

Strategies for Academic Success

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An adaptation by Liv Marken of **University Success** by N. Mahoney, B. Klassen & M. D'Eon



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Publisher Information

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Preface

Strategies for Academic Success accompanies the first-year University of Saskatchewan College of Arts and Science online course by the same name. The textbook has a reader-friendly format arranged to help you develop the essential skills and provide the information you need to succeed in university.

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-Liv Marken, University of Saskatchewan

2010

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Chapter 1: Making the Transition to University



Figure 1 - 1: Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat/25677249202/in/album-72157665958495865/> Permission: CC BY 2.0

Welcome to higher education. You likely have a mix of emotions as you begin your university journey. You may have heard a lot about what university is about — and its value — from family, friends, and the media. Remember, though, that this is *your* experience, and that it can be what you make of it!

Most students would say that they're in university with the expectation of getting a job and/or career out of the experience. And they are correct that university usually pays off enormously in terms of future earnings, job security and stability, and job satisfaction.

People with a university education will make much more in their lifetime on average and be much happier with the work they do. A recent study from the University of Ottawa examined eight consecutive years of income data for 620,000 graduates of 14 Canadian universities, finding that earnings growth was steady.

Counter to stereotype, those who completed social sciences and humanities degrees also earned more than those who had not completed a degree at all (Ross Finnie, et al., [Education Policy Research Initiative](#), 2016).

Benefits Beyond Career

Job and career attainment is only a part of the big picture. A university education results in many other personal benefits, less tangible than earnings:

- Recognizing the limits of your knowledge, yet having the ability to expand your knowledge accordingly
- Gaining decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- Widening social and professional networks.
- Developing self-confidence.
- Learning to deal with organizations, governmental agencies, and all the hassles of daily life.
- Being able to work flexibly: individually or in teams.
- Learning how to communicate clearly and persuasively.
- Acquiring technological literacies and research skills.

Barriers to Success

Despite the many benefits to completing post-secondary education, it's important to recognize that some students do not succeed in university and drop out within the first year. Sometimes it's due to an unsolvable financial problem or a personal or family crisis, but the most likely reasons that a Canadian university student will drop out are as follows:

- Ineffective social network (not getting involved in extra-curricular and volunteering opportunities, or seeking out mentors and human connections).
- Poor study skills.
- Poor attitudes and habits towards post-secondary education (Ma, X. & Frempong, G., [Reasons for Non-Completion of Postsecondary Education and Profile of Postsecondary Dropouts](#), 2008).

Certain skills, attitudes, and habits are needed for university, and some of these qualities are present in students in high school; however, the new structure and expectations of university make it hard for some students to carry those qualities forward.

Ultimately, you can learn whatever you need in order to succeed. You can learn how to

- get the most out of going to class
- study in ways that use your time efficiently and help you pass tests
- remember what you read in your university textbooks
- manage your time more effectively than you might have in the past, so that studying is less a burden and more a simple routine
- care for your health – both mental and physical
- reflect on your learning at regular intervals: how are you learning? what's working and what isn't working?

You are already bringing a lot of skills and personal strengths to the experience, so take some time to appreciate them so that you start positively.

Start Positively: Using the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), developed by organizational behaviour professor David Cooperrider, is a useful process to adapt to personal development. AI was designed with organizations in mind, but it has been used for personal development as well.

AI starts with an inventory of positive, or "the best of what is" rather than the problems that need solving ([Cooperrider, 2012](#)).

Can you begin your university journey with a list of your strengths and resources? This is the "**Discovery**"

part of Cooperrider's AI 4-D Cycle, which contains four parts. Get out a piece of paper, or type out everything you can think of that's positive right now in relation to starting university.

For example, Deanna is starting university in the fall. Here is her Discovery list of "the best of what is" for her:

- *strong connection to my grandmother*
- *one good friend joining me at university*
- *excited about moving to city, which has more activities and a range of people to meet*
- *know how to cook*
- *the campus I'm going to is really beautiful*
- *creative, have good ideas*
- *good at helping others*
- *embarking on first step toward fulfilling my dream*
- *enjoy recreational sports*

Note that Deanna's left out any "but...," such as "one good friend joining me at university, but what if I don't see her often? What if we grow apart?" or "the campus is beautiful, but it terrifies me!"; she's trusting the AI process and focusing for now on the positive.

The second step in the AI 4-D cycle is "**Dream**," the place to imagine future possibilities. Try to write a narrative rather than a list of bullet points. You can even create a poster or a drawing to represent a vision of the future. Here's Deanna's dream, which is grounded in positive realities from the "Discover" phase:

I will move to Saskatoon with my friend Mara. I will look forward to cooking my first meal in my new home, and making it a home. I'll look for a part time job where I can be helping people, such as at a daycare or a senior's home. I will make sure to keep connecting with my grandmother, which will be important for keeping my spirits up and helping me to remember my goals when times get tough, and my friend and I will be sure to connect each week since we don't have classes together. I'll join a recreational soccer team so that I can meet some new people and get some exercise.

The third step in the AI 4-D cycle is "**Design**," where you look at your discover list and your dream narrative, and thinking about some of the practicalities so that you plan a way to get to where you want to go. Here is Deanna's design for carrying out her dreams:

I'll move to the city in August so I'll have time to find a place to live. I'll have time to make it a good home, and won't be rushed when starting school. In terms of a job, maybe I can use my skill with cooking, my ability to be good at helping people, or my creativity to work with kids or seniors. I'll visit the university career centre to get some more ideas about that. I will set up a regular time each week where I can Skype grandma, and where I can meet Mara for lunch or study time at the library. I'll check the deadlines for signing up for soccer.

The fourth and final step in the AI 4-D Cycle is "**Destiny**," where you are living what you have discovered, dreamed, and designed. The destiny phase isn't really final, though, as you will return to re-discover, dream and design again before going back to the destiny phase. Deanna will have another look at herself and her strengths and resources in a few months to try this cycle out again. It's worth the time to come back to AI as it's extremely motivating and energizing when things start to feel tough.

As you work your way through this chapter, realize that you can harness some of the work you've done already, and some of your attributes and resources, to succeed. You will encounter disappointments, stress, and some ups and downs, but if you take the long view, and a positive approach, you will succeed.

1.1 Why University?

Learning Objectives

- List your most important personal values and relate them to a university education.
- Begin thinking about what kind of career will best match your interests, skills, and personality.
- Understand how university is different from high school in many ways.
- Develop a positive attitude about yourself as a university student.

Consider why you're here in university, what matters to you, and what you expect to get out of it. Even if you have already thought about these questions, it's good to reaffirm your commitment to your plan. Thinking clearly about it will help you to focus your energies.

What's Your Plan?

Take a few minutes and write down short answers to the questions in Activity 1, below. Be honest with yourself, and write down what you really feel.

Activity 1: Your University Plan

How long do you anticipate being in university?

How many courses will you need to take per term to finish university in your planned time period (Tip: talk to an academic advisor or look up your institution's degree requirements)?

What do you anticipate will be the most difficult part of completing university?

Are you confident you will be able to overcome any possible difficulties in completing university? Why or why not?

Answering these questions is a first step toward making a clear plan that includes anticipating obstacles.

What Matters to You?

A good place to start when pursuing a goal is to reflect on your values, or what you consider important and worthwhile.

Reflecting on your values can help you know what you want from life and from university. Take a moment and consider the list of things in Activity 2 that are valued by some people. For each value, rate how important that thing is to you.

Activity 2: Your Values

Following is a list of things that different people say they value. For each item on this list, indicate how important it is to you yourself by ranking it as very important (5), not important (0), or somewhere in between.

Value	Not important			Very important		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Making a good income	0	1	2	3	4	5
Learning from Elders	0	1	2	3	4	5
Learning new things about your interests	0	1	2	3	4	5
Fixing things	0	1	2	3	4	5
Having intelligent conversations	0	1	2	3	4	5
Staying current with the news	0	1	2	3	4	5
Playing sports	0	1	2	3	4	5
Hanging out with friends	0	1	2	3	4	5
Playing computer or video games	0	1	2	3	4	5
Cooking	0	1	2	3	4	5
Socializing (online or in person)	0	1	2	3	4	5
Maintaining good mental health	0	1	2	3	4	5
Reading a good book	0	1	2	3	4	5
Traveling	0	1	2	3	4	5
Budgeting, economizing	0	1	2	3	4	5
Influencing others	0	1	2	3	4	5
Engaging with activist causes	0	1	2	3	4	5
Expanding learning	0	1	2	3	4	5
Watching television	0	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoying time alone	0	1	2	3	4	5
Getting out in nature	0	1	2	3	4	5
Working	0	1	2	3	4	5
Playing a musical instrument	0	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting new people	0	1	2	3	4	5
Going to movies or other entertainment	0	1	2	3	4	5
Eating nice meals out	0	1	2	3	4	5
Exercising, being physically active	0	1	2	3	4	5

Value	Not important			Very important		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Being your own boss	0	1	2	3	4	5
Having a positive romantic relationship	0	1	2	3	4	5
Engaging in your hobbies	0	1	2	3	4	5
Setting your own schedule	0	1	2	3	4	5
Volunteering your time for a good cause	0	1	2	3	4	5
Cleaning house	0	1	2	3	4	5
Attending classes	0	1	2	3	4	5
Maintaining your religious or spiritual practices	0	1	2	3	4	5
Gaming (board games, etc.)	0	1	2	3	4	5
Spending time with your children	0	1	2	3	4	5
Participating in clubs, organized activities	0	1	2	3	4	5
Other: _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
Other: _____	0	1	2	3	4	5

Look back at the values and activities you rated highly (4 or 5) in Activity 2, which probably gave a good indication of how you enjoy spending your time. But now look at these things you value in a different way. Think about how each relates to how you think you need to manage your time effectively while in university.

Most university students feel they don't have enough time for everything they like to do. If some of your highly-rated values seem antithetical to being a good student, try "flipping" them. For example, cleaning house means that you have an organized, clean and calm space for studying, or meeting new people will mean that you will form valuable networks and connections. Combining values can lead to some interesting plans, too: if you value gaming *and* volunteering for good causes, join a campus gaming club, many of which combine their activities with fundraising for charity. Actively ask around and search online for these types of opportunities; check poster walls, student's union ratified club listings, and talk to orientation leaders or older students.

Students who enter university with their eyes open and who think about their own values and motivations will be more successful. If you have a good idea of what you want from life, the rest of it can be learned.

Thinking Ahead to a Major and Career

If you've just begun university, should you already know what career you seek in the future and what courses you should take or what you should major in?

Some students say they have known from an early age what they want to do after university, and are deliberate about the schools they apply to and the experiences they seek.

At the other extreme, some students have only a vague sense of direction before beginning university, take a wide variety of courses, select a major only when they reach the point that they must major in something (or perhaps change majors multiple times), and then after university choose to work in an entirely different field.

Neither approach is bad.

Stanford University theorist John Krumboldz's Happenstance Learning Theory is that "the career destiny of each individual cannot be predicted in advance but is a function of countless planned and unplanned learning experiences

beginning at birth" (*Journal of Career Assessment*, 2008). You can't predict the people, experiences, opportunities, happy accidents, and connections that can steer you into a fulfilling, even unexpected career path.

Some students choose to major in an academic subject simply because they enjoy that subject, never concerned with what kind of job they may get afterward. The traditional idea of the liberal arts education is that you can go to university not to prepare for a specific career but to become a well-educated person who is then in a better position to work in any number of careers.

So where are *you* in this great variety of attitudes about career and major choices?

Help is available for discovering your interests, strengths, and personality factors related to careers. You can learn a lot about your options and what you would be good at by visiting your university's advising or counseling department. Almost all universities have free tools to help you discover what careers you would most enjoy.



Figure 1-2: Talk with your college or program advisor, or a career centre advisor. Source: https://everypixel.com/free/photos/people/profession/teacher?image_id=3858713255701149858
Permission: CC0 1.0

The Strong Interest Inventory (SII) is an assessment tool used by many universities and universities. This tool can suggest specific courses, jobs, internships, and extracurricular activities relevant to personal and career interests. Another widely-used tool is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) identifies you as one of sixteen distinct types. Each type correlates with preferred work tasks and work environments. The StrengthsFinder Inventory is more detailed and complex than the MBTI or SII, giving you five of 34 Talent Themes, prioritized in order of strength. It's inexpensive to complete and you will get access to customized reports for many different aspects of your life: personal, professional, and academic.

For more career planning tools, check out the assessment options offered by the University of Saskatchewan's [Student Employment and Career Centre](#).

Although there's nothing wrong with starting out without an intended major or career path, take care to avoid accidentally taking courses that do not count toward your program goal or degree. You could end up in university longer than needed and have to pay for additional courses. Be sure to read your university catalog carefully and talk to your academic advisor.

Your Past Educational Experience

Take time to appreciate how university is different from high school and how well your educational experiences have prepared you for what you will find in university.

In starting university, you are transitioning from one form of education to another, and it's common for students to find this transition difficult. Don't underestimate the strengths you have already, but be aware that the university experience is usually different from high school in some fundamental ways.

- Time management is more important in university because of varying class and work schedules and other time commitments. Your schedule will not be so structured, people won't be giving you many reminders, and so it will be up to you to organize your time.
- University instructors seldom seek you out to offer extra help if you're falling behind. You are on your own and expected to do the work, meet deadlines, and so on, without someone looking over your shoulder. Nonetheless, do not be afraid to ask your instructors for help.
- There may be no attendance policy for classes. You are expected to be mature enough to come to class without fear of penalties.
- Many classes are large, making it easy to feel lost in a crowd.
- Many instructors, especially in large classes, teach by lecture—which can be difficult for those whose high school teachers led more interactive classes.
- University courses require more study time and require you to do your own work.
- Your social and personal life in university is less supervised. Younger students may experience a sudden increase in freedom to do what they want.
- You will meet more people from more diverse backgrounds in university.
- All of these differences, along with a change in living situation for many students, can lead to emotional changes—both positive and negative.

What does all this add up to? For some students, the sudden independence and freedom can lead in negative directions: partying too much, sleeping late, skipping classes, missing deadlines, failing to study adequately for tests, and so on. Other students who are highly motivated and work hard in their classes may also have difficulty transitioning to the higher academic standards of university; in fact, it's not uncommon for a student with 90 averages in high school to have 70 averages by the end of their first university term.

A Positive Approach

Of all the factors that affect how well one does in university, attitude is probably the single most important. A positive attitude leads to high levels of motivation, and someone who is highly motivated to succeed can overcome obstacles that may occur.

If you're feeling excited, enthusiastic, capable, and confident in your new life, that's great! But if you're less sure how well you'll do in your new role, take comfort in knowing that you're not alone.

Once they begin experiencing the differences from high school, many students start having doubts. Some may start to feel "I'm not a good enough student" or "I can't keep up with all this." While these are natural responses to big life changes, continually repeating these messages to yourself can hinder your motivation and ability to succeed.

If you have these thoughts sometimes, why is that? Are you just reacting to a low grade on your first test? Are you just feeling this way because you see other students who look like they know what they're doing and you're feeling out of place? Can you put small failures into perspective?

Ask just about any senior student, and they will tell you that they, too, had moments like you're having.

Why is it that some students need to work on strengthening their skills after beginning university, while others seem to waltz right in and do well from the start? Know that most students struggle at first, but once self-management skills are developed, experiences and performance improve in the workforce. What are the biggest changes you are experiencing now or anticipate experiencing this term?

1.2 What Is University?

Learning Objectives

Understand courses within your own university program: core courses, electives, and major courses.

Describe differences between large and small university classes and discuss the implications of those differences for learning.

Describe different skills needed for online courses.

Learn how to find your university's policies and understand their importance.

Know what resources your university makes available to students and how to access them.

Core Courses, Electives, Majors, and Credits

Every university has its own course requirements for different programs and degrees. This information is available in a printed course catalog or online. While academic advisors are generally assigned to students to help them plot their path through university and take the most appropriate courses, you should also take this responsibility yourself to ensure you are registering for courses that fit well into your plan for a program completion or degree. In general there are three types of courses:

Core courses, which are required by all students who graduate with a specific degree. They may be specific courses or a selection from a larger list. As you advance, you have more opportunity to choose the classes you want to take.

Required courses in your major are determined by individual academic departments. Whether you choose to major in accounting, marketing, math, engineering, history or any other field, your individual department sets specific required courses you must take and gives you options for a required additional number of credits in the department. You may not need to declare a major for a while, but this is something you can start thinking about now.

Electives are courses you choose freely to complete the total number of university credits needed for your program or degree. How many electives you may take, how they "count" toward your total, and what kinds of courses are acceptable as electives all vary considerably among different schools and programs.

Most important is that you understand what courses you need and how each counts. Study the university catalog carefully and be sure to talk things over fully with your advisor. Don't just sign up for courses that sound interesting—you might end up taking courses that don't count toward your degree at all.

In addition, each term you may have to choose how many courses or hours to take. Universities have rules about the maximum number of hours allowed for full-time students, but this maximum may be more than you are prepared to manage—especially if you work or have other responsibilities. Taking a light course load, while allowing more time for studying and other activities, could add up over time and result in an extra full year of university (or more!)—at significant additional expense. Part-time students often face decisions based more on time issues. Everyone's situation is unique, however, and all students should talk this issue over with their advisor each year or term.

Large Classes, Small Classes

While most high school classes are fairly small, many university classes are large—up to several hundred students in a large lecture class. Other classes will be as small as high school classes. In large classes you may feel anonymous or invisible. Don't disappear! Here are some common mistaken assumptions and attitudes about large classes:

- The instructor won't notice me sitting there, so I can check e-mail or read for a different class if I get bored.
- The instructor doesn't know my name or recognize me, so I don't even need to go to class as long as I can borrow someone's notes to find out what happens.
- I hate listening to lectures, so I might as well think about something else because I'm not going to learn anything this way anyway.

These comments all share the same flawed attitude: it's up to the instructor to teach in an entertaining way if I am to learn, and it's actually the university's or instructor's fault that I'm stuck in this large class, so they're to blame if I think about or do other things. You have more control over the situation than you think.

If you dislike large lecture classes but can't avoid them, the best solution is to learn how to learn in such a situation. Later chapters will give you tips for improving this experience. Just remember that it's up to you to stay actively engaged in your own learning while in university—it's not the instructor's job to entertain you enough to "make" you learn.

There is one thing you need to know right away. Even in a lecture hall holding three hundred students, there's a good chance that the instructors and TAs know who you are, and that's a good thing! Interacting with instructors is a crucial part of education—and the primary way students learn. Successful interaction begins with good communication and mutual respect. If you want your instructors to respect you, then you need to show respect for them and their classes as well.

Asking a question of the professor after class, checking in with a TA, sitting near the front, and engaging in class discussion will help your instructors get to know you, and help you feel less like a number.

Online Courses



Figure 1-3: Taking an online class is a flexible way to fulfill some of your degree requirements. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat/25720816990/in/album-72157664006621903/> Permission: CC BY 2.0.

The University of Saskatchewan offers some online courses that can be taken as electives. You experience an online course via a computer rather than a classroom. Many different variations exist, but all online courses share certain characteristics, such as working independently and communicating with the instructor (and sometimes other students) primarily through written computer messages. If you have never taken an online course, carefully consider what's involved to ensure you will succeed in the course:

- You need to own or have frequent access to a recent model of computer with a high-speed Internet connection.
- Without the set hours of a class, you need to be self-motivating to schedule your time to participate regularly.
- Without an instructor or other students in the room, you need to be able to pay attention effectively to the computer screen. Learning on a computer is not as simple as passively watching a show! Take notes.
- Without reminders in class and peer pressure from other students, you'll need to take responsibility to complete all assignments and papers on time.
- Since your instructor will evaluate you primarily through your writing, you need good writing skills for an online course. If you believe you need to improve your writing skills, put off taking an online course until you feel better prepared.
- You must take the initiative to ask questions if you don't understand something.
- You may need to be creative to find other ways to interact with other students in the course. You could form a study group and get together regularly in person with other students in the same course.

If you feel you are ready to take on these responsibilities and are attracted to the flexibility of an online course and the freedom to schedule your time in it, see what your university has available.

University Policies

A university campus is almost like a small town—or country—unto itself. The campus has its own police force, its own government, its own stores, its own ID cards, its own parking rules, and so on. Universities also have their own policies regarding many types of activities and behaviors. Students who do not understand the rules can sometimes find themselves in trouble.

The most important academic policy is academic honesty. Cheating is taken very seriously. Some high school students may have only received a slap on the wrist if caught looking at another student's paper during a test or turning in a paper containing sentences or paragraphs found online or purchased from a "term-paper mill." In many universities, academic dishonesty like this may result in automatic failure of the course—or even expulsion from university. The principle of academic honesty is simple: every student must do their own work. If you have any doubt of what this means for a paper you are writing, a project you are doing with other students, or anything else, check the [university website](#) for its policy statements or talk with your instructor.

Universities also have [conduct policies](#) about alcohol and drug use, sexual harassment, hazing, hate crimes, and other potential problems. Residence halls have policies about noise limits, visitors, hours, structural and cosmetic alterations of university property, and so on. The university registrar has policies about course add and drop dates, payment schedules and refunds, and the like. Such policies are designed to ensure that all students have the same right to a quality education—one not unfairly interrupted by the actions of others. You can find these policies on the university website or in the catalog.

University Resources

To be successful in university, you need to be fully informed and make wise decisions about the courses you register for, university policies, and additional resources. Always remember that your university *wants* you to succeed. That means that if you are having any difficulties or have any questions whose answers you are unsure about, there are university resources available to help you get assistance or find answers. This is true of both academic and personal issues that could potentially disrupt your university experience. Never hesitate to go looking for help or information, but realize that usually **you have to take the first step**.

The university catalog has already been mentioned as a great source of many kinds of information. You should have an updated catalog every year or know where to find it online.

The university's website is the second place to look for help. Students are often surprised to see how much information is available online, including information about university programs, offices, special assistance programs, and so on, as well as helpful information such as studying tips, personal health, financial help, and other resources. Take some time to explore your university's website and learn what is available; this could save you a lot of time in the future if you experience any difficulty.

In addition, many universities have offices or individuals that can help in a variety of ways. Following are some of the resources your university may have. Learn more about your university's resources online or by visiting the office of student services or the dean of students.

- **Academic advising office.** This office helps you choose courses and plan your program or degree. You should have a personal meeting at least once every term.
- **Counselling office.** This office helps with personal problems, including health, stress management, interpersonal issues, and so on.
- **Tutoring or skill centers.** The title of this resource varies among universities, but most have special places where students can go for additional help for their courses. There may be a separate math center, writing center, or general study skills center.
- **Computer lab.** Before almost all students became skilled in computer use and had their own computers, universities built labs where students could use campus computers and receive training or help resolving technical problems. Many campuses still maintain computer centers to assist students with technical issues.
- **Student health clinic.** In addition to providing some basic medical care and making referrals, most university student health centers also help with issues such as diet and exercise counseling, birth control services, and preventive health care.
- **Career guidance or placement office.** This center can help you find a student job or internship, plan for your career after graduation, and receive career counseling.



Figure 1-4: Your university has many resources and many professionals available to help you with any issue that may affect your success as a student. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tulanesally/4683561544> Permission: CC BY 2.0

- **Office for students with disabilities.** This office may provide various services to help students with disabilities adapt within the university environment.
- **Residence office.** This office not only controls campus residential housing but often assists students to find

off-campus private accommodations.

- **Diversity office.** This office promotes cultural awareness on campus, runs special programs, and assists diverse students with adjusting to campus culture.
- **Office of student affairs or student organizations.** Participating in a group of like-minded students often supports academic success.
- **Athletic center.** Most universities have exercise equipment, pools, courts and tracks, and other resources open to all students. Take advantage of this to improve or maintain your personal health, which promotes academic success.
- **Other specialized offices for student populations.** These may include an office supporting students who speak English as a second language, adult students returning to university, international students, religious students, students with children (possibly a child-care center), veterans of the armed services, students preparing for certain types of careers, and so on.
- **Your instructors.** It never hurts to ask a friendly instructor if he or she knows of any additional university resources you haven't yet discovered. There may be a brand new program on campus, or a certain department may offer a service not widely promoted through the university Web site.

Everyone needs help at some time—you should never feel embarrassed or ashamed to seek help.

1.3 Preparing to Learn

Learning Objectives

Identify actions you can take to prepare for learning.

Recognize the basic ways that learning occurs.

Take action to learn effectively when your learning preferences differ from your instructor's teaching style.



Figure 1-5: To better focus, sit where you won't be distracted. University of Saskatchewan

- Students-Classroom-001.

Source:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/7106711713/in/album-72157629519428982/>

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Learning is a complex process, but it can simply boil down to how you read, listen, see, do and feel. It also depends a lot on preparation. While reading this section, reflect on the areas that need work in your own learning process.

Preparation

A student rolls out of bed a few minutes before class and dashes across campus and grabs the last seat just as the instructor begins; it takes him a few minutes to find the right notebook, and then he can't find a pen. He's thinking about how he should have set his alarm a little earlier so he'd have had time to grab a coffee. Finally he settles in and starts listening, but now he can't figure out what the instructor is talking about. He starts jotting down phrases in his notes anyway, thinking he'll figure it out later. His phone keeps buzzing with texts from friends.

The next day, he has a bit of time to look over his notes from the previous class and quickly glance back at passages he'd highlighted in the textbook reading. He has time to grab a coffee. He arrives at class a few minutes early, sits where he can hear well, and has his notebook open and pen out. He turns his phone off. While waiting for the instructor, he talks to another student about her ideas for next week's assignment. He asks her a couple of questions

to fill in the gaps from yesterday's lecture.

This same person will experience a significant difference in his understanding of the topic on the day he had time to prepare. Having a bad or "off" day will happen from time to time. Your fellow students, professors, lab instructors, and others can help you if you are having a hard time, but if those off days start to become a pattern, your ability to learn will suffer, and you will wear out the good will of those around you.

Preparation to learn is the first step for learning. The same is true when you sit down to read your textbook, study for an exam, or work on an out-of-class project. You are putting yourself in the right mind-set to learn, and when you review yesterday's notes to prepare for today's class, you are also solidifying yesterday's learning.

Reading

Most university classes involve both required and recommended readings. Some instructors discuss required reading content in lectures or class discussions, but if they don't, you can't assume you won't be tested on that content. Also, required readings inform or contextualize the lecture topic, making it richer and more interesting.

Recommended readings lists aren't often explored by students, but your professor made the effort to include them for a reason! Draw on the recommended readings to deepen your learning, become more interested in a topic, or to explore when researching a project or paper. Drawing on recommended readings is also a good way to set yourself apart in an essay or exam.

Always allow plenty of time for reading assignments; rushing makes it harder to understand what you are reading. You will find that you can read faster and better with practice, so if you are overwhelmed on day one, reflect on how much better you'll read by the end of the term.

Do your reading at times of the day when you are most alert. Find a quiet, comfortable place conducive to reading, and while reading, maximize your learning through your personal learning preferences:

- If you learn better by listening, for example, take advantage of any free text-to-voice software available on campus. Library or IT support staff could probably provide more information on this.
- If you are more of a visual learner, use a visual approach in your class notes, creating mind maps, diagrams, tables, charts, or graphs. Try to relate all of these visual images to the textbook's content when you're reading an assignment. In addition, pay special attention to illustrations and diagrams in the book, which will further help you understand the written ideas and information.
- If you are more of an interpersonal learner, form a study group with other students and talk with others about the course readings. Take advantage of your instructors' office hours so that you can enrich your understanding of readings.

Listening

University students are expected to listen to their instructors in class and remember and understand what is said. Usually, instructors won't tell you to write specific things down, and so you will need to listen to other cues for what's important or being emphasized (e.g., does the instructor speak enthusiastically, for a long time, about a particular subject? Does he or she mention that a topic is important?). In discussion-heavy classes, your group dynamics and ability to work well together is often evaluated by the instructor, and so listening to team members and asking follow-up questions for clarification is important as well. Here are a few listening tips:

- Sit where you can best hear the instructor, away from other distractions.
- Study with other students and listen to what they say about the course material. Hearing them talk from their class notes may be more helpful than reviewing your own written notes.
- Record lectures and listen to them again later when reviewing material before a test.
- When studying, read your notes aloud. Review previous tests by reading the questions aloud and speaking your answers. If a section in your textbook seems confusing, read it aloud.
- Talk with your instructor if you feel you are not understanding course readings.
- Use rhymes or acronyms to recall verbal information. To create an acronym, first write down the first letters of each term you need to memorize. Then rearrange the letters to create a word or words. You can find acronym

generators online (just search for “acronym generator”) that can help you by offering options.

- Explore supplemental learning aids, such as audio and video podcasts, Open Access resources, and [free online university courses](#) related on the course’s subject matter.

