

Cheat Sheet Module 1

Essential Concepts

Habits for Success

- **Success in college looks different for everyone.** For some students, it means earning high grades; for others, it might be building friendships, staying healthy, or completing a program. Your personal definition of success may shift over time, and that's completely normal.
- **College requires trade-offs.** Choosing to attend college means investing your time and money—often at the expense of other opportunities. But with a clear sense of your goals, this investment can pay off in meaningful ways, like better job prospects or personal growth.
- **Believing you can improve makes a big difference.** A growth mindset—the belief that you can develop skills through effort and strategy—helps you stay motivated, overcome challenges, and keep learning, even when things are tough. If you believe your abilities are set in stone (a fixed mindset), you're more likely to give up when facing difficulty. Shifting to a growth mindset opens up more opportunities for learning and progress.
- **Effective study habits and time management lead to better results.** Preparing before class, taking clear notes, and starting assignments early are strategies that make learning easier and reduce last-minute stress. Setting a consistent study schedule and breaking assignments into smaller, manageable steps helps you stay organized and avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Support resources are there to help you succeed.** From academic advising to financial aid to counseling services, your college offers a wide range of support—using them proactively can make a big difference in your academic performance. Learning about these resources early on prepares you to use them when needed.
- **Getting involved on campus supports your success.** Students who participate in clubs, organizations, or campus events often feel more connected, perform better academically, and are more likely to stay enrolled. Taking on leadership roles or exploring personal interests outside the classroom can also strengthen your resume and boost your self-esteem.

Time Management

- **College time is more flexible—but also more demanding.** Unlike high school, college gives you more control over your schedule. But with that freedom comes the need to manage your time wisely so you don't fall behind on academic work.
- **Know the difference between fixed and flexible time.** Fixed time includes things like classes, work shifts, and appointments—these are non-negotiable. Flexible time includes studying, socializing, and meals—these can shift, but still need to be planned intentionally.
- **Creating a schedule helps you stay on track.** Start by blocking out your fixed commitments, then fill in time for studying and personal tasks. Breaking down big assignments into smaller steps makes it easier to manage your workload. Your schedule might change week to week—and that's okay. Create a routine that fits your life and adjust it as needed to stay balanced and productive.
- **Make the most of your study time and build in buffer time.** Study when your energy is highest, start with your hardest subjects, and use small pockets of time (like waiting in line) to review material. Aim for two to three hours of studying for every hour in class. Leave room in your schedule for delays, rest, and emergencies so you don't get overwhelmed when things change.
- **Procrastination happens—but you can overcome it with the right strategies.** It often shows up when you're low on energy, feeling overwhelmed, or afraid of failure. To manage it, try breaking tasks into smaller steps, using checklists, limiting distractions, and setting rewards for progress. Prioritizing what matters most—like what's due soon or what affects your grade the most—can also help you stay focused and productive.

Writing and Communication in College

- **College writing has many purposes and audiences.** Whether you're writing a lab report, an email to a professor, or a research paper, each context requires a different approach. Understanding your purpose and audience is the first step to writing effectively.
- **Professional communication matters.** In emails, always use a clear subject line, a polite greeting, professional language, and a respectful tone. Include relevant details like your course and student ID, and proofread before sending. If you miss a class, don't ask your professor if you missed anything important—check with a classmate for notes, review the syllabus, and follow up during office hours if needed. If you need an extension, ask early and politely.
- **Understanding assignments starts with reading carefully.** Identify the purpose by looking for key verbs, recognize what kind of thinking the assignment requires, and ask your instructor for clarification if anything is unclear. Pay attention to the assignment's language, required evidence, formatting, and citation style—these will vary by discipline and instructor.

- **Plagiarism is serious, even when unintentional.** Always credit sources you use, even during the research and brainstorming stages. If you're unsure how to cite something, ask for help rather than leaving it out. Writing centers, classmates, instructors, and online resources are all there to support your writing journey—don't be afraid to ask for help or collaborate when you need it.
- **The writing process has multiple stages—and they're flexible.** Writing well means moving through brainstorming, research, outlining, drafting, revising, and proofreading. You don't have to do them in order, and it's normal to revisit earlier steps. Using tools like assignment calculators or checklists can help you pace yourself, avoid last-minute stress, and improve the quality of your work.

