

Making the Transition to College

You and your fellow students were among the best high school students in the world, but making the transition from being a successful high school student to a successful college student still takes work. Here are some strategies to help you succeed at Princeton.

- **Keep up with the material by studying every day.** College courses move at a much faster pace than high school courses. This means you need to get to work on assignments early and expect them to take longer and be more challenging than in high school.
- **Think critically** about the material you're covering. It isn't enough to understand the material—you also need to respond to it, question it, and relate it to your existing knowledge. Focus on understanding the concepts in problems in math, sciences, and engineering. Evaluate the main point and supporting evidence in social science. Understand how a text constructs meaning in humanities courses.
- **Take notes** on your reading assignments. Have you ever read a whole chapter, only to find that you can't remember what was covered? By writing short summaries of your reading assignments in your own words, or by articulating your own questions and critiques, you can more easily recall what you have read for precept, for papers, and for exams.
- **Always go to lecture, listen to the professor, and take notes.** It sounds obvious, but sometimes the desire for sleep can lure you into not going to lecture. Who's going to notice? But going to class and listening to the lecture can help you learn the material. Don't try to take down everything the professor says—seek to understand the key concepts and follow the line of argument or explanation. Listen actively—think about what the professor is saying, then write it down in your own words.
- **Start long-term projects the day they are assigned** and conquer the lure of procrastination. Long-term projects, like term papers, midterm exams, and lab reports, are big assignments that can't be done well at the last minute. So when you are assigned a long-term project, immediately create multiple non-negotiable deadlines. Start small and straight away. By coming up with a set of small, manageable tasks, rather than one huge one, you can motivate yourself to accomplish something small each time you sit down to work on the assignment.
- **Study with a specific, systematized plan that works for you.** At the start of the semester, look at your schedule and plan your study time as you plan your course time. Write down where you are going to study and when you are going to study.
- **Find a productive study space that works for you.** It should be a well-lit place where you can concentrate without distractions and gain maximum productivity. You might find that you study best (and most efficiently) when you are away from the interruptions of roommates, email, and phone calls.
- **Use the time between your classes.** Have ten minutes between classes? Get to your next class early, and spend five minutes reviewing the notes from the last lecture. Have an hour? Bring some reading, and get something done between classes.

- **Determine which resources** will help you do your best, and seek them out, including:
 1. Your **professors** and preceptors can help you with questions about their courses.
 2. The **Writing Center** can help you through the paper writing process.
 3. The **Group Study Hall and Individual Tutoring** at the McGraw Center can help you get through your problem.
 4. McGraw's **Learning Strategies Consultants** can work with you to develop an individualized approach to learning.
 5. The **McGraw Center** can help you master the academic skills you need to succeed at Princeton.
- Maximize what you learn from lectures by adopting active listening skills, taking effective notes, and reviewing your notes within twenty-four hours of taking them. Even a brief review in the ten minutes before class will help you retain information better and remember it for papers, problem sets, and exams.

Adapted in part from Sherrie L. Nist and Jodi Patrick Holschuh. *College Success Strategies*. New York: Penguin Academics, 2003.