

Tips for Academic Success in College

Habits that will make you a better student

Jon Lineberger

PRAISE FOR
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“In this booklet, Jon offers simple but very practical wisdom in helping students maximize their potential to succeed in their classes, in taking tests, and in writing papers. His insights are seasoned with personal testimony and experience with which all students can readily identify.

Most importantly, he reminds students to include God in the academic process, by thinking biblically about their calling to do their very best and to lean daily and prayerfully upon the Lord for help along the way seeking His honor and glory above all else. We are so pleased that Jon came to Dallas Baptist University for his master’s degree and has remained as one of our finest administrators.”

Dr. Gary Cook
President, Dallas Baptist University

“The one thing that sticks out to me in this booklet is the centrality of the transformational power of the Gospel. The story of Jon's journey through school is powerful and points to the Cross. This booklet is very practical and can encourage a student on any academic level to begin their study by asking the Lord to lead them through their time of study. After all, it is not just about making good grades, but honoring Christ through your studies.”

Jason Hoyt
Executive Director, Beta Upsilon Chi
Brothers Under Christ

“I must confess that to have had this booklet and to have employed its admonitions in my early college years could/would have possibly eliminated much of the heart ache and difficulties which I endured during my freshman and sophomore years in college. I heartedly endorse this booklet and strongly suggest that student and parent alike read and employ the techniques and directives which Jon has set out so very well.”

E Douglas Hodo, PhD
President Emeritus, Houston Baptist University

To Mom and Dad.
Thank you for all your prayers.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	5
2	Tips for Class	7
3	Tips for Studying	8
4	Tips for Taking a Test	11
5	Tips for Writing a Paper	12
6	Epilogue	13

INTRODUCTION

When I first started college I was a horrible student. I never studied and I partied way too much. I had a very difficult time in school growing up. My mother tried to home school me in first grade, but when I entered second grade at a private school I was behind my classmates. I had to take a separate reading class with a few other students that were also behind. My parents even tried using a phonetics program to help me read. I can remember several times that year crying in class because I struggled with some of the in-class work other students seemed to have no problem with. My teacher actually moved my desk against the back wall away from the other students because my crying was distracting to them. Over the next couple of years I did make improvements, but I began to struggle again after transferring to a larger public school where I received less personal attention.

When I entered middle school I qualified for the Content Mastery Program (a program developed in Texas for K-12 students) due to my diagnosis of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). This program allowed me to leave class to get extra help from teaching aides. Entering high school I took a few somewhat remedial courses. Later I had to take summer school to make up a geometry course I failed. I was fortunate to graduate from high school. I just didn't apply myself and was often made fun of by my peers for not doing well in school.

My first semester after high school I registered for 15 hours at a junior college and continued to struggle academically. I was not prepared for college, not to mention that I rarely attended class. That first semester I only received transferable credit for an art appreciation class and racquetball. I actually only passed art appreciation because I convinced the professor that landscaping is art and raked the professor's yard for extra credit. She gave me a "C" for the course. The next semester I stayed out of school and for the next couple of years I would register for a few classes, drop some, and do poorly in others. I didn't feel smart, but that was not the full problem. One of the key components I was missing was a goal; something to challenge me. I needed a reason, but I also needed the confidence necessary to be successful. It wasn't until I gave my life over to Jesus Christ and became serious about completing a degree did things start to turn around for me. The change in my life didn't happen overnight or all at once, but it did happen.

When I decided to get back in school I enrolled in nine hours during a summer semester at a junior college and received two "B's" and a "C." The next semester should have been the start of my senior year of college; however I was still classified as a freshman. I had only accumulated less than 30 transferable credit hours in over three years and my grade point average was at a "C" level. When I moved off to a four-year college I was put on academic probation after my first quarter due to earning a 1.33 GPA. I thought I would never graduate from college.

That's when I solely began to trust in God to get me through school. I worked as hard as I could and relied on God to help me do what I couldn't do...remember everything. I went from a "D" average my first quarter of the year to all "A's" in the last quarter of my first year at a four year university. By the time I graduated I was inducted into the Psychology National Honor Society and the Sociology International Honor Society, elected to Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities and The National Dean's List. I was a National Collegiate Social Sciences Awards Winner, a

National Collegiate Education Awards Winner, and received the President's Award from HBU. I was also voted Senior Class Favorite, Homecoming King, and Mr. HBU by the student body at Houston Baptist University. God truly blessed me at college. I give Jesus all the glory.

