

A Student Success Workbook

A booklet of tips, guides, worksheets, and tools for you to work on your academic success skills on your own or with the help of your academic advisors to make the most of your UCSD educational experience.

How to Read a Syllabus

If you spend too much time around college professors professionally, you will learn that they almost always complain that their students never seem to read the syllabus.. So don't be one of the students they complain about. Spend some time learning how to use a syllabus to be a better student!



Instructor Contact Information

This will give you information on how best to reach your professor (do they prefer email, phone, Canvas...), the location of their office, and when they are available for drop-in visits during office hours.

Read this information **before** you email the professor about meeting to talk about a grade to make sure you are communicating in the way the professor will engage with you.



Course Description

Usually identical to] the UCSD catalog, this will give



Course Materials

What books do you need to rent/buy/borrow? Which ones are required and which are "recommended reading"? And where can you download or access online materials?



Grading

Is this class graded on a curve or a fixed scale? How much of your grade is each assignment worth? Are homework assignments graded or not? Is attendance part of your grade? What do you need for an A? B? to pass?

Be aware that some grading scales are very clear. Other classes will be graded on a curve, so your grade will be based on how you do in **comparison to the class average**.



Assignments

Get a sense of the workload in the class and figure out what each exam, paper, or task you need for the class will look like. How many assignments? Are they essays or multiple choice? In class or take home?

You should never be surprised by how much work you are going to do in a class once you review your syllabi!



Course and University Policies

Check to see if attendance is required, absence policies, deadlines and what the professor considers to be an academic integrity violation (and how they are handled) to understand professor expectations.

For example, "my other professors let me use Chegg for my assignments" ain't gonna cut it if your professor says that is considered an AI violation in their syllabus.



Learning Outcomes

The big picture of what skills and knowledge, you should gain and what it means to master this class.



Calendar

When are readings due? When are your papers due? When are your exams? When you plan your quarter, this helps you break studying down each week.

High school syllabi usually list what you need to do **after** the class on that date; **college syllabi** list what you need to do **by that date**.

How to Use Office Hours

- ❑ **Be on time or early.** Showing up at the end of office hours and expecting to get time is not going to be seen as respectful of the professor's time, nor is missing an appointment you have set up with your professor.
- ❑ **Come in prepared.** Make sure you are doing the class readings, reviewing the lectures, and doing homework or assignments before office hours. Office hours are a supplement to your work, not a replacement for it.
- ❑ **Come in with specific questions,** concerns, and topics to cover.
- ❑ **Ask for study tips!** At the very least, they can tell you what from the class is most important, most difficult, and most applicable.
- ❑ **Do not expect the professor to repeat a lecture you missed.** If you missed the lecture, you will need to rely on the professor's online notes, podcast, or a friend's lecture notes. But do ask for them to clarify specific points from lecture that you did not understand!
- ❑ **Do not expect the professor to walk you start to finish through homework problems.** When you need help on a concept or problem, you need to be able to show your professor that you started a problem, and where you are struggling with applying the learning for the class.
- ❑ **Don't wait until exam time to use office hours.** Office hours just before exams are the most crowded, and as a result may not meet your needs in the limited time you have in them. So attend regularly, and start early in the quarter.
- ❑ **Understand that you are probably not the only person in office hours.** This means that you need to respect others' time and needs, share attention, and learn from what others are asking about too. This also may mean participating in asking and answering questions, just like you should in class.
- ❑ **Expect this to be a collaborative setting.** Ideally, you, the professor, and other students will all be part of the questions, answers, and help happening in office hours. Be engaged even when other students are having time working with the professor!
- ❑ **Try to get to know the professor.** Professors are less scary than they seem at first if you give them half a chance!

Time Management

Write Down Everything

Don't rely on remembering due dates and commitments. Your brain can only do so much. You need a consistent place to note deadlines, assignments, and commitments. This can be a physical planner, a calendar app on your phone, or a running list in a notebook. But you need a way to supplement your memory to keep track of your obligations!

Look at the Big Picture

At the start of the quarter take some time to go through your course syllabi and pull out the due dates, exams, and all other important dates or put them all in one place. I recommend the use of a single page calendar for the whole quarter (see the back of this sheet) where you can note due dates and assignments at a glance to plan your weeks and days.!

Break it Down

Once you know your assignments, break them down into chunks. Have a paper due? Work backwards to when you will need to have your first draft, when you need an outline, when you need research, and when you need to have decided on an essay topic so you can set deadlines you can use to manage your time along the way.

