Creating Academic Success

FOCUS QUESTIONS
What are two essential ingredients of a system of study?
Why is each important?
How am I going to apply each?

CHAPTER TERMS
After reading this chapter, define (in your own words) and provide an example for each of the following terms:

- active learning behaviors
- extrinsic reward
- intrinsic reward
- learning modalities
- passive learning behaviors
- Personal Action Statement
A System of Study: 
The Essential Ingredients

As a college student, you no doubt have experienced—or will experience—approaches toward instruction and requirements for learning that are unlike those experienced in your previous years of education. Recent high school graduates often welcome the greater personal and social freedoms associated with college life. However, along with these freedoms come challenges. No longer does a teacher or a parent oversee your learning; at the postsecondary level, you, the student, are expected to be a self-directed and self-motivated learner.

For the nontraditional student, college life offers a different set of challenges: Returning to school after a hiatus often creates a complicated juggling act among job, family, and academic responsibilities. Whatever the personal circumstances, individual students require their own sets of learning strategies to meet the multifaceted challenges encountered at the college level effectively. This text provides you, the student, with the tools for developing the strategies you need to become a self-directed learner and achieve academic success throughout your college career.

By the time you enter college, you have developed a system of study based on two essential ingredients: your learning behaviors and your learning attitudes. Each is discussed in the following sections.

Your Learning Behaviors

The term learning behaviors refers to a variety of actions carried out in an academic situation. These learning behaviors combine to form your system of study. Note that some behaviors are conducive to learning, such as arriving at class several minutes early with notepaper and pen, sitting in the front or middle of a classroom, listening attentively and selectively, asking questions to clarify points, reviewing notes after class, seeking out help when needed, and so on. These are termed active learning behaviors because they represent self-responsibility, initiative, and involvement in the learning process. Active learning behaviors lead to successful outcomes—that is, high grades and a smooth path toward graduation.

In contrast, a host of behaviors impede learning, such as skipping classes, sleeping during classes, yielding to distractions, studying after social and leisure activities, and not seeking assistance when needed. These are termed passive learning behaviors. Students exhibiting these behaviors do not take charge of their learning. Passive learners often are not accustomed to working hard in school; they tend to devote minimal time and effort to their academic life.
This text will introduce you to active learning behaviors at the college level. Each chapter focuses on a group of active learning behaviors—or strategies—related to a major study skills topic. Principal elements of each topic are labeled “Essential Ingredients.” Within each chapter you will be given choices of which strategies you will put into practice as you engage in your day-to-day college course work.

Your Learning Attitudes

Our attitude toward all aspects of academic life (going to class, interacting with the instructors, completing assignments, studying) has a huge impact on your accomplishments in college. Successful college students exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Motivation.** They want to achieve and are determined to reach their academic goals.
- **Persistence.** They do not let hurdles block personal achievement. When problems arise, they seek out help and persevere until a satisfactory solution is reached.
- **Self-Discipline.** They are willing to make the necessary sacrifices and devote the necessary efforts to receive that college degree. Even more than measures of intelligence, students’ levels of self-discipline are associated with academic success.
- **A Personal Support Network.** They have at least one family member or close friend they can rely on for personal encouragement and support. Likewise, they tend to associate with peers who are responsible and caring.

How many of these characteristics do you exhibit at this point in your college career? As you read the upcoming chapters in this text, you will be exploring your outlook toward the many aspects of college life and determining if your attitudes work for or against your immediate and long-term successes.

**ONLINE COURSE WORK**

Because distance education can be a very anonymous and independent process, your levels of motivation, persistence, and self-discipline are especially important. Oftentimes students enroll in online courses for reasons that work against their success. For example, they are disinterested in the subject, want to get the course out of the way, or think distance education courses are easier than face-to-face instruction. You are much more likely to do well in online course work if you assume the mind-set of “What can I learn?” as opposed to “How little can I do to pass?”
Keep in mind that in college, you will be determining your own academic path; thus it is up to you to take responsibility for your successes—or failures. This mission of self-determination and responsibility can be accomplished by an awareness of why you are here, what you want to accomplish, and how you can develop a viewpoint that contributes to personal success.