I want to share with you the study habits I worked hard to develop in myself while in college and I believe that these habits will help you to do better in school as well. These habits are in no way intended to be a scientific formula for success, but a way to honor God and to show Him that we realize we need his help. We must take God seriously because what He wants to do in us is far better than anything that we could ever do on our own.

...No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9

School is tough and there is no way around that, but we have hope because "God is our refuge and strength, and an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalms 46:1). These tips are not a way for us to use God, He cannot be manipulated, but they are helpful bits of advice that aided me. In no way am I saying that this is the only process by which God will work in us. If we are sincerely seeking God, He may have another plan for us individually.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

TIPS FOR CLASS

1. Get plenty of sleep. Six to eight hours a night. If you are having trouble sleeping try exercising in the afternoon or take a hot bath before going to bed. If you study in bed and have trouble sleeping try studying at a desk and reserve the bed for sleep. Also, don't feel that you have to be a part of every social event or club because you will miss out on something. Trust me there will be plenty of opportunities for you to meet people and have fun in college. I watched year after year as incoming freshman and even upper classman that never learned their lesson, would stay up all night running around and then come home completely exhausted. They would sleep through their classes during the day or would not complete assignments that were due. The end result was that many of them had to return home to mommy and daddy because they were either put on academic suspension or they lost valuable scholarship money for not maintaining a good GPA (Grade Point Average).
2. Eat a good breakfast and maintain a healthy diet. Studies have shown that eating a good healthy breakfast improves academic performance. It's ok to splurge every once in a while.
3. Make every effort to attend class. You miss out on important information when you skip class. Some professors count attendance as part of your grade and even if they don't your attendance will inevitably affect your grade because you may miss valuable information. Attending every class is a good way to show the professor that you are trying, which could help your grade if it's borderline.
4. Be seated in class on time. You might miss important information or helpful hints if you are late. I had one professor that every once in a while would give all the students who were on time a hint to a question on a test and told us not to tell all the students that were late.
5. Be prepared. Have all the necessary materials needed for class.
6. Sit on the FRONT ROW of class. This will help eliminate distractions and will make a good impression.
7. Listen to the professor and have a system for taking good notes.
8. Ask questions when you don't understand. Don't be afraid to ask because more than likely most of the class doesn't understand as well.
9. Get to know your professors. I am not saying to brown-nose, but go by their office and ask questions or discuss ideas with them. I was privileged to get to know some of my professors very well. I was even able to catch a ride to my hometown with one of my professors. Another professor occasionally invited me to eat with him and his family. We have remained good friends today.
10. SET ACADEMIC GOALS! I can remember sitting in the cafeteria and looking at the Psychology National Honor Society plaque on the wall and setting a goal to be a member of that organization before I graduated and I did. Once you achieve a goal don't slack off though. I set a goal of graduating with a 3.0, which at one time I thought would be impossible for me to do since I started out with a "D" average. Once I had achieved a 3.0 I didn't slack off or start to coast. I set a higher goal for myself. Don't be afraid to set high goals for yourself. "If you reach for the stars and fall short you'll still be on the mountaintops" (Author Unknown).