Stick to a Routine

A standard routine give you two benefits. One is that you have to do less work to remember details of your tasks for the day. The other is that when your routine falls apart eventually, it will be easier to readjust what you need to do and still get it done!

Stay Organized

All the paper and electronic files you get from school can get out of hand and make it harder to keep on top of your tasks. Set up a system like having separate binders and notebooks for each class, files on your computer for each class, etc. to make sure the information you need is easy to find, and deadlines are hard to miss.

Use Lists

Written lists or checklist apps for your phone can help you by making you identify what you need to do each day, prioritizing important items, and then tracking if you get them done.

Balance and Wellness

If you are not eating healthy meals, not staying active, and not sleeping 7-9 hours per night, your body, particularly your hormone levels and memory function, will suffer, making it harder to manage your time and stay on-task. This can also affect your physical and mental health.

If you are not feeding your soul by living in a way that is consistent with what you value and believe, you will not be able to do well in school. If you are not able live your life fully, you will struggle academically.

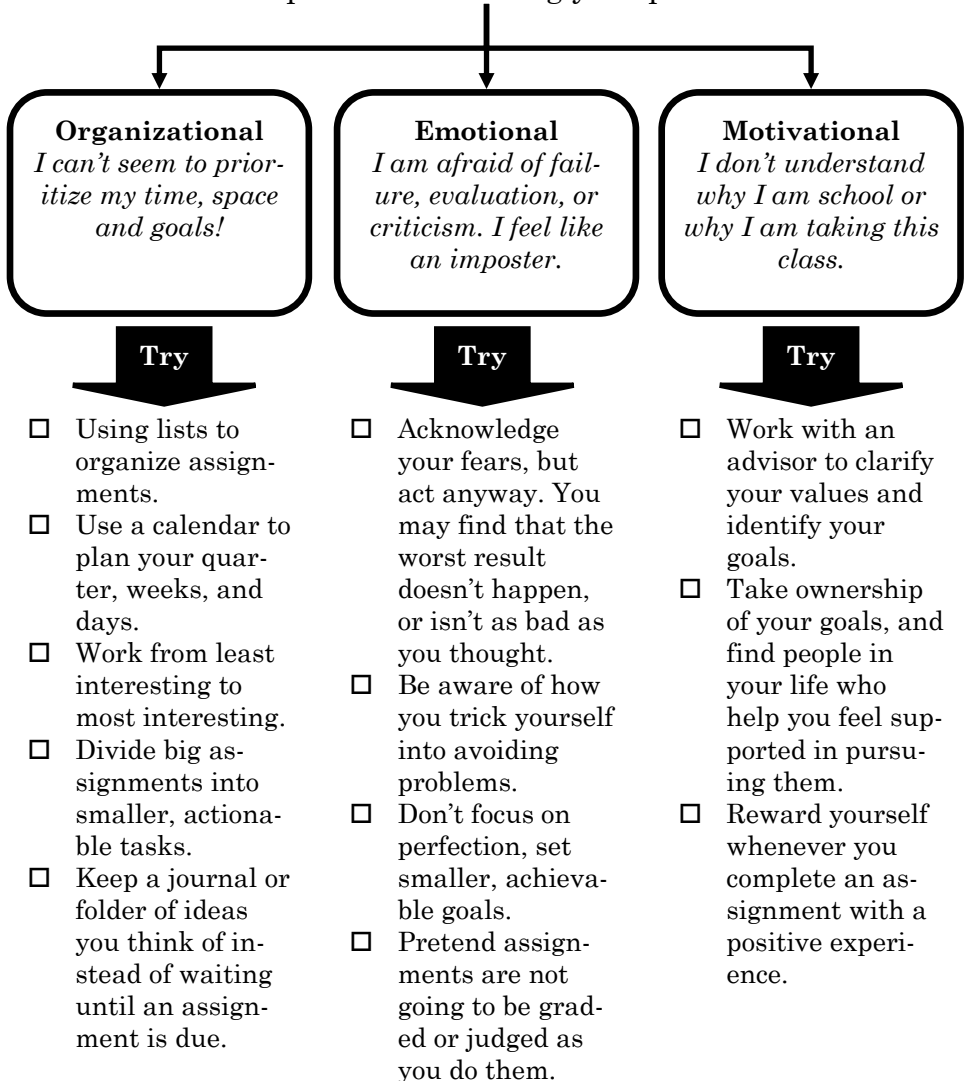
If you found yourself stretched thin or overwhelmed, seek help. Counseling, mentoring, and academic advising are all ways to ask for help, guidance, or support, and will help you get your out-of-control schedule back under control!