**pause... and reflect**

- What motivates you to achieve?
- Are you persistent when faced with a problem or stumbling block? Provide a personal example.
- Research indicates that self-discipline is more important than IQ in predicting academic success. Why do you think this is? Would you describe yourself as self-disciplined in regard to school? In what areas are you self-disciplined? Describe in what areas you are not self-disciplined, and explain why.
- Who is part of your personal support network?

**Learning Modalities**

Learning modalities refer to the senses involved in various approaches or strategies for learning and studying. Some strategies favor visual (seeing) modes of learning, while other strategies favor auditory (hearing) or tactile/kinesthetic (feeling/moving) modes, as described below:

- **Visual strategies** help students see information in their mind. Visual methods emphasize organization and spatial images, such as illustrations, charts, maps, and other graphic formats, and often include the use of color and design.
- **Auditory strategies** help students hear information in their mind and often involve listening, verbalizing, and discussing new knowledge. Examples of auditory learning methods are listening to audio files and talking aloud to yourself and others.
- **Tactile/kinesthetic strategies** help students learn through the physical sensations of touching and moving. Examples of tactile/kinesthetic learning methods are the use of real-life models and simulations, videos, role-playing, laboratory work, and field trips.
As a college student, be mindful that:

1. You likely use all three modalities at various times and in varying situations.
2. Generally it is to your advantage to utilize strategies employing multiple modalities, especially when you want to understand and remember content that is new and complex.
3. You will benefit from application and practice strategies, such as use of case studies, examples, demonstrations, and simulations. These types of strategies are most often associated with tactile/kinesthetic modalities.

At the ends of text chapters, you will identify, implement, and evaluate specific visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic learning and study strategies, with the goal of creating a system of study that is successful for you.

\[\text{pause... and reflect}\]

What modalities do you use in a learning situation? For each of the following situations, describe your favored learning strategies. Identify each strategy as using primarily visual, auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic modalities, or a combination of modalities.

- Reading a chapter for a history course.
- Writing the first draft of a research paper.
- Completing math-based homework problems.
- Studying for a test in a science course.

As you transfer suggested learning strategies to your daily course work, you will continually assess the success or failure of the strategies. The following section describes a process to assist you with applying and assessing strategies as you build and strengthen an effective system of study throughout your college career.

A Path to Success: Personal Action Statements

A successful system of study requires much trial and error; you must try a strategy to know whether it will work for you. Your academic path in college will be strewn with both successes and failures. Savvy students are alert to which strategies do and do not work for them and, when needed, they take the initiative to substitute other techniques. A Personal Action Statement is one way to oversee the piece-by-piece construction of your overall system of study. It is a concise, step-by-step, written plan of one specific strategy—either a behavior or an attitude—that you commit yourself to doing within a predetermined span of time.
Effective Personal Action Statements entail reflection, decision making, and judgment on your part. Because you are required to deliberate, analyze, and critique, each Personal Action Statement is designated as a critical thinking task within the chapters.

Use these guidelines to ensure a successful Personal Action Statement:

- Recognize that a Personal Action Statement is a commitment to yourself for action.
- Make the Personal Action Statement manageable by identifying a specific step to implement.
- Be realistic and honest with yourself. Identify a step, or strategy, that you intend to do, as well as hurdles and rewards for yourself.
- Be willing to put both thought and time into the Personal Action Statement. Know that, for most students, the results are worth the effort. Soon, you will become adept at identifying and outlining strategies and steps. You will be able to see how the Personal Action Statements can motivate you toward action and achievement as you continue to build a system of study for yourself.
- Type your answers for each step. Writing space is limited on text pages. Furthermore, when you type you are able to make more revisions, resulting in higher quality responses.