Seeing



Figure 1-6: Instructors often use visual aids to help explain concepts and ideas. This helps students with visual learning styles. Image: University of Saskatchewan - Students-Classroom-063 Source: <http://news.usask.ca/articles/general/2013/a-glimpse-into-classrooms.php> Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Some university courses include demonstrations and physical processes that can be observed. Some prefer to learn visually, but visual approaches can enrich anyone’s learning. Here are some tips for incorporating visual learning into your study plans:

- Pay special attention in class to visual presentations, such as charts, diagrams, and images.
- Take lecture notes using a visual approach. Do the same when taking notes on class readings. Use diagrams, different colors, lists, and sketches to help you remember.
- Use video podcasts or other visual aids for reviewing lectures.
- Pay special attention to your textbooks’ illustrations and diagrams.
- If your instructor or textbook uses few visuals to help you understand and recall information and ideas, try to imagine how you would present this information visually to others if you were giving a class presentation.
- Create an infographic for your own studying, using free online software (such as [Piktochart](#) or [Venngage](#)).

Doing

People who learn best by doing are often attracted to careers with a strong physical or hands-on component, which can vary from the arts to athletics to engineering. But these students may need to use other learning skills as well. Here are some tips to help maximize your learning related to *doing*:

- Try to engage all of your senses when learning. Even when reading about something, try to imagine what it would feel like if you touched it, how it might smell, how you could physically manipulate it, and so forth. This seems silly, but it works to make it more memorable!

- Think about how you yourself would teach the topic you are presently learning. What visuals could you make to demonstrate the idea or information? Imagine a class lecture as a train of boxcars and think about what things you would put in those cars to represent the lecture topics.
- When it becomes difficult to concentrate when reading while sitting in a quiet place, get up and move around while studying; make gestures as you read aloud.
- Use your hands to create a range of study aids rather than just taking notes: make charts, posters, flash cards, and so on.
- When taking notes, sketch familiar shapes around words and phrases to help you remember them. Try to associate abstract ideas with concrete examples.
- The act of writing—handwriting more than typing at a keyboard—may increase retention; write key things several times.
- Study with other students who may learn better by reading or listening.

Feeling

We sometimes assume that academia is purely objective and without feeling. Don't neglect the emotional side of information and learn through personal connections. Too often we may feel that a university textbook or a class is dry or boring if it focuses on texts or data. Make your learning more meaningful and enrich your learning by focusing on what you feel about the information and ideas being learned. Here are some tips to help maximize your learning related to feeling:

- Try to establish an emotional connection with the topic you are learning. In a history class, for example, imagine yourself as someone living in the period you are studying: what would you feel about the forces at work in your life? In a science class, think about what the implications of a particular scientific principle or discovery might mean for you as a person or how you yourself might have felt if you had been the scientist making that discovery. These exercises may feel like a waste of time, but they have an effect on your interest level and can lead you to some interesting lines of inquiry.
- Talk with your instructor during office hours or after class. Express your enthusiasm and share your feelings about the subject. Even instructors who may seem "dry" in a lecture class often share their enthusiasm in conversation.
- Do supplemental reading about the people involved in a subject you're studying. For example, reading an online biographical sketch of a historical figure, scientist, or theorist may open your eyes to a side of the subject you hadn't seen before and increase your learning. Again, it may feel like a waste of time.... but if supplemental, no-stakes reading stimulates your interest in the subject, the rest of learning is more likely to click into place!
- Study with other students who may learn better by reading or listening. Talk with them in a personal way about what the material means to them. Try teaching them about the topic while explaining your feelings about it.
- If a topic energizes you politically, join [student groups](#) that center around political subjects or advocacy. Think about joining your campus Model United Nations club.

Your Style, Your Instructor's Style

Many university classes tend to focus on lectures and readings. This isn't ideal for those who favour interaction and experiential learning.

Instructors in large lecture classes, for example, generally emphasize listening carefully and reading well. You can always make up for what's missing for you in the delivery. For example, if your instructor simply stands at a podium and lectures, you can provide your own visual stimulation by sketching concept maps in your notes or visualizing how the information being presented might look in a pie chart or graph.

As you move further into your university curriculum, you will likely have smaller classes with class discussions, demonstrations, group presentations, and other learning activities. Also, once you are in classes closely related to a career path that interests you, you will find your learning preferences more relevant to the kinds of material you will be learning.

If a genuine mismatch is occurring in your learning and the instructor's teaching to the extent that you may not succeed in a course, talk to your instructor privately during office hours. You can explain how you best learn and ask for suggestions about other resources that may help you.

1.4 Planning for Success

Learning Objectives

Understand that success in university means much more in the long term than simply passing or getting good grades.

Describe situations in which grades do matter—and why it's important to do as well as you can.
List the basic steps you can begin taking immediately to ensure your success.



Figure 1-7: Be sure to attend your institution's orientation events to meet people, find your way around campus, and learn important details about your program. Free food, swag, and entertainment are usually available, too! First-year orientation at the University of Saskatchewan. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/14994333058/in/album-72157647372444322/> Permission: CC BY 2.0

So what does “success” actually mean in university? Good grades? That’s what many students would say—at least at the beginning of their time in university.

When you ask people about their university experience a few years later, grades are seldom one of the first things mentioned. University graduates reflecting back typically emphasize the following:

- Enjoying the complete university experience (sometimes described as “the best years of my life”)
- Exploring many different subjects and discovering one’s own interests
- Meeting a lot of interesting people, learning about different ways to live
- Learning how to make decisions and solve problems that are now related to a career
- Gaining the skills needed to get the job—and life—they desire

A successful university experience does include acceptable grades, of course, but in the end—in your long-range

goals—grades are only one component of a larger picture. Interestingly, students who are motivated to learn (intrinsic motivation) than to get a good grade (extrinsic motivation) will get better grades (see [Ryan and Deci, 2000](#)).

How Much Do Grades Matter?

As you begin your university experience, it's good to think about your attitude toward grades, since grades often motivate students to study and do well on assignments.

Valuing grades too highly, or not highly enough, can cause problems. Expectations that are too high may lead to disappointment—possibly depression or anxiety—and may become counterproductive. At the other extreme, a student who is too relaxed about grades, who is content simply with passing courses, may not be motivated to study enough even to pass—and may be at risk for failing courses.

What is a good attitude to have toward grades? The answer to that depends in part on how grades do matter generally—and specifically in your own situation. Here are some ways grades clearly do matter:

- At most universities, all students must maintain a certain average to be allowed to continue taking courses and to graduate.
- Oftentimes, financial aid and scholarship recipients must maintain a certain grade in all courses, or a minimum average grade overall, to continue receiving their financial award.
- In some programs, the grade in certain courses must be higher than simply passing in order to count toward the program or major.

After graduation, it may be enough in some careers just to have completed the program or degree. But in most situations, how well one did in university may still affect one's life. Employers often ask how well you did in university (new graduates at least—this becomes less important after one has gained more job experience). Students who are proud of their grades may include their average grade on their résumés. Students with a low average may avoid including it on their resume, but employers may ask on the company's application form or in an interview (and being caught in a lie can lead to being fired). An employer who asks for a university transcript will see all your grades, not just the grade average.

In addition to the importance for jobs, grades matter if you plan to continue to graduate school, professional school, or other educational programs—all of which require your transcript.

Certainly, grades are not the only way people are judged, but along with all forms of experience (work, volunteer, internship, hobbies) and personal qualities and the recommendations of others, they are an important consideration.

If you have special concerns about grades, such as feeling unprepared in certain classes and at risk of failing, talk with your academic advisor. If a class requires more preparation than you have from past courses and experience, you might be urged to drop that class and take another—or to seek extra help. Your advisor can help you work through any individual issues related to doing well and getting the best grade you can.

Can You Challenge a Grade?

Yes and no. University instructors are careful about how they assign grades, which are based on clear-cut standards often stated in the course syllabus. The likelihood of an instructor changing your grade if you challenge it is low. On the other hand, we're all human—mistakes can occur, and if you truly feel a test or other score was miscalculated, you can ask your instructor to review the grade. Just be sure to be polite and respectful rather than confrontational.

Most situations in which students want to challenge a grade, however, result from a misunderstanding regarding the expectations of the grading scale or standards used. Students may simply feel they deserve a higher grade because they think they understand the material well or spent a lot of time studying or doing the assignment. The instructor's grade, however, is based on your actual responses on a test, a paper or other assignment. The instructor is grading not what he or she thinks is in your head, or how much effort you made, but what you actually wrote down.

If you are concerned that your grade does not accurately reflect your understanding or effort, you should still talk with your instructor—but your goal should be not to argue for a grade change but to gain a better understanding of the course’s expectations so that you’ll do better next time. Instructors do respect students who want to improve. Visit the instructor during office hours or ask for an appointment and prepare questions ahead of time to help you better understand how your performance can improve and better indicate how well you understand the material. If your meeting is unproductive, and you still feel that you’ve been graded unfairly, read your college’s policies regarding grade appeals, and follow its procedures accordingly.

A major aspect of university for some students is learning how to accept criticism. Your university instructors hold you to high standards and expect you to have the maturity to understand that a lower grade is not a personal attack on you and not a statement that you’re not smart enough to do the work. Since none of us is perfect, we all can improve in almost everything we do—and the first step in that direction is accepting evaluation of our work. If you receive a grade lower than you think you have earned, take the responsibility to learn what you need to do to earn a higher grade next time.

Succeeding in Your First Year

The first year of university is almost every student’s most crucial time. Statistics show a much higher drop-out rate in the first year than thereafter^[1]. Why? Because for many students, adjusting to university is not easy. Students wrestle with managing their time, their freedom, and their other commitments to family, friends, and work. It’s important to recognize that it may not be easy for you.

On the other hand, when you do succeed in your first year, the odds are very good that you’ll continue to succeed and will complete your program or degree.

Are you ready? The next section lists some things you can do to start right now, today, to ensure your success.

Getting Started on the Right Foot

- Make an appointment to talk with your academic advisor if you have any doubt about the courses you have already enrolled in or about the direction you’re taking. Start examining how you spend your time and ensure you make enough time to keep up with your courses.
- Check for tutoring assistance if you feel you may need it and make an appointment or schedule time to visit tutoring centers on your university campus to see what help you can get if needed.
- Pay attention to your learning preferences and how those jive with your instructors’ teaching styles. Begin immediately applying the guidelines discussed earlier for situations in which you do not feel you are learning effectively.
- Plan ahead. Check your syllabus for each class and highlight the dates of major assignments and tests. Write on your calendar the important dates coming up.
- Look around your classroom and plan to introduce yourself right away to one or two other students. Talking with other students is the first step in forming study groups that will help you succeed.



Figure 1-8: Start getting to know other students right away by talking before or after class. This is often a good way to initiate a study group or form a note-sharing alliance. Source: [Flickr](#) Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

- Introduce yourself to your instructors, if you haven't already. In a large lecture, go up to the instructor after class and ask a question about anything in the lecture or about an upcoming assignment. Take advantage of office hours.
- Participate in your classes. If you're normally a quiet person who prefers to observe others asking questions or joining class discussions, you need to take the first step toward becoming a participating student—another characteristic of the successful student. Find something of particular interest to you and write down a question for the instructor. Then raise your hand at the right time and ask. You'll find it a lot easier than you may think!
- Vow to pay more attention to how you spend your money. Some students have to drop out because they get into debt.
- Take good care of your body. Good health makes you a better student. Vow to avoid junk food, to get enough sleep, and to move around more.

Excellent! Start doing these few things, and already you'll be a step or two ahead—and on your way to a successful first year!

Freeman, S. (2009, September 20). 1 in 6 first year university students won't make the grade. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from: thestar.com ↵

Chapter 2: Building Connections



Figure 2-1: Make the most of your time at university by connecting with other students. Source: Flickr Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

New university students may not immediately realize that they've entered a whole new world at university, including a world of people different from those they have known before. How you approach the social aspects and diversity of university world has a large impact on your academic success.

All the topics covered in this chapter relate to the social world of university, a world which intersects with and complements the academic world of university. You will gain some insight into the value of making new friends and getting along with the wide variety of people you will encounter on campus. You will learn why and how a broad diversity of people enriches the university experience and better prepare you for the world after university.

Enter this new world with an open mind and you'll gain many benefits. Even if you are taking a course or two at night and do not spend much of your day on campus, try to make the most of this experience. You'll meet others who will challenge and stimulate you and broaden your thinking and emotional experiences.

2.1 Managing Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Explain the benefits of social interactions with a variety of people in the university environment.
- List personal characteristics and skills that contribute to one's ability to get along well with others.
- Improve your communication skills.
- Use online social networking beneficially.
- Balance your social life with your schoolwork.
- Describe how to successfully resolve a conflict with another person.

As students, you will continually interact with other students and instructors, and these interactions can heighten the learning process. University students depend on their instructors, but just as importantly, they depend on other students in many ways.

As important as our interactions with others are, we do not automatically possess the skills that help us form good relationships and make the most of our experiences.

Recognize the Value of Social Interaction

Building good relationships is important for happiness and a successful university experience. University offers the opportunity to meet many people you would likely not meet otherwise. Make the most of this opportunity to gain a number of benefits:

- A growing understanding of a range of people, how they think, and what they feel that will serve you well throughout your life and in your future career
- A heightened sense of your own identity, especially as you interact with others with different personalities and who are from different backgrounds
- Emotional comfort from friendship with someone who understands you and with whom you can talk about your problems, joys, hopes, and fears
- An opportunity to grow with wider intellectual and emotional horizons

University often offers an opportunity to be stimulated and excited by new relationships and interactions with people who will challenge your thinking and help you become your best. Still, it can be difficult to get started with new relationships in university.

Making New Friends



Figure 2-2: Making connections with others will improve your academic experience. Here, students connect at the University of Saskatchewan graduation Powwow. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/14367773053/in/album-72157644903277322/> CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Some people just make friends naturally, but many first-year university students are more shy or quiet and may need to actively seek new friends. Here are some starting points:

Keep all doors open for meeting new people. If you live in residence, keep your door open. Try to sit with different people at meals so you can get to know them better. Study in a common area or lounge where you'll be among others.

Be open in your interests. Don't limit yourself to people who share only certain interests. Meeting people by studying together is an excellent way to get to know people with different interests.

Don't try to get involved in everything going on around you. Committing to too many activities or joining too many social groups will create stress in the long term, and you may not spend enough time with anyone to get to know them.

Let others see who you really are. Let people get to know the things you're interested in, your real passions. People who really know you are more likely to become good friends.

Make an effort to get to know others, too. Show some interest. Don't talk just about *your* interests—ask them about theirs. Show others that you're interested, that you think they're worth spending time with, and that you really do want to get to know them.

Once a friendship has started, be a good friend. Respect your friends for who they are and don't criticize them or talk about them behind their back. Give emotional support when your friends need it and accept their support as well when you need it.

Are You Shy?

If you're shy, try meeting and talking to people in situations where you can interact one-to-one, such as talking with another student after class. Start with what you have in common—"What did you think of that test?"—and let the conversation grow from there. Avoid the emotional trap of thinking everyone but you is making new friends and start some conversations with others who look interesting to you. You'll soon find other "shy" or quiet people eager to interact with you as well and get to know you.

Communication Skills

Communication is at the core of almost all social interactions, including those involved in friendships and relationships with your instructors. Communication with others has a huge effect on our lives, what we think and feel, and what and how we learn.

Oral communication involves not only speech and listening, of course, but also nonverbal communication: facial expressions, tone of voice, and many other body language signals that affect the messages sent and received. Many experts think that people pay more attention, often unconsciously, to *how* people say something than to *what* they are saying. When the nonverbal message is inconsistent with the verbal (spoken) message, just as when the verbal message itself is unclear because of poorly chosen words or vague explanations, then miscommunication may occur.

Miscommunication is at the root of many misunderstandings among people and makes it difficult to build relationships.



Figure 2-3: Miscommunication is at the root of many misunderstandings. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/smilekerry/3224201623/> Permission: CC BY-NC 2.0

Remember that communication is a two-way process. Listening skills are critical for most university students simply because many of us may not have learned how to really listen to another person. Here are some guidelines for how to listen effectively:

- **Talk less to listen more.** Most people naturally like to share their thoughts and feelings, and some people almost seem unable to stop talking long enough to ever listen to another person. Try this: next time you're in a conversation with another student, deliberately try not to speak very much but give the other person a chance to speak fully. You may notice a big difference in how much you gain from the conversation. Don't be afraid of the odd "awkward pause"; some people require a bit more time to formulate answers or questions in conversation.
- **Ask questions.** To keep the conversational ball rolling, show your interest in the other person by asking them open-ended questions about things they are saying. This helps the other person feel that you are interested in them and helps build the relationship.
- **Watch and respond to the other person's body language.** You'll learn much more about their feelings for what they're saying than if you listen only to their words.
- **Show the other person that you're really listening and that you care.** Make eye contact and respond appropriately with nods and brief comments like "That's interesting!" or "I know what you mean" or "Really?"

Be friendly, smile when appropriate, and encourage the person to keep speaking.

- **Give the other person feedback.** Show you understand by saying things like “So you’re saying that...” or asking a question that demonstrates you’ve been following what they’re saying and want to know more.

As you learn to improve your listening skills, think also about what you are saying yourself and how. Here are additional guidelines for effective speaking:

- **Be honest, but don’t be critical.** Strongly disagreeing may only put the other person on the defensive—an emotion sure to disrupt the hope for good communication. You can disagree, but be respectful to keep the conversation from becoming emotional. Say “I don’t know, I think that maybe it’s...” instead of “That’s crazy! What’s really going on is....”
- **Look for common ground.** Make sure that your side of a conversation relates to what the other person is saying and that it focuses on what you have in common. There’s almost no better way to stop a conversation dead in its tracks than to ignore everything the other person has just said and launch into an unrelated story or idea of your own.
- **Avoid sarcasm and irony unless you know the person well.** Sarcasm is easily misunderstood and may be interpreted as an attack on the other person’s ideas or statements.
- **Remember that assertive communication is better than passive or aggressive communication.** “Assertive” in this context means you are honest and direct in stating your ideas and thoughts; you are confident and clear and willing to discuss your ideas while still respecting the thoughts and ideas of others. A passive communicator is reluctant to speak up, seems to agree with everything others say, hesitates to say anything that others might disagree with, and therefore seldom communicates much at all. Passive communication simply is not a real exchange in communication. Aggressive communication, at the other extreme, is often highly critical of the thoughts and ideas of others. This communication style may be sarcastic, emotional, and even insulting. Real communication is not occurring because others are not prompted to respond honestly and openly.

Some students may have difficulty in the opposite direction: their social lives may become so rich or so time-consuming that they have problems balancing their social lives with their schoolwork. Social media, for example, may eat up a lot of time.

Social Media

Most university students know all about Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social networking sites. The media have often emphasized negative stories involving safety concerns, obsessive behavior, a perceived superficiality of social interaction online, and so on. But more recently, online social networking has been found to have several benefits. Many of those who once criticized social networking platforms are now regularly networking among themselves via LinkedIn and other “professional” networking sites.

Interestingly, there are benefits of Facebook use—some clear to those using it, others revealed only recently by research in the social sciences. Many of these benefits can apply to other social networking sites as well:

- Facebook and other forms of online networking make it easy to stay in touch with friends and family at a geographical distance. University students who have moved away from former friends seem to make the transition more easily when they stay in touch. Maintaining past relationships does not prevent most people from making new friends at university.
- Facebook provides users with increased “social capital,” which is a sum of resources gained through one’s relationships with people. Facebook users gain information; opportunities for participation in activities and groups; invitations to events; chances to exchange advice (e.g., “what’s a good place to get sushi in this city?”; greater knowledge about others; some interaction skills; and so forth. Social capital is also associated with self-esteem, success in some endeavors, and general happiness.
- Facebook makes it easier for people who are shy or otherwise slow to initiate or respond to interactions with others to participate socially in a group. Online network sites also offer an outlet for self-expression and sharing.
- For many university students, interactions on Facebook strengthen personal relationships rather than detracting from them.

- Acknowledging that online social networking is a reality for most university students, many university administrators, clubs, groups, and instructors also use it to stay in better touch with students, to provide information and encouragement, and to help students experience the full richness of the university experience. The University of Saskatchewan has a Facebook page where you can learn about things happening around campus, and you may even receive information about important announcements.



Figure 2-4: University of Saskatchewan's Facebook Page - August 3rd, 2016. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/usask/> Permission: University of Saskatchewan.

Still, online social networking is not 100 percent beneficial for all university students. Someone who becomes obsessed with constantly updating their profile or attracting a huge number of friends can spend so much time at their computer that they miss out on other important aspects of university life.

Hopefully by now everyone knows why you should never post compromising or inappropriate photos or information about yourself anywhere online, even as a joke: many employers, university admissions offices, and others may find this compromising material in the future and deny you the job, internship, graduate program, or other position that you want. It's important also to protect your identity and privacy on online sites. Make sure you set it up so that only those who you trust can see your full profile, and make sure that people have to get approval to tag you in photographs.

In 2016, sixty percent of employers research prospective hires on social networking, which was an increase from 11 percent in 2006 ([Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder, 2016](#); 2,106 hiring managers and HR professionals and 3,031 private sector workers). Nearly fifty percent found material that would prevent them from hiring an individual, including

- Provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information (46 percent)
- Information about candidate drinking or using drugs (43 percent)
- Discriminatory comments related to race, religion, gender, etc. (33 percent)
- Candidate bad-mouthed previous company or fellow employee (31 percent)
- Poor communication skills (29 percent) — Source: [CareerBuilder, 2016](#)

Overall, online networking in moderation can help enrich one's life. When used to build relationships, gain information, and stay in touch with a larger community, it can contribute to success in university. Most university students use Facebook ten to thirty minutes a day. If you're spending more than that, you might ask yourself if you're missing out on something else.

Balancing Schoolwork and Social Life

If there's one thing true of virtually all university students, it's that you don't have enough time to do everything you want. Once you've developed friendships within the university community and have an active social life, you may feel you don't have enough time for your studies and other activities such as work. For many students, the numerous social opportunities of university become a distraction, and with less attention to one's studies, academic performance can drop. Here are some tips for balancing your social life with your studies:

- **Keep working on your time management skills.** You can't just "go with the flow" and hope that, after spending time with friends, you have enough time (and energy) left over for studying. Make a study schedule that provides enough time for what you need to do. Study first; socialize after.
- **Keep working on your study skills.** When you have only a limited amount of time for studying, be sure you're using that time as effectively as possible as you read assignments and prepare for class, organize your notes after class, and prepare for tests. Reflect on successes and failures to do better next time.
- **If you can't resist temptations, reduce them.** If you are easily distracted by the opportunity to talk with your roommate, spouse, or family members because you study where you live, then go to the library to study.
- **Make studying a social experience.** If your studying keeps you so busy that you feel like you don't have much of a social life, form a study group. You will learn more than you would alone by gaining from the thoughts of others, and you can enjoy interacting with others without falling behind.
- **Keep your social life from affecting your studying.** Simply scheduling study time doesn't mean you'll use it well. If you stayed up late the night before, you may not today be able to concentrate well as you study for that big test. This is another reason for good time management and scheduling your time well, looking ahead.
- **Get help if you need it.** If you're still having difficulty balancing your study time with other activities, talk with your academic advisor or a counselor. Maybe something else is keeping you from doing your best. Maybe you need some additional study skills or you need to get some extra help from a tutor or campus learning centre or library. Remember, your university wants you to succeed and will try to help those who seek help.

Overcoming Difficulties and Resolving Conflicts

Conflicts among people who are interacting are natural. People have many differences in opinions, ideas, emotions, and behaviors, and these differences sometimes cause conflicts. Here are just a few examples of conflicts that may occur among university students:

- Your roommate is playing loud music in your room, and you need some quiet to study for a test.
- You want to have a nice dinner out, but your partner wants to save the money to buy a new game.
- Your instructor gave you a 68% on a paper because it lacks some of the required elements, but you feel it deserves a better grade because you think it accomplished more important goals.

So how can such conflicts be resolved? Two things are necessary for conflict resolution that does not leave one or more of the people involved feeling negative about the outcome: attitude and communication.

A conflict cannot be resolved satisfactorily unless all people involved have the right attitude:

- **Respect the options and behaviors of others.** Accept that people are not all alike and learn to celebrate your differences. Most situations do not involve a single right or wrong answer.
- **Be open minded.** Just because at first you are sure that that you are right, do not close the door to other possibilities. Look at the other's point of view. Be open to change—even when that means accepting constructive criticism.
- **Calm down.** You can't work together to resolve a conflict while you're still feeling strong emotions. Agree with the other to wait until you're both able to discuss it without strong emotions.
- **Recognize the value of compromise.** Even if you disagree after calmly talking over an issue, accept that

as a human reality and understand that a compromise may be necessary in order to get along with others.

With the right attitude, you can then work together to resolve the issue. This process depends on good communication:

- **Listen.** Don't simply argue for your position, but listen carefully to what the other says. Pay attention to their body language as you try to understand their point of view and ask questions to ensure that you do. Paraphrase what you think you hear to give the other a chance to correct any misunderstanding.
- **Use "I statements" rather than "you statements," and avoid the words "always" or "never."** Explain your point of view about the situation in a way that does not put the other person on the defensive and evoke emotions that make a resolution more difficult. Don't say, "You're *always* playing loud music when I'm trying to study." Instead, say, "It's hard to study when you play loud music." Don't blame the other for the problem—that would just get emotions flowing again.
- **Brainstorm together to find a solution that satisfies both of you.** Some compromise is usually needed, but that is usually not difficult to reach when you're calm and have the right attitude about working together on a solution. In some cases, you may simply have to accept a result that you still do not agree with, simply in order to move on.

In most cases, when the people involved have a good attitude, listen and feel heard, choose their words carefully, and are open to compromise, conflicts can be resolved successfully.

Yet sometimes there seems to be no resolution. Sometimes the other person may simply be difficult and refuse to even try to work out a solution. With some interpersonal conflicts, especially if there's abuse involved (verbal, emotional, or physical), choose not to interact with that person anymore. Check out the University of Saskatchewan's [Guide to Healthy Relationships](#) for more information on what a healthy relationship is and identifying when you're in an abusive relationship.

Roommate Issues

At many universities students just out of high school must live in a campus residence hall. Other students may live in a shared apartment with new roommates. This is the first time many students have had to share a room, suite, or apartment with others who were not family members, and this situation may lead to conflicts and strong feelings that can even affect academic success.

As in other interactions, the keys to forming a good relationship with a roommate are communication and attitude. From the beginning, you should talk about everyone's expectations of the other(s) and what matters most to you about where you live. Don't wait until problems happen before talking. It's often good to begin with the key practical issues: agreeing on quiet hours for study (limiting not only loud music but also visits from others), time for lights out, neatness and cleaning up, things shared and private things not to touch.

Show respect for the other's ideas and possessions, respect their privacy, and try to listen more than you talk. Even if your roommate does not become a close friend, you can have a harmonious, successful relationship that makes your residence a good home for both of you. Millions of university students before you have learned to work this out, and if both (or all) of you respect each other and keep communication open and nonconfrontational, you will easily get through the small bumps in the road ahead, too. Follow these guidelines to help ensure you get along well:

- **Anticipate problems before they happen.** Think about things that you consider essential in your living environment and talk with a new roommate about these essentials now.
- **Deal with any problem promptly.** Don't wait until a behavior is well established before speaking up, as if the other person will somehow catch on that it aggravates you. It may be as simple as a roommate using your coffee cup or borrowing your toothpaste without asking, but if you say nothing, trying to be polite, the habit may expand to other things.
- **Be patient, flexible, and willing to compromise.** It may take a while for each of you to get used to each other and to establish a communication pattern of openness so that you can be honest with each other about what really matters.
- **Be warm, use humor, and be sensitive.** Telling someone that they're doing something bothersome can be very difficult for many people. Think before speaking, looking for the best way to communicate what you feel.

Remember, you'll be spending a lot of time around this person, so do you really want them to think of you as bossy or obsessive-compulsive?

- **Get out more.** Sometimes it helps to spend more time elsewhere on campus, studying in the library or another quiet place. You just might need a certain amount of time a day alone. That's fine, but don't expect your roommate to have to leave just to give you that time alone!

But What If You Really Have a Roommate Problem?

In some situations and with some people who will not compromise and do not respect you and your needs, a roommate can be a serious problem. In some circumstances, you may able to move to a different room. Room changes usually are not granted simply because you "don't get along," but certain circumstances may justify a change. The following are some examples:

- Your roommate smokes in the room.
- Your roommate uses illegal drugs, drinks alcohol underage, or conducts other illegal activities in the room.
- Your roommate repeatedly refuses to limit activities at any hour to allow you to sleep.
- Your roommate does anything that threatens your physical well-being or safety.
- Your roommate is abusive.
- Your roommate denies you your rights to practice your religion or other basic rights.