Dealing with Procrastination

Signs of Procrastination

- Underachievement:** I think my work doesn't live up to my potential.
- Lost Time:** I don't know why I didn't have time for my school work!
- Burnout:** I just can't find the passion or energy for what I am doing.
- Distraction:** I easily end up doing something other than studying.
- Over-involvement:** I find myself committed to more than I can do.

What kind of problem is causing your procrastination?



Textbooks: Reading and Taking Notes

Reading a textbook is not like reading a novel or a magazine. The key to reading a textbook is skimming through it to identify important information. The trick is to identify what is important and what is not.

1. When it's time to read a chapter in your textbook, take the following steps:
2. Read the introduction to the chapter.
3. Skim the rest of the text, identifying any important areas to go over in detail.
4. Read the summary at the end of the chapter, if there is one.
5. After skimming the chapter, return to the important areas of the text to look at them in depth.
6. Take notes based on your reading to help when it's time to review and to reinforce what you have just read.

Why are You Doing This?

Textbooks are important in college. Instructors assume they are tools you will use to teach yourself and form the foundation of knowledge that their lecture will then reinforce. Ideally, reading is what makes the lectures and assignments make sense.

Doing your reading before class will help you master material presented in lecture, and will give you a better basis for your studying before your exams.

Before You Start...

- Put away your highlighter (at least on your first pass). To succeed as a student you need to be an active and critical reader – highlighting can be passive and does not encourage critical reading.
- Remember why you are reading the textbook. If you are taking a math class, you may be looking for principles, formulas and applications; in a history textbook, you may be looking for names, dates, movements and definitions.
- Be alert and awake.
- Be prepared to ask questions and write them down.

What's Important to Read in Detail?

- Terms and definitions.
- Basic concepts, principles and ideas.
- Titles and subheadings.
- Bold or italic text.
- Illustrations, graphs, diagrams, and charts.
- Lists
- Introductions and summaries
- Things that trigger thoughts, reactions or questions

These are often cues to what the author has found essential to reinforce and illustrate. Based on this, look at the passages with more detail, identifying what is identified in each area and noting what is important.

Take Notes on Your Reading

You should take notes on your reading, just like you take notes on your lectures to summarize what you have read and the thoughts, questions, and connections that you make.

- Be brief, clear, organized and easy to review before exams. For example, they should be in outlines or bullet points, written on loose sheets of paper, written on only one side of the paper, and be dated and numbered so you can find topics.
- Summarize what you think is important rather than a sentence-by-sentence copy of the text.
- Include significant details of important ideas or concepts.
- Write from memory as much as possible to help you learn the topic rather than copying from the original.
- Summarize charts, illustrations, and diagrams.
- Include your own shorthand and way of thinking.
- Doodles, sketches, diagrams and cartoons can help you quickly capture a complicated idea or relationship.
- Highlighters and color coding your notes is a helpful way for you to find important ideas quickly and to organize your thoughts on the page.

Lecture Notes

Why You Take Lecture Notes

1. Note-taking helps you pay attention.
2. Note-taking helps you remember.
3. Note-taking helps you organize ideas.
4. A good set of notes is a perfect study guide.

During the Lecture

1. Do the assigned reading before lecture.
2. Come to class early and prepared with writing tools.
3. Choose your seat carefully — stay in the first two rows, away from distractions..
4. Stay awake, alert and engaged.

Organize Your Notes

You notes need to allow you to ...

- Identify key topics
- Read your notes
- See how ideas relate to each other.
- Read them later (so you need to write legibly and clearly)
- Be easy to refer to as a study guide.

Some ways to organize your note

- Outlines
- Page-ruled systems such as the Cornell note-taking system.
- Mind maps

Most people, however, will end up coming up with a hybrid system of their own. My own notes tend to be a mix of sketches, doodles, mind maps and outlines!