TIPS FOR STUDYING

1. Don't wait until the last minute to study. Begin studying well in advance, at least 3 days prior to any test you may have. Some test may require studying sooner.
2. Many times I would need extra motivation in order to study, so I would write quotes that motivated me on post it notes and stick them around my desk. One of my favorite quotes is by an unknown author. It reads, "The future is that time when you'll wish you'd done what you aren't doing now." This quote made me think about the end of the semester when grades come out. I didn't want to receive bad grades and then wish that I would have studied more.
3. Use visual aids to help you get motivated. A good friend of mine gave me a towel and told me that I could either throw in the towel or keep working. Many times school got really frustrating for me, and many times I wanted to quit. I placed the towel above my television so that when I felt like quitting I would look at that towel and remember the choice I had. I could either throw in the towel and quit or I could keep plugging along. I'm glad I didn't throw in the towel.
4. My college roommate, Ross Shelton, viewed studying as a form of worship to God. He would study in a way that would be pleasing and worshipful toward God. It reminds me of the *Little Drummer Boy* song. The boy didn't have anything to give to God, but he could play the drum. So he played the best he could for God. My friend ended up graduating with a *magna cum laude*. "Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of God" (2 Timothy 2:15).
5. Put yourself around people who are good students. One of the reasons I chose Ross for my roommate was that I knew he was a good student who took academics seriously. I wanted his attitude toward studying to rub off on me. The old saying, "you become like the people you hang around" is true. You do become like those you hang around. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm" (ESV). First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character." Put yourself around people who have good qualities you want to gain and who will be a good influence on you. A great example of this is that when Ross and I graduated we both received the President's Award and had our names placed on tiles next to each other in the Walk of Honor at Houston Baptist University. I'm glad I put myself around Ross.
6. Avoid reading in bed or studying too much when you're tired or sleepy. If you're tired you won't remember much of what you studied. Go ahead and go to bed, get plenty of sleep, and start studying the next day when you are well awake. You will remember more of what you study if you do. This does not mean that the night before the test you don't look over your notes or that you start studying the morning of the test. Strategically plan out when you will study.
7. Find a nice quiet place away from distractions so you can focus clearly (i.e. away from your boyfriend, girlfriend, roommates, TV, radio, etc.). Music is fine if you are the type of person that needs background noise to study. Many times I did listen to classical music while I studied to help drown out the other noises in the dorm. Sometimes classical music helped me to relax and got me in a rhythm while I was studying.
8. Avoid time wasters like checking email, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, or just surfing the web. If you are not careful you can easily and unintentionally spend a good portion, if not all of your time, on social sites such as these. You can always catch up on what everyone is doing after you study and truth be told you're not missing much.
9. Before studying pray and ask God to help you study and to help you remember all that you study. Ask God to bless your hard work and ask Him for wisdom and understanding to help you comprehend

what you are studying. “If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God. Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:5-8).

10. Ask God to take away any worries or things that are on your mind that might distract you. Many times before studying I would start by reading scripture. Prayer and scripture reading before studying helped me to become focused.
11. Take a few moments to breathe deep and clear your mind. Think about the goodness of God and thank Him for the opportunity you have to be at school. Keep in mind there are millions of people all over the world who do not have the opportunity to go to school and would love to be in your shoes. Also, try this when you get frustrated studying.
12. When reviewing your notes the first time, go through and highlight the important information. The second time you go through your notes take an ink pen and underline the important information even if it is the same things you highlighted. The third, fourth, fifth and so on times that you study your notes emphasize the bits of information that you highlighted and underlined. This technique was taught to me by one of my theology professors when I sought his advice after having made a “D” in his Old Testament class. He taught me this technique at a restaurant one morning while having coffee together. He holds both a law degree and a doctorate in theology so I think he knows how to study.
13. When studying your textbook use the same method as in studying notes. Remember it is very important to take good notes because most of the information that will be on the test will be covered in the professors lecture notes, but do not neglect your textbook. You can learn much more about the subject you’re studying when you read your textbook. If you do not have time to read the entire chapters at least skim read the chapters and focus on the important information like key terms, bolded text, headings, subtitles, and questions at the end of each chapter.
14. Take breaks from studying. Let your mind rest every once in a while when studying. Get something to drink like a fruit juice or take a short walk outside. Then come back and resume studying. Be sure to not let yourself get sidetracked during a break. Be disciplined.
15. **STUDY HARD.** I once heard my dad say in a sermon, “There is nothing unspiritual about hard work.” I believe that. “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Proverbs 10:4). Wealth can be in the form of good grades and good grades earn scholarships and good jobs.
16. When you are finished studying pray to God that He will help you to remember all that you studied. “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer believe that you have received it, and it will be given you” (Mark 11:24).
17. After studying I often enjoyed playing basketball. It is important to exercise your body as well as your brain. The exercise will help reduce your stress and will help you to relax while your mind processes the information you have studied. Also, studies have shown that exercise increases blood flow to the brain which improves memory.
18. If you are having trouble memorizing information try memorizing scripture. My mother also struggled for a time in college. She told me that after she started memorizing scripture her memory and grades began to improve.
19. If you are having trouble understanding and comprehending information you read try reading out loud. This technique has been very helpful for me when I am having trouble understanding text.
20. Think positive thoughts. Believe when you pray. “*I can do everything through him who gives me strength*” (Philippians 4:13). One of the great thinkers of antiquity, Marcus Aurelius, said, “A man’s life is what his thoughts make of it.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is believed by many to be the wisest man to ever live in America said, “A man is what he thinks about all day.”

21. Kick the booze. A survey conducted by a doctoral candidate at George Mason University examined just under 14,000 freshmen at 167 different institutions and revealed that alcohol consumption, after time spent studying, was the strongest predictor of a student's GPA; greater even than time spent on social sites such as Facebook. According to the results of the survey, drinking negatively impacts grade point average.