If you have a problem like this, first talk with your resident advisor (RA) or other residence hall authority. They will explain the process for a room change, if warranted, or other ways for managing the problem.

Dealing with Harassment

Although university campuses are for the most part safe, secure, and friendly places where social and intellectual interaction is generally mature and responsible, harassment can occur in any setting. Harassment is a general term referring to behavior that is intended to disturb or threaten another person in some way, often psychologically. Typically the person or people doing the harassment may target their victim because of a difference in race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.

Acts of harassment may be verbal, physical, psychological, or any other behavior intended to disturb another person. Bullying behavior, name-calling, belittling, gesturing obscenely, stalking, mobbing—any action intended to torment or deliberately make another person uncomfortable or feel humiliated is harassment. Harassment may also be intended to manipulate a targeted person to act in some specific way.

Sexual harassment is a special term referring to persistent, unwanted sexual behaviors or advances. Sexual harassment may begin with words but progress to unwanted touching and potentially even rape.

Many types of harassment are illegal. In the workplace, a supervisor who tells off-color sexual jokes around an employee of the opposite gender may be guilty of sexual harassment. Students who deliberately malign members of another race may be guilty of committing a hate crime. Physically tormenting another student in a hazing may be judged assault and battery. On a university campus, any harassment of a student by a faculty member or university employee is expressly forbidden, unethical, and also possibly illegal. Read up on your university's [code of misconduct](#).

Harassment of any type, at any time, of any person, is wrong and unacceptable. You will know it if you are harassed, and you should know also that it is your basic right to be free of harassment and that your university has [strict policies and procedures around harassment and discrimination](#).

Changing Family Relationships

The university years are a time of many changes, including one's relationships with parents, siblings, and one's own children and partners. Any time there is change, issues may arise.



Figure 2-5: A video communication program like Skype makes it easy to stay in touch with friends and family.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/10557450@N04/4439315507/> Permission: CC BY-NC 2.0

As in other relationships, try to understand the other's perspective. Honesty is particularly important—but with tact and understanding. Here are some tips for getting along:

- Understand that your parents may not change their attitudes toward you as quickly as you yourself may be changing. They may still think of you as a younger person in need of their continued guidance. They will worry about you and fear that you might fall in with the wrong crowd or engage in risky behavior. Be patient. Take the time to communicate, and don't close yourself off. Let them gradually accept you as a more mature person who can make your own decisions wisely.
- Stay in touch. You may be busier than ever and feel you haven't time for a phone call or e-mail, but communication is important for parents—especially if they are now empty nesters without other children at home. Even if they seem to want too much involvement in your life and to make decisions for you, realize that this at least in part is simply a desire to stay in touch with you—and to feel they still matter in your life.
- Use your best listening skills. Understanding what they're really feeling, which is often simply a concern for you born of their love for you, will usually help you know best to respond.
- Be assured that over time your parents and other family members will get used to your being on your own and will accept your ability to make your own decisions. Time itself often solves issues.
- With your own family, now that you are busier than ever with classes and work, you may need to pay special attention to ensuring you stay active in family relationships. Schedule times for family outings and make room in your days for casual interactions. But remember, it's not how much time you spend together but the quality of that time, so give your family your full attention when you are together.

2.2 Embracing Diversity

Learning Objectives

- Define diversity and explain the benefits of a diverse university campus for all students.
- Explain why all university students are more successful academically in a diverse environment and list several additional benefits of diversity for all students.
- Describe the valuable characteristics of “non-traditional,” mature university students.
- Explain what students can do to take a stand against hate and discrimination, foster multiculturalism, engage in anti-oppressive practices, and celebrate diversity.

In 2011, 19.1% of Canadians identified themselves as visible minorities, with the three largest visible minority groups being South-Asians, Chinese and African Americans^[1]. Canada’s diverse society also includes Aboriginal Peoples, made up of First Nations’, Metis, and Inuit, comprising 4.1% of the total Canadian population^[2]. But “diversity” means much more than a variety of racial and ethnic differences.

As we’ll use the term here, diversity refers to the great variety of human characteristics—ways that we are different even as we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity, and moving beyond “us” versus “them,” and beyond fear, is crucial to civil society. Think about where these groups might intersect, and what groups of people might experience more advantages or disadvantages in Canadian society: women, men, LGBTQ people, cisgender people, senior citizens, people with disabilities, teenagers, people who are considered “overweight,” straight people, middle-class people, high-income people, working class, people living in poverty, people with mental health issues, people of colour, Christians, English Language Learners, Indigenous people, or immigrants.

We’ll look first at some of the ways that people differ and explore the benefits of diversity for our society generally and for the university experience. While we should all celebrate diversity, at the same time we need to acknowledge past issues that grew from misunderstandings of such differences and work together to bring change where needed.

The Benefits of Diversity

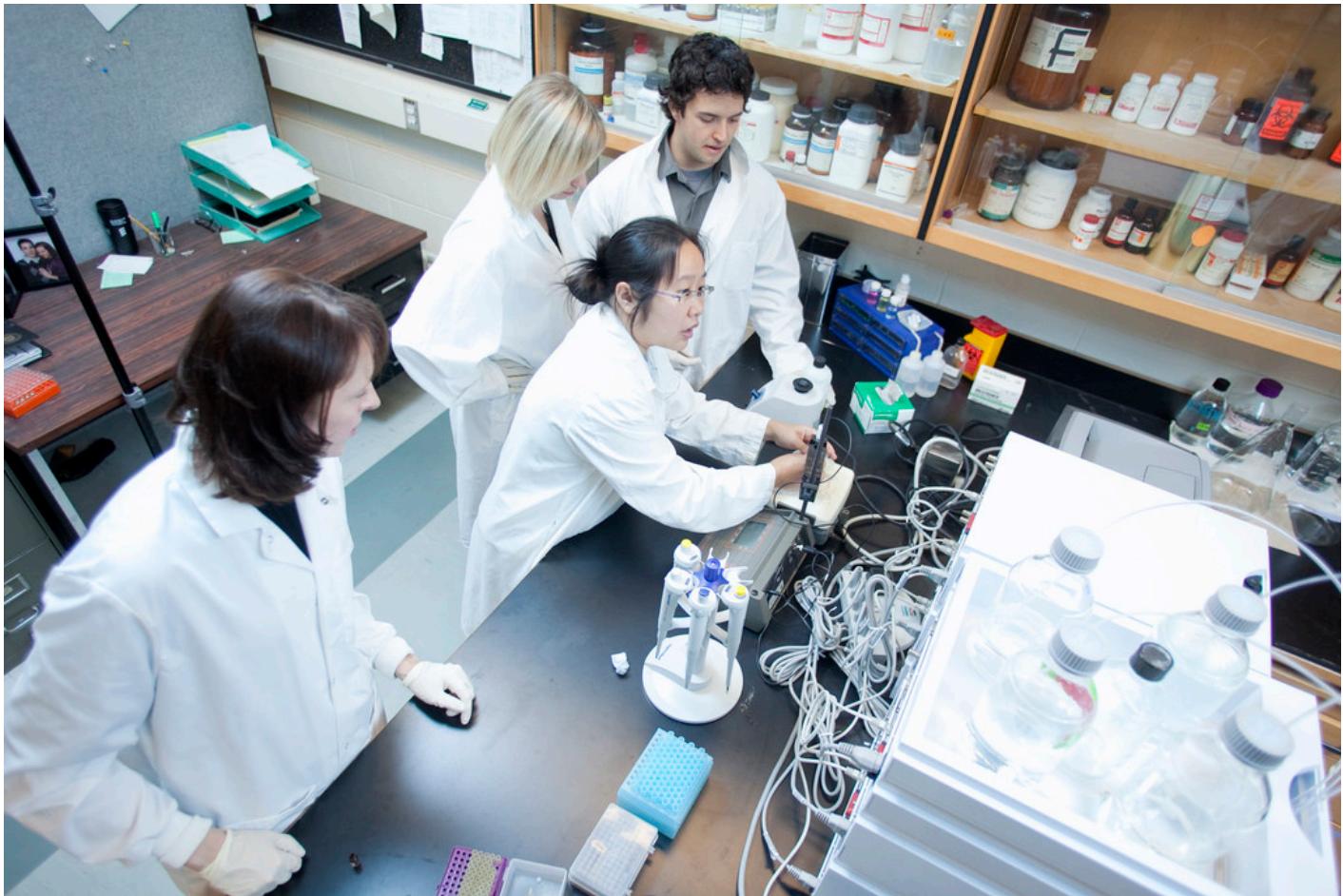


Figure 2-6: Experiencing diversity at university prepares students for the diversity they will encounter the rest of their lives. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/5453757884/in/photolist-8g6nHw-8g6mZG-8g6oK1-9iUVVN-bB69JN-8g6kuw-8g6i79-9uSgs2-aphBs-9iSNT8-8g33z6-9uSsZX-aphHwU-9uVnjE-8g34p2-9iVWdm-bPZLe8-bB68dL-9syTkQ-6boz7s-c5k3dA-9sz7X9-9syWL9-9iSMGn-bq66so-c5k2T3-9swAH-c5k3fm-c5k3J-c5k2Yd-9szch3-8g6kQ9-9uVFnN-c5k38U-c5k2Rq-9sw3cK-c5k3cq-c5k2W9-c5k35f-c5k37j-c5k2UL-bB686L-c5k2ZQ-c5k3aW-bq65pj-79j2vx-bq664m-9uVztW-9iW6Bm-SAmmiG> Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

The goal of many university admissions departments is to attract diverse students from a broad range of backgrounds involving different cultural, socioeconomic, age, and other factors. But why is diversity so important? There are many reasons:

- **Experiencing diversity at university prepares students for the diversity they will encounter the rest of their lives.** Learning to understand and accept people different from ourselves is very important in our world. While many high school students may not have met or gotten to know well many people with different backgrounds, this often changes in university. Success in one's career and future social life also requires understanding people in new ways and interacting with new skills. Experiencing diversity in university assists in this process.
- **Students learn better in a diverse educational setting.** Encountering new concepts, values, and behaviors leads to thinking in deeper, more complex, and more creative ways, rather than furthering past ideas and attitudes. Students who experience the most racial and ethnic diversity in their classes are more engaged in active thinking processes and develop more intellectual and academic skills (and have higher grade point averages) than others with limited experience of diversity.
- **Attention to diversity leads to a broader range of teaching methods, which benefits the learning process for all students.** Just as people are different in diverse ways, people from different backgrounds and experiences learn in different ways. University teaching has expanded to include many new teaching techniques. All students gain when instructors make the effort to address the diverse learning needs of all students.

- **Experiencing diversity on campus is beneficial for both minority and majority students.** Students have more fulfilling social relationships and report more satisfaction and involvement with their university experience. Studies show all students on campus gain from diversity programs. All the social and intellectual benefits of diversity cited in this list hold true for all students.
- **Diversity experiences help break the patterns of racism, segregation, cultural suppression, exploitation, and prejudice that have characterized North American history.** Discrimination against others—whether by race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or anything else—is rooted in ignorance and sometimes fear of people who are different. Getting to know people who are different is the first step in accepting those differences, furthering the goal of a society free of all forms of prejudice and the unfair treatment of people.
- **Students of a traditional university age are in an ideal stage of development for forming healthy attitudes about diversity.** Younger students may not yet have reached a point at which they can fully understand and accept very different ideas and behaviors in others. The university years are a time of growth and maturation intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and a sustained experience of diversity is an opportunity to heighten this process.
- **Experiencing diversity makes us all better citizens in our democracy.** When people can better understand and consider the ideas and perspectives of others, they are better equipped to participate meaningfully in our society. Democracy depends on shared values of equality and the public good. An attitude of “us versus them,” in contrast, does not further the public good or advance democratic government. Studies have shown that university graduates with a good experience of diversity generally maintain patterns of openness and inclusivity in their future lives.
- **Diversity enhances self-awareness.** We gain insights into our own thought processes, life experiences, and values as we learn from people whose backgrounds and experiences are different from our own.

While all the benefits described have been demonstrated repeatedly on campuses all across the country in study after study, and while admissions and retention programs on many campuses try to promote and celebrate diversity, some problems still remain. Society changes only slowly, and sadly, many students in some areas—including students with disabilities, and many minority students—still feel marginalized in the dominant culture of their campuses. Even in a country that prides itself on tolerance and acceptance, racism still exists. Thus society as a whole, and universities in particular, need to continue to work to destroy old stereotypes and achieve a full acceptance of our human differences.

Multiculturalism is *not* political correctness. We've all heard jokes about “political correctness,” which suggests that we do or say certain things not because they are right but because we're expected to pay lip service to them. Unfortunately, some people think of universities' diversity programs as just the politically correct thing to do. Use your critical thinking skills if you hear such statements. In the world of higher education, truth is discovered through investigation and research—and research has shown the value of diversity for all university participants^[3].

“Nontraditional” Mature Students and Diversity

Sometimes overlooked among the types of diversity on most university campuses are mature students, often called by administrators and admissions officers as “nontraditional” students, who are returning to education, often after working a number of years. While many university students are younger and enroll in university immediately after high school, these mature students help bring a wider range of diversity to campuses and deserve special attention for the benefits they bring for all students. As a group, mature students often share certain characteristics that bring unique value to the university experience overall. They often

- have well-established identities and broader roles and responsibilities on which to base their thinking;
- more fully represent the local community and its values;
- have greater emotional independence and self-reliance;
- have well-developed problem-solving, self-directing, and decision-making skills;
- can share important life lessons and insights not found in textbooks;
- have relationships and experience with a greater variety of people; and
- can be positive role models for younger students with less experience and maturity.

In many ways, these “nontraditional” students benefit the campus as a whole and contribute in meaningful ways to the educational process. Both instructors and “traditional” students gain when older students share their ideas and feelings in class discussions, study groups, and all forms of social interaction.

What Students Can Do

While diversity exists in most places, not everyone automatically understands differences among people and celebrates the value of those differences. Students who never think about diversity and who make no conscious effort to experience and understand others gain less than others who do. There are many ways you can experience the benefits of diversity on your university campus, however, beginning with your own attitudes and by taking steps to increase your experiences with diverse individuals.

Acknowledge your own uniqueness, for you are diverse, too. Diversity doesn’t involve just other people. Consider that you may be just as different to other people as they are to you. Don’t think of the other person as being the one who is different, that you are somehow the “norm.” Your religion may seem just as odd to them as theirs does to you, and your clothing may seem just as strange looking to them as theirs is to you—until you accept there is no one “normal” or right way to be. Look at yourself in a mirror and consider why you look as you do. Why do you use the slang you do with your friends? Why did you just have that type of food for breakfast? How is it that you prefer certain types of music? Read certain books? Talk about certain things? Much of this has to do with your cultural background—so it makes sense that someone from another cultural or ethnic background is different in some ways. But both of you are also individuals with your own tastes, preferences, ideas, and attitudes—making you unique.

Consider your own (possibly unconscious) stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed, simplistic view of what people in a certain group are like. It is often the basis for prejudice and discrimination: behaving differently toward someone because you stereotype them in some way. Stereotypes are generally learned and emerge in the dominant culture’s attitudes toward those from outside that dominant group. A stereotype may be explicitly racist and destructive, and it may also be a simplistic generalization applied to any group of people, even if intended to be flattering rather than negative. As you have read this chapter so far, did you find yourself thinking about any group of people, based on any kind of difference, and perhaps thinking in terms of stereotypes? If you walked into a party and saw many different kinds of people standing about, would you naturally avoid some and move toward others? Remember, we learn stereotypes from our cultural background—so it’s not a terrible thing to admit you have inherited some stereotypes. Thinking about them is a first step in breaking out of these irrational thought patterns.

Examples of Cultural Differences in Body Language

While we should be careful not to stereotype individuals or whole cultures, it is important to be aware of potential differences among cultures when interacting with other people. For example, body language often has different meanings in different cultures. Understanding such differences can help you better understand your interaction with others. Here are a few examples:

- Some Canadians clap their hands together to emphasize a point, while some French clap to end a conversation.
- Many Canadians cross their legs when seated and thus may point the bottom of their shoe toward another person; many Japanese find this gesture offensive.
- Many Canadians may wave their index fingers at someone else to make a point, but this gesture is often offensive to Mexicans and Somalis, who may use that gesture only for dogs.
- For many Canadians, direct eye contact is generally considered polite and a sign of interest, although many Indigenous people see direct eye contact as impolite.

Do not try to ignore differences among people. Some people try so hard to avoid stereotyping that they go to the other extreme and try to avoid seeing any differences at all among people. But as we have seen throughout this chapter, people *are* different in many ways, and we should accept that if we are to experience the benefits of diversity.

Don't apply any group generalizations to individuals. As an extension of not stereotyping any group, also don't think of any individual person in terms of group characteristics. People are individuals first, members of a group second, and any given generalization simply may not apply to an individual. Be open minded and treat everyone with respect as an individual with his or her own ideas, attitudes, and preferences.

Take advantage of campus opportunities to increase your cultural awareness. Your university likely has multiculturalism courses or workshops you can sign up for. Special events, cultural fairs and celebrations, concerts, and other programs are held frequently on most campuses. There may also be opportunities to participate in group travel to other countries or regions of cultural diversity. Think about signing up to take the [Intercultural Development Inventory](#) (IDI) to more deeply understand and develop your intercultural competence; ask your international students' centre whether they offer it or know who does.

Take the initiative in social interactions. Many students just naturally hang out with other students they are most like—that almost seems to be part of human nature. Even when we're open-minded and want to learn about others different from ourselves, it often seems easier and more comfortable to interact with others of the same age, cultural group, and so on. If we don't make a small effort to meet others, however, we miss a great opportunity to learn and broaden our horizons. Next time you're looking around the classroom or dorm for someone to ask about a class you missed or to study together for a test or group project, choose someone different from you in some way. Making friends with others of different backgrounds is often one of the most fulfilling experiences of university students.

Work through conflicts as in any other interaction. Conflicts simply occur among people, whether of the same or different background. If you are afraid of making a mistake when interacting with someone from a different background, you might avoid interaction altogether—and thus miss the benefits of diversity. Nothing risked, nothing gained. If you are sincere and respect the other, there is less risk of a misunderstanding occurring. If a conflict does occur, work to resolve it as you would any other tension with another person, as described earlier.

Take a Stand against Prejudice and Hate

Unfortunately, prejudice and hate still exist in Canada, even on university campuses. In addition to racial prejudice, some people are also prejudiced against women, people with disabilities, older adults, LGBTQ individuals—virtually all groups that can be characterized as “different.” All campuses have policies against all forms of prejudice and discriminatory behaviors. But it is not enough for only university administrators to fight prejudice and hate—this is a responsibility for all good citizens who take seriously the shared value of equality for all people. So what can you as a university student do?

- **Decide that it does matter.** Prejudice threatens us all, not just the particular group being discriminated against in a specific incident. Don't stand on the sidelines or think it's up to the people who may be victimized by prejudice or hate to do something about it. We can all do something.
- **Talk with others.** Communication has great value on campuses. Let others know how you feel about any acts of prejudice or hatred that you witness. The more everyone openly condemns such behavior, the less likely it is to reappear in the future. This applies even if you hear another student telling a racist joke or putting down the opposite sex—speak up and tell the person you find such statements offensive, or question where they heard that or why they think that's true. You don't want that person to think you agree with them. Speaking up can be difficult to do, but it can be done tactfully. People can and do learn what is acceptable in a diverse environment.
- **Report incidents you observe.** If you happen to see someone spray-painting a hateful slogan, for example, be a good citizen and report it to the appropriate campus office or the police.
- **Support student groups working for change.** There is a great tradition of university students banding together to help solve social problems. Show your support for groups and activities that celebrate diversity and condemn prejudice. Even if you are a shy, quiet person, your attendance at a parade or gathering lends support. Or you can write a letter to the editor in a student newspaper, help hand out leaflets for an upcoming rally, or put up posters on campus. Once you become aware of such student activities on campus, you'll find many ways you can help take a stand and [become an ally](#) if you have [privilege](#) (e.g., racial, socio-economic, or gender privilege).
- **Engage in anti-oppressive actions.** Consider what powers you have to avoid marginalizing, silencing, or taking away the power of others. For example, speak out against bigotry when you witness it; give

opportunities to others where you can; don't generalize actions or thoughts to a whole group; and don't dominate conversations — listen and learn as well.

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2.3 Campus Groups

Learning Objectives

Describe several benefits of participating in campus life by participating in organized groups and campus activities.

List ways that you can learn about groups and activities on your own campus.

List ways that you can balance curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The university social experience includes organized campus groups and activities. Participating in organized activities requires taking some initiative; you can't be passive and expect these opportunities to come knocking on your door.

Benefits

The active pursuit of a stimulating life through organized groups on campus offers many benefits:

- **Organized groups and activities speed your transition into your new life.** New students can be overwhelmed by their studies and every aspect of a new life, and they may be slow to build a new life. Rather than waiting for it to come along on its own, you can immediately begin broadening your social contacts and experiences by joining groups that share your interests.
- **Organized groups and activities help you to experience a much greater variety of social life than you might otherwise.** New students often tend to interact more with other students their own age and with similar backgrounds—this is just natural. But if you simply go with the flow and don't actively reach out, you are much less likely to meet and interact with others from the broader campus, such as upper-level students who have much to share from their years on campus.
- **Organized groups and activities help you to gain new skills, whether technical, physical, intellectual, or social.** Such skills may find their way into your résumé when you next seek a job or your application for a scholarship or other future educational opportunity. Employers and others like to see well-rounded students with a range of proficiencies and experiences.
- **Organized groups and activities are fun, and a way to stay healthy and relieve stress.** Exercise and physical activity are essential for health and well-being, and many organized activities, such as campus recreational sports leagues, offer a good way to keep moving.

Participating in Groups and Activities

University campuses offer a wide range of clubs, organizations, and other activities open to all students. University administrators view this as a significant benefit and work to promote student involvement in such groups. When you made your decision to attend your university, you likely received printed materials or studied the university's Web site and saw many opportunities. But you may have been so busy attending to academic matters that you haven't thought of these groups since. It's a good time now to check out the possibilities:



Figure 2-7: Check bulletin boards on campus to learn about cultural events

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/denverjeffrey/458846298/> Permission: CC BY-ND 2.0

- Browse the [University of Saskatchewan website](#), where you're likely to find links to pages for student clubs and organizations.
- Watch for club fairs, open houses, and similar activities on campus. Especially near the beginning of the year, an activity fair may include tables set up by many groups to provide students with information. Talk with the representatives from any group in which you may be interested.
- Look for notices on bulletin boards around campus. Student groups really do want new students to join, so they usually try to post information where you can find it.
- Stop by the appropriate university office, such as the student affairs or student activities office or cultural center.
- If you are looking for a group with very specialized interests, check with the academic offices of departments where many students with that interest may be majoring.
- Consider a wide variety of organizations. Some are primarily social; some are political or activist; some are based on hobbies (photography, chess, equestrianism, bird watching, gaming, programming); some involve the arts (instrumental music, choral singing, painting, improvisational theatre, creative writing); some are forms of physical recreation (rock climbing, ballroom dancing, archery, table tennis, team sports); some focus on volunteerism (tutoring other students, community service projects, food drives); and others are related to academic or intellectual pursuits (nursing club, math club, chess club, engineering club, debate club, student literary magazine). For a full list of available student groups at the University of Saskatchewan, visit the [Student Groups page](#).
- Consider other forms of involvement and roles beyond clubs. Gain leadership experience by running for office in student government, volunteering to write for the student newspaper, or applying for a residence hall support position.
- If the University of Saskatchewan doesn't have a group focused on a particular activity you enjoy yourself, think about starting a new club. Visit the [University of Saskatchewan Students' Union](#) to get started.

Whatever your interests, don't be shy about checking out a club or organization. Take chances and explore. Attending a meeting or gathering is not a commitment; you're just going the first time to see what it's like, and you have no obligation to join. Keep an open mind as you meet and observe other students in the group, especially if you

don't feel at first like you fit in: remember that part of the benefit of the experience is to meet others who are not necessarily just like everyone you already know.

Exercise: Explore Your Interests for University Clubs and Organizations

Write things you may be interested in doing with others in each of these categories.

Clubs Related to Hobbies and Personal Interests	Sports, Exercise, Physical Fitness	Interests Related to Your Major Area of Study	Purely for Fun
creative writing group	hiking	political studies — debate	gaming

Balancing the Curricular and Extra-Curricular

For all the benefits of an active social and campus life, too much of any good thing can also cause trouble. If you join too many groups, or if you have limited time because of work and family commitments, you may spend less time with your studies—with negative results. Here are some guidelines for finding a good balance between your curricular and extracurricular lives:

- Don't join too many organizations or clubs. Most advisors suggest that one or two regular activities are the maximum that most students can handle.
- Work on your time management skills. Plan ahead for study time when you don't have schedule conflicts. If you have a rich social life, study in the library or places where you won't be tempted by additional social interaction with a roommate, family member, or others passing by.
- Don't be afraid to say no. You may be active in a club and have plenty of time for routine activities, but someone may ask you to spend extra time organizing an upcoming event just when you have a major paper deadline coming up. Sometimes you have to remember the main reason you're in university and just say you can't do it because you have to get your work done.
- If you really can't resolve your time conflicts, seek help. Talk with your advisor or a university counselor. They'll help you get back on track.

Chapter 3: Physical and Mental Health



Figure 3-1:

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/synergybyjasmine/6841772337/>

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What you're doing now in terms of personal health will have a significant influence on your academic performance, and, via setting healthy habits early, on your long-term health.

Considerable research has demonstrated that the basic elements of good health—nutrition, exercise, not abusing substances, stress reduction—are important for preventing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases, known to be the causes of nearly two thirds of deaths worldwide (The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)60648-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)60648-6)). The key risk factors for these non-communicable diseases are high blood pressure, smoking, high BMIs, low physical activity levels, alcohol consumption, and poor diet.

Wellness is more than just avoiding disease, however. Wellness involves feeling good in every respect — in mind and spirit as well as in body. Good health habits also offer the benefits of increased energy; better focus; less stress; more resilience; less lost time due to colds, flu, infections and other illnesses; more restful sleep; and improved mental health.

3.1 Activity and Exercise

Learning Objectives

- List the physical and mental health benefits of regular exercise.
- Plan a program of regular exercise that you enjoy and can maintain.



Figure 3-2: Most universities offer students a free or low-cost gym membership. Grab a friend and make a routine of getting some exercise between classes, even if only for 30 minutes. University of Saskatchewan Flickr: "Physical Activity Complex (PAC) gym cardio centre", <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/5263272283/in/album-72157636130538285/> Permission: CC BY 2.0

Exercise is good for both your body and mind. Indeed, physical activity is almost essential for good health and university success. The physical benefits of regular exercise include ^[1]

- Improved fitness for the whole body
- Greater cardiovascular fitness and reduced disease risk
- Increased physical endurance
- Stronger immune system, providing more resistance to disease
- Lower cholesterol levels, reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease
- Lowered risk of developing diabetes
- Weight maintenance or loss

Also important to students, who tend to be under a lot of stress, are the mental and psychological benefits [\[2\]](#):

- Stress reduction
- Improved mood, with less anxiety and depression
- Improved ability to focus mentally
- Better sleep

For these reasons, it's important for university students to engage in physical activity regularly. Like good nutrition and getting enough sleep, exercise is a key habit that contributes to overall wellness.

With aerobic exercise, your heart and lungs are working hard enough to improve your cardiovascular fitness. This generally means moving fast enough to increase your heart rate and breathing. To realize health benefits of physical activity, try to achieve at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous levels of aerobic physical activity in a week^[3]. You don't even have to go to the gym to fulfill this minimum; you can simply take a brisk walk daily between class times or study sessions, and climb the stairs rather than take the elevator. You can also try the seven-minute workout created by the Human Performance Institute in Orlando, Florida; researchers Brett Klika and Chris Jordan developed a high-intensity workout using only body weight as resistance (see DOI: 10.1249/FIT.0b013e31828cb1e8). They recommend aerobic and resistance training session lasting about seven minutes, but that can be repeated up to three times if you are wanting more exercise. The sample workout included in their article includes jumping jacks, wall sits, pushups, step-ups, squats, tricep dips, planks, running in place, lunges, and side planks. If you are wanting other workouts, simply google "HICT workouts," but be sure to get clearance from your doctor, and direction from someone who knows how to do the exercises safely and properly!

If you really enjoy exercise and are motivated, you may exercise as often as six days a week, but take at least one day of rest. When you're first starting out, or if you've been inactive for a while, take it gradually, and let your body adjust between sessions. If you feel sharp pain in any activity, stop or cut back (see Johns Hopkins Medicine's [advice](#) for differentiating between good and bad pain). The way to build up strength and endurance is through a plan that is consistent and gradual.