What to Take Notes On

1. Is the information notable? ..
 - Definitions, **dates, names, places and formulas.**
 - Information that **reinforces the textbook.**
 - Information that is **not covered in the textbook.**
 - Basic **principles and techniques**
 - Anything the instructor **puts on the board.**
 - Anything the instructor **says is important, or likely to be on the exam.**
 - Any topic the professor dedicates a **large amount of time or energy** to cover.
 - Anything the instructor **repeats or emphasizes.**
 - **Questions the instructor asks** students
 - Any **references to material previously covered**
 - Any **detailed responses to questions** in lecture.
 - **Your thoughts and questions.**
2. Does the information relate to the topic? And note not only if it relates, but how it relates – knowing that one topic is connected to others is essential.
3. Do you need the information?
4. Do you want to remember the information?

Key Words to Listen for in Lecture

- For example...
- For instance...
- To sum up...
- In essence...
- Therefore...
- To review...

Review Your Lecture Notes!

Review your notes the same day you take them – preferably just after lecture. Use that time to clarify your notes, fill in the blanks, and make sure your ideas are legible, organized and easy to find. This helps you in two ways::

1. It makes sure your notes are complete and easy to use.
2. It gives you one more chance to review the lecture material.

Extra Credit

1. The syllabus is a useful outline to the course, to help you see what information is important to take note of.
2. Be careful of technical language – know when to rephrase words and when wording is important.
3. Use abbreviations and shorthand to help you keep up.
4. Leave plenty of room in your notes to add, revise, or clarify your notes.
5. Be brief, clear, organized and easy to review before exams. Write on only one side of loose sheets of paper, and date and number your pages.

Preparing for Exams

Early in The Quarter

Learn what kind of exam it will be.

Figure out what kind of exam you will be taking — whether it is a multiple-choice exam, a short-answer exam or even an essay exam. This makes a big difference in how the exam will work. This should be described in the course syllabus

If possible and allowed by the professor (see the Academic Integrity policy section of the professor's syllabus), get a copy of the instructor's old exams so that you can see the way the instructor writes their exams and have a practice exam to rehearse test-taking.

Start Early

Preparing for your exam should start day one— you'll remember more if you start studying early and focus on drilling yourself on information you already know than if you are cramming a lot of information just before the exam.

Set Study Goals Every Time

Determine what you are going to get done in each study session. Have a goal to meet. You'll be more productive if you decide to review a certain number of pages or a certain set of topics rather than looking only at the number of hours you study.

Gather Your Resources

Whenever you study, you should have everything you need available. That means that you should study with textbooks, writing utensils, note-taking materials and the like handy. Having a dictionary at hand will help you when you're reading, too, but it isn't necessary. Your most important tools, though will be your class notes — if you keep them organized and complete.

Put Together a Study Group

When you are learning, one of your best resources will be other classmates. Having a strong study group can make your studying more productive and will help keep you responsible to keep up to date on information.

Near the Exam

As your exam approaches, you need to study a bit more and be a bit more focused.

Review

You should not be doing all your study before the exam. Instead, your focus should be on reviewing material you have already been working on all quarter.

Drill

Take time to review material regularly. Drill to reinforce factual information — definitions, basic concepts, names, dates, formulas, etc. This kind of information is good to practice using flash cards or other memorization tools whenever you have free time — waiting for the shuttle, in line for lunch — and you'll find extra time for your other studying.

Practice

While drilling will help you remember concepts, facts, and dates, the only way to get

better at solving problems and answering questions is to solve problems and answer questions. That means doing all the homework problems, whether the professor requires or grades them or not; getting together with a study group to do problems on the board, and to debate and discuss topics as if you are writing essays for each other ahead of the actual paper you have to write.

If You End Up Cramming Anyway

Cramming is not the way to get a top grade or to really learn the material, but sometimes it's what you need to do to pass an exam.

Remember that:

- Cramming is about short-term memory.
- Cramming works best for factual information and basic knowledge.
- Study in 50-minute blocks with 10-minute breaks.
- Even if you cram, give yourself enough time to for a good night's sleep – if you are not getting enough REM sleep, your brain will not be able to retain any information from your marathon cramming session. (And no, you are not an exception to how the human brain works.)

Taking Exams

The Night Before : Be Rested and Ready

Your mind and your memory work better if you have a full night's rest. If you want to do your best, don't stay up all night before your exam cramming. Get at 6-7 hours of sleep, more like 8-9 to improve memory and cognitive function and resilience against stress.

The Day of the Exam: Get Psyched

If at all possible, get to the exam early. Give yourself a chance to give your notes a final once-over, then put everything away and give yourself a moment to get yourself mentally ready. Take a few deep breaths, relax, and start thinking about the course and the material you do know.

