



Making the grade: time-management tips

Marianopolis Student Services

New expectations

Welcome to Marianopolis College! This handout has been compiled to help you get off to a great start. One of the first things you will have to do is accept that you are not in high school anymore and that the study habits and time management skills you used there are probably no longer adequate. Writing your first assignment, using the library for the first time, taking your first test, and making your first class presentation, etc., will all likely require an adjustment on your part. The following guidelines were put together precisely to make your transition to college life a smooth and enjoyable one. Success is yours for the taking.

By becoming an effective student, you will be getting the most out of Marianopolis College. Remember, the learning skills you develop in college will serve you for the rest of your life!

Navigating the maze

School policies, program requirements, administrative deadlines, etc., can all be found on marianopolis.edu as well as in your student agenda. Make reading through the weekly electronic information bulletin [What's Up](#) a habit.

As a college student, you are expected to assume responsibility for your education. Acquaint yourself with your new college and the people who work here. All human and material resources are here to provide you with the information you need to become a successful college student. Seek out the information that you need. Avoid unnecessary stress by asking questions, locating and using all sources of information.

Time management

Time-management skills exert a powerful influence on college success. Unlike high school, in college, you are in charge of most of your time. Learn to use it wisely.

Begin by getting a wall calendar and a personal agenda and then develop the habit of recording everything. Deadlines have a way of sneaking up on a student, so write them and all other important details down.

At the beginning of term, you may feel overwhelmed. This is normal. The best way to address this feeling is through effective time management. Begin by taking a serious look at your long-term goals, then break them down into monthly, weekly and daily components. In accordance with these goals, keep an ongoing "to do" list, establish a weekly list on Sundays and a daily "to do" list every evening for the following day.

When organizing your weekly and daily schedule of activities, prioritize all tasks and deadlines. Focus on the most important and urgent, leaving the lowest priority and less urgent tasks for last. If you use your time efficiently, you WILL have time for your friends and favourite pastimes.

When scheduling your study time, assess honestly how much time is necessary per task. Be realistic, don't skimp and always include generous amounts of time for review. The more you review, the more you will remember!

Examine your current daily routine. Are you a morning person or night owl? Schedule blocks of study time in relation to your most productive time. Do not plan to work at midnight if your most productive time of the day is around 10 a.m.

When putting together your study plan, try not to schedule enormous blocks of time for single subjects. Instead, strive for study periods of approximately 50 minutes followed by a break of 10 minutes. If necessary return to the same subject after your break, if not, turn to something new.

Now that you have a wall calendar and a personal agenda, and you have meticulously noted all the necessary submission deadlines, assignment details and examination dates, stick to your schedule. Students who float through the semester without keeping on top of their studies always end up in trouble. Make a plan and follow it. Keep up to date on your readings, your homework assignments and lab reports. This way, your life will not seem so out of control. Procrastination is one of the most debilitating tendencies. Be honest with yourself. Ask yourself why you tend to procrastinate. More often than not, procrastination only increases a student's stress level. If you find yourself in this situation, begin by planning to work for only fifteen minutes or half an hour. Break down your work into "do-able" components, then attack them one at a time. Before you realize it, you will be half way through that assignment, chapter or lab report. Hit the books, you'll feel better!

Study skills

The secret to studying smarter, and not necessarily longer, lies in effective study skills. Develop a proactive attitude when it comes to your studies. Success depends on your attitude. The more positive you are, the better you will do. Take control of your studies: plan, prepare and participate. Seek out the information you need and learn to study effectively. If you run into trouble, get help immediately!

Research has established that students who develop a positive rapport with their teachers achieve greater levels of success than their "suffer-in-silence" classmates. Talk to your teachers. If you are having trouble with the course material, make an appointment to see the teacher during office hours or speak to him/her briefly either before or after class. Don't be shy; teachers know their subjects and they are there to help you.

Study skills include such activities as textbook reading, listening and notetaking, preparing for and taking exams and writing papers. In the following sections, each of these skills will be briefly examined. Implement the tips provided and you will be on your way to studying smarter!

Textbook reading

Some students feel that if they go to class and take good notes that they do not need to read their textbooks. Unfortunately, this type of assumption can lead to serious problems. Textbooks are an important part of your education. Buy them immediately and get a head start by reading through the tables of contents, the prefaces and introductions. Then, leaf through the chapters. Look at the pictures, diagrams and tables and read the chapter headings and sub-headings. Remember to check out the extra material at the back. Sections such as appendices, bibliographies and glossaries often provide important additional information.