Here is the setup for the Personal Action Statement:

1. I will: ________________________________________________.
2. My greatest hurdle to achieving this is: ____________________________.
3. I will eliminate this hurdle by: ________________________________.
4. My time frame for achieving this is: ____________________________.
5. My reward for achieving this is: ________________________________.

On line 1, write what you intend to do. Write a strategy that is specific, realistic, and meaningful to you. Here are some examples:

- “I will study in a library study room three nights next week.”
- “I will improve my concentration by taking short breaks every 30 minutes when reading my biology textbook.”

Line 2 refers to what you anticipate as being the greatest barrier toward completing the Personal Action Statement. Relying on past experiences and your personal weaknesses, what tends to hinder successful completion of your schoolwork? Examples of hurdles are boredom, the temptation to play an online game, friends dropping by to chat, and your dislike of the subject matter or the instructor. Be honest with yourself: What tends to obstruct your study plans?

On line 3, write how you will overcome the hurdle identified in line 2. What can you do realistically to reduce, if not eliminate, this barrier? For instance, you can study with a classmate to relieve boredom, or use an online game only as a break from studying, or be more assertive with your friends, or talk to your professor about your problems.
On line 4, indicate your time frame. When are you going to implement this Personal Action Statement? Make the time frame immediate; begin as soon as possible.

On line 5, identify a reward for completing your Personal Action Statement successfully. It can be an internal or **intrinsic reward** (such as a sense of satisfaction with a high test grade or increased confidence from knowing subject matter) or an external or **extrinsic reward** (such as using a social media site, watching a favorite television program, or talking to a friend).

After completing the Personal Action Statement, place it in an accessible location (such as above your desk, in your planner, or on your computer or smart phone) so that you can refer to it regularly to remind yourself about your intentions.

The last, yet very important, step in this process is the follow-up. At the conclusion of implementing your Personal Action Statement, assess critically what happened. Did you accomplish all that you set out to accomplish? If so, great—reward yourself! Think about the factors that contributed to your success. Use the follow-up as a time to evaluate what happened and anticipate building on your successes.

Also, learn from your partial successes as well as failures. If everything did not work out as anticipated, do not berate yourself. Keep in mind that risk taking is an inherent part of change, and it is inevitable that you will not always be successful when taking risks. However, do learn from your ineffective Personal Action Statements. Analyze what happened. Often students make their Personal Action Statements either too general or too unrealistic (refer to the examples that follow). Think about how you can shape your Personal Action Statement to make it more specific and/or practical.

**TOO GENERAL:**
I will improve my time management.

**MORE SPECIFIC:**
I will put class assignments in my planner.

**TOO UNREALISTIC:**
I will study in the library for three hours *every night* this week.

**MORE REALISTIC:**
I will study in the library for two hours on three days this week.

How about the anticipated hurdle? Did it actually emerge? If so, were you able to overcome it effectively? Did you discover other impediments? Furthermore, was your time frame appropriate for completing the Personal Action Statement?

Finally, examine your reward. Did you identify a reward that is meaningful to you? Your reward should motivate you to finish a task and make you feel good about succeeding. Dangle a reward in front of yourself that you really want—and can have!

Answering these and similar questions will aid you in analyzing what learning strategies do and do not work for you. It takes deliberate practice to develop effective Personal Action Statements, but the practice is worthwhile. Not only will you be learning about valuable college study strategies, but you also will be learning about yourself!
Conclusion

Your success in college depends on a combination of factors: your behaviors in and out of class, your attitude and commitment to working hard, your awareness of key learning strategies, and your commitment to applying and accessing these strategies in your daily life. The following checklist contains keys to a successful academic year, elements that directly relate to success, satisfaction, and, ultimately, graduation from college. As the year progresses, review the checklist periodically with the goal of accomplishing as much as you can to keep yourself on the track of academic success.