TIPS FOR TAKING A TEST

1. Read over your notes at least once about an hour before taking your test.
2. Be prepared! Remember to bring two pens or two sharpened pencils, scratch paper, scan-tron, calculator or whatever utensils are needed for the test. I always took earplugs with me to exams because I didn't want to be distracted by others around me. I might have looked like a weirdo, but they helped block out noise and allowed me to concentrate.
3. Before taking a test relax your mind and take some deep breaths.
4. Pray and ask God to help you remember all that you have studied and to bless your hard work. When praying I would sometimes throw in there "...and help me make an 'A' on this test" just for good measure.
5. Never ever, ever, ever cheat. How can you expect God to bless your hard work if you cheat? Cheating is lying and is dishonest because you are lying about who the answers came from and taking credit for someone else's work.
6. If you have a learning disability make sure to inform your teachers at the beginning of the semester. I have ADHD and being in a class is very hard for me. I hear every noise that is made in class (i.e. pens tapping, gum smacking, clock ticking, students texting). Sometimes because of the noise I could hardly concentrate and would get frustrated. After confiding in some of my professors they allowed me to take tests in a separate room or allowed me to come in earlier to take tests to help eliminate distractions.
7. After taking a test thank God for His help and that it is over.
8. After taking tests allow yourself to unwind. Go do something fun and enjoyable. I enjoyed playing basketball after taking a test because it helped me to release a lot of bent up tension and stress I built up over the test.
9. Keep in mind that a test is an opportunity for you to be a witness and for others to see God's power at work in you. Don't pass it up. Ephesians 5:15-16a reads, "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..."
10. When you get your graded test back give God the glory and thank Him for his help. Thanking God for His goodness is very important. Our God is merciful and gracious and He enjoys hearing thankful hearts.

TIPS FOR WRITING A PAPER

1. Read all of the directions the professor gave you before starting your paper.
2. Select a topic quickly. If you wait around other students that have selected the same topic as you may beat you to the library. Trust me when I say that they will check out all of the resources that you will need to use.
3. Start on your paper early, way ahead of time, and work on it in increments. Getting started is the hardest part. Just start it. Get the title page completed and you will feel much better about your paper. Once you get a feel for what you are doing and have a direction in mind you will worry less about the assignment. Getting started early will also reduce your stress over the paper.
4. Again, avoid time wasters like checking your email or looking at MySpace, Facebook, etc. If you are not careful you can spend a good portion, if not all of your time, on social sites such as these. You can always catch up on what everyone is doing after you complete your paper. If you do not need the internet to write your paper go ahead and disable your internet access to remove the temptation.
5. Be sure to save your paper after every paragraph. Save it on both your computer and a USB flash drive. I can tell you many stories about papers that have been lost or “eaten” by computers. Sometimes I would even e-mail myself a copy of the paper for back up.
6. When you feel that you have a final copy ask some of your friends to read it and make corrections. If your school has a writing lab take your paper by their office to see if a staff member will proofread your paper and make any suggestions.
7. After making the corrections look over it and then take it by the professor to let him/her proofread it ahead of time if they are willing to do so. However, don't take it to your professor to proofread the day it's due.
8. Print the final copy of your paper the day before it is due. I have known several students that have had printers fail on them right before class. They ended up turning their papers in late and had points deducted from their grade.
9. Make sure your paper looks nice and presentable before turning it in.
10. **TURN YOUR PAPER IN ON TIME!** Professors do not think kindly of late work. Most professors will either not accept late work or count points off. To do well you cannot afford either of these scenarios.

EPILOGUE

Keep in mind that doing well in school and giving the glory to the LORD is a good way to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Doing well in school is also a good way to earn money. By studying hard you can earn scholarship money for school. Earning scholarships is a good way to show your parents that you are thankful for their help and that you are doing your best. You will not only reap the benefits now, but later as well when a possible employer sees how hard you worked in college.

Be responsible. If you want to do well in school you must make it a priority. School must come before your social life. That doesn't mean you can't have a social life, but prioritize your time accordingly. We cannot ask God to help us if we are not willing to do our part. If we work hard and ask God for help He is faithful to help us. "...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

I do not intend for the methods I've suggested to be a scientific formula, but rather a helpful guide to how you can achieve academic success in college. God may work in you and through you in different ways and as He does I hope you will share them with others. I could never have done as well in school without God's help. My intention in writing this guide is to offer you some suggestions on how to improve your grades. May God bless you as you seek to live a life pleasing to Jesus Christ.

To God be the glory.