Before you begin, prepare to read your textbook by assessing how much time you need to complete the section in question. Do not save up large sections of reading for one sitting. Find an appropriate place and plan to read for a period of 60 to 90 minutes. Divide this time block into 20-minute intervals. During these intervals, concentrate on your text without becoming distracted. Keep your head down and press on. At the end of each interval, take a five-minute break during which you can relax a little and review what you have just read. After 60 to 90 minutes of these "concentrated reading" intervals, you'll be ready for a 20-minute break. Relax, then change subjects. By maintaining this type of reading schedule, you will stay on top of your weekly readings. In turn, this will allow for maximum comprehension and retention. (It will also make studying for exams a lot easier!)

In order to get the most out of your textbooks, consider using the following SQ3R five-step reading system. Using the SQ3R acronym as a guide, your first step is **S - Survey**. Leaf through the assigned section. As an initial overview, skim over the chapter headings and sub-headings and read the summary and the concluding paragraphs. The second stage is **Q - Question**. In order to help you focus your attention, turn headings and subheadings into questions by placing *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *how* before them. This will arouse your curiosity and therefore increase your motivation to complete the reading. The third step is **R - Read**. Read to answer the questions you constructed in the preceding stage. The fourth step is **R - Recite**. Look away from the page and recite what you have just read in your own words. If you do not succeed at this, return to the text and re-read the section. Try reciting again. The final stage consists of **R - Review**. Go back to the beginning and review the contents of the section. Think about the questions you have just asked and answered.

To maximize comprehension and retention, use the SQ3R5 step system in co-ordination with other textbook reading techniques such as jotting down questions in the margins and highlighting the main points.

Active readers always have a pencil in hand when reading. Pick up a pencil and underline important names, dates and definitions, make notes in your margins, jot down your own ideas, create symbols for eventual reviewing. Circle words you don't know, look them up in a dictionary then write them in the margins. By getting to know your textbooks, your readings will seem easier and less time consuming.

Active listening and taking notes

By developing effective listening and note-taking skills, you will be able to get more out of lectures and reduce time spent studying before important exams.

Be prepared for the lecture, always complete the assigned readings and review your class notes from the previous session. It's also a good idea to take a quick look at the course outline to see what the teacher has planned. Arrive early!

During the lecture, sit close to the teacher so you can hear and see well. Avoid sitting next to friends and do not tolerate any distractions. Listen actively to your teacher. Follow the organization of the lecture. Teachers usually begin with a main topic then proceed to sub-topics before moving along to other main topics. Pay attention to examples. Stay alert and take good notes. When the teacher puts something on the board, you can bet it's important. Be an active participant in class.

Write your notes on loose-leaf paper. Take clear legible notes by dividing them into main ideas and sub-topics. Add proofs and examples for each. Underline titles and highlight the main points. Number points to ensure clarity. Do not write anything down twice; if the teacher repeats something, just underline your first entry for emphasis. Use abbreviations and remember to leave wide (2 to 3 cm) left-hand margins for later use during review or preparation for exams. Also, use this extra space for key words, definitions, diagrams and your own ideas. If anything remains unsure, consult your teacher.

As soon as possible after the lecture, review by going over and organizing your notes. Update your agenda with any new information you have been given. Schedule sufficient time for your readings. If you missed something, get the information as soon as possible. If you did not understand something, see your teacher.

Preparing for and taking exams

Exams are a very big part of college. Effective exam-preparation skills are essential, as they not only reduce the time needed, they also enhance learning!

When preparing for an exam, find a place to study that offers a minimum of distractions. Make sure that the lighting is proper, that the table is big enough to spread everything out on and

that your chair is only moderately comfortable. Stock this place with all the necessary items. In order to enhance concentration, remove all things in this place that are not related to your studies and, as music very rarely enhances exam preparation, turn down the volume or turn it off completely. Put a "do not disturb" sign on your door and get to work!

Effective exam preparation begins on the first day of classes. By going to all your classes, doing your readings, keeping up to date on all your homework and assignments, and reviewing regularly, you will actually be preparing for your mid-term and final exams. Keep up the good work! Vigilance pays off!

Find out as much as possible before the actual day of the exam. Talk to the teacher and your classmates. Ask for specific information regarding which lectures and chapters will be covered. Ask what type of questions there will be. Ask if any old exams are available. Multiple choice, true or false, short answer and essay question exams all require different preparation, so make sure you know in advance what to expect on exam day.

Plan ahead. How many exams will you be writing during mid-term and final exam weeks? Assess how many hours of studying are necessary for each subject. Prioritize your exams and prepare a study schedule well in advance. To maximize concentration and retention, remember to schedule short study periods with regular breaks and changes in subject material.

When it comes to actually studying the subject material, organize, organize and organize. Your memory will thank you for it! Once you have organized the material, practice it. By rewriting the main ideas then recalling the important details, talking about the subject with classmates or solving problems, you are helping your memory to store the information. Practice makes perfect!

On the final evening before an exam, end with a quick overview, then relax. Get as much sleep as you can and eat a sensible breakfast. You won't remember a thing if you are too tired or hungry to think! During hectic exam periods, maintain healthy eating habits, a regular sleep pattern and don't stop your exercise activities. Enough sleep, healthy food and moderate exercise can actually help you to think more clearly!

During the actual exam, begin by reading through the exam in its entirety. Failure to follow directions is the most common reason that students do not pass exams, so read all directions carefully! Once you have read through the exam, jot down any key words, definitions, formulas, or thoughts that you feel might escape you. Make a note of which questions you will do, if you have a choice. Then decide how you will spend your time by using the percentage worth of each question as a guideline. In other words, don't devote 50% of your examination period on a question that is only worth 5%. Begin with the questions you know you can answer. While you are working on these questions, your mind will actually be working on some of the other less obvious ones.

Each type of exam requires a specific approach. Develop the ability to respond precisely to the type in question. Always start by organizing an outline for essay questions. List main ideas, then elaborate by providing additional information and examples. Remember to substantiate your answers. If you begin to run out of time, start answering in point form, most teachers give at least partial marks for showing that you knew what else needed to be included. Always leave at least five minutes for review and make sure that you have legibly written all of the information requested on the front of your exam booklet, especially your name, course title and section, and the instructor's name.

Essay-writing

Essay-writing is also a big part of college. Take the time to develop good essay writing skills and you will actually enjoy the process!

There are several essay-writing formats. Ask your teacher to clarify which one is expected. When in doubt, put together a detailed outline and ask your teacher if you are on target. Most teachers are very helpful and will provide you with some useful tips and insight.

Regardless of the format, there is usually one basic structure to all essays: Introduction-Body-Conclusion. This structure makes essays easier to write and easier to read. In the Introduction, state your thesis statement, then tell your readers why you have decided the topic is important. In the Body, provide background information and describe all causes and effects, weaknesses and strengths, and opposing arguments. In the Conclusion, summarize and restate your position.

There are several methods used to write good essays. The "Card Method" consists of writing each point on a file card, along with its bibliographical information and sorting the cards in a logical order before composing the first draft. In a like manner, in the "One Topic per Page Method," you divide your essay into sections and write all your points for each section on a single page prior to the final assembly. After you have done a few papers and incorporated your teachers' feedback into your method, you will probably develop an excellent routine of your own.

Put together a research and writing schedule well in advance. Choose a topic that interests you and check with your teacher to see if it corresponds to the course material. Learn to really use the library and conduct research in a systematic way. As you begin to collect information, jot down main topics and then put together a preliminary outline. The more detailed your outline, the less time your first draft will take to compile.

When writing your rough draft be as concise as possible. Make sure your grammar and sentence structures are correct and avoid wordiness as it unnecessarily stretches out an essay. Avoid shifting verb tenses and try not to repeat words. Put your first draft away for a couple of days and edit once you have cleared your mind. Use a style manual for your bibliography, table of contents and title page, and always give credit where credit is due! Plagiarism is never acceptable, so learn how to quote, paraphrase and cite in a scholarly fashion. For important details regarding essay and term paper writing, pick up a copy of "Notes on Scholarly Style" at the Student Services counter. As in all things, give yourself extra time to review the final copy for typos and other errors. Ask a friend to read your paper for clarity, conciseness and organization.

For Math students

Math is a prerequisite for many courses. When it comes to studying mathematics, nothing is as important as going to lectures, taking good notes, keeping up to date with readings, and practising homework exercises. Failure to do any of this will lead to trouble later on!

There are a few things you can do to maximize your performance. Go back to your high school textbooks and review the sections that you need. Check out the library for other math textbooks. They may help you pinpoint an area of math that you did not fully comprehend.

Math is a continuation of stages. If you are having problems, go back to a prior stage and master it before returning to your current studies. Build on your understanding! You might also find it useful to study with a partner or join a study group. Discuss your problem with the teacher.

When preparing for a quiz, a mid-term or a final exam, organise your study schedule carefully. Identify key concepts and learn theories and laws. Relate each concept to its corresponding formulae. Make sure you can identify each term and explain each formula.

Sometimes a rough sketch is enough to give you the information you require to solve a problem. Sometimes a more elaborate graph is necessary.

For more information, see a counsellor at Student Services.