

## • **Tips for Students (& faculty): 12 Strategies for Academic Success**

[Tami Strang - Managing Editor - August 22, 2014](#)

\*For every successful student tip you should be asking yourself how **you** have implemented this **in class**. Students, especially those more at-risk, require much more than just 'being told'; they require **active training/assessment**, as well as **modeling of the behavior by the instructor**. Your efforts in these areas have produced amazing results in a short period of time! Just as in the classroom, our emphasis in divisions is now on providing the necessary support needed to assist those faculty who need it the most.

For many students, the new school year is a chance to begin again. (this is true for the **~half** of students who **persist to this second year**) Perhaps they didn't do as well as they could have last year, and they are hoping to find some strategies that lead to greater academic success. Or, perhaps they want to do *even better* than they did in the previous term, and they want some practical ideas that can help them reach their goals.

In her book [FOCUS on College Success, Fourth Edition](#), Constance Staley offers students a number of suggestions designed to help them study more effectively and intentionally. If students put these twelve strategies into practice, they can approach their studies with a **positive and proactive** mindset that fosters academic success. Share these suggestions with them!

**1. Don't guess at what your instructor wants or expects; be certain about it.** If you're unsure about the directions or expectations for an assignment, be sure to ask for clarification. **Specific unit objectives inform the student of exactly what they need to know or be able to do for the next text/assessment. This eliminates the need to ask the question...."Will this be on the test?"** Expectations must be crystal clear to every student, and not just for the course, but for every class period/assignment. The instructors with the fewest problems in class are the ones with crystal clear expectations and continuous communication and support.

**2. When making a study plan, consider the past, the present, and the future.** Ask yourself: What study tools and strategies proved effective in the past? What do you need to know and do *now*, and how motivated are you to put in the effort? And, what can and will you do to complete your work and learn what's asked of you? **Most importantly, this plan must be written. This considerably increases the chance of sticking to the plan. Many instructors have the student present their written plan as part of their first assignment.**

**3. Coach yourself by verbalizing what you need to know and do.** If you're feeling challenged by what you're learning, don't be afraid to talk yourself through it! Sometimes hearing yourself speak your questions and comments out loud can help clarify matters and focus your mind on the next steps you have to take.

**4. Pay attention to detail.** Take the time to read through instructions carefully. Check your work for errors in spelling or calculation. **Since following directions is the most important aspect of learning, it is imperative you have a first assignment that allows you to identify those students who are at-risk for following directions. Keep in mind that many students have been able to get away with this behavior for years, hence, they have been trained that they are not required to follow directions/rules to succeed. Ideally, this first day assignment must include other areas of assessment as well (i.e....ability to email via Bb, communicate in writing, etc.).**

**5. Take a break.** Pause every half hour or so to stretch, walk around, or get yourself a glass of water or light snack. You'll appreciate the time you take for some mental and physical refreshment! **This 'break' in the classroom is exactly why straight lectures are limited to no more than 20 min. before implementing an activity that allows students time to assimilate the information presented. To model critical thinking is it crucial you explain 'WHY' you give certain assignments or conduct class in a certain format. This explanation not only makes the material more relevant for the student, but also shows them you are using critical thinking in your duties (Why do we always start class with a writing assignment?... Why do you always state the objective being covered, before actually beginning lecture? Why do you only 'lecture' for 15-20 min before starting a discussion, writing assignment, or group activity? Why is this always followed with an assessment of learning for that particular objective? Why do you interject certain activities (videos, stories, etc), even though they do not seem to be specifically related to the**

material?). By conveying the ‘why’ behind what you do, you are effectively modeling the behavior (critical thinking) you expect of the student.

**6. Vary your study schedule.** Instead of devoting several straight hours to the work for one class, study for your various courses in chunks of time. Read your history assignment for an hour; practice your conversational Spanish with a study buddy; complete your Calculus assignment; work through your HTML tutorials... the variety will help you stay focused and engaged. Studying in different locations can also provide a boost of interest and alertness. *Same reason we abandoned the least effective means of teaching there is...straight lecture for the entire period.*

**7. Before you sit down to study, estimate how long it will take you to complete the assignment.** For example: “I think it will take me forty-five minutes to read this chapter in my Economics textbook.” Once you’re done, take note of how long it *actually* took you to do the work. Were you right on—or, did it take you more (or less) time to finish? The more you do this, the better you’ll be able to estimate how long it will take you to complete similar assignments in the future... which, in turn, helps you better manage your time. *We model this same behavior when we adjust activities based on past experience (& share this with students).*

**8. Recognize that different courses require different study skills.** For Physics, you may spend much of your time solving equations, whereas in French, you might use flashcards, and in Literature, you need to read and take critical notes. Try out a variety of techniques and apply those that prove most effective. (You might also visit your school’s tutorial center or website for assistance.) *These different student methods must also be modeled in class, and not just ‘told’ to students. “Telling is not always teaching.”*

**9. Choose an earlier study time.** If you can study during the morning or afternoon, rather than during the evening, do so. Not only will you be more alert, you’ll have more time to get the rest you need at night.

**10. Endeavor to complete the work early.** Have a History paper due on the tenth of next month? Challenge yourself to complete it by the fifth. By setting this early **deadline**, you’ll give yourself a buffer in case any interruptions, technological mishaps, or personal emergencies arise. (Those mishaps *do* always seem to happen at the last minute!) *Same for anything you have deemed crucial to improving student learning and total student development. Since this is a priority, you must make time to implement these strategies. Many times this requires writing down your specific goal (i.e...counsel every student who makes below a 70 on the first assessment....after all, isn’t that the purpose of the first assessment; to identify those at-risk students?). Having a **written** checklist significantly improves chances of completion.*

**11. Think of school as you would a job.** Just as you’d have a work schedule with defined hours to “clock in”, create a school schedule and follow it in a disciplined and attentive manner. As an example: on Tuesdays, you attend class from eight to eleven. Then, you have your lunch break, get some exercise, and plan research and study time at the library from one to five. Put your effort and focus into studying during those hours (while taking some brief breaks). Then, the evening is free for other responsibilities or for fun with friends and family! *If we do the same as faculty there should be an extra 7-8 weeks a year available for work outside campus time. Six of these weeks come from the 5 hrs/wk faculty (x 48 wks = 240 hrs = 6 full-time weeks) are not required to be on campus (40 – 35hrs). The other two weeks come from breaks the normal full-time worker does not get. This provides substantial opportunity for improvement through professional development, personal enhancement, and implementing more effective strategies/videos/activities/etc. (as well as answering emails/discussions via Bb) Championships are won during *off-season*!*

**12. Stay committed.** Go to class regularly and on time. Make that study schedule, and stick to it. Get the help you need along the way. You’ll see success in due time! *Same for faculty...model the behaviors you expect! If you are not getting the help you need, it is not because it is not available.*