During the Exam

Stay Focused and Awake

Keep your mind on the exam. If you can pick your seat, pick one at the front of the room and away from windows where you are less likely to be distracted by the view, by classmates, or by shuffling papers.

Sit on the edge of your seat and stay present in the exam. Don't settle in and get to cozy. You need to keep your mind present.

Read the Exam , the Whole Exam

Before you start the exam, read through it once quickly to figure out what kind of questions will be asked, what problems you can easily solve and what problems may take more time.

Budget Your Time

You need to learn how to budget your time on the exam:

- Consider that different kinds of questions require different amounts of time:
 - ◇ For example, essay questions require more time than short-answer questions which require more time than multiple-choice questions which require more time than true-false questions.
 - ◇ Be sure to check time during the exam to make sure you aren't running later than expected.
 - ◇ Try to save at least a few minutes to double-check your answer.
- Answer questions you know the answers to first. These are guaranteed points on the exam. Do these as quickly but as thoroughly as possible.
- Focus next on questions you are *pretty sure* you know the answer to.
- Leave time to revisit questions you had trouble with.
- Unless you will lose points for wrong answers you should guess on true-false or multiple-choice questions, and attempt to answer short-answer or essay questions to get partial credit.
- On multiple-choice questions, narrow selections to 2 choices before you guess.

Test Anxiety

What are the Causes?

- Normal fear: Hey, tests are scary!
- Do I have strong test-taking skills?
- Do I understand the material?
- Do I have negative associations with tests?
- Do I have negative associations with tests?
- Do I have trouble with confidence?

Before the Test

- Be prepared: (make sure you know the time and place of the exam and what you need to bring.
- Don't talk to others about the exam if it raises stress
- Arrive early and avoid feeling rushed!
- Think positive thoughts
- Visualize yourself doing well

During the Test

- Read all directions and plan your approach
- Ask the professor or TA for clarification if you have questions about directions or procedures
- Take your time
- Pay attention to the test, not to others
- When you are working, you are less prone to anxiety
- Don't second guess yourself — often your first answer is correct. Don't let panic lead you to changing answers at the last minute!
- Breathe deeply
- Relax your muscles

A Relaxation Exercise

- Sit upright with your feet flat on the floor, your back straight, and your hands on your lap or on the desk.
- Relax your shoulders, pushing them down and away from your neck.
- Take a deep breath through your nose, expanding your stomach as you count to 3. Breathe out through your mouth, counting to 3.

Making a Decision

Decision I need to make: _____

Importance: Trivial Moderately important Important Life-changing

The best I can hope for...

--

The worst I am afraid of...

--



Brain + Heart



Pros	Cons

Gut Feelings

Rational Conclusion

--

Intuitive Conclusion

--

Decision: _____

Next Steps: _____

Identify Your Strengths

3 things that I am good at....

- _____
- _____
- _____

3 compliments I have received....

- _____
- _____
- _____

3 things that I enjoy....

- _____
- _____
- _____

3 challenges I have overcome....

- _____
- _____
- _____

My top 3 values....

- _____
- _____
- _____

3 things that make me unique....

- _____
- _____
- _____

1 thing I have done that I am proud of is.... _____

I feel most confident when: _____

The 1 strength I would most want to develop is: _____

Some examples of strengths...

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind | <input type="checkbox"/> Punctual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Mature | <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Articulate | <input type="checkbox"/> Experienced | <input type="checkbox"/> Methodical | <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Meticulous | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourceful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candid | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capable | <input type="checkbox"/> Focused | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charismatic | <input type="checkbox"/> Forthright | <input type="checkbox"/> Neat | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear headed | <input type="checkbox"/> Frank | <input type="checkbox"/> Objective | <input type="checkbox"/> Seasoned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicative | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard working | <input type="checkbox"/> Open minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Considerate | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Outspoken | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-disciplined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative | <input type="checkbox"/> Humble | <input type="checkbox"/> Painstaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Passionate | <input type="checkbox"/> Sincere |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curious | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Perceptive | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determined | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuasive | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Devoted | <input type="checkbox"/> Insightful | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite | <input type="checkbox"/> Team player |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Intuitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical | <input type="checkbox"/> Thorough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Inventive | <input type="checkbox"/> Proactive | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Involved | <input type="checkbox"/> Prudent | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatile |

