



College Success **Playbook**



Disclaimer: The information provided in this student success guide is intended for general knowledge and informational purposes only. The tips and suggestions offered are not a substitute for professional advice. If you are experiencing mental health concerns, please seek help from a qualified healthcare provider.

About this playbook

Transitioning from high school to college is an exciting but sometimes overwhelming journey.

You're about to experience new freedoms, face fresh challenges, and encounter a whirlwind of opportunities. It's a time of growth, learning, and discovery, but it's also when many students feel uncertain or even a bit lost. That's where this playbook comes in.

This guide can be your go-to resource for navigating the ups and downs of your first year. We know that change can be scary, and while there's no one-size-fits-all approach to college life, the essentials we've compiled here will help you survive—and thrive—in this new environment. From settling into dorm life, making friends, succeeding in your classes, and managing your newfound independence, we've got you covered.

While there may be challenges that this playbook can't predict, you can rest assured that the fundamentals for a successful start to your college journey are all here.

Ready to start your journey in Higher Education?

Let's dive in and make your first year the best one (yet)!

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Gear up

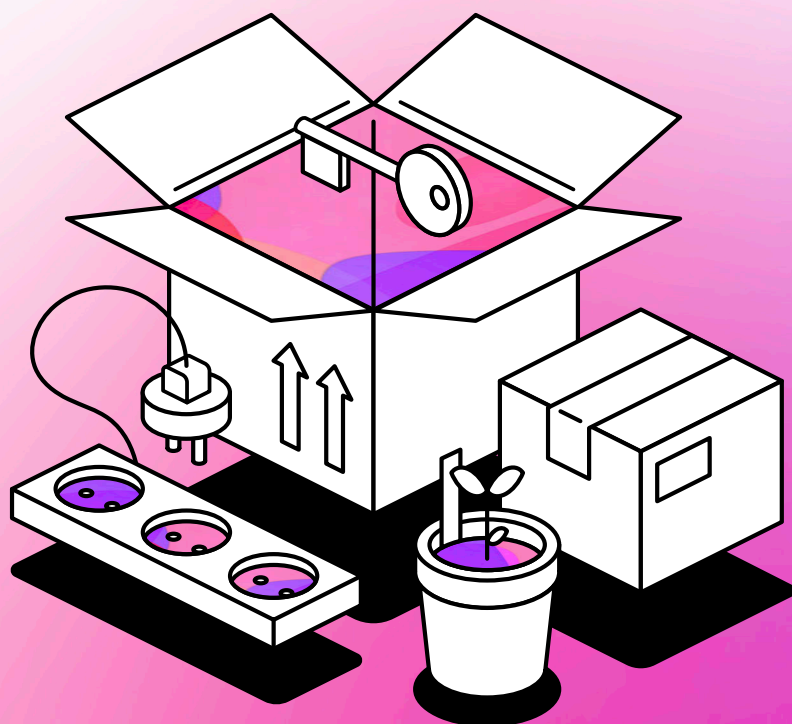
Getting ready for college starts with the things you bring to your new chapter! Of course, it all starts with a positive mindset, but some items can make things easier for you along the way.

Start with the basics

If you are studying from home or will not have to move for college, start at the **“electronics, tech, and gadgets”** section.

If you are moving into a new space for college or sharing a dorm room, you may not have loads of space or storage room, so try to bring with you those things that will help you the most and will not get in the way. It may surprise you how quickly an empty dorm can turn into a mess.

Your college may have a comprehensive list of things to bring when you move into your dorm, but if not, here are some of our favorites.



Dorm room must-haves

- ▶ Desk/bedside lamp
- ▶ Alarm clock (your phone may not be enough if you are a heavy sleeper!)
- ▶ Small trash can (4 gal)
- ▶ Small desk fan

- ▶ Mini tool kit
- ▶ Hangers and sticky hooks
- ▶ Foldable storage options
- ▶ Foldable laundry basket

Bed, bath and beyond

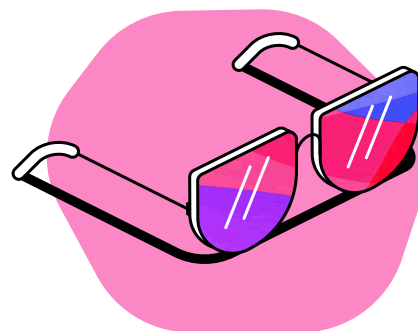
- ▶ Sheets (usually a twin XL) and comforter
- ▶ Pillows and pillowcases
- ▶ Mattress cover (topper)
- ▶ Ear plugs (help you meet your sleep goals on noisy nights)
- ▶ Eye mask
- ▶ Towels (bath, hands, and face)
- ▶ Shower caddy
- ▶ Cleaning wipes
- ▶ Shower flip flops
- ▶ Hair dryer