For exercise to have aerobic benefits, try to keep your heart rate in the target heart rate zone for at least twenty to thirty minutes. The target heart rate is 60 percent to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate, which can be calculated as 220 minus your age. For example, if you are 24 years old, your maximum heart rate is calculated as 196, and your target heart rate is 118 to 166 beats per minute. If you are just starting an exercise program, stay at the lower end of this range and gradually work up over a few weeks. "Additional Resources" below includes an online calculator that estimates your target heart rate depending on your present level of fitness.

Enjoy It!

Most important, find a type of exercise or activity that you enjoy—or else you won't stick with it. This can be as simple and easy as a brisk walk or slow jog through a park or across campus. Swimming is excellent exercise, but so is dancing. Think about what you like to do and explore activities that provide exercise while you're having fun. If you tire of your chosen activities, try something new.

Do whatever you need to make your chosen activity enjoyable. Many people listen to music or a podcast, watch a show, or read when using workout equipment. Try different activities to prevent boredom. Exercising with a friend can be more enjoyable and keeps you both accountable. Some people like their activity to do double duty. For example, a paper route gives you some exercise twice a week, and it makes you a little bit of money; walking or running while listening to an [educational podcast](#) related to your studies helps to enrich your learning while working toward your exercise quota.

You can also learn to stay motivated using exercise equipment. Wearable activity trackers are a popular way to track your progress to help stay active throughout the week.

Often the biggest obstacle to getting enough exercise, many students would likely agree, is a lack of time. Actually, we all have the time, if we manage it well. Build exercise into your weekly schedule on selected days. Eventually, you'll find that regular exercise actually saves you time because you're sleeping better and concentrating better. Time you used to fritter away is now used for activity that provides many benefits.

Campus Activities Can Help

The University of Saskatchewan has resources to make exercise easier and more enjoyable for their students. Take a look around and think about what you might enjoy. The [Physical Activity Centre](#) on campus offers exercise equipment, and regularly schedules yoga, aerobic, or spin classes. You don't have to be an athlete to enjoy casual sports such as playing tennis or shooting hoops with a friend. If you like more organized team sports, try intramural sports, organized through [Campus Rec](#).

Public Health Agency of Canada. (n.d.). *Canada's Physical Activity Guide*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/resources/CPAG.pdf> ↵

Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). *Benefits of Good Mental Health*. Retrieved from:

http://toronto.cmha.ca/mental_health/benefits-of-good-mental-health/ ↵

Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. (n.d.). *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines*. Retrieved from:

http://csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP_PAGuidelines_adults_en.pdf ↵

3.2 Sleep

Learning Objectives

Explain why students need adequate sleep to succeed in university.

Determine how much sleep you need.

Change your habits and routines in ways to ensure you get the sleep you need.

Like good nutrition and exercise, adequate sleep is crucial for wellness and success. Sleep is particularly important for students because there seem to be so many time pressures—to attend class, study, maintain a social life, and perhaps work—that most university students have difficulty getting enough. Yet sleep is critical in order to focus effectively at school. In a multi-year survey of students at 21 Canadian universities, 28.4% reported that sleep difficulties affected their academic performance ([ACHA National College Health Assessment II, Canadian Reference Group, 2016](#)).

The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep



Figure 3-3: Sharing a dorm room can make for some sleepless nights. Have a talk with your roommate about times that you'll need sleep. Source: "Show suite in the College Quarter undergraduate student residences" <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/5533311068/in/album-72157616131590356/> Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

You may not realize the benefits of sleep, or the problems associated with being sleep deprived, because most likely you've had the same sleep habits for a long time. Or maybe you know you're getting less sleep now, but with all the changes in your life, how can you tell if some of your stress or problems studying are related to not enough sleep?

On the positive side, a healthy amount of sleep has the following benefits^[1]:

- Improves your mood during the day
- Improves your memory and learning abilities
- Gives you more energy
- Strengthens your immune system

In contrast, not getting enough sleep over time can lead to a wide range of health issues and student problems. Sleep deprivation can have the following consequences:

- Affects mental health and contributes to stress and feelings of anxiety, depression, and general unhappiness (see
- Causes sleepiness, difficulty paying attention in class, and ineffective studying
- Weakens the immune system, making it more likely to catch colds and other infections
- Increases the risk of accidents (such as while driving)
- Contributes to weight gain

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

Most adults need around eight hours of sleep per night^[2]. Some say they need much less than that, but often their behavior during the day shows they are actually sleep deprived. Some genuinely need only about six hours a night, but that's rare; only 5% of people have the genetic mutation that allows for this, and these people are thought to have more "efficient" sleep (see DOI: 10.1126/science.1174443). So how much sleep do you actually need?

There is no simple answer, in part because the quality of sleep is just as important as the number of hours a person sleeps. Sleeping fitfully for nine hours and waking during the night is usually worse than seven or eight hours of good sleep, so you can't simply count the hours. Do you usually feel rested and alert all day long? Do you rise from bed easily in the morning without struggling with the alarm clock? Do you have no trouble paying attention to your instructors and never feel sleepy in a lecture class? Are you not continually driven to drink more coffee or caffeine-heavy "power drinks" to stay attentive? Are you able to get through work without feeling exhausted? If you answered yes to all of these, you likely are in that 10 percent to 15 percent of university students who consistently get enough sleep.

How to Get More and Better Sleep

You have to allow yourself enough time for a good night's sleep, so schedule at least eight hours for sleeping every night. If you still don't feel alert and energetic during the day, try increasing this to nine hours. Keep a sleep journal, and within a couple weeks you'll know how much sleep you need and will be on the road to making new habits to ensure you get it.

Myths about Sleep

- **Having an alcoholic drink or two helps me sleep better.** *False:* Although you may seem to fall asleep more quickly, alcohol makes sleep less restful, and you're more likely to awake in the night.
- **Exercise before bedtime is good for sleeping.** *False:* Exercise wakes up your body, and it may be some time before you unwind and relax. Exercise earlier in the day, however, is beneficial for sleep.
- **It helps to fall asleep after watching television or surfing the Web in bed.** *False:* Rather than helping you unwind, these activities can engage your mind and make it more difficult to get to sleep. Exposure to light from screens can affect your sleep, too.

Tips for Success: Sleep

- Avoid nicotine, which can keep you awake—yet another reason to stop smoking.
- Avoid caffeine for six to eight hours before bed. Caffeine remains in the body for three to five hours on the average, much longer for some people. Remember that many soft drinks contain caffeine.
- Don't eat in the two to three hours before bed. Avoid alcohol before bedtime. While it can initially make you sleepy, you are more likely to wake up during the night.
- Take shorter naps during the day. Limit your naps to 20 minutes or less to avoid a negative effect on your nighttime sleep.
- Exercise earlier in the day (at least several hours before bedtime).
- Try to get to bed and wake about the same time every day—your body likes a routine.
- Make sure the environment is conducive to sleep: dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
- Use your bed only for sleeping, not for studying, watching television, or other activities. Going to bed will become associated with going to sleep.
- Establish a pre-sleep, winding-down routine, such as taking a hot bath, listening to soothing music, or reading (not a textbook).

If you can't fall asleep after ten to fifteen minutes in bed, it's better to get up and do something else rather than lie there fitfully for hours. Do something you find restful (or boring). Read, or listen to a recorded book. Go back to bed when you're sleepy.

If you frequently cannot get to sleep or are often awake for a long time during the night, you may be suffering from insomnia, a medical condition. Resist the temptation to try over-the-counter sleep aids. If you have tried the tips listed here and still cannot sleep, talk with your health-care provider or visit the student health clinic. Many remedies are available for those with true, persistent sleep problems.

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. (2012). *Why is Sleep Important?* Retrieved from:
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/why> ↗

University of Saskatchewan Student Health Services. (2016). *Sleep*. Retrieved from:
<https://students.usask.ca/articles/sleep.php> ↗

3.3 Substance Use and Abuse

Learning Objectives

Define the terms “substance,” “abuse,” and “addictive.”

Describe physical and mental effects associated with smoking and frequent or heavy drinking.

List the risks of using illicit drugs.

Know how to get help if you have a substance use habit to break.

“Substance” is the word health professionals use for most things you might take into your body besides food. When people talk about substances, they often mean drugs—but alcohol and nicotine are also drugs and are considered substances.

Substances—any kind of drug—have effects on the body and mind. People use these substances for their effects. But many substances have negative effects, including being physically or psychologically addictive. Be aware of any substance’s effects on your health and on your life as a student, and make smart choices.

Smoking and Tobacco

Why Start, and Why Is It So Hard to Stop?

Everyone knows smoking is harmful to one’s health, and that smoking causes cancer and lung and heart disease. Most adult smokers continue smoking not because they really think it won’t harm them but because it’s very difficult to stop.

Many young smokers think there is plenty of time to quit later. Social smokers, who may have a cigarette only occasionally with a friend, usually think they won’t develop a habit. But nicotine is a very addictive drug.

Here is some good news: stopping smoking brings immediate health benefits, and the benefits get better over time. Just twenty minutes after quitting, your heart rate drops. After two weeks to three months, your heart attack risk begins to drop and your lung function begins to improve. After one year, your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker’s. And every year your health continues to improve^[1].

Tips for Stopping Smoking

Stopping isn’t easy. Many ex-smokers say it was the hardest thing they ever did.

However, you know it’s worth the effort. And it’s easier if you think it through and make a good plan. There’s lots of help available. Before you quit, the National Cancer Institute suggests you START with these five important steps^[2]:

S = Set a quit date.

T = Tell family, friends, and coworkers that you plan to quit.

A = Anticipate and plan for the challenges you’ll face while quitting.

R = Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your home, car, and work.

T = Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit.

To get ready, download this booklet to help you quit smoking; “[On the road to Quitting](#)”, published by Health Canada.

A lot of people are not able to stop smoking by themselves, so don’t feel bad if you aren’t successful the first try. Ask your doctor about other ways to stop. Maybe nicotine-replacement therapy is what you need. Maybe you need

prescription medication. Stop by the [Student Health Services](#) at the University of Saskatchewan and learn about smoking cessation programs. Your doctor and other health professionals at your school have a lot of experience helping people—they can help you find what works for you.

What's the Big Deal about Alcohol?



Figure 3-4: Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/51845556@N00/2528634692/>
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Drinking, and binge drinking, have been normalized as part of university life. But don't assume that everyone in university is drinking and partying like they do in the movies! Most university students report drinking at least some alcohol at some point in time—and even those who do not drink are often affected by others who do. A report on university students in Canada, with data from 32 universities every two years between 2008 and 2016, shows an interesting contrast in the perception of how much their peers are drinking versus how much they were actually drinking: students assumed that only 3.5 percent of students had never used alcohol, but the true number was close to 16 percent; they also assumed that 43 percent of students had used alcohol within the last 10-29 days, but only 13 percent had ([American College Health Association National College Health Assessment II, Canadian Reference Group](#)).

Like everything else that affects your health and happiness—eating, exercise, use of other substances—drinking is a matter of personal choice. Like most decisions we all face, there are trade-offs. The most that anyone can reasonably ask of you is to be smart in your decisions. That means understanding the effects of alcohol and deciding to take control.

Students at the University of Saskatchewan have put themselves on the map when it comes to alcohol awareness. [What's Your Cap?](#) is a student-made web resource that seeks to “raise awareness and knowledge of the risks involved with the over consumption of alcohol and promote a culture of moderation on the University of Saskatchewan campus.”

The goal of this resource is not to preach against drinking. You'll be able to learn more about the effects of alcohol on the body and mind. You'll learn about responsible drinking versus high-risk drinking. You'll be able to access resources that will help you think about your own attitudes and learn coping strategies to help prevent or manage a problem.



Know when to put a lid on drinking.

Figure 3-5: The What's Your Cap? website includes survey results from U of S students, sharing how much they actually drink. Source: <http://www.whatsurcap.ca/about-us/our-supporters/> Permission: University of Saskatchewan.

How Much Alcohol Is Too Much?

There's no magic number for how many drinks a person can have and how often. If you're of legal drinking age, you may not experience any problems if you have one or two drinks from time to time. According to Health Canada, 'heavy drinking' occurs when a man consumes 5 or more drinks, or a woman consumes 4 or more drinks, per occasion, at least once a month during the past year^[3].

As with most factors affecting your health and your well-being as a student, what's important is being honest with yourself. You're likely drinking too much or too often if

- you have missed classes or work because you were hung over or overslept after drinking;
- your friends or family members have hinted that you drink too much, or you've hidden your drinking from others;
- your drinking is causing trouble in a relationship;
- you can't remember what you did or said while drinking;
- you need to drink to have a good time at a party or with friends;
- you've driven a car when you know you shouldn't have after drinking;
- you binge drink (consume five or more drinks at a time).

Visit [Student Health Services](#) or talk with your university counselor if you need help. They understand how you feel and have a lot of experience with students feeling the same way.

Safer Drinking

If you think you may be drinking too much, then you probably are. Can you stop—or drink moderately if you are of age—and still have fun with your friends? Of course. Here are some tips for enjoying yourself in social situations when others are drinking:

- Have a buddy with whom you agree to watch and encourage one another.
- Drink only moderately (if above legal age) and slowly. Your body processes alcohol at a rate of about one drink an hour—drinking faster than that leads to problems. Sip slowly. Set yourself a limit and stick to it.
- Avoid drinking games.
- Drink a mixer without the alcohol. It tastes just as good or better.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with nonalcoholic ones to slow down the pace.
- Rather than just standing around with others who are drinking, stay active: move about and mingle with different people, dance, and so on.

Because drinking is a serious issue in many places, it's a good idea to know what to do if you find yourself with a friend who has had too much to drink:

- If they pass out after drinking a great deal of alcohol fast and cannot be awakened, get urgent medical help.
- Stay with the person if there is any risk that they can hurt themselves (driving, biking) or pass out. Take away their keys if necessary.
- An intoxicated person who falls asleep or passes out on their back is at risk of choking on vomit—roll them on their side or face down.
- Do not try to give him food or other substances in an effort to sober him up.
- Don't put them in a cold shower, which could cause unconsciousness.

A Note on Marijuana

Times have changed since the 1980's [War on Drugs](#) and the ensuing extreme levels of incarceration, which

particularly affected specific racial and socio-economic groups. While it's considered one of the least dangerous illicit drugs, marijuana is a particularly risky for young people, up to age 24, as their brains are still rapidly developing. Chronic use is also associated with cognitive problems (thinking, remembering, and paying attention), and "might also increase the risk of psychosis, depression and anxiety" ([Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction](#)). Canadian university students assume that only 8 percent of all students have never used marijuana, but close to 60 percent of all students had never used it ([American College Health Association National College Health Assessment II, Canadian Reference Group](#)).

Prescription and Illegal Drugs

While alcohol is a legal drug for those above the drinking age, most other drugs—including the use of many prescription drugs not prescribed for the person taking them—are illegal. They usually involve more serious legal consequences if the user is caught. Some people may feel there's safety in numbers: if a lot of people are using a drug, or drinking, then how can it be too bad? But other drugs carry the same risks as alcohol for health problems, a risk of death or injury, and a serious impact on your ability to do well as a student.

While society may seem to condone drinking, and the laws regarding underage drinking or being drunk in public may not seem too harsh, the legal reality of being caught with an illegal drug can impact the rest of your life. Arrest and conviction may result in being expelled from university—even with a first offense. A conviction is a permanent legal record that can keep you from getting the career you wanted.

Although the effects of different drugs vary widely, a single use of a drug can have serious effects and consequences. Even if you're told that a pill is a prescription medication whose effects are mild or safe, can you really be sure of the exact ingredients and strength of that pill? Do you fully understand how it can affect you with repeated use? Can it be addictive? Could it show up on an unexpected random drug test at work?

Any street drug can be laced and cut with other substances, and this has been particularly worrying in the last few years with deaths from [fentanyl](#) overdoses. A 2016 Health Canada data shows that fentanyl was found in thousands of street drug samples, reportedly a huge increase from the year before.

If you need help with drug abuse, don't hesitate to get help:

- Community Addiction Services in Saskatoon
https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations_services/Services/mhas/Pages/CommunityAddictionServices.aspx
- Drug Information Online: http://www.drugs.com/drug_information.html
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse: <http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Pages/default.aspx>
- Drug and Alcohol Helpline: 1-800-565-8603

Table 3.1 "Common Prescription and Illegal Drugs on Campuses" lists some of the possible effects of drugs used by university students. Good decisions also involve being honest with oneself. Why do I use (or am thinking about using) this drug? Am I trying to escape some aspect of my life (stress, a bad job, a boring class)? Could the effects of using this drug be worse than what I'm trying to escape?

Table 3.1 Common Prescription and Illegal Drugs on Campuses^[4]

Drug and Common Names	Intended Effects	Adverse Effects	Common Overdose Effects
Anabolic Steroids	Muscle development	Liver cancer, sterility, masculine traits in women and feminine traits in men, aggression, depression, mood swings	—
Barbiturates	Reduced anxiety, feelings of well-being, lowered inhibitions	Addiction; slowed pulse and breathing; lowered blood pressure; poor concentration; fatigue; confusion; impaired coordination, memory, and judgment	Coma, respiratory arrest, death

Drug and Common Names	Intended Effects	Adverse Effects	Common Overdose Effects
Prescription Opioids: OxyContin, Vicodin, Demerol	Pain relief, euphoria	Addiction, nausea, constipation, confusion, sedation, respiratory depression	Respiratory arrest, unconsciousness, coma, death
Heroin	Pain relief, anxiety reduction	Addiction, slurred speech, impaired vision, respiratory depression	Respiratory failure, coma, death
Morphine	Pain relief, euphoria	Addiction, drowsiness, nausea, constipation, confusion, sedation, respiratory depression	Respiratory arrest, unconsciousness, coma, death
Abuse of Ritalin	Stimulant: mood elevation, increased feelings of energy	Fever, severe headaches, paranoia, excessive repetition of movements and meaningless tasks, tremors, muscle twitching	Confusion, seizures, aggressiveness, hallucinations
Amphetamines: Dexedrine, Benzedrine, methamphetamine	Stimulant: mood elevation, increased feelings of energy	Addiction, irritability, anxiety, increased blood pressure, paranoia, psychosis, depression, aggression, convulsions, dizziness, sleeplessness	Convulsions, death
Cocaine, Crack	Stimulant: mood elevation, increased feelings of energy	Addiction, paranoia, hallucinations, aggression, insomnia, and depression, elevated blood pressure and heart rate, increased respiratory rate, insomnia, anxiety, restlessness, irritability	Seizures, heart attack, death
Ecstasy	Stimulant: mood elevation	Panic, anxiety, depression, paranoia, nausea, blurred vision, increased heart rate, hallucinations, fainting, chills, sleep problems	Seizures, vomiting, heart attack, death
Marijuana, Hash	Euphoria	Impaired or reduced comprehension, altered sense of time; reduced ability to perform tasks requiring concentration and coordination; paranoia; intense anxiety attacks; impairments in learning, memory, perception, and judgment; difficulty speaking, listening effectively, thinking, retaining knowledge, problem solving	—
LSD	Hallucinogen: altered states of perception and feeling	Elevated blood pressure, sleeplessness, tremors, chronic recurring hallucinations (flashbacks)	—

Health Canada. (2012). *On the road to Quitting - Guide to becoming a non-smoker*. Retrieved from: <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/healthy-living-vie-saine/non-smoker-adult-non-fumeur-adulte/index-eng.php> ↵

National Cancer Institute. (2008). *Clearing the Air: Quit Smoking Today*. Retrieved from:
<https://smokefree.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/clearing-the-air-accessible.pdf> ↵

Statistics Canada. (2015). *Heavy Drinking, 2013*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2014001/article/14019-eng.htm#n1> ↵

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3.4 Mental Health

Learning Objectives

- Explain the common causes of anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions in university-age people.
- Explain at what point you or someone you know should seek professional help.
- Describe changes you can make in your life to achieve or maintain emotional balance.
- List characteristics of healthy relationships.
- Describe the steps of conflict resolution.

Your mental health is entwined with your physical health. If you're unhappy much of the time, you are less likely to attend to your physical health; on the same note, if you are not attending to your physical health, your mental health will suffer. do as well as in university—or life—as you can if you're happy. You will feel more stress, and your health will suffer.

Still, most of us are neither happy nor unhappy all the time. Life is constantly changing, and our emotions change with it. But sometimes we experience more negative emotions than we would normally, and over a longer period of time. Things go beyond “a bad day” or “a bad week,” and our entire lives begin to suffer.

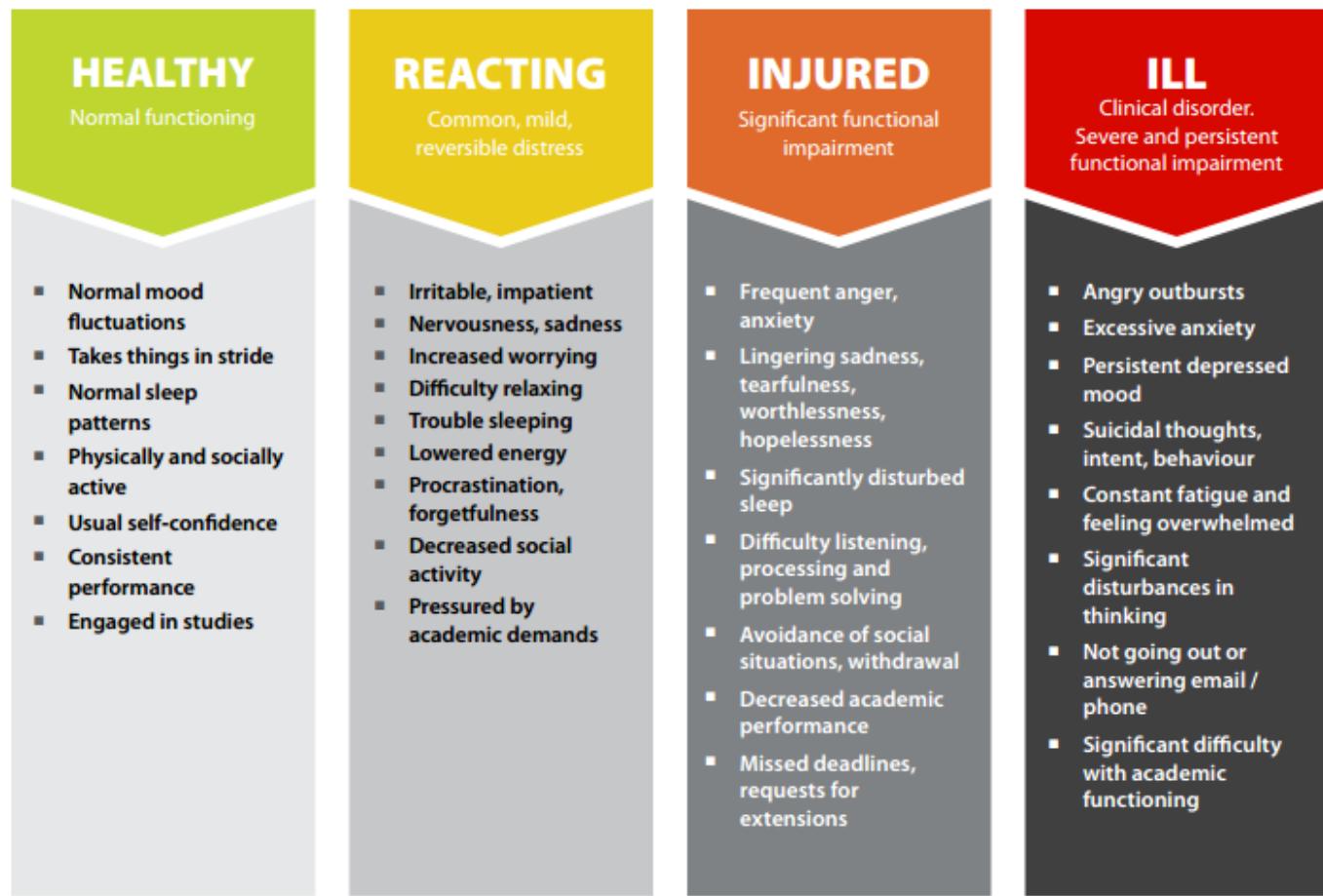
Problematic Emotions

When is an emotion problematic? Is it bad to feel anxious about a big test coming up or to feel sad after breaking up a romantic relationship?

It is normal to experience negative emotions. University students face so many demands and stressful situations that many naturally report often feeling anxious, depressed, or lonely. These emotions become problematic only when they persist and begin to affect your life in negative ways. That's when it's time to work on your emotional health—just as you'd work on your physical health when illness strikes.

Student Health and Counselling at the University of Saskatchewan has created a helpful graphic to help us to recognize the signs of distress in students:

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



SELF CARE AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

PROFESSIONAL CARE

Adapted from the Canadian Armed Forces Mental Health Continuum

Figure 3-6: The Mental Health Continuum. Source: University of Saskatchewan Student Counselling Services, used with permission.

Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most common emotions university students experience, often as a result of the demands of university, work, and family and friends. In a multi-year survey of students at 41 Canadian universities, 33% reported that anxiety and 42% reported that stress affected their academic performance ([ACHA National College Health Assessment II, Canadian Reference Group, 2016](#)).

Anxiety typically results from stress. Some anxiety is often a good thing if it leads to studying for a test, focusing on a problem that needs to be resolved, better management your time and money, and so on. Anxiety is normal, but when it is “too intense, persists, and interferes with life” (University of Saskatchewan Student Counseling Services), it’s time to seek professional help.

Anxiety is easier to deal with when you know its cause. Then you can take steps to gain control over the part of your life causing the anxiety. But anxiety can become excessive and lead to a dread of everyday situations. Note that feeling anxious is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw; rather, its causes are a combination of changes in the brain, possibly caused by environmental stress (such as trauma) and brain circuitry regulating emotions.

There are five types of more serious anxiety^{[1] [2]}:

Generalized anxiety disorder is characterized by chronic anxiety, exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is little or nothing to provoke it. The person may have physical symptoms, especially fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, irritability, sweating, and hot flashes.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions), repetitive behaviors (compulsions), or both. Repetitive behaviors such as hand washing, counting, checking, or cleaning are often performed with the hope of preventing obsessive thoughts or making them go away.

Panic disorder is characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms that may include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, or abdominal distress.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.

Social phobia (or social anxiety disorder) is a persistent, intense, and chronic fear of being watched and judged by others and being embarrassed or humiliated by one's own actions. Their fear may be so severe that it interferes with work or school, and other ordinary activities. Physical symptoms often accompany the intense anxiety of social phobia and include blushing, profuse sweating, trembling, nausea, and difficulty talking.

These five types of anxiety go beyond the normal anxiety everyone feels at some times. If you feel your anxiety is like any of these, see your health-care provider. Effective treatments are available to help you regain control, such as [cognitive-behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#), medication, and mindfulness meditation. [Free meditation sessions](#) are offered at the University of Saskatchewan via Student Health and Counselling.

Depression

Depression, like anxiety and loneliness, is commonly experienced by university students. In a multi-year survey of students at 41 Canadian universities, 21% reported that depression affected their academic performance ([ACHA National College Health Assessment II, Canadian Reference Group, 2016](#)). It may be a mild sadness resulting from specific circumstances or be intense feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Many people feel depressed from time to time because of common situations:

- Feeling overwhelmed by pressures to study, work, and meet other obligations
- Not having enough time (or money) to do the things you want to do
- Experiencing problems in a relationship, friendship, or work situation
- Feeling overweight, unhealthy, or not in control of oneself
- Feeling that your new life as a student lacks some of the positive dimensions of your former life
- Not having enough excitement in your life

Depression, like stress, can lead to unhealthy consequences such as poor sleep, overeating or loss of appetite, substance abuse, relationship problems, or withdrawal from activities that formerly brought joy. For most people, depression is a temporary state. But severe depression can have crippling effects. Not everyone experiences the same symptoms, but the following are most common^[3]:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Insomnia, early morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems

If you have feelings like this that last for weeks at a time and affect your daily life, your depression is more severe than “normal,” temporary depression. It’s time to see your health-care provider and get treatment as you would for any other illness. Also check out Student Health and Counselling’s useful workbooks on depression:

- [Understanding Depression and Developing a Plan to Overcome It](#)
- [Taking Care of Your Physical Health](#)
- [Challenging Depressive Thinking](#)
- [Managing Your Emotions](#)
- [Making Behaviour Changes](#)

Suicidal Feelings

Severe depression often makes a person feel there is no hope, and therefore many people with depression do not seek help.

In reality, though, depression can be successfully treated, but only if the person seeks help.

Suicidal feelings, which can result from severe depression, are more common in university students than in the past. In most cases, the person had severe depression and was not receiving treatment. Recognizing severe depression and seeking treatment is crucial.