Technology in Writing

- **Strong word-processing skills are essential for college success.** Most assignments will need to be typed and submitted electronically, so becoming familiar with tools like Microsoft Word, Google Docs, and Pages will save you time and help you meet academic formatting expectations.
- **Discussion boards are academic conversations, not casual chats.** When posting online, use clear subject lines, stay on topic, write in full sentences, and be polite. Your tone should be professional but conversational, and you should always check spelling and grammar before posting.
- **Social media can be used for coursework—professionally.** If your instructor assigns a post on LinkedIn, X (Twitter), or Instagram, match your tone and format to the platform, but keep your language respectful, your message clear, and your visuals relevant and high-quality.
- **Your digital footprint matters.** Anything you post online—from discussion replies to social media content—can be seen by future employers, instructors, and peers. Be intentional about what you share and how it reflects your goals and professionalism. Avoid sharing sensitive personal information like your phone number or home address. Use privacy settings wisely, and think about who can access your content before you post it publicly.

Critical Thinking and Reflection

- **Critical thinking means asking deeper questions.** It's about examining assumptions, analyzing arguments, evaluating sources, and considering multiple perspectives before deciding what to believe or do. Critical thinkers stay curious, reflective, and open to changing their views.
- **College challenges you to think more deeply.** Unlike memorizing facts, academic work requires you to question what you read, test claims with evidence, and recognize bias—both in others and in yourself. This level of thinking helps you become a more effective learner and communicator.

- **Problem-solving is rooted in critical thinking.** Whether you're budgeting, choosing between options, or evaluating a public figure's qualifications, critical thinking helps you break complex situations into manageable parts and make better decisions based on logic, not assumptions.
 - **Good thinkers reflect on their own thinking.** Recognizing your strengths and gaps in understanding is a key part of learning. Reflecting honestly—on what you know, how you learn, and what you still need to work on—helps you grow in any subject. From nursing to engineering to the arts, professionals use reflective thinking to improve their practice.
 - **Reflective writing deepens your learning.** It's more than describing an experience—it's about analyzing what happened, interpreting what it means, evaluating its impact, and planning how to apply the insight moving forward. Writing reflectively—whether in a formal essay or a quick journal entry—builds the habit of connecting ideas, assessing progress, and making informed changes.
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Glossary

buffer time

extra time intentionally built into a schedule to account for unexpected delays, transitions, mental breaks, or extended work on tasks, helping to reduce stress and maintain flexibility

college success

a personal measure of progress that can include anything from passing classes and securing financial aid to forming relationships and managing responsibilities

critical thinking

the process of thinking clearly and thoughtfully to evaluate information, question assumptions, and make reasoned decisions about what to believe or do

digital footprint

the record of your online presence, including social media activity, websites, and other content that can be seen by others and may shape how you're perceived by potential employers or schools

discussion board

an online platform where students and instructors post and respond to questions or prompts asynchronously, allowing for written academic discussion that follows specific formats and guidelines

fixed mindset

the belief that abilities and intelligence are static traits that cannot be significantly changed

fixed time

time dedicated to non-negotiable commitments that occur at specific times, such as classes, work shifts, exams, appointments, and important events

flexible time

time allotted for activities that can be scheduled around fixed commitments, such as studying, socializing, eating, errands, exercise, and hobbies

growth mindset

the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence

impostor syndrome

the consistent fear that one does not belong or that one is not good enough; someone suffering from impostor syndrome may worry about being “exposed” as a fraud or fake

office hours

a specific time faculty set aside to meet individually with students who want extra help, have questions, or seek mentoring; some faculty ask students to make an appointment while others have drop-in office hours

opportunity cost

the value of the next best alternative that is given up when a choice is made; in the context of college, it refers to what you must temporarily trade off—such as time, income, or personal activities—in order to pursue your education

plagiarism

using another person’s words, images, or other original creations without giving proper credit

prioritization

organizing your responsibilities by importance and urgency so you can focus on what needs to be done first, especially when managing deadlines, workload, or the impact on your grade

procrastination

the act of delaying or postponing tasks that need to be completed, which can become a problem when it happens often, especially with important or time-sensitive work

reflection

the ongoing process of thinking deeply about your own learning, experiences, and growth—past, present, or future—in order to better understand your strengths, challenges, and progress as a learner

reflective writing

a type of writing that combines personal insight with critical thinking by describing experiences, analyzing their meaning, interpreting their significance, evaluating outcomes, and considering how to apply what was learned in the future

the writing process

a flexible, step-by-step approach to developing and refining a piece of writing, which includes brainstorming, researching, outlining, drafting, revising, and proofreading to turn ideas into clear and polished work

word-processing program

a type of software used to create, edit, format, and print text-based documents, such as essays, reports, and letters (e.g., Microsoft Word, Google Docs)