advantage of them. If you have to fulfill a history requirement, for example, choose an area of the world that interests you. For a literature requirement, consider taking a class that covers a book or an author that you like. There's bound to be a class or two within each discipline that interests you, so find it.

A core curriculum can be an important element in your quest to find a major-it forces you to take classes in a variety of disciplines, some of which you might have never otherwise considered. If you'll pardon the cliché-you'll never know unless you try.

Double Up

If you're lucky enough to find not one passion but two then perhaps it's time to think about a double major. Before you take this leap, though, there are a few important considerations that you need to keep in mind.

First of all, a double major can be very, very hard. You will be doing more work than your single-major classmates, and that extra work will start to take its toll after a couple of years. As your classes become more and more advanced, you'll find it harder to keep up with your coursework while maintaining a reasonable social and extracurricular life. And you'll have very few credits with which to explore other academic fields.

On the plus side, double majoring allows you to explore two potentially very different academic fields in reasonable depth. You'll truly be maximizing your college education if you can handle it. A double major leaves you more options for specializing in a certain field and pursuing graduate studies in it. It also looks quite impressive on a resume (but, of course, only if it's accompanied by a strong grade point average).

If you do choose to double major and later find that it wasn't a wise decision, you'll probably have the option to drop one of the fields in favor of the other. Find out what the deadlines and requirements for such decisions are, and keep them in mind. You should also talk to a few double majors about their experiences-try to find a few terrible experiences along with a few who give you wholehearted recommendations, so you can learn from both sides.

Beyond the Books

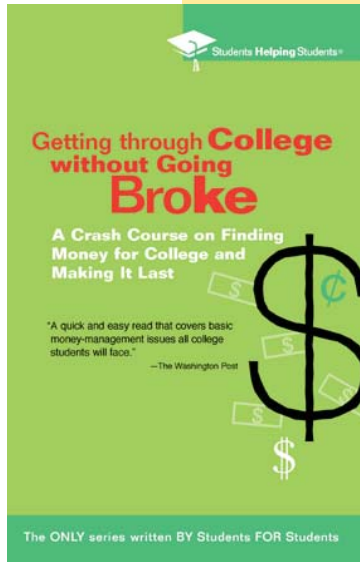
No doubt, college is the perfect place to explore and find what you enjoy doing and learning about. But going to class and majoring in a certain subject is just one way to do that. Another great way to try out different things and see if any one of them spikes your passions is to get involved in extracurricular activities. As you think about your career, don't feel the need to have a major that fits perfectly with it.

If you're interested in working in the music industry, for instance, you might be doing yourself a far greater service by joining your school's radio station or securing an internship at a recording studio than by studying modern media. If you're thinking about being a teacher, studying early childhood psychology won't really tell you what it's like to work with kids-but volunteering as a tutor will.

"I always thought that I wanted to be an English teacher. But when I got the chance to get into an actual classroom as a tutor, I realized that too much of my time was spent being a policeman instead of talking about the beauty of Shakespeare's sonnets."

**Junior,
Wesleyan University**

In other words, don't put all the pressure of finding out what you like to do and what you'd like to do as a career on your major. Talking to people around you, finding out about potential careers, getting internships, becoming involved in extracurricular activities, and just learning about things that people do in the world will all help you figure out what it is that you want to do. Your major should be something that interests you and makes you excited to learn, and it's not necessarily something that you can practically integrate into your future career.



**You're off to college.
You're excited.
You're nervous.
You're broke!**

Finding a way to pay for college and live on a budget while there is not always easy, but it definitely beats paying off huge loans for the next 30 years. This guide gives the straight story on how to figure out a way to pay for college, understand and apply for financial aid, make extra cash while at school, stick to a budget (and still have plenty of fun) — and graduate with as little debt as possible.

The tips featured in this section of the *e-tips for A grades* ebook were graciously provided by the authors and editors of the **Students Helping Students®** guide books. All **Students Helping Students®** books are written and edited by college students and recent grads — and are full of brutally honest advice that you can put into practice immediately.

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For a limited time, visitors placing online orders can type in the promo code STUDENT to receive a 20% discount on the purchase of any of the books in this series.

Free Money

Scholarships are the best kind of financial aid you can get because you don't need to pay them back. You should apply to as many scholarships as humanly possible during your junior and senior year, and continue to look for scholarships even after you start college. Most scholarships ask you to fill out an application and write an essay on a particular topic. Here are some suggestions based on our own experiences for how to ace your scholarship essay.

- ♦ Make sure that each essay is customized to the particular scholarship and organization where you're sending it. General essays don't work.
- ♦ Get to know the organization sponsoring each scholarship-what it does, what are its goals and mission. Then tailor your essay to touch on those themes, and describe what role they play in your life. For example, if you're applying for a scholarship from a non-profit organization that supports literacy, talk about why literacy is important and what you've done and will continue to do to promote it. Every organization has an agenda-find out what it is and target your essay appropriately.
- ♦ Whining doesn't help. Don't spend your essay talking about how poor you are, how college is too expensive, how you're desperate to find any money, and so on. If you talk about difficulties in your life or your parents' lives, make sure that it's in the context of what you've learned from them.
- ♦ Try to sound human. Whoever is reading tons of these scholarship applications needs to find something in your essay that sticks out, that sounds personable and that the reader can relate to. Be honest with what you write and with your writing.
- ♦ Talk about what you plan to do with your education. Give the scholarship committee a sense that you have a longer-term vision than just getting this scholarship and getting into college. Write about things you care about and what you want to contribute to the world.
- ♦ Proofread. You've heard this before, and for a good reason. And don't trust the spellchecker-it can't tell the difference between "their" and "there."