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC YEAR

1. **Be aware of why you are attending college, as well as what you expect to get out of college.** Whose decision was it to attend college, yours or your family’s? Are you attending the college of your choice? Do you intend to graduate from this or from another college? What do you expect to accomplish in college? Be honest with yourself and clear in your goals.

2. **Know what is expected of you in each subject.** Read each syllabus. Make an appointment with each instructor. Attend all classes. Go to review sessions or form your own study group. Ask, and then write down the answers!

3. **Manage your time wisely.** Establish a routine; be aware of the dangers of too much free and unstructured time. This is especially true for online course work. Muster the self-discipline to say no to tempting people and activities. Also, create a balance among your academic, personal, and social/leisure lives. Assess your priorities periodically: Do you typically place your academic responsibilities before your social aspirations? Do you allow yourself time for fun between the academic and personal demands on your time?

4. **Develop and use effective methods of study.** Create a study system that is advantageous to you; choose, use, and evaluate recommended learning strategies. Form beneficial habits early in the year.

5. **Involve yourself in college life.** Students who participate in academic, social, and personal campus activities tend to do better academically. Create links between yourself and other people within the college community. Make commitments like these:
   - Join a student organization or club related to your interests or major.
   - Obtain a campus job.
   - Participate in academic support services, such as tutoring, group study sessions, and workshops, or become a tutor or peer educator.
   - Go to campus cultural events, such as guest speakers, fine arts productions, and museum exhibits.
   - Participate in intramural sports and other extracurricular activities.
6. **Avoid these hazards:**
   - Mishandling of your personal freedom and time
   - Misuse of alcohol and drugs
   - Mishandling of your personal health
   - Mishandling of your best interests

---

**pause... and reflect**

Refer to the checklist that offers keys to a successful academic year. At this point in your college career, where would you place yourself?

For each of the six items, write a short paragraph assessing yourself at this time. Include what you have done, as well as what you still need to accomplish.

---

**try it out!**

Create a sample Personal Action Statement by choosing one of the items that you still need to accomplish for a successful academic year. Use the following examples as models.

**EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL ACTION STATEMENTS**

1. I will: **become more involved in campus life by obtaining an on-campus job.**
2. My greatest hurdle to achieving this is: **not knowing where campus jobs are advertised.**
3. I will eliminate this hurdle by: (1) **asking my adviser about job listings during our meeting on Wednesday,** and (2) **investigating the Career Services office Web site.**
4. My time frame for completing this is: **by Thursday of this week.**
5. My reward for achieving this is: **the self-satisfaction of knowing that I began looking for a job early in the semester!**

1. I will: **set aside definite times during the afternoon to do both math and chemistry problems.**
2. My greatest hurdle to achieving this is: **the distractions of TV and people in my apartment.**
3. I will eliminate this hurdle by: **studying at a desk at the library during the afternoons when I have large chunks of free time.**
4. My time frame for completing this is: **next Tuesday.**
5. My reward for achieving this is: **not having unfinished work hanging over my head.**
1. I will: join a campus club related to my interest in an outdoor sport.
2. My greatest hurdle to achieving this is: not knowing what clubs are here.
3. I will eliminate this hurdle by: checking the Web site for the Office of Student Organizations and narrowing my options to two or three clubs that I will contact and visit.
4. My time frame for completing this is: within the next 2 weeks.
5. My reward for achieving this is: the knowledge that I actually followed through with something, as well as looking forward to meeting other students.

Your Personal Action Statement

1. I will: __________________________

2. My greatest hurdle to achieving this is: __________________________

3. I will eliminate this hurdle by: __________________________

4. My time frame for achieving this is: __________________________

5. My reward for achieving this is: __________________________

Comprehension Check

Return to page 1. Without looking back through the chapter, provide a complete answer for each focus question. Then, define each chapter term in your own words and provide an example.