Depression can strike almost anyone at any age at any kind of university. In reality, anyone can be ill with severe depression and, if not treated, become suicidal.

Following are a few of the known risk factors for suicide. For a full list, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

- Depression and other mental disorders or a substance-abuse disorder (more than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have these risk factors)
- Prior suicide attempt
- Family history of mental disorder, substance abuse, or suicide
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Exposure to the suicidal behavior of others, such as family members, peers, or media figures

Warning Signs for Suicide

- Being depressed or sad most of the time
- Having feelings of worthlessness, shame, or hopelessness about the future
- Withdrawing from friends and family members
- Giving away possessions
- Talking about suicide or death
- Being unable to get over a recent loss (broken relationship, loss of job, etc.)
- Experiencing changes in behavior, sleep patterns, or eating habits

If you or a friend is in a crisis and needs help at any time, contact one of the Saskatchewan crisis centres listed at the [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention website](#). Call for yourself or for someone you care about.

If you think someone is suicidal, do not leave him or her alone, or send someone to check on them if you are not able to get there. Try to get the person to seek immediate help by calling the hotline number. Many campuses also have twenty-four-hour resources. In an emergency, call 911. Try to ensure that the person does not have access to a firearm or other potential tool for suicide, including medications.

Achieving Emotional Balance

Emotional balance is an essential element of wellness—and for succeeding in university. Emotional balance means we balance the negative with the positive, that we can be generally happy even if we're saddened by some things.

Emotional balance starts with being aware of our emotions and understanding them. If you're feeling angry, stop and think about the real cause of your anger. Are you really angry because your friend said something about one of your bad habits, or are you angry because you haven't been able to break that habit? Are you feeling anxiety because you're worried you might not be cut out for university, or are you just anxious about that test tomorrow?

See the Emotional Help Tips for other ways you can achieve and maintain a healthy emotional balance.

Emotional Health Tips

- Accept that most emotions can't be directly controlled, but the things you do—such as getting exercise, using a relaxation technique, trying the various stress-reduction methods discussed in this chapter—do improve your emotional state.
- Connect with others. Your emotional state is less likely to change when you keep to yourself and either mull over or ignore your feelings.
- Develop your empathy for others. Empathy involves recognizing the emotions that others are feeling. You'll find yourself in better emotional balance as a result, and your relationships will improve.
- Be honest in your relationships. If you try to hide your feelings, the other person will know something is wrong and may react the wrong way.
- Understand that negative emotions are temporary. You may be feeling bad now, but it will pass in time. But if a negative feeling does last a long time, recognize that you likely need help resolving it—and that help is available.
- If you've just become a university student, know that the first term is usually the hardest. Hang in there. Once you've developed effective study habits and time management skills, each term will be easier and happier than the one before.

Loneliness



Figure 3-7: Connecting with other students can be a challenge at a large institution. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fixersuk/15454492319> Permission: CC BY-ND 2.0

University students away from home for the first time are likely to feel lonely at first. Older students may also feel lonely if they no longer see their old friends as much. People can differ in terms of the number and types of connections they need to not feel lonely: one person may need only one friend while others need to feel more connected with a group.

If you are feeling lonely, there are many things you can do to meet others and feel connected. You will likely start making new friends through going to classes, working, studying, and living in the community. But you can jump-start that process by taking active steps such as these:

- Realize you don't have to be physically with friends in order to stay connected. Many students use social media sites to stay connected with friends at other universities or in other locations. Telephone calls, Skype, instant messaging, and e-mail work for many.
- Understand that you're not alone in feeling lonely. Many others like you are just waiting for the opportunity to connect, and you will meet them and form new friendships fast once you start reaching out.
- Become involved in campus opportunities to meet others. Every university has a wide range of clubs for students with different interests. If you're not the "joiner" type, look for individuals in your classes with whom you think you may have something in common and ask them if they'd like to study for a test together or work together on a class project.
- Remember that loneliness is a temporary thing—it's only a matter of time until you make new friends.

If your loneliness persists and you seem unable to make friends, then it's a good idea to talk with your counselor or someone at the student health center. They can help.

Relationships



Figure 3-8: Good communication is essential to a strong relationship. Source: Francisco Osorio "University Life 32" https://www.flickr.com/photos/francisco_osorio/8425507378/in/album-72157632633067987/ Permission: CC BY 2.0

Romantic relationships are often as much a part of a rich emotional life for university students as for anyone else. The added challenges of university, however, especially when combined with working and maintaining a family life, often stress these relationships. You may have to give extra attention to a relationship to keep it healthy and avoid conflicts that lead to unhappiness and other problems.

Building Relationships

There are many components to a healthy relationship. Here are a few important ones to consider:

- Both partners should respect each other as individuals with unique interests and personality traits. Don't expect your partner to be just like you; embrace rather than reject differences. Both partners should be supportive of each other, and not try to change or "fix" one another.
- Both partners should trust and be honest with each other. You must feel that you can open up emotionally to the other without fear of rejection. Starting out with deceptions is certain to cause eventual problems.
- Both partners should be understanding and have empathy for each other. Good communication is essential. Many relationship problems are rooted in misunderstandings, such as when one partner doesn't make the effort to understand what the other wants or needs.

These positive characteristics of a good relationship don't happen overnight. The relationship may begin with romantic attraction and only slowly develop into a trusting, mutually supportive friendship as well. The following signs may indicate that a dating relationship is not developing well:

- Your partner is pressuring you sexually
- Your partner seems angry or abusive when you disagree about something
- Your partner seems possessive when others want to spend time with you
- Your partner treats you unequally in any way
- Your partner is emotionally or physically abusive (whether it happens once or many times)

If you recognize that any of these things are happening with someone you're dating, it may be time to reconsider, even if you still feel attraction towards them. Any relationship that begins this way is not likely to end well.

For more information on building and maintaining a healthy relationship, see the University of Saskatchewan workbook "[Guide to Healthy Relationships](#)."

Resolving Conflicts

In any friendship or relationship, conflict will eventually happen. This is just natural because people are different. If a conflict is ignored, or the partners just argue without resolving it, it may simmer and continue to cause tension, eventually weakening the relationship. It's better to take steps to resolve it.

Conflict resolution is a process of understanding what's really going on and then finding a solution. The same general steps of conflict resolution can work to solve a relationship conflict or a conflict between any people or groups because of a disagreement about anything. Following are the general principles of conflict resolution:

Allow things to cool off. It's difficult to resolve a conflict while either party is still emotional. Wait a few minutes or agree to talk about it later.

Using "I statements" rather than "you statements," each party explains what bothers him or her about the cause of the conflict. For example, don't say, "You're always playing loud music when I'm trying to study." Instead, say, "I have difficulty studying when you play loud music, and that makes me frustrated and irritable." "You statements" put the other person on the defensive and evoke emotions that make resolution more difficult.

Listen carefully to what the other person says. Then restate the message in your own words to give the other a chance to clarify their thoughts and feelings. Each party should listen to the other and restate the other's message to ensure the real issue is out on the table for discussion.

Accept responsibility for your role in the conflict, instead of blaming the other. A good example of accepting responsibility is to say, "I know I'm always studying and need the quiet. I guess that makes it hard for you to listen to your music."

Brainstorm together to find a solution that satisfies both of you. Some compromise is usually needed, but that is usually not difficult to reach when you're calm and are working together on a solution. In this example, you might compromise by going elsewhere to study at selected times when the other has friends over and wants to listen to music, and the other may compromise by agreeing to use headphones at other

times and never to play music aloud after 10 p.m.

Apologize, thank, and forgive. After reaching a resolution, emotional closure is needed to restore your relationship and end on a positive, affirming note. When appropriate, apologize for your past anger or arguing. Thank the other for being willing to compromise to resolve the conflict. In your mind, forgive the person for past misunderstandings and actions so that you do not carry any grudge into the future.

Online and Long-Distance Relationships

Can your relationship survive if you and your partner are living at a distance? This is a common issue for young people going off to university at different schools—and for older university students, too, who may move because of work or school. Sometimes the relationship survives, and sometimes it doesn't. It's important, if you're making an effort to stay together, for both partners to accept that being apart will add new pressures on the relationship. Accept also that both of you will be changing in many ways. You may naturally grow apart and decide to break up.

Yet often long-distance relationships do survive successfully. If you do decide to work to keep your relationship alive and vibrant, there are things you can do:

- Acknowledge that you are both changing, and accept and celebrate your new lives.
- Don't feel guilty about being excited by your new life, and don't try to pretend to your partner that you're always miserable because you're separated.
- Don't be upset or jealous when your partner tells you about new friends and activities—be happy that he or she seems happy. Talk about these changes and be happy for each other.
- If your relationship is solid, it is already based on trust and mutual support, which should continue to give you strength when apart.

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<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-attacks-and-anxiety-disorders.htm> ↵

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3.5 Sexual Health

Learning Objectives

Explain the importance of understanding your sexual values and making wise decisions regarding your sexuality.

Describe guidelines for sexually active university students to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.

List actions some can take to protect against sexual assault.

Sexuality is a normal, natural human drive. As an adult, your sexuality is your own business. Like other dimensions of health, however, your sexual health depends on understanding many factors involving sexuality and your own values. Your choices and behavior may have consequences. Learning about sexuality and thinking through your values will help you make responsible decisions.

Sexual Values and Decisions

It's often difficult to talk about sexuality and sex. Not only is it a very private matter for most people, but also the words *sexuality* and *sex* are often used loosely, resulting in misunderstandings. Surveys might ask you if you have been 'sexually active' in the past—but survey questions rarely specify exactly what that phrase means. To some, sexual activity includes passionate kissing and fondling, while to others the phrase means sexual intercourse. Manual and oral sexual stimulation may or may not be included in an individual's own definition of being sexually active.

We should therefore begin by defining these terms. First, sexuality is not the same as sex. Human sexuality is the capacity of humans to have erotic experiences and responses^[1]. Since all people are sexual beings, everyone has a dimension of human sexuality regardless of their behavior. Someone who practices complete abstinence from sexual behavior still has the human dimension of sexuality.

Sexuality involves gender identity, or how we see ourselves in terms of maleness and femaleness, as well as sexual orientation, which refers to the gender qualities of those to whom we are attracted. The phrase sexual activity is usually used to refer to behaviors between two (or more) people involving the genitals—but the term may also refer to solo practices such as masturbation or to partner activities that are sexually stimulating but may not involve the genitals. For the purposes of this chapter, with its focus on personal health, the term sexual activity refers to any behavior that carries a risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease. This includes vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse. The term *sexual intercourse* will be used to refer to vaginal intercourse, which also carries the risk of unwanted pregnancy. We'll avoid the most confusing term, *sex*, which in strict biological terms refers to reproduction but is used loosely to refer to many different behaviors.

There is a stereotype that sexual activity is prominent among university students. One survey found that most university students think that *other* students have had an average of three sexual partners in the past year, yet 80 percent of those answering said that they *themselves* had zero or one sexual partner. In other words, university students as a whole are not engaging in sexual activity nearly as much as they think they are. Another study revealed that about 20 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-old university students had never been sexually active and about half had not been during the preceding month.

In sum, some university students are sexually active and some are not. Misperceptions of what others are doing may lead to unrealistic expectations or feelings. What's important, however, is to be aware of your own values and to make responsible decisions that protect your sexual health.

Information and preparation are the focus of this section of the chapter. People who engage in sexual activity in the

heat of the moment—often under the influence of alcohol—without having protection and information for making good decisions are at risk for disease, unwanted pregnancy, or abuse.

What's "Safe Sex"?

It has been said that *no* sexual activity is safe because there is always some risk, even if very small, of protections failing. The phrase “safer sex” better describes actions one can take to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

About two dozen different diseases can be transmitted through sexual activity. People between the ages of 18 and 25 will have friends who have or had a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and many STIs will have no symptoms. If you are sexually active, get regular testing. The most common STIs that the U of S Student Health and Counselling has seen reported are chlamydia, genital warts, and genital herpes.

STIs range from infections that can be easily treated with medications to diseases that may have permanent health effects to HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the cause of AIDS, a fatal disease. Saskatchewan double the rate of HIV when compared to the rest of Canada, it cuts across race, class, and gender. Despite decades of public education campaigns and easy access to protection, STIs still affect many millions of people every year. Often a person feels no symptoms at first and does not realize he or she has the infection and thus passes it on unknowingly. Or a person may not use protection because of simple denial: “It can’t happen to me.”

Table 10.2 “Common Sexually Transmitted Infections” lists facts about common STIs for which university students are at risk. Although there are some differences, in most cases sexual transmission involves an exchange of body fluids between two people: semen, vaginal fluids, or blood (or other body fluids containing blood). Because of this similarity, the same precautions to prevent the transmission of HIV will prevent the transmission of other STIs as well.

Although many of these diseases may not cause dramatic symptoms, always see a health-care provider if you have the slightest suspicion of having acquired an STI. Not only should you receive treatment as soon as possible to prevent the risk of serious health problems, but you are also obligated to help not pass it on to others.

Table 10.2 Common Sexually Transmitted Infections^[2]

Infection	Incidence	Transmission	Symptoms	Risks
HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) Causing AIDS	As of 2014, 75,000 Canadians living with HIV. Rates are highest in Saskatchewan. A fifth are unaware they have it.	Contact with infected person’s blood, semen, or vaginal secretions during any sexual act (and needle sharing)	Usually no symptoms for years or decades. Later symptoms include swollen glands, weight loss, and susceptibility to infections.	Because medical treatment can only slow but not cure AIDS, the disease is currently eventually fatal.
Chlamydia Bacteria	The most common bacterial STI. 200 per 100,000 women and 360 per 100,00 men in Canada (2010), a 72% increase since 2001.	Vaginal, anal, or oral sex with infected person	Often no symptoms. Symptoms may occur 1–3 weeks after exposure, including burning sensation when urinating and abnormal discharge from vagina or penis.	In women, pelvic inflammatory disease may result, with permanent damage to reproductive tissues, possibly sterility. In men, infection may spread and cause pain, fever, and rarely sterility.

Infection	Incidence	Transmission	Symptoms	Risks
Genital HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) Causing Genital Warts	HPV is not nationally reported in Canada, but rates are known to be very high.	Genital contact, most often during vaginal and anal sex	Most infected people have no symptoms at all and unknowingly pass on the virus. Warts may appear in weeks or months.	Of the 40 types of HPV, many cause no health problems. Some types cause genital warts; others can lead to cancer. Vaccine is now recommended for girls and young women and protects against cancer-causing HPV.
Genital Herpes Virus		Genital-genital or oral-genital contact	Often no symptoms. First outbreak within 2 weeks of contact may cause sores and flu-like symptoms. Outbreaks occur less frequently over time.	Many adults experience recurrent painful genital sores and emotional distress. Genital herpes in a pregnant woman puts the infant at risk during childbirth.
Gonorrhea Bacteria	147 cases per 100,000 population in Canada (2010).	Direct contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus; ejaculation does not have to occur	Often no recognized symptoms. Burning sensation when urinating. Abnormal discharge from vagina or penis. Rectal infection symptoms include itching, soreness, or bleeding.	If untreated, it may cause serious, permanent health problems, including pelvic inflammatory disease in women with permanent damage to reproductive tissues and possibly sterility in both men and women.
Trichomoniasis Protozoa	Millions of Canadians get this infection every year, but most don't have any symptoms.	Genital contact, most often during vaginal sex	Most men have no symptoms or may have slight burning after urination or mild discharge. Some women have vaginal discharge with strong odor and irritation or itching of genital area.	Trichomoniasis makes an infected woman more susceptible to HIV infection if exposed to the virus. It may cause babies to be born early. Trichomoniasis is easily treated with medication.

Infection	Incidence	Transmission	Symptoms	Risks
Syphilis Bacteria	A sharp increase in syphilis since 2001, up 457% in ten years. 5.2 people per 100,000 in Canada (2010).	Direct contact with a syphilis sore, which occurs mainly on the external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum but can also occur on the lips and in the mouth; during vaginal, anal, or oral sex	Often no recognized symptoms for years. Primary stage symptom (a small painless sore) appears in 10–90 days but heals without treatment. Secondary stage symptoms (skin rashes, fever, headache, muscle aches) may also resolve without treatment. Late-stage symptoms occur after 10–20 years, including severe internal organ damage and nervous system effects.	Because the infected person may feel no symptoms, the risk of transmission is great. Syphilis is easy to treat in the early stages, but treatment in late stages cannot repair damage that has already occurred. Untreated, syphilis is often fatal.

The following are guidelines to protect yourself against STIs if you are sexually active:

- Know that only abstinence is 100 percent safe. Protective devices can fail even when used correctly, although the risk is small. Understand the risks of not always using protection.
- Talk with your partner in advance about your sexual histories and health. Agree that regardless of how sure you both are about not having an STI, you will use protection because you cannot be certain even if you have no symptoms.
- Use a condom. A male condom is about 98 percent effective when used correctly, and a female condom about 95 percent effective when used correctly. With both, incorrect use increases the risk. If you are unsure how to use a condom correctly and safely, do some private online reading. Good information can be found at http://www.emedicinehealth.com/how_to_use_a_condom/article_em.htm. You can watch a video demonstration of how to use condoms correctly at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teen-talk/watch/how-use-condom-26797.htm>.
- If you are sexually active with multiple partners, see your health-care provider twice a year for an STI screening even if you are not experiencing symptoms.
- Use the services of the [Sexual Health Centre Saskatoon](#) or your [USSU Pride Centre](#).

Preventing Unwanted Pregnancy

Heterosexual couples who engage in vaginal intercourse are also at risk for an unwanted pregnancy. There are lots of myths about how a woman can't get pregnant at a certain time in her menstrual cycle or under other conditions, but in fact, there's a risk of pregnancy after vaginal intercourse at any time. All couples should talk about protection before reaching the stage of having intercourse and take appropriate steps.

While a male condom is about 98 percent effective, that 2 percent failure rate is real! When not used correctly, condoms are only 82 percent effective^[3]. In addition, a couple that has been healthy and monogamous in their relationship for a long time may be less faithful in their use of condoms if the threat of STIs seems diminished. Other methods of birth control should also be considered. With the exception of the male vasectomy, at present most other methods are used by the woman. They include intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants, injected or oral contraceptives (the "pill"), hormone patches, vaginal rings, diaphragms, cervical caps, and sponges. Each has certain advantages and disadvantages.

Birth control methods vary widely in effectiveness as well as potential side effects. This is therefore a personal decision. In addition, two methods can be used together, such as a condom along with a diaphragm or spermicide, which increases the effectiveness. (Note that a male and female condom should not be used together, however, because of the risk of either or both tearing because of friction between them). Because this is such an important issue, you should talk it over with your health-care provider, or a professional at your student health center or an agency such as the [Saskatoon Sexual Health Centre](#).

In cases of unprotected vaginal intercourse, or if a condom tears, emergency contraception is an option for up to five days after intercourse. Sometimes called the “morning after pill” or “plan B,” emergency contraception is an oral hormone that prevents pregnancy from occurring. It is *not* an “abortion pill.” Planned Parenthood offices around the country can provide more information and confidential contraceptive services including emergency contraception.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. Examples include unwanted kissing, fondling, touching sexual body parts, and rape ([Sexual Assault and Consent](#), University of Saskatchewan, 2017).

Although rape has no specific provision in Canada’s Criminal Code^[4], rape is usually more narrowly defined as “unlawful sexual intercourse or any other sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part, or foreign object, without the consent of the victim.” Both are significant problems among university students.

Sexual assault is so common in our society in part because many people believe in myths about certain kinds of male-female interaction.

Rape Culture

You’ve likely heard the term “rape culture” in the last few years, but the term came about in the 1970s in reaction to society’s propensity to victim-blaming and its normalization of sexual violence. There are various behaviours associated with the normalization of rape, including slut-shaming, public apathy, the popularity of violent pornography, suspicion about victims’ honesty, objectification, stigma, rape jokes (including jokes about prison rape), denial of rape statistics, and refusal to understand the consequences and effects of rape. Rape culture is detrimental to both men and women as it stereotypes men as being naturally violent and out-of-control, and women as being “slutty” and dishonest about what they really want.

While many universities are confronting the fact that rape culture has existed on their campuses for decades, many still have not addressed it through their policies and actions. The University of Saskatchewan is undergoing the creation of a [sexual assault prevention and response strategy](#) (2016-2017).

Myths

Common myths include “It’s not really rape if the woman was dressed provocatively” and “It’s not rape unless the woman is seriously injured.” Both statements are not legally correct. Another myth or source of confusion is the idea that “Saying ‘no’ is just playing hard to get, not really ‘no.’” Those who really believe these myths may not think that they are committing assault, especially if their judgment is impaired by drugs or alcohol. Other perpetrators of sexual assault and rape, however, know exactly what they’re doing and in fact may plan to overcome their victim by using alcohol or a predator drug.

Many university administrators and educators have worked very hard to promote better awareness of sexual assault and to help students learn how to protect themselves. Yet universities cannot prevent things that happen at parties and behind closed doors.

Anyone can commit a sexual assault. Perpetrators of sexual assault fall into three categories:

- Strangers
- Acquaintances
- Dating partners

Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances or dating partners. The fault for sexual assault will always lie

with the perpetrator and never with the person assaulted. To avoid becoming a perpetrator, you must understand the concept of consent.

Consent

It's important to know that consent for sexual activity is "fundamental to any relationship and can only be given when it is *enthusiastic, voluntary, and sober*" (University of Saskatchewan "[Sexual Assault and Consent](#)," 2017). Understand that sexual assault includes any unwanted kissing, fondling, touching, or rape, whether it's between friends, sexual partners, or strangers; also, remember that alcohol or drugs can affect your judgement when determining whether these things are wanted. If you've been told that the plan is to have sex, remember that the person can change their mind at any point. Consent means that someone has said "yes." Do not push drugs or alcohol on someone, especially without their knowledge.

If You Are a Bystander

Reducing sexual assault is not only on the shoulders of the potential aggressor and the potential victim. Look out for people, especially your friends, and intervene if you can by saying something, doing something, or reporting it. Here are some ways to be a helpful bystander:

- Remember that you need to keep yourself safe, too. If you feel that your own safety is going to be compromised by intervening, call the police or campus security.
- If you see someone targeted, help them out by asking whether they want to go home or go to the restroom. This will give them a reason to leave the area.
- Get help from someone in a position of authority, such as club security, a coach, or a staff person.
- If you hear someone tell a sexist joke, a rape joke, or a demeaning comment, speak up.

Protecting Yourself

It's never your fault if you are assaulted, no matter the circumstances. Here are some tips for reducing your chances of being targeted:

- Let people (friends or family) know where you're going and what your plans are.
- If you are feeling unwell, have someone trustworthy stay with you.
- Have a party buddy who watches over you, just as you watch over them.
- Make sure you see your drinks being prepared (by a bartender or host), and keep an eye on them afterwards.
- Have a transportation plan, and carry money for a cab or bus
- Don't be embarrassed about making a scene or making noise
- If you are walking alone, try to stay on busy streets with good lighting
- Use the [Safewalk](#) service if you're studying on campus. A male and a female pair of students will walk you to your car or other transportation at night.
- If you are a woman, consider signing up for a self-defense course like [R.A.D.](#). Bring a friend if you are nervous!

Predator Drugs

In addition to alcohol, sexual predators use certain commonly available drugs to sedate women for sexual assault. They are odorless and tasteless and may be added to a punch bowl or slipped into your drink when you're not looking. These drugs include the sedatives GHB, sometimes called "liquid ecstasy," and Rohypnol, also called "roofies." Both cause sedation in small doses but can have serious medical effects in larger doses. Predator drugs are typically used at parties. Do not force or pressure people into taking drugs, and do not push alcohol on them. To avoid being victimized, the following tips to protect yourself against predator drugs (sometimes called "date rape drugs"):

- Don't put your drink down where someone else may get to it. If your drink is out of your sight for even a moment, don't finish it.
- Never accept an open drink. Don't accept a mixed drink that you did not see mixed from pure ingredients.
- Be wary of drinking from punch bowls.
- If you experience unexpected physical symptoms that may be the result of something you drank or ate, get to

an emergency room and ask to be tested.

If You Are Assaulted

If you are sexually assaulted, always talk to someone. Call the **Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) toll-free crisis line at 1-604-255-6344** for a confidential conversation, or contact [Student Health Services](#). Even if you do not report the assault to law enforcement, it's important to talk through your feelings and seek help if needed to prevent an emotional crisis.

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Chapter 4: Staying Motivated and Organized



Figure 4-1: Students Studying in the Science Library. Source: University of Saskatchewan - [Students-Library-13](#) Permission: CC BY-SA 2.0

You've already set at least one goal for yourself—to get a university education—and that you've been motivated to come this far.

This chapter looks at how to make sure that you succeed in your courses through motivational and organizational strategies. The first step is to be committed to your education. You've been motivated to start university—now you need to keep that motivation going as you target specific goals for success in your classes. Much of this has to do with attitude and managing your time effectively.

In fact, time management skills can make the difference between those who graduate from university and those who drop out. Time management is actually all about managing yourself: knowing what you want, deciding how to get what you want, and then efficiently and effectively getting it. That applies to fun things, too. In fact, you may want to think of the goal of this chapter as not just managing your time for studying but ensuring that even as you do well in your studies, you're still enjoying your life while in university.

4.1 Setting and Reaching Goals

Learning Objectives

Make short-, mid-, and long-term goals that are realistic and specific and commit to them.

Set priorities for reaching your goals as a basis for time management.

Develop an attitude for success.

Learn to use strategies for staying focused and motivated.

Network with other students to help ensure academic success.

A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions. Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final examination may completely prevent reaching that goal. That may be an extreme case, yet still a lot of university students don't reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have conflicting goals. One way to prevent problems is to think about all your goals and priorities and to learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You're also a person with individual needs and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervor, but they remain goals and are still important in your life.

Goals also vary in terms of time. Short-term goals focus on today, the next few days and perhaps the next few weeks. Mid-term goals involve plans for this school year and the time you plan to remain in university. Long-term goals may begin with graduating university and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (e.g., the kind of career you want) guide your midterm goals (getting the right education for that career), and your short-term goals (such as doing well on an exam) become steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals.

Write out your goals in Activity 1. The act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them. Follow these guidelines:

- **Goals should be realistic.** It's good to dream and to challenge yourself, but your goals should relate to your personal strengths and abilities.
- **Goals should be specific.** Don't write, "I will become a great musician"; instead, write, "I will finish my music degree and be employed in a symphony orchestra."
- **Goals should have a time frame.** You won't feel very motivated if your goal is vaguely "to finish university someday." If you're realistic and specific in your goals, you should also be able to project a time frame for reaching the goal.
- **You should really want to reach the goal.** We're willing to work hard to reach goals we really care about, but we're likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we don't feel strongly about a goal. If you're doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it's not your own personal goal—and you may have some more thinking to do about your life.

Activity 1: Personal Goals

Write your goals in the following blanks. Be sure to consider all areas of your life—consider *everything important* that you want to do between this moment and old age. (While you might aim for three to eight goals in each section, remember that everyone is unique, and you may be just as passionate about just one or two goals or more than eight.)

Short-term goals (today, this week, and this month):

Midterm goals (this year and while in university):

Long-term goals (from university on):

Priorities

Thinking about your goals gets you started, but it's also important to think about priorities. We often use the word "priorities" to refer to how important something is to us. We might think, *This* is a really important goal, and *that* is less important. Try this experiment: go back to the goals you wrote in Activity 1 and see if you can rank each goal as a 1 (top priority), 2 (middle priority), or 3 (lowest priority).

It sounds easy, but do you actually feel comfortable doing that? Maybe you gave a priority 1 to passing your courses and a priority 3 to playing your guitar. So what does that mean—that you never play guitar again, or at least not while in university? Whenever you have an hour free between class and work, you have to study because that's the higher priority? What about all your other goals—do you have to ignore everything that's not a priority 1? And what happens when you have to choose among different goals that are both number 1 priorities?

In reality, priorities don't work quite that way. It doesn't make a lot of sense to try to rank goals as *always* more or less important. The question of priority is really a question of what is more important *at a specific time*. It is important to do well in your classes, but it's also important to have a social life and enjoy your time off from studying. You shouldn't have to choose between the two—except *at any given time*. Priorities always involve time: what is most important to do *right now*. As we'll see later, time management is mostly a way to juggle priorities so you can meet all your goals.

When you manage your time well, you don't have to ignore some goals completely in order to meet other goals. In other words, you don't have to give up your life when you register for university—but you may need to work on managing your life more effectively.

But time management works only when you're committed to your goals. Attitude and motivation are very important. If you haven't yet developed an attitude for success, all the time management skills in the world won't keep you focused and motivated to succeed.



Figure 4-2: Everything starts with attitude Loozrboy Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/loozrboy/7755365008> Permission: CC BY-SA 2.0

Stay Focused and Motivated

Okay, you've got a positive, yet realistic, attitude. But you've got a lot of reading for classes to do tonight, a test tomorrow, and a paper due the next day. Maybe you're a little bored with one of your reading assignments. Maybe

you'd rather play a computer game. Uh oh—now what? Attitude can change at almost any moment. One minute you're enthusiastically starting a class project, and then maybe a friend drops by and suddenly all you want to do is close the books and relax a while, hang out with friends.

One of the characteristics of successful people is accepting that life is full of interruptions and change—and planning for it. Staying focused does not mean you become a boring person who does nothing but go to class and study all the time. You just need to make a plan.

Planning ahead is the single best way to stay focused and motivated to reach your goals. Don't wait until the night before an exam. If you know you have a major exam in five days, start by reviewing the material and deciding how many hours of study you need. Then schedule those hours spread out over the next few days—at times when you are most alert and least likely to be distracted. Allow time for other activities, too, to reward yourself for successful studying. Then when the exam comes, you're relaxed, you know the material, you're in a good mood and confident, and you do well.

Planning is mostly a matter of managing your time well, as we'll see later. Here are some other tips for staying focused and motivated:

- If you just can't focus in on what you should be doing because the task seems too big and daunting, break the task into smaller, manageable pieces. Don't start out thinking, "I need to study the next four hours," but think, "I'll spend the next thirty minutes going through my class notes from the last three weeks and figure out what topics I need to spend more time on." It's a lot easier to stay focused when you're sitting down for thirty minutes at a time.
- Remember your successes, even small successes. As you begin a project or approach studying for a test, think about your past success on a different project or test. Remember how good it feels to succeed. Know you can succeed again.
- Try not to multitask while studying. You may think that you can monitor your e-mails and send text messages while studying, but in reality, these other activities lower the quality of your studying.
- Imitate successful people. Does a friend always seem better able to stick with studying or work until they get it done? What are they doing that you're not? We all learn from observing others, and we can speed up that process by deliberately using the same strategies we see working with others. *Visualize yourself* studying in the same way and getting that same high grade on the test or paper. Also, ask them about how they do so well.
- Get the important things done first. We'll talk about managing your academic planner and to-do lists later in the chapter, but for now, to stay focused and motivated, concentrate on the things that matter most. You're about to sit down to read a chapter in a book you're not much enjoying, and you suddenly notice some clothing piled up on a chair. "I really should clean up this place," you think. "And I'd better get my laundry done before I run out of things to wear." Don't try to fool yourself into feeling you're accomplishing something by doing laundry rather than studying. Stay focused!
- Negative thinking is powerful, in both good and bad ways. While it's important to avoid spiraling into negativity that creates deep anxiety and paralyzes you from achieving your goals, remembering that to picture future obstacles can be helpful in achieving your goals, according to Kappes and Oettingen (2011). The researchers found that the students who had positive fantasies about the future had less energy to achieve their goals, though they were more relaxed and contented in the moment. The trick is to think clearly about your end goal, but to think *also* about the steps to get there and the likely and potential obstacles along the way.

Don't Go It Alone



Figure 4-3: Studying alone is very effective, but think about leveraging the benefits of studying in a group from time to time. Source: Francisco Osorio https://www.flickr.com/photos/francisco_osorio/albums/72157632633067987 Permission: CC BY 2.0

Did you study alone or with friends in high school? Because university classes are typically much more challenging, many university students discover they do better, and find it much more enjoyable, if they study with other students taking same course. This might mean organizing a study group or just getting together with a friend to review material before a test. It's good to start thinking right away about networking with other students in your classes.

If you consider yourself an independent person and prefer studying and doing projects on your own rather than with others, think for a minute about how most people function in their careers and professions, what the business world is like. Most work today is done by teams or individuals working together in a collaborative way. Very few jobs involve a person always being and working alone. The more you learn to study and work with other students now, the more skills you are mastering for a successful career.

Studying with other students has immediate benefits. You can quiz each other to help ensure that everyone understands the course material; if you're not clear about something, someone else can help teach it to you. You can read and respond to each other's writing and other work. You can divide up the work in group projects. And through it all, you can often have more fun than if you were doing it on your own.

Studying together is also a great way to start networking—a topic we'll discuss more in coming chapters. Networking has many potential benefits for your future. University students who feel they are part of a network on campus are more motivated and more successful in university.

Problem Solving: When Setbacks Happen

Even when you have clear goals and are motivated and focused to achieve them, problems sometimes happen. Accept that they *will* happen, since inevitably they do for everyone. The difference between those who succeed by solving the problem and moving on and those who get frustrated and give up is partly attitude and partly experience—and knowing how to cope when a problem occurs.

Lots of different kinds of setbacks may happen while you're in university—just as to everyone in life. Here are a few examples:

- Financial struggles
- An illness or injury
- A crisis involving family members or loved ones
- Stress related to frequently feeling you don't have enough time

- Stress related to relationship problems

Some things happen that we cannot prevent. But many other kinds of problems can be prevented or made less likely to occur. You can take steps to stay healthy. You can take control of your finances. You can learn how to build successful social relationships and get along better with your instructors, with other students, and in personal relationships. You can learn time management techniques to ensure you use your time effectively for studying.

What to do when setbacks do happen?

First, work to resolve the immediate problem:

The most important thing to do is to connect. Connect with your feelings and reconnect with your goals, and don't forget to connect with other people. Seek help when you need to. None of us gets through life alone, and it's not a sign of weakness to see your academic advisor or a university counselor if you have a problem. Analyze the problem to consider all possible solutions. An unexpected financial setback doesn't automatically mean you have to drop out of school—not when alternatives such as student loans, less expensive living arrangements, or other possible solutions may be available. Failing a midterm exam doesn't automatically mean you're going to fail the course—not when you make the effort to determine what went wrong, work with your instructor and others on an improved study plan, and use better strategies to prepare for the next test. Many students go through this, especially in their first year, and then go on to do better next time. When you've developed a plan for resolving the problem, work to follow through. If it will take a while before the problem is completely solved, track your progress in smaller steps so that you can see you really are succeeding. Every day will move you one step closer to putting it behind you.

4.2 Organizing Your Space

Learning Objectives

Recognize the importance of organizing your space to your best advantage for studying.

Avoid distractions in the space where you are studying.

Understand the myth of multitasking and prevent distractions from your personal technology.

People's moods, attitudes, and levels of work productivity change in different spaces. Learning to use space to your own advantage helps get you off to a good start in your studies. Here are a few of the ways space matters:

- **You need your own space.** This may seem simple, but everyone needs some physical area, regardless of size, that is really his or her own—even if it's only a small part of a shared space. Within your own space, you generally feel more secure and in control. If you don't have access to that at home or in your dormitory, ask around (staff and students) to find the quiet and secluded study spaces on campus. Some students prefer to study off-campus where they are less likely to run into friends and distractions; check out your public libraries and coffee shops....and bring some earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones. There are plenty of [white noise websites](#) that you can listen to one headphones, too!
- **Physical space reinforces habits.** For example, using your bed primarily for sleeping makes it easier to fall asleep there than elsewhere and also makes it a poor good place to try to stay awake and alert for studying.
- **Different places create different moods.** One study space may be bright and full of energy, with happy students passing through and enjoying themselves—a place that puts you in a good mood. But that may actually make it more difficult to concentrate on your studying. Yet the opposite—a totally quiet, austere place devoid of color and sound and pleasant decorations—can be just as unproductive if it makes you associate studying with something unpleasant. Everyone needs to discover what space works best for himself or herself—and then let that space reinforce good study habits.

What's the Best Study Space for You?

Begin by analyzing your needs, preferences, and past problems with places for studying. Where do you usually study? What are the best things about that place for studying? What distractions are most likely to occur there?

The goal is to find, or create, the best place for studying, and then to use it regularly so that studying there becomes a good habit.

- **Choose a place you can associate with studying.** Make sure it's not a place already associated with other activities (eating, watching television, sleeping, etc.). Over time, the more often you study in this space, the stronger will be its association with studying, so that eventually you'll be completely focused as soon as you reach that place and begin. Make it a pleasant-looking space so you don't dread using it. Google image search "studyspo" for some inspiring photographs of other students' study spaces!
- **Your study area should be available whenever you need it.** If you want to use your home, apartment, or dorm room but you never know if another person may be there and possibly distract you, then it's probably better to look for another place, such as a study lounge or an area in the library. Look for locations open at the hours when you may be studying. You may also need two study spaces—one in or near where you live, another on campus. Maybe you study best at home but have an hour free between two classes, and the library is too far away to use for only an hour? Look for a convenient empty classroom.



Figure 4-4: Figure out how you best like to study, whether it's in your room or at the library, in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Try to avoid studying on a couch or in bed where you may fall asleep! Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat/25167741264/in/dateposted/> Permission: CC BY 2.0

- **Your study space should meet your study needs.** You'll tire quickly if you try to write notes sitting in an easy chair or a bed (which might also make you sleepy). You need good light for reading, to avoid tiring from eyestrain. If you use a laptop for writing notes or reading and researching, you need a power outlet so you don't have to stop when your battery runs out.
- **Your study space should meet your psychological needs.** Some students may need total silence with absolutely no visual distractions; they may find a perfect study carrel hidden away on the fifth floor in the library. Other students may be unable to concentrate for long without looking up from reading and momentarily letting their eyes move over a pleasant scene. Some students may find it easier to stay motivated when surrounded by other students also studying; they may find an open space in the library or a study lounge with many tables spread out over an area. Experiment to find the setting that works best for you—and remember that the more often you use *this same space*, the more comfortable and effective your studying will become.
- **You may need the support of others to maintain your study space.** Students living at home, whether with a spouse and children or with their parents, often need the support of family members to maintain an effective study space. The kitchen table probably isn't best if others pass by frequently. Be creative, if necessary, and set up a card table in a quiet corner of your bedroom or elsewhere to avoid interruptions. Put a "do not disturb" sign on your door.
- **Keep your space organized and free of distractions.** You want to prevent sudden impulses to neaten up the area (when you should be studying), do laundry, wash dishes, and so on. Unplug a nearby telephone, turn off your cell phone, and use your computer only as needed for studying. If your e-mail or message program pops up a notice every time an e-mail or message arrives, turn off your Wi-Fi or detach the network cable to prevent those intrusions.
- **Plan for breaks.** Everyone needs to take a break occasionally when studying. Think about the space you're in and how to use it when you need a break. If in your home, stop and do a few exercises to get your blood flowing (e.g., walk around the block or do some stretching). If in the library, take a walk up a couple flights of stairs and around the stacks before returning to your study area.

- **Prepare for human interruptions.** Even if you hide in the library to study, there's a chance a friend may happen by. At home with family members or in a dorm room or common space, the odds increase greatly. Have a plan ready in case someone pops in and asks you to join them in some fun activity. Know when you plan to finish your studying so that you can make a plan for later—or for tomorrow at a set time.

The Distractions of Technology

Multitasking is the term commonly used for being engaged in two or more different activities at the same time, usually referring to activities using devices such as cell phones, smartphones, computers, and so on. Many people claim to be able to do as many as four or five things simultaneously, such as writing an e-mail while responding to an instant message (IM) and reading a tweet, all while watching a video on their computer monitor or talking on the phone. Many people who have grown up with computers consider this kind of multitasking a normal way to get things done, including studying. Even people in business sometimes speak of multitasking as an essential component of today's fast-paced world. However, it's an established fact that multitasking is a myth; watch this explanation from psychologist Dr. Ali Mattu:

Video: The Psych Show – [Multitasking Is a Myth](#) (4:45).

It is true that *some* things can be attended to while you're doing something else, such as checking e-mail while you watch television news—but only when none of those things demands your full attention. You can concentrate 80 percent on the e-mail, for example, while 20 percent of your attention is listening for something on the news that catches your attention. Then you turn to the television for a minute, watch that segment, and go back to the e-mail. But you're not actually watching the television *at the same time* you're composing the e-mail—you're toggling back and forth. In reality, the mind can focus only on one thing at any given moment. Even things that don't require much thinking are severely impacted by multitasking, such as driving while talking on a cell phone or texting.

"Okay," you might be thinking, "why should it matter if I write my paper first and then answer e-mails or do them back and forth at the same time?" **It actually takes you longer to do two or more things at the same time than if you do them separately**—at least with anything that you actually have to focus on, such as studying. That's true because each time you go back to studying after looking away to a message or tweet, it takes time for your mind to shift gears to get back to where you were. Every time your attention shifts, add up some more "downtime"—and pretty soon it's evident that multitasking is costing you a lot more time than you think. And that's assuming that your mind *does* fully shift back to where you were every time, without losing your train of thought or forgetting an important detail. It doesn't always.

The other problem with multitasking is the effect it can have on the attention span—and even on how the brain works. Research has shown that in people who constantly shift their attention from one thing to another in short bursts, the brain forms patterns that make it more difficult to keep sustained attention on any one thing^[1]. So when you really do need to concentrate for a while on one thing, such as when studying for a big test, it becomes more difficult to do even if you're not multitasking at that time. It's as if your mind makes a habit of wandering from one thing to another and then can't stop.



Figure 4-5: Multitasking makes studying much less effective. Source: <https://pixabay.com/en/book-desk-hand-handwritten-1845356/> Permission: CC0 1.0

So stay away from multitasking whenever you have something important to do, like studying. If it's already a habit for you, don't let it become worse. Manipulate your study space to prevent the temptations altogether. Turn your computer off, or shut down e-mail and messaging programs if you need the computer for studying. Turn your cell phone off—if you just tell yourself not to answer it but still glance at it each time to see who sent or left a message, you're still losing your studying momentum and have to start over again. For those who are really addicted to technology (you know who you are!), go to the library and don't take your laptop or cell phone.

In the later section in this chapter on scheduling your study periods, we recommend scheduling breaks as well, usually for a few minutes every hour. If you're really hooked on checking for messages, plan to do that at scheduled times.

What about listening to music while studying? Some don't consider that multitasking, and many students say they can listen to music without it affecting their studying. Studies are inconclusive about the positive or negative effects of music on people's ability to concentrate, probably because so many different factors are involved^[2]. But there's a huge difference between listening to your favorite music and spontaneously singing along with some of the songs and enjoying soft background music that enhances your study space the same way as good lighting and pleasant décor. Some people can study better with low-volume instrumental music that relaxes them and does not intrude on their thinking while others can concentrate only in silence. And some are so used to being immersed in music and the sounds of life that they find *total* silence more distracting—such people can often study well in places where people are moving around. The key thing is to be honest with yourself: if you're *actively* listening to music while you're studying, then you're likely not studying as well as you could be. It will take you longer and lead to less successful results.

Family and Roommate Issues

Sometimes going to the library or elsewhere is not practical for studying, and you have to find a way to cope in a shared space.

Part of the solution is time management. Agree with others on certain times that will be reserved for studying; agree to keep the place quiet, not to have guests visiting, and to prevent other distractions. These arrangements can be

made with a roommate, spouse, and older children. If there are younger children in your household and you have child-care responsibility, it's usually more complicated. You may have to schedule your studying during their nap time or find quiet activities for them to enjoy while you study.

The key is to plan ahead. You don't want to find yourself, the night before an exam, in a place that offers no space for studying.

Finally, accept that sometimes you'll just have to say "no." If your roommate or a friend often tries to engage you in conversation or suggests doing something else when you need to study, be firm but polite as you explain that you just *really* have to get your work done first. Students who live at home may also have to learn how to say no to parents or family members. Remember, you can't be everything to everyone all the time.

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4.3 Organizing Your Time

Learning Objectives

Discover your time personality and know where your time goes.

Understand the basic principles of time management and planning.

Practice time management strategies to help ensure your academic success.

When you know what you want to do, why not just sit down and get it done? The millions of people who complain frequently about “not having enough time” would love it if it were that simple!

Time and Your Personality

People’s attitudes toward time vary widely. One person seems to be always rushing around but actually gets less done than another person who seems unconcerned about time and calmly goes about the day. Since there are so many different “time personalities,” it’s important to realize how you approach time.

Start by trying to figure out how you spend your time during a typical week, using Activity 2.

Activity 2: Where Does the Time Go?

See if you can account for a week’s worth of time. For each of the activity categories listed, make your best estimate of how many hours you spend in a week. (For categories that are about the same every day, just estimate for one day and multiply by seven for that line.)

Category of activity	Number of hours per week
Sleeping	
Eating (including preparing food)	
Personal hygiene (i.e., bathing, etc.)	
Working (employment)	
Volunteer service or internship	
Chores, cleaning, errands, shopping, etc.	
Attending class	
Studying, reading, and researching (outside of class)	
Transportation to work or school	
Getting to classes (walking, biking, etc.)	
Organized group activities (clubs, church services, etc.)	

Category of activity	Number of hours per week
Time with friends (include television, video games, etc.)	
Attending events (movies, parties, etc.)	
Time alone (include television, video games, surfing the Web, etc.)	
Exercise or sports activities	
Reading for fun or other interests done alone	
Talking on phone, e-mail, Facebook, etc.	
Other—specify: _____	
Other—specify: _____	

Now use your calculator to total your estimated hours. Is your number larger or smaller than 168, the total number of hours in a week? If your estimate is higher, go back through your list and adjust numbers to be more realistic. But if your estimated hours total fewer than 168, don't just go back and add more time in certain categories. Instead, ponder this question: *Where does the time go?* We'll come back to this question.

Plan your tasks according to time of day. When you need to concentrate, such as when writing a class paper, are you more alert and focused in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Do you concentrate best when you look forward to a relaxing activity later on, or do you study better when you've finished all other activities? Do you function well if you get up early—or stay up late—to accomplish a task? How does that affect the rest of your day or the next day? Understanding this will help you better plan your study periods.

Think about your time analysis in Activity 2. People who estimate too high often feel they don't have enough time. They may have time anxiety and often feel frustrated. People at the other extreme, who often can't account for how they use all their time, may have a more relaxed attitude. They may not actually have any more free time, but they may be wasting more time than they want to admit with less important things. Yet they still may complain about how much time they spend studying, as if there's a shortage of time.

People also differ in how they respond to schedule changes. Some go with the flow and accept changes easily, while others function well only when following a planned schedule and may become upset if that schedule changes. If you do not react well to an unexpected disruption in your schedule, plan extra time for catching up if something throws you off. This is all part of understanding your time personality.

Another aspect of your time personality involves time of day. If you need to concentrate, such as when writing a class paper, are you more alert and focused in the morning, afternoon, or evening? Do you concentrate best when you look forward to a relaxing activity later on, or do you study better when you've finished all other activities? Do you function well if you get up early—or stay up late—to accomplish a task? How does that affect the rest of your day or the next day? Understanding this will help you better plan your study periods.

While you may not be able to change your "time personality," you can learn to manage your time more successfully. The key is to be realistic. How accurate is the number of hours you wrote down in Activity 2? The best way to know how you spend your time is to record what you do all day in a time log, every day for a week, and then add that up.

There are numerous apps out there for tracking time using your mobile device. You can also simply create a spreadsheet or a table with the following categories:

- date and time
- activity
- duration
- your feeling about it (energy level, emotions)

- how valuable the activity is in relation to your goals and priorities (high? medium? low? none?).

Once you've logged your time for a week, assess it by highlighting the number of low to zero value activities you took part in, and how many of your activities sapped your energy or negative emotions. Next, make a plan to reduce, delegate, or eliminate these activities. For example, if you are the only one doing dishes at home, think about delegating this to others in the household by creating a roster. After that, look at the most challenging tasks, and note what times of day you had low energy, to determine the best time to fit in a challenging task according to your energy level (for instance, someone who is energetic in the morning might use that time to get some exercise or work on an essay). Finally, note how often you are switching tasks. It can be inefficient to check your emails as they arrive in your inbox when you can devote a chunk of time each day to focus and respond to them instead.

Time Management



Figure 4-6: Spend time tracking what you do each day and night. This will help you identify where to save time in the long term! Source: <https://pixabay.com/en/brightness-clock-computer-217920> 0/ Permission: CC0 1.0

Time management for successful university studying involves these factors:

- Determining how much time you need to spend studying
- Knowing how much time you actually have for studying and increasing that time if needed
- Being aware of the times of day you are at your best and most focused
- Using effective long- and short-term study strategies
- Scheduling study activities in realistic segments
- Using a system to plan ahead and set priorities
- Staying motivated to follow your plan and avoid procrastination

For every hour in the classroom, university students should spend, on average, about two hours on that class,

counting reading, studying, writing papers, and so on. If you're a full-time student with fifteen hours a week in class, then you need another thirty hours for rest of your academic work. That forty-five hours is about the same as a typical full-time job. If you work part time, time management skills are even more essential. These skills are still more important for part-time university students who work full time and commute or have a family. To succeed in university, virtually everyone has to develop effective strategies for dealing with time.

Many students begin university not knowing this much time is needed, so don't be surprised if you underestimated this number of hours. Remember this is just an average amount of study time—you may need more or less for your own courses. To be safe, and to help ensure your success, add another five to ten hours a week for studying.

Look back at the number of hours you wrote in Activity 2 for a week of studying. Do you have two hours of study time for every hour in class? Many students begin university not knowing this much time is needed, so don't be surprised if you underestimated this number of hours. Remember this is just an average amount of study time—you may need more or less for your own courses. To be safe, and to help ensure your success, add another five to ten hours a week for studying.

To reserve this study time, you may need to adjust how much time you spend in other activities.

Chapter 5: Reading to Learn in University



Figure 5-1: You'll become a stronger reader as you work your way through university. Source: Francisco Osorio "[University Life 246](#)" Permission: CC BY 2.0

Think back to a high school history or literature class. Those were probably the classes in which you had the most reading. You would be assigned a chapter, or a few pages in a chapter, with the expectation that you would be discussing the reading assignment in class. In class, the teacher would guide you and your classmates through a review of your reading and ask questions to keep the discussion moving. The teacher usually was a key part of how you learned from your reading.

If you have been away from school for some time, it's likely that your reading has been fairly casual. While time spent with a magazine, blog, or newsfeed can be important, it's not the sort of concentrated reading you will do much of in university.

In university, you will be expected to read much more. For each hour you spend in the classroom, you will be expected to spend an average of two or more additional hours studying between classes, and most of that will be reading. Assignments will be longer (a couple of chapters is common, compared with perhaps only a few pages in high school) and much more difficult. University textbook authors write using many technical terms and include complex ideas. Many university authors include research, and some textbooks are written in a style you may find dry. You will also have to read from a variety of sources: your textbook, ancillary materials, primary sources, academic journals, periodicals, and online postings. Your assignments in literature courses will be complete books, possibly with convoluted plots and unusual wording or dialects, and they may have so many characters you'll feel like you need a scorecard to keep them straight.

In university, most instructors do not spend much time reviewing the reading assignment in class. Rather, they expect that you have done the assignment before coming to class and understand the material. The class lecture or discussion is often based on that expectation. Tests, too, are based on that expectation. This is why active reading is so important—it's up to you to do the reading and comprehend what you read.

Note: It may not always be clear on an instructor's syllabus, but a reading assignment listed on any given class date should be read *before* coming to class on that date.

This chapter will provide some insights into university-level reading strategies, including effective reading of textbooks and other materials.

5.1 Reading Textbooks

Learning Objectives

Review the parts of a typical textbook.
Use questions to read more deeply and actively.

Open your text to the assigned pages. What is the chapter title? Is the chapter divided into sections? What are the section titles? Which sections are longer? Are there any illustrations? What are they about? Illustrations in books cost money, so chances are the author and publisher thought these topics were particularly important, or they would not have been included. How about tables? What kinds of information do they show? Are there bold or italicized words? Are these terms you are familiar with, or are they new to you? Are you getting a sense for what is important in the chapter? Why did the author choose to cover certain ideas and to highlight specific ideas with graphics or boldface fonts? What do they tell you about what will be most important for you in your course? What do you think your instructor wants you to get out of the assignment? Why?



Figure 5-2:Get to know your textbook before diving into a specific

Anatomy of a Textbook

Textbooks are designed to help you learn, not just to present information. They differ from other types of academic publications intended to present research findings, advance new ideas, or deeply examine a specific subject. Textbooks have many features worth exploring because they can help you understand your reading better and learn more effectively. In your textbooks, look for the elements listed in the table below.

Table 5.1 Anatomy of a Textbook

Textbook Feature	What It Is	Why You Might Find It Helpful
Preface or Introduction	A section at the beginning of a book in which the author or editor outlines its purpose and scope, acknowledges individuals who helped prepare the book, and perhaps outlines the features of the book.	You will gain perspective on the author's point of view, what the author considers important. If the preface is written with the student in mind, it will also give you guidance on how to "use" the textbook and its features.
Foreword	A section at the beginning of the book, often written by an expert in the subject matter (different from the author) endorsing the author's work and explaining why the work is significant.	A foreword will give you an idea about what makes this book different from others in the field. It may provide hints as to why your instructor selected the book for your course.
Author Profile	A short biography of the author illustrating the author's credibility in the subject matter.	This will help you understand the author's perspective and what the author considers important.
Table of Contents	A listing of all the chapters in the book and, in most cases, primary sections within chapters.	The table of contents is an outline of the entire book. It will be very helpful in establishing links among the text, the course objectives, and the syllabus.
Chapter Preview or Learning Objectives	A section at the beginning of each chapter in which the author outlines what will be covered in the chapter and what the student should expect to know or be able to do at the end of the chapter.	These sections are invaluable for determining what you should pay special attention to. Be sure to compare these outcomes with the objectives stated in the course syllabus.
Introduction	The first paragraph(s) of a chapter, which states the chapter's objectives and key themes. An introduction is also common at the beginning of primary chapter sections.	Introductions to chapters or sections are "must reads" because they give you a road map to the material you are about to read, pointing you to what is truly important in the chapter or section.

Textbook Feature	What It Is	Why You Might Find It Helpful
Applied Practice Elements	Exercises, activities, or drills designed to let students apply their knowledge gained from the reading. Some of these features may be presented via Web sites designed to supplement the text.	These features provide you with a great way to confirm your understanding of the material. If you have trouble with them, you should go back and reread the section. They also have the additional benefit of improving your recall of the material.
Chapter Summary	A section at the end of a chapter that confirms key ideas presented in the chapter.	It is a good idea to read this section before you read the body of the chapter. It will help you strategize about where you should invest your reading effort.
Review Material	A section at the end of the chapter that includes additional applied practice exercises, review questions, and suggestions for further reading.	The review questions will help you confirm your understanding of the material.
Endnotes and Bibliographies	Formal citations of sources used to prepare the text.	These will help you infer the author's biases and are also valuable if doing further research on the subject for a paper.

Use your critical thinking skill of questioning what the author is saying. Turn the title of each major section of the reading into a question and write it down in your left column of your notes. For example, if the section title is "The End of the Industrial Revolution," you might write, "What caused the Industrial Revolution to end?" If the section title is "The Chemistry of Photosynthesis," you might write, "What chemical reactions take place to cause photosynthesis, and what are the outcomes?" Note that your questions are related to the kind of material you are hearing about in class, and they usually require not a short answer but a thoughtful, complete understanding. Finally, also in the left column, jot down any keywords that appear in boldface. You will want to discover their definitions and the significance of each as you read.

5.2 Reading in Other Contexts

Learning Objectives

Recognize strategies for reading special types of material and special situations, such as the following:

- Mathematics texts
- Science texts
- Social studies texts
- Primary sources
- Foreign language texts
- Online reading

While the active reading process outlined earlier is very useful for most assignments, you should consider some additional strategies for reading assignments in other subjects.

Mathematics Texts

Mathematics present unique challenges in that they typically contain a great number of formulas, charts, sample problems, and exercises. Follow these guidelines:

- Do not skip over these special elements as you work through the text.
- Read the formulas and make sure you understand the meaning of all the factors.
- Substitute actual numbers for the variables and work through the formula.
- Make formulas real by applying them to real-life situations.
- Do all exercises within the assigned text to make sure you understand the material.
- Since mathematical learning builds upon prior knowledge, do not go on to the next section until you have mastered the material in the current section.
- Seek help from the instructor, math centre, or teaching assistant if need be.

Reading Graphics

You read earlier about noticing graphics in your text as a signal of important ideas. But it is equally important to understand what the graphics intend to convey. Textbooks contain tables, charts, maps, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, and the newest form of graphics—Internet URLs for accessing text and media material. Many students are tempted to skip over graphic material and focus only on the reading. Don't. Take the time to read and understand your textbook's graphics. They will increase your understanding, and because they engage different comprehension processes, they will create different kinds of memory links to help you remember the material.

To get the most out of graphic material, use your critical thinking skills and question why each illustration is present and what it means. Don't just glance at the graphics; take time to read the title, caption, and any labeling in the illustration. In a chart, read the data labels to understand what is being shown or compared. Think about projecting the data points beyond the scope of the chart; what would happen next? Why?

Table 5.2 “Common Uses of Textbook Graphics” shows the most common graphic elements and notes what they do best. This knowledge may help guide your critical analysis of graphic elements.

Table 5.2: Common Uses of Textbook Graphics

Number of Hours Read					
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
At the library	2	2	6	2	1
In my room	3	4	1	5	1
Total	5	6	7	7	2

Figure 5-3: Table

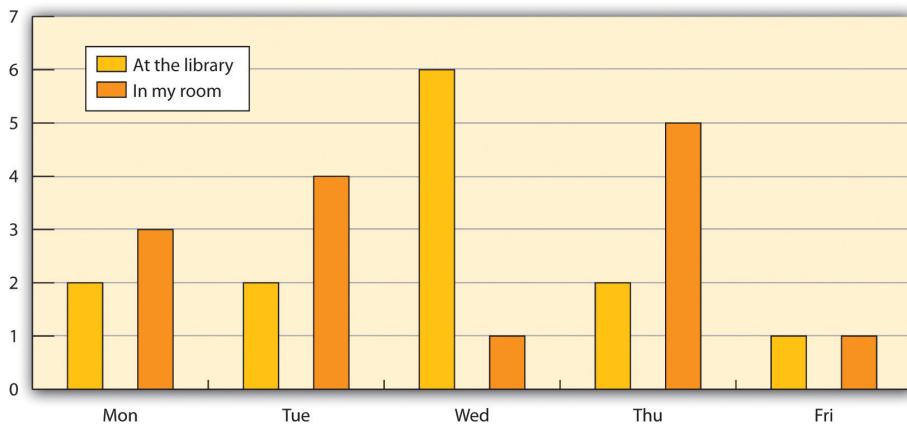


Figure 5-4: Bar Chart

Most often used to present raw data. Understand what is being measured. What data points stand out as very high or low? Why? Ask yourself what might cause these measurements to change.

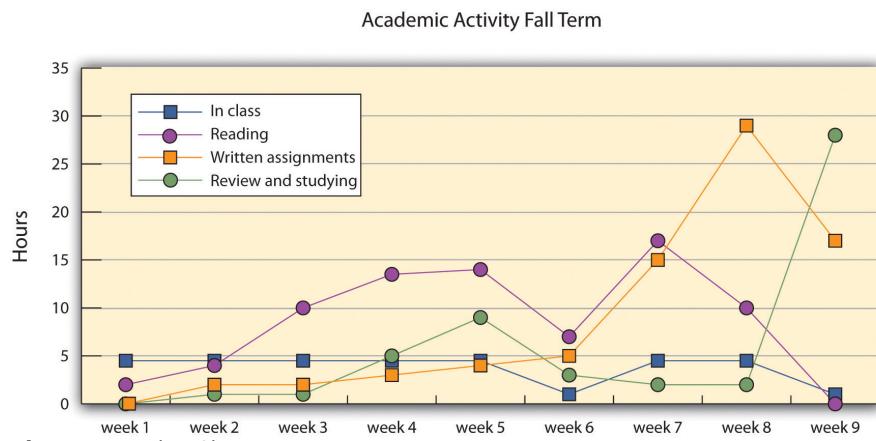
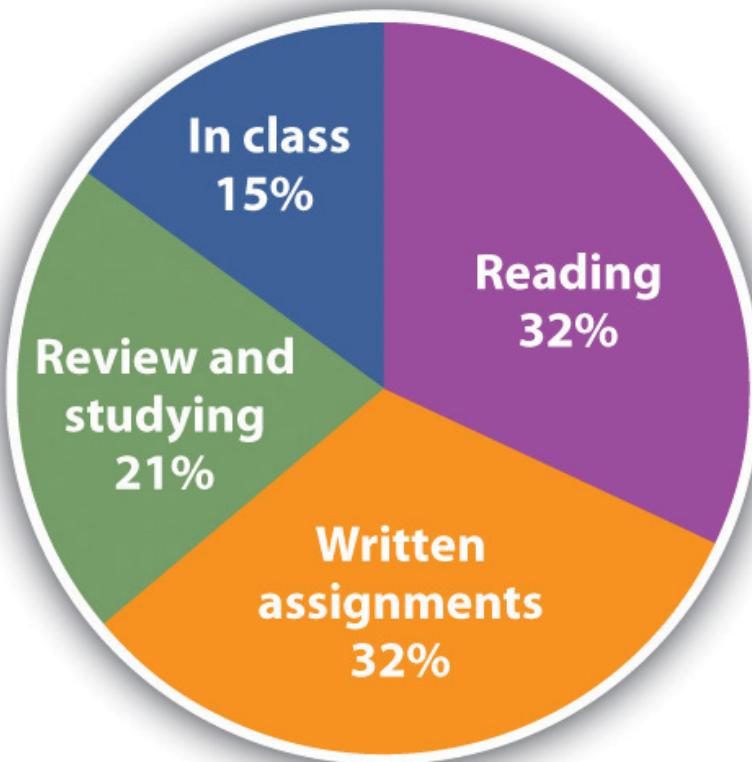


Figure 5-5: Line Chart

Used to compare quantitative data or show changes in data over time. Also can be used to compare a limited number of data series over time. Often an illustration of data that can also be presented in a table.

Used to illustrate a trend in a series of data. May be used to compare different series over time.

Academic Activity



Used to illustrate the distribution or share of elements as a part of a whole. Ask yourself what effect a change in distribution of factors would have on the whole.

Figure 5-6: - Pie Chart

Effect of Postwar Suburban Development City of Oak Hills



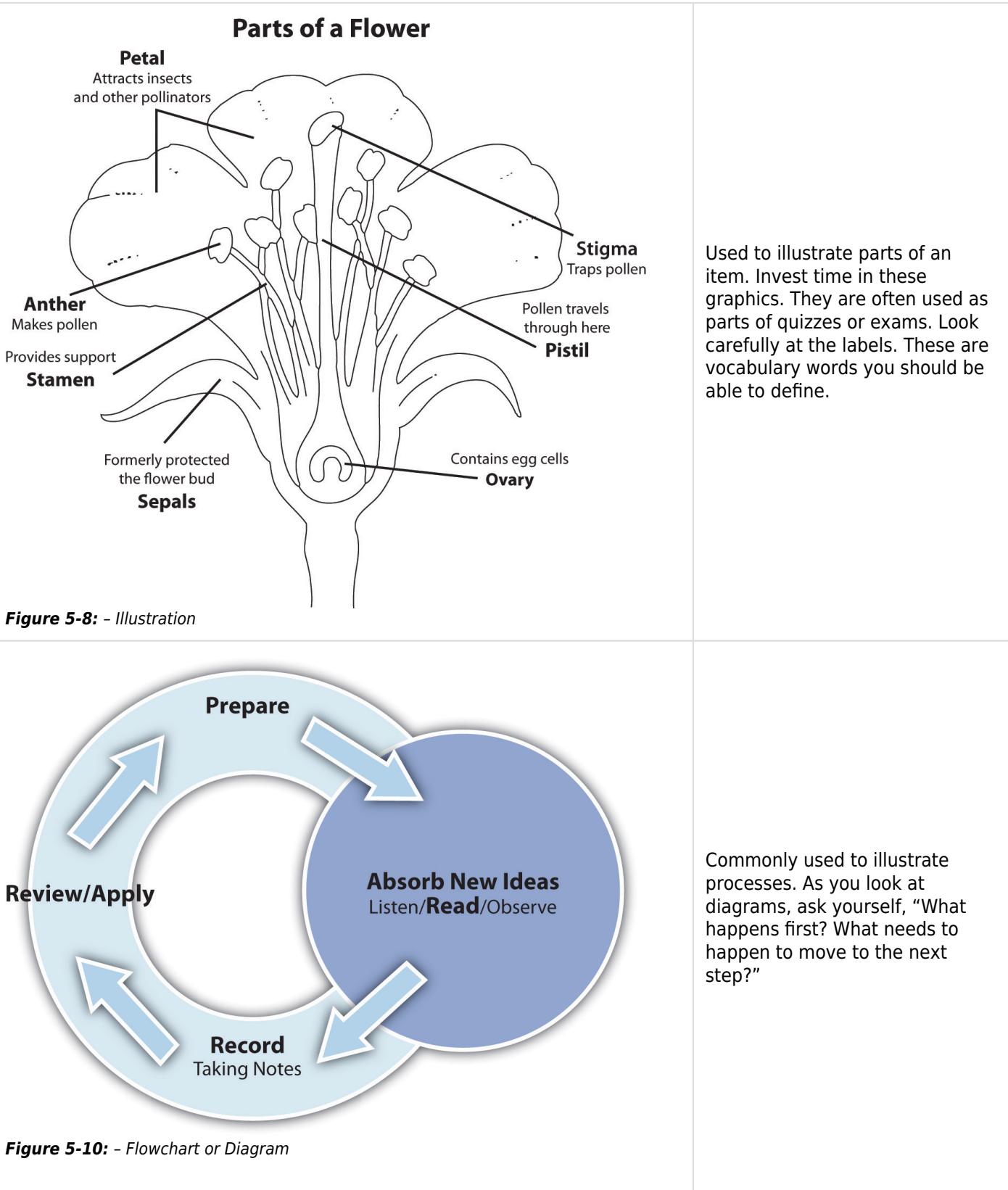
Used to illustrate geographic distributions or movement across geographical space. In some cases can be used to show concentrations of populations or resources. When encountering a map, ask yourself if changes or comparisons are being illustrated. Understand how those changes or comparisons relate to the material in the text.

Figure 5-7: - Map



Figure 5-8:
Theodore Roosevelt - [Wikipedia Commons](#) - Public Domain

Used to represent a person, a condition, or an idea discussed in the text. Sometimes photographs serve mainly to emphasize a significant person or situation, but photographs can also be used to make a point. Ask yourself if the photograph reveals a biased point of view.



Source: College Success, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2015. CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

Scientific Texts

Science occurs through the experimental process: posing hypotheses, and then using experimental data to prove or disprove them. When reading scientific texts, look for hypotheses and list them in the left column of your notes

pages. Then make notes on the proof (or disproof) in the right column; in scientific studies these are as significant as the questions you ask for other texts. Think critically about the hypotheses and the experiments used to prove or disprove them. Ask:

- Can the experiment or observation be repeated? Would it reach the same results?
- Why did these results occur? What kinds of changes would affect the results?
- How could you change the experiment design or method of observation? How would you measure your results?
- What are the conclusions reached about the results? Could the same results be interpreted in a different way?

Social Sciences Texts

Social sciences texts, such as those for history, economics, and political science classes, often involve interpretation where the authors' points of view and theories are as important as the facts they present. Put your critical thinking skills into overdrive when you are reading these texts. As you read, ask yourself questions such as the following:

- Why is the author using this argument?
- Is it consistent with what we're learning in class?
- Do I agree with this argument?
- Would someone with a different point of view dispute this argument?
- What key ideas would be used to support a counterargument?

Record your reflections in the margins and in your notes.

Social science courses often require you to read primary source documents. Primary sources include documents, letters, diaries, newspaper reports, financial reports, lab reports, and records that provide firsthand accounts of the events, practices, or conditions you are studying. Start by understanding the author(s) of the document and his or her agenda. Infer their intended audience. What response did the authors hope to get from their audience? Do you consider this a bias? How does that bias affect your thinking about the subject? Do you recognize personal biases that affect how you might interpret the document?

Foreign Language Texts

Reading texts in a foreign language is particularly challenging—but it also provides you with invaluable practice and many new vocabulary words in your “new” language. It is an effort that really pays off. Start by analyzing a short portion of the text (a sentence or two) to see what you do know. Remember that all languages are built on idioms as much as on individual words. Do any of the phrase structures look familiar? Can you infer the meaning of the sentences? Do they make sense based on the context? If you still can’t make out the meaning, choose one or two words to look up in your dictionary and try again. Look for longer words, which generally are the nouns and verbs that will give you meaning sooner. Don’t rely on a dictionary (or an online translator); a word-for-word translation does not always yield good results. For example, the Spanish phrase “Entre y tome asiento” might correctly be translated (word for word) as “Between and drink a seat,” which means nothing, rather than its actual meaning, “Come in and take a seat.”

Reading in a foreign language is hard and tiring work. Make sure you schedule significantly more time than you would normally allocate for reading in your own language and reward yourself with more frequent breaks. But don’t shy away from doing this work; the best way to learn a new language is practice, practice, practice.

Note to English-language learners: If you do struggle with the level of English reading skills required of university students, check for university resources that may be available to ESL (English as a Subsequent Language) learners. As an additional language learner, you possess a rich linguistic experience that many Canadian-born students would envy. You simply need to account for the difficulties you’ll face and (like anyone learning a new language) practice, practice, practice.

Online Reading

When accessing materials online, you should ask additional questions in order to fully understand the assignment.

Go online and you can find many articles on just about any subject. The following five steps will help you understand the “story behind the story” in online materials and also evaluate the reliability of the material, especially if this is a reading you selected yourself for research or independent work:

Look at the URL, the web address to begin to gain information about the reliability and intentions of the site. Start with the page publisher (the words following the “www” or between the “http//” and the first single backslash): have you heard of this source before? If so, would you consider it a reliable source for the kind of material you are about to read? For example, you might happen upon an article about cholesterol with this URL: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1516>. The page publisher identifier shows this is the website of the American Heart Association, a reputable source of health information. Now consider the domain type in the URL, which follows the period after the publisher: “.com” and “.biz” are used by commercial enterprises; “.org” is normally used by nonprofit organizations; “.ca” is a Canadian country domain, often used by Canadian universities; and “.edu” is reserved for American educational institutions. None of these is necessarily bad or good, but you can begin to understand the motivation for publishing this material. For example, a different article about cholesterol on a pharmaceutical company’s website might be biased toward treatment of high cholesterol with a drug that the company makes.

Look at the page’s perimeter and the “masthead” at the top of the page. What name is listed there? Is it the same entity as the one listed as the publisher in the URL? Are you dealing with a company or the website of an individual—and how might that affect the quality of the information on this site? What can you learn from poking around with navigation tabs or buttons: what do they tell you about the objective of the website? Look for a tab labeled “About Us” or “Biography”; those pages will give you additional background on the writer. Check the quality of the information. Based on what you learned earlier, ask yourself if the information from this website is reliable for your needs. If the material you are reading was originally published elsewhere, was that publication reputable, such as an academic or peer-reviewed journal or a well-known newspaper? If you need the most up-to-date information, check the bottom of the page, where a “last modified” date may be shown. Does the author reference reliable sources? What links does the author offer to other websites? Are they active? Are they reputable?

Consider what others are saying about the site. Does the author offer references, reviews, or quotations about the material? Check blogs to see what other people think of the author or website by searching for the title of the article together with the word “review” or “blog.”

Trust your impressions about the material. You have recently been exposed to related material in your class and textbooks. What does your “gut” say about the material? Ask yourself why the website was created. (To inform and provide data or facts? To sell something? To promote a cause? To parody?) If you are unsure of the quality of the information, don’t use it or check first with your instructor or university librarian before you do.

Chapter 6: Using Creative Thinking



Figure 6-1: Creativity can be learned. Source: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/blur-cellphone-close-up-device-196646/> Permission: CC0 1.0

Developing your ability to think creatively will be an asset as you come up with insights and ideas for papers; participate in undergraduate research projects; work out solutions to problems; and generate novel ways to remember and analyze.

Once you enter a profession, creativity will help you. Generating new ideas, fostering innovation, and developing processes or plans to implement them are something that cannot be easily farmed out or automated. Businesses and organizations usually want problem solvers, not just instruction-followers. Developing your creative thinking skills will position you for lifelong success in whatever career you choose.

6.1 Searching for "Aha!"

Learning Objectives

Name some myths about creative thinking.

Practice guidelines for creating ideas.

Follow rules and directions to create effectively.

Explain group creativity when it comes to effective brainstorming.

Creativity can be learned.

Creative thinking is the ability to look at things from a new perspective to come up with fresh solutions to problems. It is a deliberate process that allows you to think in ways that improve the likelihood of generating new ideas or thoughts.

Let's start by addressing a couple of myths:

- **Creativity is an inherited skill.** Creativity is not something people are born with but is a skill that is developed over time with consistent practice. It can be argued that people you think were “born” creative because their parents were creative, too, are creative simply because they have been practicing creative thinking since childhood, stimulated by their parents’ questions and discussions.
- **Creativity is free-form thinking.** While you may want to free yourself from all preconceived notions, there is a recognizable structure to creative thinking. Rules and requirements do not limit creative thinking—they provide the scaffolding on which truly creative solution.

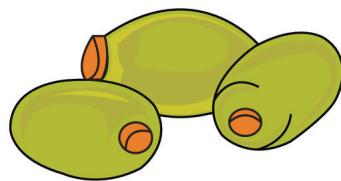
Creative thinking involves coming up with new or original ideas; it is the process of seeing the same things others see but seeing them differently. Creative thinking utilizes skills such as examining associations and relationships, flexibility of thought, elaboration and modification of ideas, imagery, and metaphorical thinking. Throughout the creative thinking process, you will stimulate your curiosity, come up with new approaches to things, and have fun.

Tips for Creative Thinking

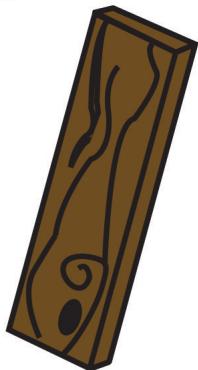
- **Feed your curiosity.** Read. Read books, newspapers, magazines, blogs—anything at any time. When online, follow links just to see where they will take you. Go to events or productions that you might not normally attend. Take advantage of guest lectures and other public presentations.
- **Gather information.** Creative people make a habit of gathering information as they never know when they might put it to good use; creativity is often as much about rearranging known ideas as it is about creating a completely new concept. The more “known ideas” you have been exposed to, the more options you’ll have for combining them into new concepts.
- **Develop your flexibility** by looking for a second right answer. Throughout school we have been conditioned to come up with the right answer; the reality is that there is often more than one “right” answer. Examine all the possibilities. Look at the items in [Figure 6-2](#). Which is different from all the others?



a. Apple



b. Olives



c. Board



d. Clams

- Source: College Success, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2015. [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

If you chose C, you're right; you can't eat a board. Maybe you chose D; that's right, too—clams are the only animal on the chart. B is right, as it's the only item you can make oil from, and A can also be right; it's the only red item. Each option can be right depending on your point of view.

Life is full of multiple answers, and if we go along with only the most obvious answer, we would be in danger of losing the context for our creative ideas. The value of an idea can only be determined by comparing it with another. Multiple ideas will also help you to generate new approaches by combining elements from a variety of "right" answers. In fact, the greatest danger to creative thinking is to have only one idea. Always ask yourself, "What's the other right answer?"

- **Combine old ideas in new ways.** When King C. Gillette registered his patent for the safety razor, he built on the idea of disposable bottle caps, but his venture didn't become profitable until he toyed with a watch spring and came up with the idea of how to manufacture inexpensive (therefore disposable) blades. Bottle caps and watch springs are far from men's grooming materials, but Gillette's genius was in combining those existing but unlikely ideas. Train yourself to think "out of the box." Ask yourself questions like, "What is the most ridiculous solution I can come up with for this problem?" or "If I were transported by a time machine back to the 1930s, how would I solve this problem?" You may enjoy watching competitive design, cooking, or fashion shows (*Top Chef*, *Chopped*, *Project Runway*, etc.); they are great examples of combining old ideas to make new, functional ones.
- **Think metaphorically.** Metaphors are useful to describe complex ideas, and are useful in making problems more familiar and in stimulating possible solutions. Observe how metaphors are used throughout communication and think about why those metaphors are effective. Have you ever noticed that the financial business uses water-based metaphors (*cash flow*, *frozen assets*, *liquidity*) and that meteorologists use war terms (*fronts*, *wind force*, *storm surge*)? What kinds of metaphors are used in your area of study?
- **Ask.** A creative thinker always questions the way things are: Why are we doing things this way? What were the objectives of this process and the assumptions made when we developed the process? Are they still valid? What if we changed certain aspects? What if our circumstances changed? Would we need to change the process? How? Get in the habit of asking questions—lots of questions.

- **Don't worry about fitting in.** A [study](#) by Sharon Kim (2012) found that creative people tend to stand out, and have often become creative in response to social isolation. No longer worrying about what others think can be freeing.
- **Go for a walk.** Walking, especially outside, can significantly stimulate your creativity. [Oppenzo & Schwartz](#) (2014) found that in three studies, 81-100% of the college students studied were more creative when walking than sitting, and in another of their studies, 100% came up with "at least one novel high-quality analogy," but only 50% seated inside could do the same.

There are many ways to stimulate and grow your creativity, but the most important takeaway is to *practice*. Some of these suggestions (reading more widely or walking every day) are simple enough and will have other benefits beyond improving your creativity. For now, just pick a couple of the above suggestions to fold into your everyday life!

Chapter 7: Preparing for and Taking Tests



Figure 7-1:

Source: <https://www.eduardpunset.es/17291/general/sorpresa> Permission: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Many of our daily activities are measurements of progress toward mastery of skills or knowledge. We welcome these opportunities as both work and fun. But when these opportunities are part of our academic life, we often dread them and rarely feel any sense of fun. In reality, however, academic tests are similar to real-life tests in the following ways:

- They help us measure our progress toward mastery of a particular skill.
- They are not a representation of how smart, talented, or skilled we are but rather are a measurement only of what we know about a specific subject at a specific point in time.
- They are extraordinary learning opportunities.

Take a look at the learning cycle in [Figure 6.2 “The Learning Cycle: Review and Apply”](#). In this chapter, we cover reviewing and applying the material you learn; preparing for and taking exams is the practical application of this phase.

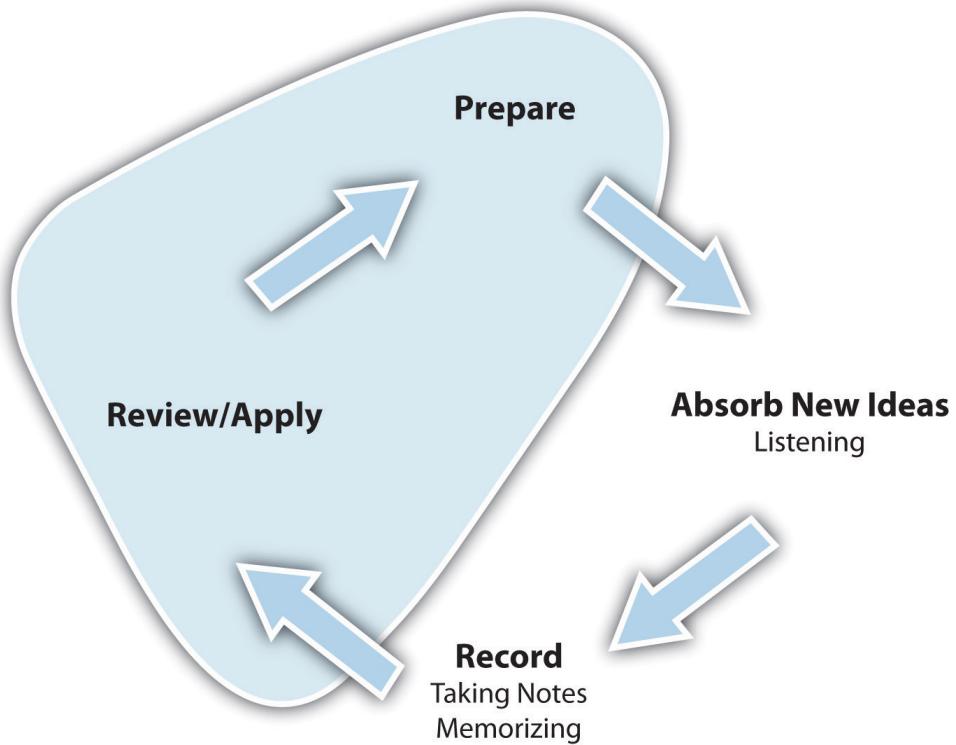


Figure 7.2: The Learning Cycle: Review and Apply. *Source: College Success, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2015. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

The end and the beginning of the learning cycle are both involved in test taking, as we'll see in this chapter. This chapter explains the best study habits for effective review and strategies for successful application of your knowledge in specific types of tests and exams. It also covers how the review and application processes set you up for additional learning.

7.1 Studying to Learn

Learning Objectives

Structure daily study sessions.

List some key study strategies for exams (and for learning).

Form and participate in study groups.

You have truly learned material when you can readily recall it and actually use it—on tests or in real-life situations. Effective studying is your most important tool to combat test anxiety, and, more importantly, effective studying helps you to master the material and be able to apply it when needed.

Effective studying is an ongoing process of reviewing course material. To be effective, studying is something you do as part of an ongoing learning process, throughout the duration of the term, not just a few days before an exam.

Structuring Your Everyday Study Sessions

Studying happens everyday, and begins after each class or assignment when you review your notes. Each study session should involve three steps:

Gather your learning materials. Take time to merge your class notes with your reading notes: how do they complement each other? What aspects of the material are you unsure about? Do you need to reread a part of your text? Write down any questions you have, and during office hours, pay a visit to your instructor, tutorial leader, or lab instructor. It's better to get your questions answered soon after you are exposed to the material for three reasons: (1) the question or doubt is fresh in your mind; (2) instructors usually build their lessons on material already presented; and (3) you avoid irritating your instructors by asking last-minute questions before an exam.

Apply or visualize. What does this material mean to you? How will you use this new knowledge? Try to find a way to apply it in your own life or thoughts. If you can't use the knowledge right away, visualize yourself using the knowledge to solve a problem or visualize yourself teaching the material to other students.

Cement your knowledge. If you use the Cornell note-taking method, cover up the right side of your notes with a piece of paper, leaving the questions in the left column exposed. Test yourself by trying to answer your questions without referring to your notes. How did you do? If you are unsure about anything, look up the answer and write it down right away. Don't let a wrong answer be the last thing you wrote on a subject, because you will most likely continue to remember the wrong answer.

Studying in Course Units

At the end of each unit, or at least every two weeks or so, use your notes and textbook to write an outline or summary of the material in your own words. After you have written the summary or outline, go back and reread your outline from the prior unit followed by the one you just wrote. Does the new one build on the earlier one? Do you feel confident you understand the material?

Studying before the Exam

At least a week before a major exam, review what the instructor has mentioned about the exam so far. Has the instructor said anything about what types of questions will be included? If you were the instructor, what questions would you ask on an exam? Challenge yourself to come up with some really tough open-ended questions. Think

about how you might answer them. Be sure to go to any review sessions offered through the class or a student support service (often, these are called “Structured Study Sessions”).

Now review your course unit outlines, and then re-read the sections of your notes that are most closely associated with expected exam questions. Pay special attention to those items the instructor emphasized during class. Read key points aloud and write them down on index cards. Make flash cards to review in your downtime, such as when you’re waiting for a bus or for a class to start.

More Tips for Success

- **Schedule a consistent study-review time for each course at least once a week**, in addition to your class and assignment time. Keep to that schedule as rigorously as you do your class schedule. Use your study time to go through the steps outlined earlier; this is not meant to be a substitute for your assignment time. Spacing out your studying consistently over the term — rather than cramming in the week or two ahead of your exams — will have a dramatic effect on your ability to synthesize and memorize what you’re learning.
- **Minimize distractions.** Turn off your cell phone and get away from social media, television, other nearby activities, and chatty friends or roommates. All of these can cut into the effectiveness of your study efforts. Multitasking and studying don’t mix.
- **If you will be studying for a long time, take short breaks at least once an hour.** Get up, stretch, breathe deeply, go for a short walk, and then get back to work. If you keep up with your daily assignments and schedule weekly review sessions for yourself—and keep them—there should be almost no need for long study sessions.

Studying in Groups



Figure 7-3: Book a study room on campus to work in a group. Study rooms often come equipped with monitors so that you

can review class slides, and whiteboards so that you can put up important formulas or definitions. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wocintechchat/25772201176/in/dateposted/> Permission: CC BY 2.0

Study groups are a great idea—as long as they are thoughtfully managed. A study group can give you new perspectives on course material and help you to fill in gaps in your notes. Discussing course content will sharpen your critical thinking related to the subject, and being part of a group to which you are accountable will help you study consistently. Ideally, you will end up “teaching” each other the material, which is a powerful way to retain new material.

Here are some tips for creating and managing effective study groups:

- **Think small.** Limit your study group to no more than three or four people. A larger group would limit each student’s participation and make scheduling of regular study sessions a real problem.
- **Go for quality.** Look for students who are doing well in the course, who ask questions, and who participate in class discussions. Don’t make friendship the primary consideration for who should be in your group.
- **Look for complementary skills.** Counter your weaknesses with another student’s strengths. When a subject requires a combination of various skills, strengths in each of those skills is helpful (e.g., a group with one student who is strong with statistics and another with creativity would be perfect for some marketing class projects).
- **Meet regularly.** When you first set up a study group, agree to a regular meeting schedule and stick to it. Moving study session times around can result in non-participation, lack of preparation, and eventually the collapse of the study group. Equally important is keeping your sessions to the allotted times. If you waste time and regularly meet much longer than you agreed to, participants will not feel they are getting study value for their time invested.
- **Include some of the following items on your agenda:**
 - Review and discuss class and assignment notes since your last meeting.
 - Discuss assigned readings.
 - Quiz each other on class material.
 - “Reteach” aspects of the material team participants are unsure of.
 - Brainstorm possible test questions and responses.
 - Review quiz and test results and correct misunderstandings.
 - Critique each other’s ideas for paper themes and approaches.
 - Define questions to ask the instructor.
- **Assign follow-up work.** If there is any work that needs to be done between meetings, make sure that all team members know specifically what is expected of them and agree to do the work.
- **Rotate the role of moderator or discussion leader.** This helps ensure “ownership” of the group is spread equally across all members and ensures active participation and careful preparation.

7.2 Taking Tests

Learning Objectives

- Explain the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment.
- List several test delivery types.
- Apply general strategies to apply when taking tests and quizzes.
- Explain what test anxiety really is, and how to reduce it.



Figure 7-4: How does this photograph make you feel? Many exams are written in regular classrooms, but some are written in gyms such as this one in the U of S PAC. Get prepared both psychologically and intellectually with this chapter's advice. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usask/8161590961> Permission: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Types of Tests

Two general types of tests are based on their objectives, or how they intend to provide feedback learning has occurred: *formative assessments* and *summative assessments* [1].

Formative assessments include quizzes, unit tests, pop quizzes, and review quizzes from a textbook and, if available, accompanying web resources. They test you on fundamental material before you are tested on more challenging topics. Quizzes go beyond grades; they can help you to identify what you know and what you still need to learn in terms of applying the material. A poor result on a quiz may not have a big effect on your overall average, but learning from its results and correcting your mistakes *will* affect your final grade when you take midterms and finals.

Summative assessments include midterms and finals. They are used by the instructor to determine if you are mastering the course material, and as such, they usually carry a heavy weight toward your final grade for the course.

Because of this, they often result in high levels of test anxiety and long study periods.

In addition to this classification by objective, tests can also be grouped into various categories based on how they are delivered. Each type has its own peculiar strategies.

- **Paper tests** are still the most common type of test, requiring students to write answers on the test pages or in a separate test booklet. They are typically used for in-class tests. Neatness and good grammar count, even if it's not an English exam, as your writing needs to be clear and easy-to-read.
- **Open-book tests** allow the student to consult their notes, textbook, or both while taking the exam. Instructors often give this type of test when they are more interested in seeing your thoughts and critical thinking than your memory power. Be prepared to expose and defend your own viewpoints. When preparing, know where key material is present in your book and notes; do this by creating an index for your notes and using sticky notes to flag key pages of your textbook before the exam. Don't assume that an open-book test is easier! They are often much more challenging than closed book; not only will your instructor make them longer, he or she will make them harder.
- **Take-home tests** are like open-book tests except you have the luxury of time on your side. Make sure you submit the exam on time. Know what the instructor's expectations are about the content of your answers. The instructor will likely expect more detail and more complete work because you are not under a strict time limit and because you have access to reference materials. Be clear about when the test is due. (Some instructors will ask you to e-mail your exam to them by a specific time.) Also find out if the instructor allows or expects you to collaborate with classmates. Be sure to type your exam and don't forget to spell-check!
- **Online tests** are most commonly used for formative assessments, although they are starting to find their way into high-stakes exams, particularly in large lecture classes. The main advantage of online tests is that they can be computer graded, providing fast feedback to the student (with formative tests) and allowing the instructor to grade hundreds of exams easily (with summative assessments). With online tests, be sure you understand the testing software. Are there practice questions? If so, make sure you use them. Find out if you will be allowed to move freely between test sections to go back and check your work or to complete questions you might have skipped. Some testing software does not allow you to return to sections once they are "submitted." Unless your exam needs to be taken at a specific time, don't wait until the last minute to take the test. Should you have technical problems, you want to have time to resolve the issues. To avoid any conflicts with the testing software, close all other software applications before beginning the testing software. Finally, let your family or roommates know that you cannot be interrupted while writing the exam. Find a comfortable, quiet location to write the exam. Wear earplugs if you do not want noise distractions.
- **Electronic tests in the classroom** are becoming more common as universities install "smart classrooms" with technology such as wireless "clicker" technology that instructors may use to get a quick read of students' understanding of a lecture. This testing method allows for only true-or-false and multiple-choice questions, so it is rarely used for summative assessments. When taking this kind of quick quiz, take notes on questions you miss so that you can focus on them when you do your own review.
- **Presentations and oral tests** are the most complete means for instructors to evaluate students' mastery of material, because the evaluation is highly interactive. The instructor can probe you on certain points, question your assumptions, or ask you to defend your point of view. Make sure you practice your presentation many times with and without an audience, such as your study group.

Top Ten Tips for Taking Tests

What do you do before and during a test? You have some good ideas for studying and performing well on tests, but maybe you could pick up a few more ideas in this section.

Before

Learn as much as you can about the test. What has the instructor told you about it? Will it be open book? What types of questions will be on it (i.e., multiple choice, short answer)? Are there parts that will be worth more points than others? Will it be cumulative or just cover the most recent material? Will you have choices about which questions to answer? Find the answers to these questions as best you can before going to your

instructor. Students often hammer instructors with questions when all the answers to those questions are in the syllabus or mentioned in class.

Try to foresee the questions likely to be on the test. What kinds of questions would you include if you were the instructor? Brainstorm possible questions with your study group. Look for possible questions in your notes. Review past quizzes and tests to see what kinds of questions the instructor likes to ask. Above all, take it seriously whenever your instructor warns, “This will be on the test.”

Don’t be tempted to stay up late cramming. Cramming is not a substitute for doing your assignments and studying consistently over time. It’s better to get a good night’s sleep and face your test fresh and well rested.

Get some exercise and eat well. Exercising the day before an exam will help you sleep well, meaning that you will be more focused during the exam. A healthy diet the night before and the day of the exam will give you energy and better concentration. Include “brain foods,” such as those rich in omega-3 oils, and avoid “heavy” foods that are rich in fat and sugar. If you are writing a long exam (such as a final exam, typically three hours), avoid simple carbohydrates beforehand as you will have a “crash” soon afterwards; instead, eat something high in protein so that your blood sugars remain level.

Get to the test site early. Take out all your allowable tools (pencils, pens, calculator, etc.). Turn off your cell phone (yes, all the way off, not on vibrate) as a way of disconnecting from your everyday world. Do some of the relaxation exercises described earlier for controlling test anxiety.

During

Create a test plan. Listen carefully to the directions given by the instructor. When you receive your test, scan the entire test first. Evaluate the importance of each section. Then create a time allocation plan. Decide how much time you should dedicate to each section. You don’t want to spend 80 percent of your time on a question worth 10 percent of the grade.

Write it down. Take a couple minutes to write down key facts, dates, principles, statistics, and formulas on a piece of scratch paper or in the margin of the exam paper. Do this while you are still fresh and aren’t yet feeling time pressure (when it will be harder to remember them). Then you can refer to these notes as you take the exam.

Read the directions carefully. Then reread them. Do you understand what is expected of you? If not, ask the instructor to be sure you are clear. Too many students lose points simply by not following directions completely!

Do the easy questions first. By getting the easy questions out of the way, you’ll feel more confident about the test and have more time to think about the tougher questions. Start with the objective sections of the exam first (multiple choice, true or false, and matching columns). As you answer these questions, keep an eye out for facts or concepts you may want to use later in an essay question.

Keep an eye on the time. Keep as close to your plan as possible. If you see that you are running out of time, don’t panic. Move to those questions you think you can still answer accurately within the remaining time.

Check your work. This doesn’t mean going through all your calculations again. Start by ensuring that you have *complete* answers according to the directions. Then look for other common mistakes, such as a misplaced decimal point, dropped words (especially those that can modify the answer, like “not”), and any incomplete or incomprehensible phrases.

Managing Test Anxiety

Most of us have experienced some anxiety around tests. It is normal to feel stress before an exam, and in fact, that may be a good thing. Stress motivates you to study and review; generates adrenaline to help sharpen your reflexes and focus while taking the exam; and may even help you to remember some of the material you need. But suffering too many stress symptoms or suffering any of them severely will impede your ability to show what you have learned. Strong anxiety during a test interferes with your ability to recall knowledge from memory as well as your ability to use higher-level thinking skills effectively.

There are steps you should take if you find that stress is getting in your way:

- **Be prepared.** A primary cause of test anxiety is not knowing the material and not knowing what to expect. Make sure that you find out how the exam is structured and what material to study. Double-check the exam time and location, and arrive to the exam a little early. Some people find, though, that talking with classmates before the exam increases their anxiety; if this is you, wait somewhere close by. You can also go to the exam rooms during off-hours to check them out before an exam. Scope out where you'd like to sit and whether the room has a clock.
- **Address negative thoughts.** Negative thoughts—"I'll never pass this exam" or "I can't figure this out, I must be really stupid!"—may have you spiraling into a stress cycle that in itself causes enough anxiety to block your best efforts. When you begin with the negative thoughts, stop what you are doing and clear your mind. Allow yourself to daydream a little. Go for a walk. Confide in a friend. **Meditate.** Try **abdominal breathing**. Don't go back to work until you feel the tension release. Once your mind is clear, repeat a reasonable affirmation to yourself—"I can do this"—before continuing your work. Remember to use believable thoughts; in other words, don't tell yourself "I'm going to get 100%" or "I am a genius!"; rather, tell yourself "I know this material well. I'm determined to do my best!").
- **Visualize success.** Picture what it will feel like to get the grade that you want. Translate that vision into specific, reasonable goals and work toward each individual goal. Take one step at a time and reward yourself for each goal you complete.
- **It's all about you!** Don't waste your time comparing yourself to other students in the class, especially during the exam. Keep focused on your own work and your own plan. Exams are not a race, so it doesn't matter who turns in their paper first. In fact, those who take more time have the ability to explain their points more fully or check their work for mistakes.
- **Get help.** If exam anxiety is persistent and debilitating, and if it is getting worse despite your best efforts to address it, seek help from student counselling services.

Exercise: Talking Back to Your Anxious Self

You've learned how negative thoughts contribute to test anxiety and keep you from doing as well as you can. Take some time to disarm your most frequent offenders. From the following list, select three negative thoughts that you have experienced (or write your own). Then fill in the second and third columns for each statement, as shown in the example.

- I don't know anything....What's the matter with me?
- If I fail this test, I'll flunk the course.
- I should have studied more....I'll never make it through.
- I just can't think....Why did I ever take this course?
- I know everyone's doing better than I am.
- If I fail this test, my parents (or partner, or teacher) will be mad. I don't know how I can face them again.
- I'm going to be the last one done again....I must really be stupid.
- I'm getting really tense again; my hands are shaking....I can't even hold the pen.
- I can't remember a thing....This always happens to me....I never do well on anything.

My boogie statement	How rational is this thought? Do you have any evidence that it is true?	Reasonable reinforcing or affirmation statements you can use to replace it.
Example: I'm drawing a blank....I'll never get the answer...I must really be stupid.	I've missed questions on things that I studied and knew before.	I studied this and I am determined to do my best. I'll visualize where it's written in my notes to help me trigger my memory.

Hanna, G. S., & Dettmer, P. A. (2004). *Assessment for effective teaching: Using context-adaptive planning*. Boston, MA: Pearson A&B.⁴

7.3 Strategies for Different Exam Types

Learning Objectives

- Understand the five principal types of questions.
- Gain specific strategies for addressing each type of question.
- Gain strategies for doing well on math and science exams.

You can gain even more confidence in your test-taking abilities by understanding the different kinds of questions an instructor may ask and applying the following proven strategies for answering them. Most instructors will likely use various conventional types of questions. Here are some tips for handling the most common types.

Multiple-Choice Questions

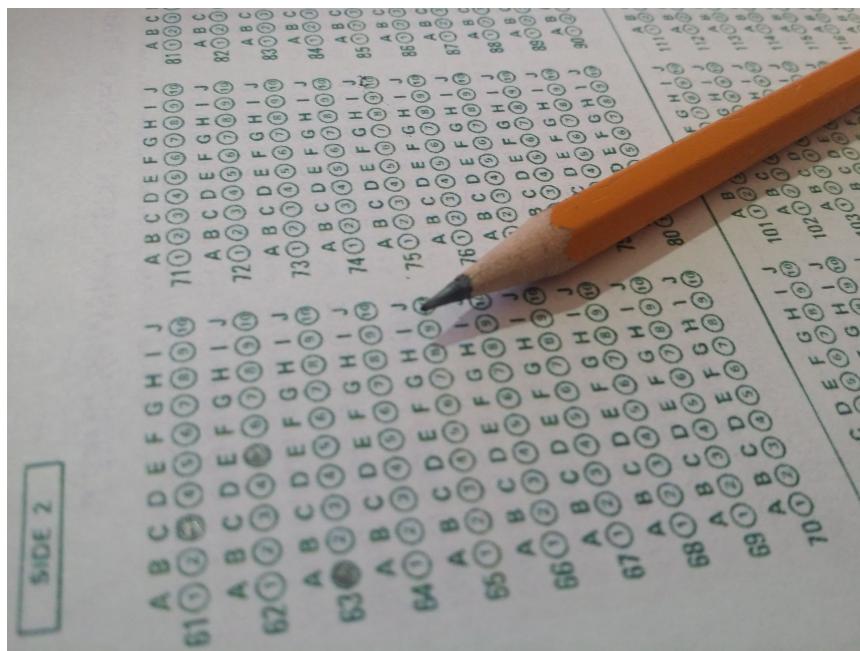


Figure 7-5: Don't forget to bring a pencil and eraser to multiple choice exams!
Source: <https://pixabay.com/en/test-testing-exam-sat-act-mcat-986769/> / Permission: CC0 1.0

- Read the instructions carefully as there may be more than one right answer. If there are multiple right answers, does the instructor expect you to choose just one, or do you need to mark all correct options?
- Read each question carefully and try to answer it in your head *before* reading the answer options. Then consider *all* the options. Eliminate first the options that are clearly incorrect. Compare the remaining answers with your own answer before choosing one and marking your paper.
- Look for clue words that hint that certain option answers might be correct or incorrect. Absolute words like "never," "always," "every," or "none" are rarely found in a correct option. Less absolute words like "usually," "often," or "rarely" are regularly found in correct options.
- If you have to read a passage before choosing a multiple choice answer, read the question first so that you read with more focus.
- Be on the lookout for the word "not" in the stem phrase and in the answer choice options; it is an easy word to

miss if you are reading too quickly, but it completely changes the meaning of the possible statements.

- Reread the question before it (the “stem”). Do any of the answers not follow grammatically from the stem? If they don’t, they are probably not correct.

True-or-False Questions

- Most of the tips for multiple-choice questions apply here as well. Be particularly aware of the words “never,” “always,” “every,” “none,” and “not” because they can determine the correct answer.
- Answer the questions that are obvious to you first. Then go back to statements that require more thought.
- If the question is stated in the positive, restate it to yourself in the negative by adding the word “not” or “never.” Does the new statement sound truer or more false?
- If you still are unsure whether a statement is true or false and must guess, choose “true” because most tests include more true statements than false (but don’t guess if a wrong answer penalizes you more than one left blank).

Matching Questions

- Start by looking at the two columns to be matched. Is there an equal number of items in both columns? If they are not equal, do you have to match some items in the shorter column to two or more items in the longer column, or can you leave some items unmatched? Read the directions to be sure.
- If one column has a series of single words to be matched to phrases in the other column, read all the phrases first, then all the single words before trying to make any matches. Now go back and read each phrase and find the word that best suits the phrase.
- If both columns have single words to be matched, look to cut down the number of potential matches by grouping them by parts of speech (nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, and so on).
- As always, start by making the matches that are obvious to you, and then work on the ones that require more thought. Mark off all items you have already used so you can easily see which words or phrases still remain to be matched.

Subjective Questions

Subjective questions such as short answer and essay questions require planning, outlining, drafting, and revising. You will bring in memorized material, but you must expand on it in your own way, often bringing in your own arguments and examples.

Short Answer

- Short answer questions are designed for you to recall and provide some very *specific* information (unlike essay questions, which also ask you to apply critical thinking to that information). When you read the question, ask yourself what exactly the instructor wants to know. Keep your answers short and *specific*. Do not “information dump” everything you know; craft a clear paragraph.
- Read the question very carefully.
- Repeat key terms in the question.
- Understand the qualities of a good argumentative paragraph: topic sentence, evidence, explanation of evidence, concluding sentence.
- Use full sentences, and take some time to add transitional expressions (e.g., “furthermore,” “for example,” “however”) so that you are clearly linking ideas together.
- Budget some time to proofread!

Essays

- Essay questions are used by instructors to evaluate your thinking and reasoning applied to the material covered in a course. Good essay answers are based on *your* thoughts, supported by examples from classes

and reading assignments.

- Careful planning is critical to answering essay questions effectively. Note how many essay questions you have to answer and how difficult each question seems, and then allocate your time accordingly.
- Read the question carefully, underlining or circling key words. Watch for words that describe the instructor's expectations for your response. Pay particular attention to verbs (action words), such as "discuss," "explain," or "compare" (see table 6.1).
- Create a quick outline for your essay. This helps to ensure that you don't leave out key points, and if you run out of time, it may pick up a few points for your grade. Write a preliminary thesis, some topic sentences, and jot down specific information you might want to use, such as examples, figures, dates, or places.
- Double space so that you have room to rewrite or revise.
- Introduce your essay answer, but get right to the point. Remember that the instructor will be grading dozens of papers and avoid "filler" text that does not add value to your answer. For example, rather than writing, "In our study of the Civil War, it is helpful to consider the many facets that lead to conflict, especially the economic factors that help explain this important turning point in our nation's history," write a more direct and concise statement like this: "Economic factors help to explain the start of the Civil War."
- Revise with an eye to the "hot spots," areas that can make or break your essay: the first sentence, the thesis statement (i.e., main argument in the introduction), topic sentences, and conclusion. Make sure that these sentences are as clear as can be, and check that the topic sentences beginning each paragraph have a crystal clear connection to the thesis statement.
- Add transitional expressions.
- Don't waste time erasing or using correction tape. Simply cross out sentences and passages that you don't want the instructor to read.
- Write neatly and watch your grammar and spelling. Allow time to proofread.

Table 6.1 Verbs to Watch for in Essay Questions

Word	What It Means	What the Instructor Is Looking For
Analyze	Break concept into key parts	Don't just list the parts; show how they work together and illustrate any patterns.
Compare	Show similarities (and sometimes differences) between two or more concepts or ideas	Define the similarities and clearly describe how the items or ideas are similar. Do these similarities lead to similar results or effects? Note that this word is often combined with "contrast." If so, make sure you do both.
Contrast	Show differences between two or more concepts or ideas	Define the differences and clearly describe how the items or ideas are different. How do these differences result in different outcomes? Note that this word is often combined with "compare." If so, make sure you do both.
Critique	Judge and analyze	Explain what is wrong—and right—about a concept. Include your own judgments, supported by evidence and quotes from experts that support your point of view.
Define	Describe the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept	Define the concept or idea as your instructor did in class—but use your own words. If your definition differs from what the instructor presented, support your difference with evidence. Keep this essay short. Examples can help illustrate a definition, but remember that examples alone are <i>not</i> a definition.
Discuss	Explain or review	Define the key questions around the issue to be discussed and then answer them. Another approach is to define pros and cons on the issue and compare and contrast them. In either case, explore all relevant data and information.

Word	What It Means	What the Instructor Is Looking For
Explain	Clarify, give reasons for something	Clarity is key for these questions. Outline your thoughts carefully, and use examples and explanations to make yourself clear.
Illustrate	Offer examples	Use examples from class material or reading assignments. Compare and contrast them to other examples you might come up with from additional reading or real life.
Prove	Provide evidence and arguments that something is true	Instructors who include this prompt in an exam question have often proven the hypothesis or other concepts in their class lectures. Think about the kind of evidence the instructor used and apply similar types of processes and data.
Summarize	Give a brief, precise description of an idea or concept	Keep it short, but cover all key points. This is one essay prompt where examples should not be included unless the instructions specifically ask for them. (For example, "Summarize the steps of the learning cycle and give examples of the main strategies you should apply in each one.")

Strategies for Math and Science Exams

Math tests require some special strategies because they are often problem based rather than question based.

Do the following before the test:

- Attend all classes and complete all assignments. Pay special attention to working on all assigned problems. After reviewing problems in class, take careful notes about what you did incorrectly. Repeat the problem and do a similar one as soon as possible. The last solution to a problem in your mind should be a correct solution.
- Think about how each problem solution might be applied in a real-world situation. This helps make even the most complex solutions relevant and easier to learn.
- In a study group, take turns presenting solutions to problems and observing and correcting everyone's work.
- If you are having difficulty with a concept, get help right away. Study in your university's math centre, where you can get help as you need it, and make use of office hours and extra study sessions. Remember that math especially builds new material on previous material, so if you are having trouble with a concept now, you are likely to have trouble going forward.

Do the following during the test:

- Review the entire test before you start, and work on the problems you feel most confident with first.
- Approach each problem following four steps:
 - **Read.** Read the problem through twice: the first time to get the full concept of the question, and the second time to draw out pertinent information.
 - **Ask.** After you read through the problem the first time, ask yourself, "What is this problem about?" and "What is the answer likely to look like?" The second time through, consider these questions: "What facts do I have available?" "What do I know?" "What measurable units must the answer be in?" Think about the operations and formulas you will need to use. Try to estimate a ballpark answer.
 - **Compute.** Compute your answer, writing as neatly as you can (fours can look like nines). First, eliminate as many unknowns as possible. You may need to use a separate formula for each unknown. Use algebraic formulas as far as you can before plugging in actual numbers; that will make it easier to cancel and combine factors. Remember that you may need two or more tries before you come up with the answer.
 - **Check.** Check your work. Start by comparing your actual answer to the estimate you made when you first read the problem. Does your final answer sound likely? Check your arithmetic by opposite operations: use multiplication to check division and addition to

check subtraction, and so on. Look at the question to be sure you answered it completely.

Science tests also are often problem based, but they also generally use the scientific method. This is why science tests may require some specific strategies:

- Before the test, review your lab notes as well as your class notes and assignments. Many exam questions build upon lab experience, so pay close attention to your notes, assignments, and labs. Practice describing the experimental process.
- Read the question carefully. What does the instructor expect you to do? Prove a hypothesis? Describe an experiment? Summarize research? Underline the words that state the objective of the question.
- Look carefully at all the diagrams given with the question. What do they illustrate? Why are they included with the question? Are there elements on the diagram you are expected to label?
- Many science questions are based on the scientific method and experimental model. When you read the test question, identify the hypothesis the problem is proposing; be prepared to describe an experimental structure to prove a hypothesis. When you check your work, make sure the hypothesis, experimental steps, and a summary of results (or expected results) are clear. Some of these elements may be part of the question, while others you may need to provide in your answer.

7.4 Using Test Results

Learning Objectives

Effectively evaluate your test results and correct your mistakes.
Use your test results as a study guide.

This section discusses how to *use* test results to their greatest benefit. Some of your most important learning begins when your graded test paper is returned to you. What do you do with an exam after you get it back? Look at the mark, and then throw it away or never look at it again? Compare yourself to others? These are natural responses. The best thing to do, however, is to use your results to do better in the future, even outside the subject area in which it was written.

Make sure you listen to the instructor as the papers are returned. What is the instructor saying about the test? Is there a particular point everyone had trouble with? Does the instructor generally think everyone did well? What was the average grade and where did you fall? The instructor's comments at this point may give you important information about what you should study more, about the value of review sessions, and even about possible questions for the next exam.

Learning from a test is a three-step process, beginning with evaluating your results.

Three-Step Process for Learning from Test Results

You will likely have an emotional reaction to your exam result, whether it's poor, mediocre, or exceptional. If you are upset, take a bit of time to cool off. When you are ready, sit quietly and take a close look at it.

What questions did you get wrong? What kind of mistakes were they? (See Table 6.2 "Exam Errors and How to Correct Them.") Do you see a pattern? What questions did you get right? What were your strengths? What can you learn from the instructor's comments?

Now think of the way in which you prepared for the exam and the extent to which you applied the exam strategies described earlier in this chapter. Were you prepared for the exam? Did you study the right material? Did you space your studying out over time, or did you study in the brief days ahead of the exam? What surprised you? Did you read the entire test before starting? Did your time allocation work well, or were you short of time on certain parts of the exam?

Table 6.2 Exam Errors and How to Correct Them

Type of Error	Examples	Corrective Steps
Study and Preparation Errors	I did not study the material for that question (enough).	Practice better predicting possible questions. Use the textbook activities, or ask your classmates.
	I ran out of time.	You cannot bring a cellphone into an exam, and some classrooms do not have clocks. Ask your instructor what his or her policy is regarding the use of a watch, or whether a timer can be projected onto the screen. When you begin your exam, make sure that you make a little estimate of how long each section should take, and budget some time at the end to check your work. If you get stuck on a question, don't stall! Keep writing and then go back to work on that question at the end.
	I did not prepare enough.	Work on time and task management. Break down your study schedule according to tasks and realistically estimate how much time things will take.
Focus Errors or Carelessness	I did not read the directions carefully.	Allocate exam time carefully. Read and then reread exam questions, underlining key terms, especially verbs (actions, such as "debate," "summarize," or "argue").
	I confused terms or concepts that I actually know well.	Give yourself time to read carefully and think before answering a question. Budget time to go back and revise your answers.
Content Errors	I studied the material but couldn't make it work with the question	Seek additional help from the instructor. Use study strategies that move beyond memorization, such as asking questions or explaining with examples.
	I didn't understand what the instructor wanted.	Go to all classes, labs, and review sessions. Notice cues that he or she gives in lectures. Make sure you get caught up on any missed classes.
	I confused terms or concepts.	Join or form a well-run study group. Practice your active reading and listening skills. Schedule regular study time for this course, and space it out over time rather than in the days before the exam.

Type of Error	Examples	Corrective Steps
Mechanical Errors	The instructor misread my writing.	Budget time to revise and rewrite. If you have less-than-good handwriting, use pencil so that you can erase and rewrite. Focus on key terms if you are short on time.
	I didn't erase a wrong answer completely.	Cross things out very clearly rather than use an eraser. Erasers are time-consuming compared to cross-outs.
	I forgot to go back to a question I had skipped over.	Budget time to go over and check your work. Even five minutes at the end of an exam can make a big difference on your overall performance.
	I miscopied some calculations or facts from my worksheet.	Slow down and take care with preliminary steps such as these.

Correcting Your Mistakes

The second step in making your test work for you is to correct your wrong answers. The last time you wrote the information (when you took the test), you created a link to wrong information in your memory, so that must be corrected.

- For multiple-choice questions, write out the question stem with the correct answer to form a single correct sentence or phrase.
- For true-or-false questions, write the full statement if it is true; if it is false, reword it in such a way that it is true (such as by inserting the word “not”). Then write the new statement.
- For math and science questions involving calculations, redo the entire solution with the calculations written out fully.
- You need not rewrite an entire essay question if you did not do well, but you should create a new outline for what would be a correct answer. You could also take time to rewrite the thesis statement. Make sure you incorporate any ideas triggered by your instructor’s comments. If you did not get a lot of written feedback, talk to your professor about how you could do better next time.
- When you have rewritten all your answers, read them all out loud before incorporating your new answers in your notes.

Integrating Your Test into Your Study Guide

Your corrected quizzes and midterm exams are an important study tool for final exams. Make sure you file them with your notes for the study unit. Take the time to annotate your notes based on the exam. Pay particular attention to any gaps in your notes on topics that appeared in the quiz or exam. Research those points in your text or online and complete your notes. Review your exams throughout the term (not just before the final) to be sure you cement the course material into your memory.

When you prepare for the final exam, start by reviewing your quizzes and other tests to predict the kinds of questions the instructor may ask on the final. This will help focus your final studying when you have a large amount of coursework to cover.

If You Don’t Get Your Test Back

If your instructor chooses not to return tests to students, make an appointment to see the instructor soon after the test to review it and your performance. Take notes on what you had trouble with and the expected answers. Add these notes into your study guide. Make sure you don’t lose out on the opportunity to learn from your results.