Borrowed Funds

Although none of us likes the idea of graduating with a load of debt, two-thirds of undergraduate students take out some type of loan to help them pay for college and on average, students graduate with about sixteen thousand dollars in debt. This sounds like a lot, and it is, but you should find some comfort in the fact that millions of students just like you have managed to pay back these loans. There are three general types of loans, outlined below. You should become familiar with them and understand what forms, if any, besides the Free Application for Student Aid, you'll have to fill out to apply for them.

"The most challenging part about financial aid was understanding what my dad was talking about with fixed rates and subsidized loans and the economics of loans-if I had known those words meant thousands of dollars back then, I would have read up a bit more on what I was getting myself into."

**Recent Grad,
University of Wisconsin - Madison**

♦ Student Loans

Student loans are either provided or guaranteed by the government and they're the best kind of loans to get because they have extremely low interest rates.

The two most popular student loans are the Stafford Loan and the Perkins Loan.

The Stafford Loan can either be subsidized-the government pays the interest while you're in school--or unsubsidized--you're responsible for the interest, although you can usually defer actually paying it until you graduate. You have to qualify for financial aid in order to receive a subsidized Stafford Loan. As of 2002, the most you can borrow with a Stafford Loan is \$2,625 during your freshman year, \$3,500 during your sophomore year, and \$5,500 for each additional year. Many students choose both the subsidized and unsubsidized loans to get the maximum amount.

Students who demonstrate exceptional financial need receive the Perkins Loan. Your college or university will actually administer this loan, but the funds are provided by the government. This is

the best kind of loan that you can get—it's completely subsidized, and the government pays the interest while you're at school and for a 9-month grace period after you graduate. In 2002, you could borrow up to \$3,000 per year in Perkins Loans, and you were limited to a total of \$15,000.

"Now that I have finished college I can look back and see what I could have done differently. First of all, I would not have taken so many types of loans. Basically, I took whatever they would give me in loans that did not have interest accruing during school. This was a good strategy but now I have four separate payments to make each month."

**Recent Grad,
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh**

Whatever Stafford or Perkins loans you get, the money will go directly to the school each semester. You won't be getting a big fat check from the government or a private organization that's lending you money through the Perkins or Stafford program. In contrast, when you get a scholarship, you'll most likely be receiving a check from the organization sponsoring it—unless they're directly from your college, in which case they may be dispersed directly to the bursar's office.

♦ **Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS)**

Your parents can take out the PLUS loan to help pay for your education. Your parents can borrow as much as they need to supplement the financial aid package that you receive, but they can't borrow more than that. This loan is the responsibility of your parents whereas the Stafford and Perkins loans are your responsibility to pay back.

♦ **Private Loans**

If your family does not receive enough financial aid in the form of Stafford, Perkins, PLUS loans, scholarships, and work-study, your parents might have to apply for additional loans from private lenders. There are many sources for this, but the terms are not as great as those that are provided or supported by the government.

Find the Right Job

"I'm glad I got a job when I came to school. It taught me more about the value of what I spend my money on. And having a work schedule made me budget my time better between classes, work, and other activities."

**Junior,
Cornell University**

In an ideal world, you wouldn't have a job while in college. In reality, this almost never happens. You'll most likely have to work at some point, so your goal is to find the job that pays you enough but also doesn't smother you.

Many financial aid offers come with a few thousand dollars worth of work-study. Before you arrive on campus, make sure that you understand how work-study at your school functions. Many schools assign their work-study recipients jobs, but others expect students to find their own. Some colleges will require that you work on campus, and others will allow both on- and off-campus work.

As soon as you get to campus and catch your breath, go to the financial aid office where work-study jobs are usually listed. (There might also be a list in the student employment office at your school.) The earlier you go, the better are your chances of scoring the best jobs—those in the library or other quiet places where you might be able to squeeze in some homework and chill time.

"There are an incredible number of menial jobs on campus. Once you run out of money, you can always get one. It'll be demeaning, horrible, antagonizing, and simply awful. But you'll get paid."

**Junior,
Cornell University**

If you're not eligible for work-study, you should still have no problem finding a part-time job either on or off campus. Check in with your school's student employment office and see what options are available. If there's a particular place where you'd like to work, say, the art center or the library, go there and see if they're hiring—some jobs never make it to the job listings.

If you can't find a job that you like on campus, check into off-campus opportunities. The local newspaper will probably have listings, and it never hurts to just go to a place and see if they need anyone. Keep in mind, though, that although some off-campus jobs may pay more, they will be less flexible and less understanding when you ask to take time off to finish that midterm paper or study for an exam.

Holly's Corner

Because of circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to turn in my FAFSA on time one year, and I got a much lower financial aid package than normal. As a result, I couldn't afford to go to school. I wasn't about to drop out, but as a last resort, I did end up going part-time. This allowed me to work 40 hours a week to earn money toward tuition costs, while also staying in school and continuing to work toward my degree. It took longer to graduate, but in the end, it was better than the alternative of dropping out.