Toiletries & hygiene

- ▶ Shampoo
- ▶ Body wash
- ▶ Conditioner Deodorant
- ▶ Toothbrush and toothpaste
- ▶ Body Lotion
- ▶ Dental floss
- ▶ Comb/brush
- ▶ Nail clipper Tweezers
- ▶ Sunscreen
- ▶ Razors and shaving cream
- ▶ Feminine hygiene products
- ▶ First aid kit
- ▶ Cotton swabs
- ▶ Loofah
- ▶ Air freshener

Clothing. Besides your favorite dressing essentials, consider...

- ▶ Pajamas
- ▶ Raincoat
- ▶ Light and heavy jacket
- ▶ Walking shoes (comfortable)
- ▶ 1 pair of dress shoes
- ▶ 1 set of business casual clothes
- ▶ Sunglasses
- ▶ Waterproof boots or shoes



Kitchen essentials

- ▶ Bowls, plates and cups (dishwasher & microwave safe)
- ▶ Food-storage containers (dishwasher & microwave safe)
- ▶ Coffee mug
- ▶ Leakproof thermal cup
- ▶ Silverware basics
- ▶ Lunch portable set (including reusable silverware)
- ▶ Cleaning supplies (dishwasher soap, scrubber, kitchen towel)
- ▶ Can opener
- ▶ Water bottle (stainless steel or BPA-free)

Electronics, tech, and gadgets

- ▶ **Laptop**
Prioritize quality. Better to have one that lasts rather than replacing it every year. If you can, get it insured.
- ▶ **Headphones**
Noise cancelling headphones are great for focus! For test centers you should have wired earphones with a 3.5mm jack
- ▶ Powerbank
- ▶ Cable case (keeps your cables organized)
- ▶ Surge protector
- ▶ Extension cords and power strip
- ▶ Travel plug converter (if you are an international student)
- ▶ Portable speakers
- ▶ Ethernet cable
- ▶ Flash drive/external disk

Desk supplies and stationery

- ▶ Laptop stand
- ▶ Pens, pencils and Pencil case
- ▶ Pencil holder (an old cup will do!)
- ▶ Notebook
- ▶ Binder notebook and Index cards
- ▶ Sticky notes
- ▶ Rubber bands
- ▶ Scissors
- ▶ Highlighters
- ▶ Stackable desk trays
- ▶ Stapler/staples and clips
- ▶ Binder/notebook page dividers

Campus essentials

- ▶ Waterproof backpack (at least water resistant)
- ▶ Portable umbrella
- ▶ Rechargeable flashlight

Note

Your dorm may not include a TV, microwave, coffee maker, or small fridge. Check what your dorm includes so you get all you need beforehand!

Preparations for dorm life

With your dorm essentials packed and ready to go, it's time to dive into the exciting world of dorm life. The space alone doesn't define your dorm experience—it's shaped by the relationships you build, especially with your roommate.

Living with someone else in such close quarters can be one of the most rewarding aspects of college life. Roommate relationships can evolve into meaningful friendships built through shared experiences, late-night heart-to-hearts, and learning to navigate life together. Whether you're binge-watching shows, celebrating small victories, or supporting each other through stressful times, your roommate becomes a part of your everyday life.

Even if you're not instant best friends, the bond you develop can teach you valuable lessons about communication, compromise, and understanding different perspectives. It's all part of making your dorm feel like a true home.



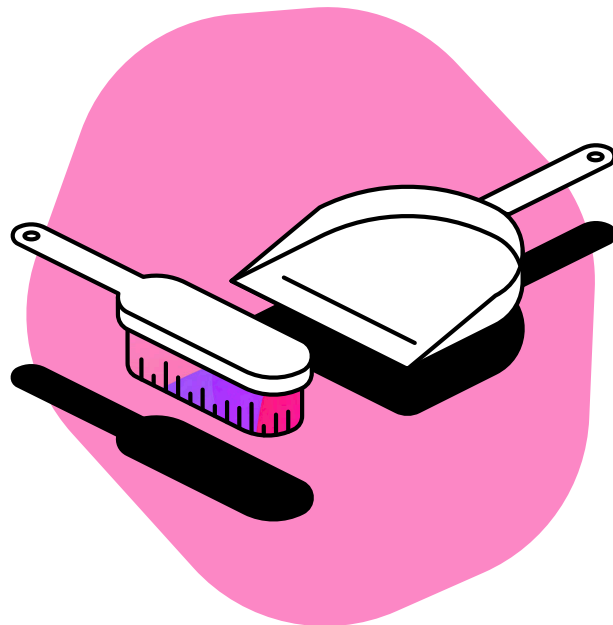
Roommate relations

Living with a roommate can be an exciting but unfamiliar experience, especially if it's your first time sharing personal space. The key to a harmonious living situation is setting clear boundaries early on.

Don't hesitate to talk with your roommate during the first week about expectations like cleanliness, quiet hours, and sharing personal items. It might feel awkward at first, but it's essential to prevent misunderstandings later.

Do you prefer to study in complete silence? How do you feel about having guests over? **Being upfront about your habits and listening to your roommate's preferences** will help you both create a comfortable living environment.

Remember, setting boundaries isn't about being rigid but finding common ground and making compromises. Establishing boundaries early allows you both to build respect for one another's space and habits. The more proactive your communication, the smoother your living arrangement will be, setting a positive tone for the months ahead.



Conflict resolution

Even in the best of roommate situations, conflicts can arise. Disagreements are natural when living in close quarters with someone, but how you handle them can make all the difference.

The best way to approach conflict is with a calm and respectful attitude. Instead of letting frustrations build up, address issues as they arise—whether it's about noise, cleanliness, or personal boundaries. Use “I” statements to express your feelings rather than blaming or accusing. For example, saying, “I feel distracted when the music is too loud while I’m studying,” is far more productive than, “You’re always so loud!”

Resolving conflicts is all about compromise. Listen to your roommate’s perspective, and be open to finding solutions that work for both of you.

If a situation becomes more difficult than anticipated, don’t hesitate to contact your Student Affairs (or similar) department for mediation. They can help facilitate peaceful resolutions and ensure both parties feel heard and respected.

Communication tips

Open communication is the foundation of any strong roommate relationship. Don’t assume your roommate can read your mind; regular check-ins can prevent small issues from becoming major ones.

Make it a point to sit down once in a while to talk about how things are going. Is the room setup working for both of you? Are there any habits that are becoming challenging? These conversations can be casual and friendly but are essential to maintaining a peaceful living arrangement.

A proactive approach to communication helps avoid resentment and encourages mutual respect. When you communicate openly and regularly, you build a positive and collaborative relationship.

Living independently

Now that you are about to spread your wings and embrace the thrilling world of independent college living, there are some things you should consider.

Let's take a look at some practical tips and strategies to help you thrive in your college adventure.



Managing time

One of the most liberating aspects of college life is having full control over your schedule. But with that freedom comes responsibility—balancing academics, social life, and personal time can be challenging at first. The key is time management.

Create a weekly schedule that includes your classes, study time, and extracurricular activities. Remember to schedule downtime for yourself! Use a planner or a digital calendar to stay organized and avoid last-minute cramming sessions or missed deadlines.

Remember, the transition to independent living isn't about perfection but finding a rhythm that works for you. Eventually, you'll learn how much time you need for each task and how to adjust your schedule when things get busy.

As you settle into college life, your time management skills will improve, helping you stay on top of your commitments without feeling overwhelmed.

Self care routines

With all the excitement and busyness of college, it can be easy to overlook self-care. But taking care of yourself is just as important as hitting the books. Building self-care into your daily routine will help you maintain your mental and physical wellbeing throughout the semester.

Start by establishing healthy habits—eat balanced meals, get enough sleep, and make time for regular exercise. These simple routines can make a world of difference in how you feel and perform academically.

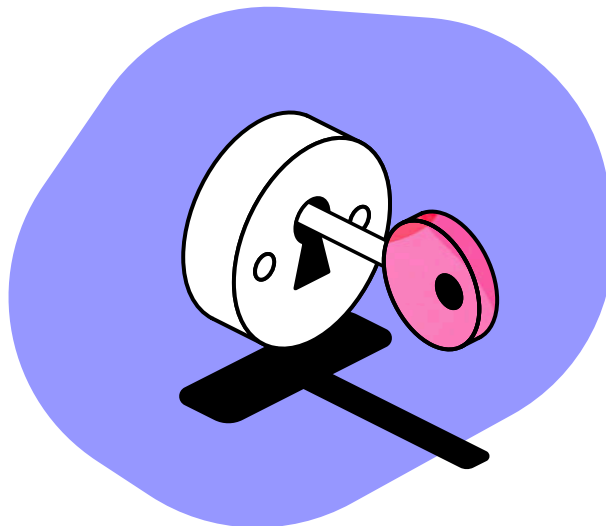
Self-care is more than just physical; it also involves nurturing your mental health. Take breaks when needed, engage in activities you enjoy, and don't hesitate to ask for support if you feel overwhelmed. Your college likely offers counseling services, and it's perfectly normal to use them since they are there to support you as you navigate your college journey.

Safety tips

Living independently also means being responsible for your own safety. You can adopt a few simple habits to keep yourself and your belongings safe:

- ▶ **Always lock your dorm room when you leave**, even if you just step out for a minute.
- ▶ **Familiarize yourself with campus security protocols**, like emergency contact numbers and where to go for help if needed.
- ▶ Setting up **emergency contacts** on your phone is also a good idea.
- ▶ Additionally, **be aware of your surroundings** when walking around campus, especially at night.
- ▶ Stick to well-lit paths, and consider walking with a friend if you feel unsafe. Most campuses also offer **safety escort services**. Find out how you can access them.

Taking a few precautions can give you peace of mind as you enjoy your newfound independence.



Living independently as an international student

Moving to a new country for college is a huge step, and while it's an exciting opportunity to experience new things, it can also come with cultural adjustments.

As an international student, you might face unique challenges like homesickness, language barriers, or understanding a new educational system. But remember, you're not alone—many campuses have resources specifically for international students, including orientation programs, support groups, and advisors who can help you navigate your transition.

One of the best ways to adjust is by embracing the diversity around you. Try to engage with local culture while sharing your own with others. Participate in campus events, join clubs, and find communities that share your interests. Building a solid support network can help ease the transition and enrich your college experience.

And don't forget—your background and experiences bring valuable perspectives to your campus community.



Feeling homesick?

Feeling homesick is a completely normal reaction when you first move away to college. Missing your family, friends, and familiar surroundings is natural. It's important to remember that everyone experiences it to some degree. The key is to find healthy ways to cope.

One of the best ways to manage feeling homesick is by staying connected to home while also making an effort to immerse yourself in your new environment:

- ▶ **Schedule regular calls or video chats** with family and friends to maintain those important connections, but try not to rely too heavily on them for comfort.
- ▶ **Try joining clubs or participating in campus activities** to help you feel more connected by making new friends.

Over time, as you grow more comfortable and involved in college life, the feeling of being homesick will likely fade, and you'll feel more at home in your new space.

Remember: you are not alone!

Transitioning to independent living can be a lot. If you find yourself struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to the free, available support services your college may have. These can include:

- ▶ **Counseling centers:** These provide professional mental health services, including therapy and counseling.
- ▶ **Student health centers:** Offer a range of physical and mental health services.
- ▶ **Academic advising:** Academic advisors can provide support and guidance, helping students manage their workload and academic stress.
- ▶ **Disability services:** Assist students with disabilities, including mental health conditions.
- ▶ **Student support groups:** These groups offer peer support and a safe space to share experiences.
- ▶ **Campus recreation centers:** Physical activity can significantly improve mental health.

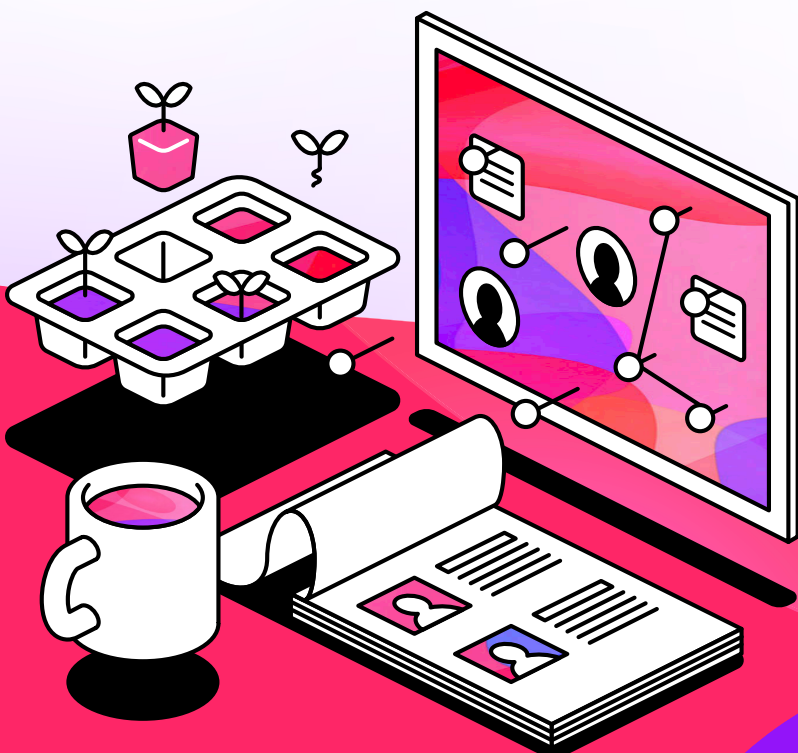
Student organizations: Joining clubs and organizations can help build a social network.

Succeeding in your first week: where to go, what to do, and when

As you step onto campus, grab your campus map and take the opportunity to wander—find your classrooms, locate the best study spots, and discover where to grab a coffee between lectures.

Embrace the first-week orientation activities with an open mind, attend campus tours, and join social events to meet new people and make friends.

Getting comfortable with your surroundings early on will help you feel at home and confident as you find your way. These first few weeks are about setting the tone for the journey ahead, so dive in with excitement and let your curiosity guide you.



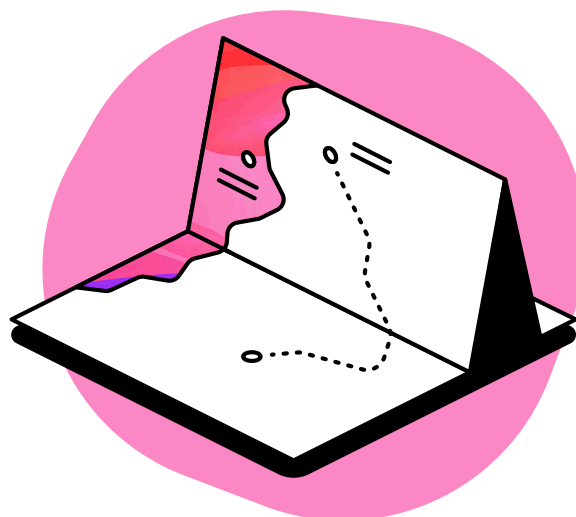
Navigating campus

Campus map

Knowing where everything is is one of the first steps to feeling confident and at home on campus. Spend time familiarizing yourself with the campus map and identifying key buildings such as your classrooms, dining halls, libraries, student centers, and health services.

Walking around campus in your free time can help you feel more comfortable finding your way when classes start. There's nothing worse than being late to class because you got lost, so take this opportunity to map out the fastest routes to your classes and key hangout spots. Many schools also offer **virtual maps or apps to help you navigate quickly**, so download those if available.

Becoming familiar with campus early on also means discovering shortcuts and understanding peak times for certain areas, like dining halls or popular study spots. The more familiar you are with the layout, the less stress you'll feel during those first few weeks.



First week orientation

Orientation is more than just icebreakers and welcome speeches—it's your first big opportunity to get to know the campus, your resources, and even some of your future friends. During orientation, you'll likely have tours of the main buildings, sessions on academic expectations, and social activities designed to help you meet other students.

Try to attend as many of these events as possible, even if you feel shy or overwhelmed; they are designed to help you feel more at home, answer questions, and give you a solid start.

Orientation is also a great time to ask questions. Approach orientation leaders, student representatives, or faculty members to clarify anything you're unsure about. Whether it's about navigating the campus or academic requirements, they're there to help you succeed.

Finding your classes

Before the first day of class, do a “test run” of your schedule. Take some time to physically walk to each of your classrooms so that you know exactly where they are and how long it will take to get from one class to the next.

By taking this “test run,” you can prevent future anxiety and ensure you won't be frantically searching for your lecture hall five minutes before it starts. Pay attention to the building numbers and room names, and if you're unsure where to go, don't be afraid to ask someone for directions.

Pro tip: give yourself 10-15 minutes of cushion time during your first week. It's better to arrive early and have time to settle in than to rush in late. This “extra time” will also allow you to relax, organize your materials, and review notes before class begins.

Clear goals: a path to academic success

The first few weeks of college are a whirlwind of new experiences and information. Among the excitement, it's crucial to establish a solid foundation for your academic journey. Setting clear goals early on will help you stay focused and motivated.

Since you are just starting, you may need more clarity on what to focus on and what should be a priority. But no worries, **here are three achievable goals for your first couple of weeks at college:**

1. Creating a schedule

Managing your time well is one of the most important skills you can develop in college. Create a balanced schedule incorporating your class times, study sessions, and personal time using your course syllabus as a guide for key times, dates, and upcoming tasks.

Use a planner or digital calendar to block out your day, ensuring you have dedicated time for academics, social activities, and recreation. When planning study time, schedule it for when you feel most productive—some people work best in the morning, while others are night owls.

Remember to factor in breaks and downtime. Overloading your schedule with back-to-back tasks can lead to burnout, so it's important to give yourself time to recharge. Finding this balance will improve your academic performance and make your first few weeks a lot less stressful.

2. Attending classes

One of the simplest but most important things you can do during your first week is to attend every single class.

Even if it feels like the first few days are just syllabus reviews, showing up on time and being engaged sends a strong message to your professors. They'll see you as a committed student ready to learn.

Plus, the first week often sets the foundation for the rest of the semester, covering key topics or outlining the professor's expectations for assignments and exams.

Do your best to show up, take notes, and get to know the flow of each course—this is your chance to make a great first impression. Missing a class early on can put you behind since they usually involve introductions or opportunities to ask initial questions.

3. Handling assignments

You'll probably get your first set of assignments or readings during your first week. Don't wait until the last minute to start—begin early, even if it's just reading through the materials or drafting an outline.

By staying on top of assignments from the start, you'll avoid the stress of cramming and give yourself more time to ask questions or seek help if you run into difficulties.

It's a good habit to write down all your due dates as soon as you get them. Many professors provide an entire semester's worth of deadlines in the syllabus, so take the time to enter these into your calendar or planner. A clear view of your workload will help you manage it efficiently and avoid surprises.

Small (and sound) habits that go far: learning to work smarter, not harder.

Having a clear plan allows you to stay on top of your learning while balancing other aspects of student life. Whether juggling a part-time job, extracurricular activities, or personal responsibilities, establishing good habits early on is one of the best ways to set yourself up for success.

By organizing your time, reviewing your syllabus, setting up a productive study space, and connecting with your professors, you'll create a foundation supporting your academic goals and personal well-being.

Syllabus review

The syllabus is your roadmap for each course, and reviewing it thoroughly during the first week will set you up for success. Take the time to go through each syllabus line by line, noting important dates like assignment deadlines, exam schedules, and required readings. Highlight any policies about attendance, participation, or grading that you should keep in mind.

Understanding the expectations from the beginning can prevent confusion later on.

Break down big projects into smaller, manageable tasks and incorporate them into your weekly schedule. This way, you'll avoid feeling overwhelmed when multiple deadlines hit at once. A solid syllabus review helps you plan your semester and puts you ahead of your learning path.

Setting up study space

Your dorm room will likely be a part of your study space, so creating an environment that helps you focus is important.

Designate a specific area where you can study—a desk, a quiet corner, or even part of your bed if space is tight. Make sure it's free from distractions, well-lit, and equipped with everything you need: notebooks, pens, your laptop, and other supplies. Consider adding a few personal touches that inspire productivity, like a motivational quote, a plant, or photos from home. A comfortable, organized study area can significantly improve your focus and make studying a more enjoyable experience.

Sometimes, focusing on studying in your dorm can be challenging. You may have too many distractions or feel the space is not welcoming enough for learning. If that is the case, try to find a place on campus where you can study, like the library, a student lounge, or a coffee shop.

Introduction to professors

Introducing yourself to your professors during the first week is a simple yet effective way to build a positive relationship.

Before or after class, take a moment to say hello, mention your major, and express your excitement for the course. Most professors appreciate students who show initiative, and making that connection early on will make it easier to approach them later with questions or concerns.

If your class is too large for personal introductions, look for office hours during the first week. Office hours are an ideal time to introduce yourself in a more relaxed setting, ask questions about the course, and show that you're proactive about your education.

Building a rapport with your professors can open doors for mentorship, academic advice, and even recommendation letters.

Adapting to college academics

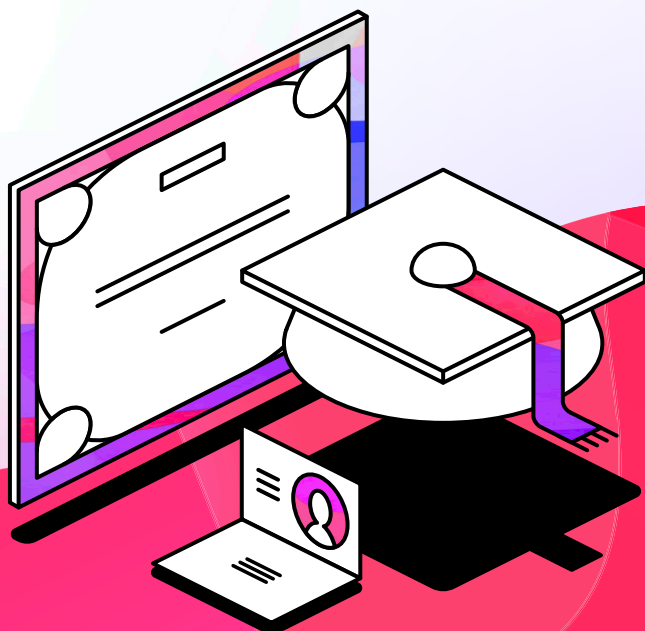
Starting at college is more than just moving to a new environment; it's about adapting to a new way of learning and thinking. Higher education requires students to be more independent, proactive, and responsible for their academic journey.

The shift from high school to college can feel significant, but understanding what to expect and how to navigate these changes will help you succeed.

This section will guide you through the critical aspects of adapting to college academics, including understanding expectations, embracing active learning, integrating tech tools, and seeking academic support.

College academics significantly differ from high school, requiring more time and effort and a more self-directed approach to learning. **In college, you are in charge of taking ownership of your education**, staying on top of your schedule, and engaging more deeply with the material.

The good news is that a solid strategy can make this big jump in your academic life smooth. Let's break down the most important things to know as you adapt to the demands of college academics.



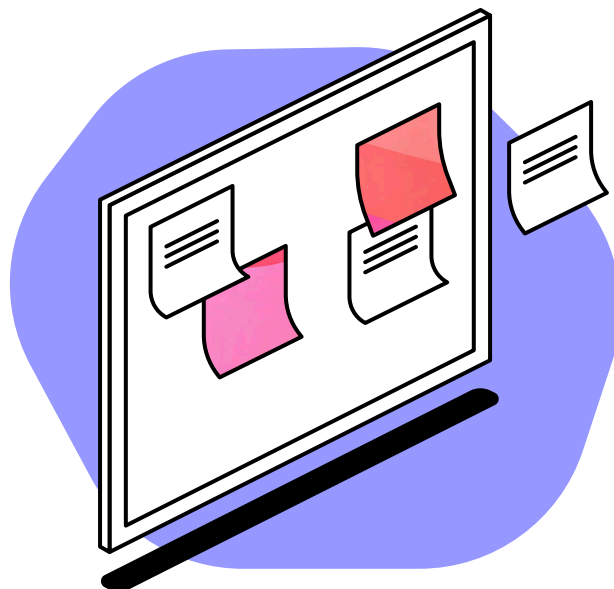
Understanding expectations

One of the first contrasts between high school and college is the level of responsibility placed on you as a student. In high school, teachers often guide you through assignments and remind you of upcoming deadlines. In college, professors provide a syllabus outlining the semester's work, but it's up to you to keep track of assignments, readings, and exams.

College courses may also cover material at a faster pace and expect more critical thinking and independent research. Lectures might not always cover everything that appears on exams, so independent study is crucial.

Understanding these expectations early on will help you manage your time and workload more effectively. Your syllabus will be one of your best friends during this process since it usually contains key information about the course and supporting resources.

However, if you have more questions, **don't hesitate to ask professors about anything unclear**. Being proactive will set the tone for a successful academic journey.



Active learning

In college, passive learning—just listening to lectures or reading textbooks— isn't enough to grasp the material truly and efficiently. Active learning is crucial to engaging with the content in a way that sticks.

Active learning is all about being hands-on and engaged with your studies instead of just passively listening or reading. It's a more interactive approach that helps you understand things better, remember them longer, and actually enjoy the learning process.

Rather than just cramming information into your brain, you're getting involved and making connections that stick. Here's how you can make active learning part of your routine:

1. Take smart notes and summarize

During lectures, don't just copy down everything your professor says—make notes that make sense to you. Write down key points, add your own thoughts, and jot down any questions that come to mind.

After class, go back and **summarize the material in your own words**. It helps you digest everything and makes it easier to recall later. You can even turn your notes into mind maps or explain them to a friend—it's a great way to see how much you actually got from your class and can remember.

2. Ask questions and reflect

Curiosity is your best friend when it comes to active learning. Don't just accept information as it's given to you—**ask questions!**

- ▶ Why is this important?
- ▶ How does it connect to other things you've learned?
- ▶ What's confusing about it?

These reflections will help you engage with the material on a deeper level, and if you're still stuck, you'll know exactly what to ask your professor or dig into later.

3. Apply what you learn

One of the coolest parts of active learning is **applying what you've learned** to real-world situations.

If you're studying something like economics, try linking the theories to what's happening in the news. In a literature class, see if you can find themes in the book that apply to today's world.

Applying concepts in this way makes everything feel more relevant and interesting—it's not just about memorizing facts but really getting to the heart of why they matter.

4. Get into active reading

When you're reading your textbooks, **don't just skim through them**. Highlight important stuff, make notes in the margins, and summarize what you've read afterward.

You could try using a method called **SQ3R** (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review). You ask yourself questions about what you're about to read, read actively to answer those questions, then summarize it in your own words and review the key points. It makes reading so much more effective.

5. Discuss and collaborate

Talking things out with classmates is an excellent way to reinforce your learning. Join study groups, engage in class discussions, or chat with friends about your learning.

Teaching someone else what you've just studied is a game-changer—it helps you improve your understanding of the material, and if you can explain it clearly, you know you've mastered it. Plus, you get to hear other perspectives that might make things click in a new way.

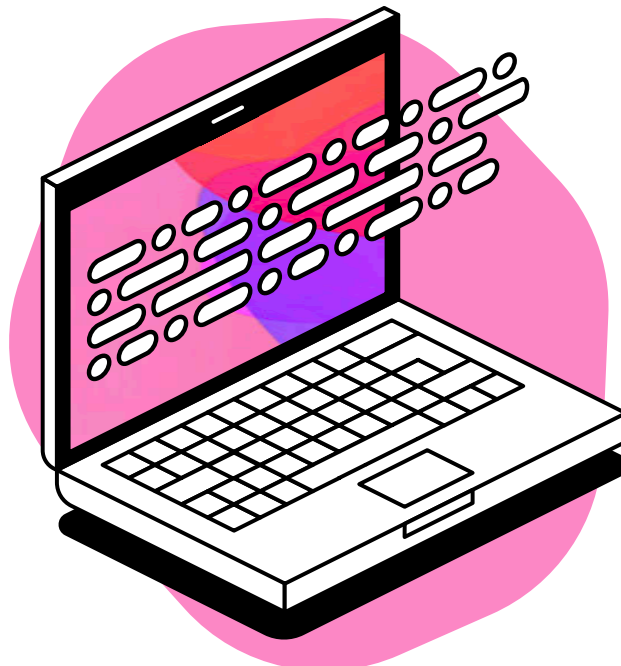
6. Self-testing and quizzing

Testing yourself regularly is one of the best ways to keep knowledge fresh. You can use **flashcards, AI-generated quizzes, or even make your practice tests**. This method, called retrieval practice, helps lock information in your brain.

Plus, self-quizzing lets you spot the areas you need to work on so you have enough time to improve before big exams or projects arise.

7. Make use of study tools

There are so many fun tools that can help you with active learning. These **interactive study tools** make studying feel less like a chore and more like a game, which keeps you engaged and learning without even realizing it.



Integrating study tech tools

Technology can be a huge asset in college if you use it wisely. Your laptop or tablet isn't just for typing assignments—it's a powerful tool for organizing your academic life.

Digital note-taking apps like **Genio Notes** allow you to create powerful, all-in-one study notes that are easy to learn from.

Recording your lectures

Recording a lecture (with your professor's permission) allows you to focus more on **listening and engaging** with the material in real time rather than trying to write down every word the professor says.

Knowing that you can always go back later to fill in the details from the recording, allows you to be more present and absorb key ideas. It helps you understand the lecture more deeply while reducing stress during class. Genio Notes can also transcribe audio into text, making it easier to review later.

Even if you're an organized note-taker, missing a few points or not writing things down perfectly during a lecture is normal. By recording the class, you can revisit the material later to fill in any gaps in your notes or clarify things you didn't fully understand the first time.

However, do not rely solely on the recordings—actively listening and taking notes during class will help you retain the information better.

Additionally, use calendar apps or task management tools like Google Calendar to keep track of assignment deadlines and study sessions so you can stay organized and balance academic tasks with personal time. Integrating technology into your routine makes it easier to manage your workload and stay on top of your responsibilities.