Working Your Way through College

I never took college seriously until I started paying for it myself. I think the best thing to happen to me academically, personally, and (thus) professionally was my father losing his job and cutting off the tuition and rent payments. I wouldn't change a thing. I had to get a waitressing job quickly to support myself and pay the tuition. Believe me, you take your grades and your education much more seriously when you are the one financing them. Having less time to goof off and slack was really not a bad thing. I actually gave myself time to go out and have fun as well, which was easier to do with my own money. Some people might think that having a job would detract from my studies, but it was quite the opposite—it forced me to learn time and money management skills quickly.

I believe that no matter how much money I may ever make, my own kids will have to work their way through college as well. I'm convinced that you cannot learn to manage something (money, time, your own education) whose value you don't fully understand. In fact, it can't have any value to you if it is handed to you freely. That's why I believe that working to put myself through college was an invaluable experience.

**Elissa, Recent Grad
SUNY – Albany**

Emergency Use Only

Let's get the basics down about what credit cards are, how they work, and what features different credit cards have.

There are three major types of cards that all get called credit cards:

- ♦ **Credit Card:** A card that lets you make purchases and then allows you to either pay the entire amount of what you've spent in a given month, or just a portion of that amount, with the rest to be paid later, with interest.
- ♦ **Charge Card:** A card that lets you make purchases like a credit card but requires that you pay the entire bill in full at the end of the month. In other words, you can't shift your balance and pay some now and some later.
- ♦ **Debit Card (or Check Card):** A card that's linked to your bank account and that allows you to make purchases without using cash. Every time you make a purchase, the amount of the purchase is deducted from your bank account and you can't charge more on the card than you have in your account. Debit cards are accepted wherever you see the logo featured on the card—if it's a MasterCard, then you can use it wherever you see the MasterCard Logo.

Beyond these distinctions, each credit card comes with a particular set of features and fees, and it's important that you know what they are and how they affect you. Check out the table below to get an idea of the main things you should check about each credit card you're considering.

Annual Percentage Rate (APR)	This is the interest rate that will be charged to any balance that you revolve on your card-i.e., if you don't pay your monthly balance in full, a % will be added to the revolving balance when your bill comes the next month, and so on.	You want your APR to be as low as possible. Be especially careful because often credit card companies will give you a low APR for the first several months, and then hike it after that.
Annual Fee	An annual membership fee.	You can definitely get a credit card in college without a membership fee.
Grace Period	The number of days you have after the end of one payment period to pay your balance in full and avoid interest charges on new purchases that you made.	25 days is standard and you shouldn't get a card that's less than that.
Late Payment Fee	Amount you'll get charged, on top of any interest charges, if your payment is late.	Usually around \$20-\$25.
Incentives	Most cards come with incentives. For each dollar you spend you might get frequent flyer miles, free phone minutes, or just dollars that you can spend on whatever you want.	You can usually get a bonus for getting a card for the first time—such as 10,000 frequent flyer miles.

Be Smart with Credit

Misusing credit cards is probably one of the most common ways that college students get themselves into financial trouble, so think twice before signing up for one. You'll be approached by dozens of credit card companies on campus and through the mail, offering you what might be your first ever credit card with no annual fee, low interest rate, and a cool gift like a hat or a funky pen. Being wanted is good, but you should understand why you're so wanted. Unfortunately, it's not because you're smart or good-looking or can speak backwards. Credit card companies want you to sign up now, when you're a college student, because they think that they'll get to keep you—and your business—for a long time after you graduate. And they're not wrong because many people do keep the same credit cards after they graduate.

Here are our suggestions for which credit card to get and how to use it:

- ♦ **Don't get more than one card.** Having more than one card doesn't make you more adult or more sophisticated; it increases the risk that you'll spend more money than you have.
- ♦ **Don't sign up for a card over the phone.** You've probably heard the horror stories about people being scammed over the phone and giving away personal information—you don't want to end up in that situation.
- ♦ **You should never pay a fee for a credit card.** If you didn't pay a fee initially but notice it on your statement, call the company right away and tell them that you want to cancel your card. They will likely remove the fee rather than lose your business.
- ♦ **Consider getting a debit card instead of a credit card.** That way, you can't possibly get into debt or credit trouble because you can't spend more than what you have in your bank account.
- ♦ **If you know that your payment is going to be late, call the credit card company.** They may extend your grace period or offer you another arrangement. Be proactive.

Holly's Corner

I managed to get myself into credit card debt; it was simply something that was unavoidable because I couldn't get money anywhere else. I found myself with three separate cards, all carrying balances and high interest rates. At this point, the smartest thing I did was to get a new credit card that had free balance transfers, and offered a really great interest rate for those transfers for the first few months. As soon as the three cards were all transferred to one, I cut up the old cards so I wasn't tempted to use them again, and I immediately worked toward paying down the one with the huge balance. The lower interest rate really saved me some money in the end.

Cash Flow

The word "budget" sounds really official, but really it's just an account of your expenses and the resources that you'll have to cover those expenses over a period of time. Since you don't have unlimited resources, you need to stick to a budget--this means that you'll have to watch what you spend, and make sure that you don't spend any more money than you actually have coming in during that period.

You should start by estimating your expenses and your available resources, and then creating a budget should be easy. Start with figuring out your budget for the entire year, and then you can do this month by month.

The first thing to do is to take the two components--your expenses and resources--and compare them. Here's an example of how you might want to do this.

Expenses		Resources	
One-time total	\$6,740	n/a	n/a
Tuition	\$15,000	Savings	\$3,000
Housing	\$4,000	Parents' Contribution	\$10,000
Meal Plan	\$3,000	Scholarship 1	\$5,000
Books	\$2,500	Scholarship 2	\$7,000
Cable	\$480	Loan 1	\$2,625
Parking	\$1,200	Loan 2	\$3,000
Gas	\$500	Work-study	\$4,200
Entertainment	\$1,000	---	\$
Clothes	\$500	---	\$
Other personal	\$500	---	\$
TOTAL	\$35,420	TOTAL	\$34,825

In this example, using the numbers we've pulled out of the air, there's a **total shortfall of \$595**. This means that you need to find a way to either increase your resources by that amount--perhaps by working extra hours during the summer--or to reduce your expenses--by not getting cable, leaving the car at home, or reducing the amount of money you spend on clothes, as a few examples.

Pocket Change

In most cases, you'll pay tuition and room and board once every semester, so we won't include these expenses in the monthly budget template. You should know, from your annual budget, how much money you have to save during the year and each month to pay for your share of tuition and room and board, so we've included that as an expense in the monthly budget-you should think of it that way and put that amount of money in the bank each month.

Expenses		Resources	
Savings Contribution	\$	Work Study	\$
Books/School Supplies	\$	Savings Account	\$
Meals (if not already paid in meal plan)	\$	Other	\$
Take-out/Going out	\$	---	\$
Car Expenses	\$	---	\$
Other Travel Expenses	\$	---	\$
Clothes, etc.	\$	---	\$
Other Expenses	\$	---	\$
Total	\$	Total	\$

WRITE IT DOWN! Keeping track of your expenses helps you see where the money is flowing and identify areas where you could cut down to either increase your savings or stay out of debt. You might have a brilliant memory and think you can remember what and where you spent, but we've found that it's so much more helpful to write things down. You can keep a simple paper log or, if you're computer savvy, use a spreadsheet program. And don't forget to write down your credit card expenses as well.

As you keep track of your monthly expenses, it might help to stick to the same categories you created in your budget-so a meal out would go into the Take-out/Going Out category.

Trim the Fat

"I set a mental budget for myself and also passed on going out with friends every once in a while. Plus, there are tons of cheap and even free things for students to do while at college, you just have to dig a bit to find them and be creative."

**Recent Grad,
Winona State University**

There are tons of things to do at college that don't cost much at all, and shopping at thrift stores is more fun than it is trying to cut down on purchases. As you go through the year, stick to your budget and try to find ways to cut some corners without cutting out the essentials.

Here are a few ideas:

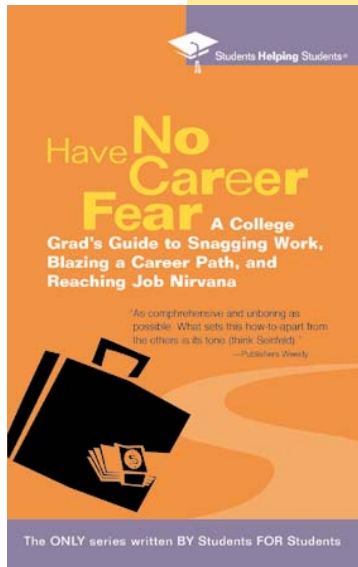
- ♦ Buy non-perishable goods, like pasta or cereal or paper towels, in bulk. If you're worried about storage space, keep them back home and bring small quantities to school that you can replenish over breaks.
- ♦ Instead of using the phone all the time, write emails and Instant Messenger with your friends and family.
- ♦ Bring a bike to campus to get around, or walk; it's cheaper than taking the bus or having a car. (But if you do decide to ride the bus, buy a bus pass for the semester or the year if it will save you money on fares.)
- ♦ Instead of taking the bus or train home, find someone who lives near your hometown, or who has to drive past your town, and carpool with him or her, splitting the cost of the gas.
- ♦ Shop off campus for food and other goods-on-campus stores tend to be more expensive.
- ♦ Save scrap paper to write notes on or print rough drafts.
- ♦ Try to avoid bars. Instead, go to parties where drinks are provided by the host, and the social scene can be more fun.
- ♦ Clip coupons and buy things that are on sale.
- ♦ Don't get 3-way calling or call waiting for your phone unless you really need them-they can add up to a lot on your monthly bill.

Budgeting Wisely

One problem you will definitely not have in college is finding a place to spend your money. But you can also find ways to have a great time and not empty your bank account. The most important thing you can do is budget your money! Budget, budget, budget! If you learn nothing else, learn how to budget. You don't need to have spreadsheets accounting for every little cent, but you do need to have some kind of idea of where your money goes. How many times have you asked yourself, "Where did all my money go?" If you simply keep track of where you spend your money, and on what, you will have no problem keeping track of your funds.

Also, if you allow yourself a weekly allowance, say \$30, you will be able to avoid temptation better because you'll know your limits. A sale at the Gap, as exciting as it may be, is not as important as buying textbooks. You need to prioritize and realize that in college, things like books come before clothes.

**Lisa, Recent Grad
Winona State University**



Show the real world who's boss!

This unique guide is packed with tips from recent grads and experienced professionals who've been through the grueling process of starting their careers and offer job-seekers invaluable insights on how to define a career path, network like a pro, create a resume that turns inexperience into impressive accomplishments, survive the first few weeks at a new gig, use youth to one's advantage, impress the boss and colleagues, and more.

The tips featured in this section of the *e-tips for A grades* ebook were graciously provided by the authors and editors of the **Students Helping Students®** guide books. All **Students Helping Students®** books are written and edited by college students and recent grads — and are full of brutally honest advice that you can put into practice immediately.

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For a limited time, visitors placing online orders can type in the promo code **STUDENT** to receive a 20% discount on the purchase of any of the books in this series.

Ahh!

“So, what are you going to do after graduation?” Ugh! If you hear your parents or second cousins twice removed ask this question once more, your ears will surely pop. But we figured that although the endless questioning by relatives who stick their collective nose into your business is annoying, you’re probably asking yourself the same exact question—“What AM I going to do after graduation?”

Don’t despair. You’ll figure out something you want to do and you will find a job. It may not be your ideal dream job (heck, it probably won’t be), and after taking it you might realize that you don’t actually like what you’re doing. But that’s completely okay. Your first or second or third job after college is just the beginning of your career, and you’ll have every opportunity to make your next gig a much more satisfying one. Lilia, a recent graduate and music producer, explains, “Keep in mind, your first job is never quite what you’re looking for. It’s meant to be a stepping stone and for you to acquire experience.”

Will you absolutely, positively love your first job after college? Probably not. But you should try to find a job that interests you in some way. Work takes up so much of our days that it would be a shame to be stuck in a job that makes you utterly bored and unhappy.

But what if what you’re interested in or passionate about doesn’t come with any type of job security or a paycheck big enough to cover more than your grocery bills? Take some time and think about your priorities. Be brutally honest: Do you really want something bad enough to endure the many sacrifices in terms of lifestyle? Or is there a compromise you can find that would make more sense to you?

Nataly, a recent grad, offers this advice: “I had a ton of college loans after graduation, wanted to live in New York, and didn’t have parents with deep pockets to support me. So I looked for jobs that were of interest to me, but that came with some security, reasonable pay, and flexibility that would allow me to pursue my true passion for writing and publishing. I started writing at nights and on weekends and have been able to work on a few books while being able to pay the bills and enjoy life in New York.

“Don’t buy into the ‘you’re a sell-out’ rhetoric if you decide to take a job that pays and has some job security, and pursue your true passions on the side. I’ve met people who refuse to ‘sell out,’ and who are miserable and tired of following their passions without any money or being able to support themselves.”

The Spanish Self-Inquisition

No one ever said that choosing a job or a career path was easy. But you can make this process much more bearable if you get organized. (Yes, there is a method to this madness!)

You can go about getting organized in a hundred ways, but here’s one suggestion—take from it what you find most helpful and adapt it to your particular situation. The general idea is this:

1. Think about your interests, skills, and priorities.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- ♦ What inspires me?
- ♦ What do I love to do?
- ♦ What are the skills I want to develop?
- ♦ What do I want to learn?
- ♦ What are my talents?

Nabulungi, who took a position as an executive assistant after foregoing medical school, reminds us: “Be as open-minded as possible. Don’t be bogged down by preconceived notions your parents may have about what is best for you.”

2. Consider your ideal work setting.

Think about what kind of an atmosphere you need to be most productive and happy. Or, just as important, are there certain settings that typically don't work for you? Here are some things to consider:

- ♦ Do I work best alone or in groups?
- ♦ Do I prefer short-term or long-term projects?
- ♦ Would I prefer working in an office or out in the field?
- ♦ Does a fast-paced work setting appeal to me?
- ♦ How do I deal with deadlines?
- ♦ How casual a work culture do I want?
- ♦ What kind of a work schedule do I want—9 to 5 or flexible?
- ♦ Will I want to work with people my own age?
- ♦ How diverse a work environment am I seeking?

3. Identify several possible jobs.

The process of matching your interests to the actual jobs and careers you'll pursue is sometimes clear cut and sometimes not. A lot of it depends on how well you know what different jobs are out there and what they involve. Our advice is to put some work into this step. The more you know about the diversity of opportunities out there, the greater the chance that you'll go after those that you'll actually enjoy.

4. Find several companies or organizations to go after.

Once you've narrowed down your list of potential jobs to a manageable size, you've got to start looking at companies and organizations where you might find those jobs. Your college or university might have a database of employers or you can always use the extensive online job-listing websites, like **www.monster.com**.

Some Jobs...

The best way to find a job is to jump in and try something that you think you're interested in. Also understand that some jobs won't be fully nourishing to your mind, body, and soul. What I mean is that different work has different benefits and drawbacks—it's a compromise.

Some jobs are just about earning money so you can afford to do what you really like to do. Some jobs are boring, but the co-workers are great, so it's worth it. Some jobs are wonderful and you pour your heart into your work, but the pay is crap. Some jobs are terrible, but the schedule allows you to do other things (spend time with your partner, work on your art, whatever). Some jobs are no fun but are necessary stepping stones to good positions further down the road. Some jobs pay well, but the hours are so long that you can't spend time with the people you love. Every job is some sort of compromise.

**Nills, Recent Grad
Writer**

Q&A

Networking is easy and fun (stop shaking your head) because it taps into this human predilection to talk about ourselves when asked. Consider successful networking as little more than the process of guiding a person to tell you about his life, what he's doing, the company that employs him, and his current industry.

Who knew that so much could come from a simple conversation? Or even an email. But it can. And it does. Networking is literally the most effective way to find out about what different jobs are out there and what they involve, earn a position, research specific companies and industries, meet a mentor, or join a peer group.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you begin your quest to become a true networking pro:

- ♦ Don't feel awkward about networking. It is a normal process that is expected and common. Older people like to talk about their lives and experiences so your interest isn't annoying, it's actually fun for them.
- ♦ Network with people from your everyday life: friends, family, peers, and alumni. Ask everyone you talk to you point you to another person who might be helpful.
- ♦ When networking, ask lots of questions, volunteer personal information, and arrange informational interviews. Be yourself-don't try to seem older or more mature. Your energy and youth are your assets.
- ♦ Don't discount any contact or opportunity-you never know where it might lead you. Your second cousin's friend's brother might work at a company that has your dream job.
- ♦ Maintain positive relationships with your contacts by respecting them, respecting their contacts, and by following up with them in a professional manner.
- ♦ Maintain and grow your professional network as you progress in your career. It's an invaluable asset.
- ♦ Finding a mentor through networking won't happen overnight, but it's something you should aim for. Mentors can share great advice, open up doors, and help you score your next gig.
- ♦ Internet work: get online, post your resume, view job fair announcements, peruse advertisements for local networking events, hit message boards, and find out when your next college alumni event is happening nearby.

Yada, Yada, Yada

Madeline, a veteran consultant for nonprofits, understands the extensive benefits to networking: "Almost every job I've had I've gotten from networking, word of mouth, or knowing someone. The key to success is connecting with people and joining a group of like-minded thinkers. Don't underestimate the power of maintaining relationships. Life is all about relationships."

Jamison, a faculty assistant at Harvard's Kennedy School, networked her way into exceptional internships and summer jobs during college, and then into full-time work after graduating in 2001. Here comes her advice, so uncap your highlighter now.

No Man Is an Island

"The hardest part of the networking process is beginning it. But once you start, the whole process seems to snowball on itself. Ask professors, friends, parents, family friends, and former employers for suggestions of people to talk to—not for a job but for information on finding a job in a given field. One person suggests two people to call, those two people suggest one more each, and pretty soon you have a wide range of contacts to assist you in the job-finding process."

Beware of the J-Word

"Something that's really important in the whole networking process is the wording that you use when approaching people. If you contact someone and present yourself as if you're asking for a job, you're likely to end the conversation before it begins. However, if you make it clear that you're really only looking for advice or guidance, people will be much more willing to help you."

Get a Makeover

It's kind of a cruel joke: In order to land the perfect job, employers need to look at your resume of less-than-perfect jobs. The trick? Lie about your jobs, of course. Or not.

All you really need is a resume makeover. Take your sub-par work experiences and make them sound like you're ready to ascend to CEO. The key is your use of detail, making the position appear selective, and highlighting personal responsibility. But don't go overboard. Over-dressing your duties in a job is as obvious as wearing a toupee. Here are some examples:

BEFORE

Camp Counselor

- ♦ Taught swimming and crafts to kids at an overnight camp.
- ♦ Taught art class to campers twice a week.

AFTER

Youth Instructor

- ♦ Taught basic, intermediate, and advanced swimming techniques and water safety to a class of forty 8-year-old campers for 10 hours each week.
- ♦ Designed curriculum and lesson plan for daily arts and crafts course at the camp, and implemented them with a class of thirty 10-year-old campers. The course became a permanent fixture at the camp.

BEFORE

Intern

- ♦ Learned about financial sector in an internship at a major financial corporation.
- ♦ Supported staff.

AFTER

Financial Training Program Intern

- ♦ Was selected from a pool of 500 applicants for one of ten internships for undergraduates at a Fortune 100 investment firm in Philadelphia.
- ♦ Collaborated with senior staff members, while learning the basics of financial accounting, modeling, and projections through Microsoft Excel.

BEFORE

Assistant

- ♦ Ran errands for a producer on the set of a major movie.

AFTER

Production Associate

- ♦ Supported staff and crew on set of \$100 million summer blockbuster for the third largest Hollywood production company.
- ♦ Shadowed executive producer of the film, and was entrusted with duties critical to the smooth and successful operation of day-to-day activities.

BEFORE

Candy Striper

- ♦ Cheered up sick children in the hospital by keeping them company and playing games.

AFTER

Children's Hospital Volunteer

- ♦ Spent 15 hours per week in the pediatric oncology wing, lifting the spirits of young people diagnosed with cancer.
- ♦ Assisted hospital staff with patient care and support.

BEFORE

Retail Store Clerk

- ♦ Worked the register and helped customers at a hardware store.

AFTER

Salesperson and Customer Service Representative

- ♦ Assisted customers with purchases, returns, exchanges, discount promotions, and equipment selection.
 - ♦ Managed cash register, tracked financial transactions, and organized cash receipts in hardware store with weekly revenue of \$100,000.
-

Taboo

Want to ace your job interview? Then avoid all of the following:

- ♦ **No Dough.** Unless you are asked about salary needs, DO NOT mention pay on a first interview. It is presumptuous, as you may not even be hired. You could also do yourself a disservice by stating a salary that is lower than what you may have been paid.
 - ♦ **Don't over-share.** Sometimes you will encounter that magical interview in which you and your potential employer just completely vibe. You're chatting, laughing, completely comfortable. It's great that the interview is going so well, but don't ruin it by thinking that the two of you are closer than you really are. Don't talk about the night before when you got drunk at a bar, or how hot his secretary is. Things could quickly go from fun loving to serious.
 - ♦ **Don't trash your last job.** Your interviewer is going to feel a sense of kinship to your last boss. It is not a good idea to make that last person look bad. The interviewer will most likely view you as the problem, not your boss.
 - ♦ **Politics.** Your interviewer will likely have a political bent more liberal or conservative than your own. Unless your opinions about current events are integral to the potential position, steer clear.
 - ♦ **No More Drama.** Your interview should not include references to difficulties you have encountered unless these obstacles provide clear evidence of your ability to deal with adversity. For example, if you have struggled with depression, this is not the time to make a full confession, even if you've made a complete recovery.
-

Show Me the Money

Here's the lowdown on some of the questions you need to consider before you accept (or decline) any job offer.

- ♦ **Salary:** Do your research. Do you have a minimum figure in mind? Have you figured out your monthly budget? Have you checked out www.salary.com?
- ♦ Have you considered the non-salary benefits or perks of a job? Does the company provide good health care coverage or maybe a discount gym membership?
- ♦ Will you have friends or family where you're working? How easy will the daily commute be? Will you be making any sacrifices professionally or socially?
- ♦ What are your impressions of your potential colleagues and the office atmosphere? Do people have lunch together, by themselves, or not at all? How well did you get along with your interviewers?
- ♦ What kind of expectations will the company have of you regarding work schedule? What kind of a commitment are you willing to make?
- ♦ What do you think of your potential new boss as a supervisor and mentor? Will this person help you develop personally and professionally? Could you see yourself working for this person happily?

You're Hired

The good news is somehow you've been hired. It's your first day on the job, you're excited, you want to make a difference. But you have no idea about prioritizing tasks, you're not sure how often to check in with your boss, and you don't know where the bathroom is.

First, locate the restrooms—that's life or death. Second, prepare yourself to absorb a tsunami of information. From meetings with your boss and colleagues about workload, to discerning the ways of your office environment, to conveying the right attitude from the start, there's a lot to handle in your first few weeks and months on the job.

And to help you navigate through it all, check out a few helpful tips we've put together:

- ♦ Find time to meet with your boss to define yours and his or her expectations and quantifiable goals for your position. Make sure that you and your supervisor are on the same page from Day One.
- ♦ Identify positive colleagues with whom to associate initially. One of the quickest ways to excel is to model yourself after those who already have.
- ♦ Play the active observer role in perceiving office culture. What makes the office tick? Do colleagues hang out after work? What do people do for lunch? How is taking a break viewed?
- ♦ Use your youth to your advantage, making your age an asset. What young hires often bringing to the table are fresh perspective, aggressive learning curve, flexible schedule, lower pay scale, energy, and ambition.
- ♦ Ask questions while it's still acceptable and expected of you, because you're not the new hire forever. The stupid question is the question unasked. Until you've already been there three months and should've known what you were just asking about, bucko.
- ♦ Attitude matters. Almost more than anything else. Have a positive one and maintain it consistently. Realize that you're building a reputation that starts with first impressions and continues as long as you work at the company.

We asked Gabe, a Legal Assistant and recent grad, to share his advice on settling into a new job – check it out.

How do you acclimate yourself to the office or company culture?

"Any post-grad who's put in a few years in the working world will tell you that from day one, you have to start building a positive reputation among your supervisors and colleagues. This reputation can follow you until week 100. The key is to realize that you're your own PR firm.

On a daily basis, you need to actively manage your reputation around the office. One way you can start off on the right foot is by becoming a "go-to" guy or gal for special tasks and topics around the office. For example, let your boss know in advance that you'd like a shot at a certain project the next time it comes around. Or, without bragging, let your supervisor know that you studied business in college or that you've taken a couple years of French or Japanese. After a while of taking on these special responsibilities or projects, you may find yourself as the first person your supervisor looks to when a new or challenging project comes along."

What should a person *not* do when first settling in?

"When you're the new guy or gal, one of your top priorities should be approaching the office relationships really slowly. Tread lightly in this area. This may sound like common sense, but after a few slip-ups, you may find that those stories you told to your new pals over a coffee break somehow found themselves into an office meeting... and everyone is looking at you just a little bit differently. So think and act humbly—don't brag, and whatever you do, save the Monday morning stories (especially any that include references to college-related activities) for later down the road."

What's Next?

At some point you're going to decide that you need to look for your next great gig. You might realize that you've outgrown your current position, can't stand your boss another minute, or would like to follow other interests in other fields. Definitely do some soul-searching before you take the leap-this is a big decision. But if your mind is determined, check out a few tips below for how to best manage changing jobs:

Job Searching While on the Job

- ♦ Job search before and after business hours, not during the day. You might get caught and the repercussions can be unpleasant.
- ♦ Arrange interviews during your lunch hour if the company is nearby, or use a sick or personal day in other cases.
- ♦ Don't discuss your search with coworkers. It puts your colleagues in an awkward position, and it makes you vulnerable to information leaks.

Get the Most from Your Current Employer

- ♦ Seek professional learning and experience from your employer before splitting for another. The point is to advance, not to plateau.
- ♦ A job represents references. Strengthen your relationships with individuals or supervisors who will be your references later.
- ♦ A job also represents a network. As you move through your career, networking becomes more effective as you build relationships with more people. Remember that your current colleagues can potentially help you snag jobs in the future.

How Not to Burn Bridges

- ♦ Give ample advance notice of a job change. Aim for one month's notice, so that your employer has time to hire someone before you split.
- ♦ Offer to help hire for, train, and orient your replacement. Knowledge transfer is crucial within companies, and the more that you can facilitate a smooth and seamless transition between yourself and your successor, the better.
- ♦ If you feel comfortable, check in with your former employer occasionally after you have left the company. For reasons of networking and job references, it just makes too much sense to keep in touch with former supervisors.

Passion Fruit

Will you absolutely, positively love your first job after college? Probably not. But you should try to find a job that interests you in some way or has something to do with things that you care about. Work takes up so much of our days that it would be a shame to be stuck in a job that makes you utterly bored and unhappy.

Which brings us to a good starting point for your job search-figuring out what it is that you're interested in. For some, this is pretty easy. If you've been writing articles from age five and devour ten newspapers a day, go forth and find that journalism job. Or maybe it's politics that drives you wild? Then search for those opportunities in Washington, or consider working for a congressman in your district.

But for many of us, it takes a bit of soul searching to find the direction in which to point our job search.

"How did I discover my interests?" recalls Katherine, an organizational consultant. "I spent time reflecting, learning, discussing what matters to me, the legacy I want to leave, the contribution I'd like to make. I did this by participating in career, personal, and professional development classes, and by reading books of this nature."

Rebecca, a fundraiser who graduated from college in 2001, made a similar discovery. "At the end of the day, it was over a drink with my best friend talking about the types of classes I'd taken and the extracurriculars I was involved with, and what made them interesting, valuable, and enjoyable, when I realized where I was headed."

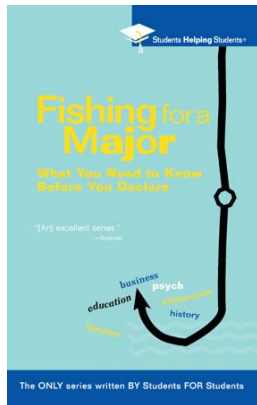
You may not be the soul-searching type, but give it a shot. You'll change and so will your interests, but life will be so much better if you find a job that you find interesting and that doesn't bore you to tears.

Ari's Corner

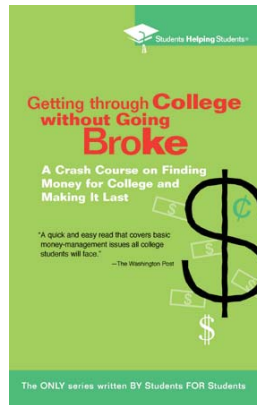
A passion for books and stories has always been a strong current running through my life. When I was 12, a teacher introduced me to several outstanding African-American authors. I then found a job at a bookstore specializing in ethnic literature. The owner became my friend and mentor, and for years we went to hear exceptional authors reading from their works. My work as a freelance writer after college was just the next step in following my passion for literature and storytelling. But what if what you're interested in or passionate about doesn't come with any type of job security or a paycheck big enough to cover more than your grocery bills? That's a tough question and we won't claim to know the right answer. But we have a few suggestions. Take some time and think about your priorities. Be brutally honest: Do you really want something bad enough to endure the many sacrifices in terms of lifestyle? Or is there a compromise you can find that would make more sense to you? For example, if your passion is to become a writer, you could find a more secure job, but one that leaves you enough time to work on the next great American novel. If you want to live in a relatively expensive city—say New York or San Francisco—have college loans, and would like to be able to eat something other than pasta every night, you'll have to be practical about balancing your interests and your job choices.

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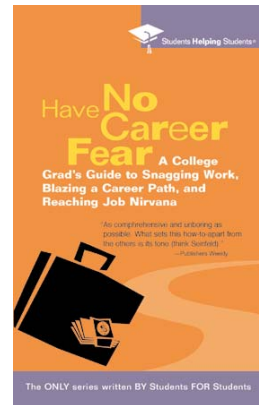
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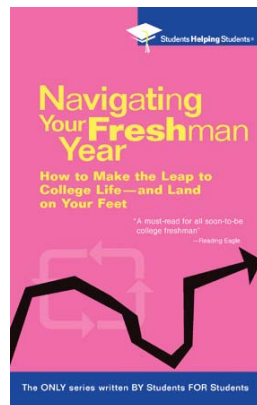
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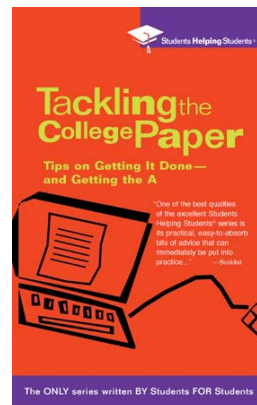
Getting through College without Going Broke



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