



# iFALCON Academic Success Guide Fall 2012



habits of mind



# Table of Contents

<b><i>Introduction to iFALCON and Academic Success</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>iFALCON Habits of Success Inventory</i></b>	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Classroom Expectations for Academic Success</i></b>	<b>8</b>
<b><i>How to Visit Your Professor's Office Hours</i></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><i>How to E-Mail Your Professor</i></b>	<b>12</b>
<b><i>Resist the W</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>iFALCON Habits of Successful Students</i></b>	
<b><i>Focus: Recognizing Procrastination</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b><i>Focus: Studying, Memory, and Success</i></b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>Advance: Developing Higher Order Thinking Skills</i></b>	<b>19</b>
<b><i>Link Up: Independence vs. Interdependence</i></b>	<b>22</b>
<b><i>Comprehend: Study Skills for Academic Success</i></b>	<b>24</b>
<b><i>Comprehend: Understanding the Steps of an Assignment</i></b>	<b>27</b>
<b><i>Organize: Keeping Track of Your Academic Life</i></b>	<b>30</b>
<b><i>New Ideas: Higher Education and Brave New Worlds</i></b>	<b>33</b>

<http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon>



## ***What brings you to Cerritos College?***

Some students arrive straight out of high school and imagine that college is just a continuation of the same old stuff of high school. As a result, they bring the same old behaviors, many of which are not success-oriented. When they find out they are now in control of their schedules, both when they attend class and when they study, and that the demands of the classroom are often much more rigorous, they struggle to stay organized and succeed.

Some students set high goals for their academic success, but because they are the first in their families to go to college, there is little awareness at home about the amount of work or kind of support a college student needs. As a result, they don't always have the personal space or time away from family responsibilities they need for studying. At Cerritos College, 70% of students report they are among the first generation in their families to attend college.

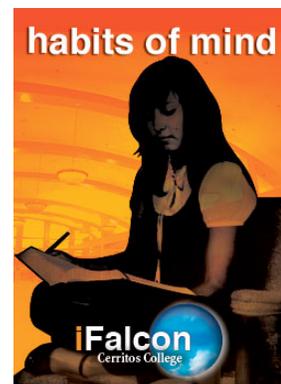
Other students are returning to school after years in the workforce, coming back to pursue a degree or professional certificate that will allow them to advance in their professions, or to attain new skills for new career goals. After an absence from the classroom, these students can feel out of place and wondering whether college is right for them, creating unnecessary anxiety about their ability to succeed.

And all of these students find themselves trying to balance increasingly complex lives: attending classes, studying to prepare for exams and assignments, working full- or part-time, and supporting a family. Occasionally even sleeping!

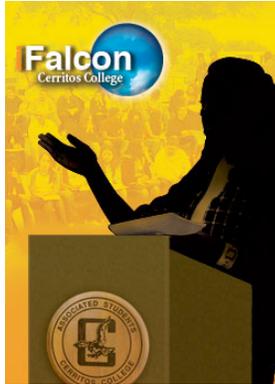
Do you recognize yourself in any of these descriptions?

College students, particularly new students, often struggle to succeed. Those who are successful have discovered a set of skills, what we call "**habits of mind**," practices for balancing their lives and achieving personal, academic, and professional success. All students have the potential to develop these habits and be successful if they are willing to do two things:

1. ***recognize and adopt the habits of success, which often means making changes to their lives, schedules, behaviors and attitudes;***
2. ***practice consistently the habits of success for every class, every day.***



iFALCON is designed to help students achieve those goals.



## What is iFALCON?

iFALCON is a campaign at Cerritos College designed to raise awareness of the success-oriented habits of mind across the entire student body and increase the number of students who practice those habits which lead to academic success.

As a result of research into student success, the college has identified **six core habits** that are consistently practiced by successful students: those who achieve professional degree certificates, A.A. degrees, or transfer to four-year universities. To make these six habits easier to remember, we've oriented them around the college mascot, the falcon:

### F: Focus

Successful students focus on the work to be done. They choose a major early, even if it means changing their minds later. They are academically self-disciplined, spending appropriate amounts of time studying (*minimum* 2 hours for every hour spent in class weekly, for *every* class). They come to class on time and prepared, book and notes in hand. They complete all assignments and turn them in on time. They finish their classes, education plans, and degrees or certificates, or they prepare for transfer to a four-year university. They learn to recognize and avoid procrastination, plan their time on task efficiently, and consciously take the time to balance the demands of their lives effectively.

### A: Advance

Successful students advance by always improving. They embrace life-long learning. They understand that subject expertise requires a long-term commitment, and commit to ongoing development of thinking skills and learning skills. They recognize that general education requirements aren't a burden, but offer skills that may help them succeed in their majors or in other areas of their personal or professional lives. They want good grades, but their goal isn't a grade; their goal is personal growth and development. They link up with programs to help them advance, like Scholars' Honors, Project HOPE, Puente, EOPS, DSPS, TeacherTRAC, and others.

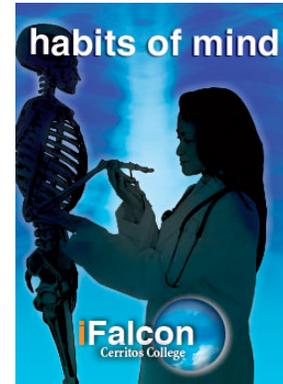
### L: Link Up

Successful students link up with the academic community. They get involved. They get to know their professors, visit office hours, study in groups, and surround themselves with focused students and mentors. They use college resources and programs to help with their learning, from the Success Center, to the Library, to counselors and support staff in offices such as Admissions and Financial Aid. They become involved in student clubs, taking on leadership roles, or in student government, knowing that future employers and universities want to see community involvement as well as grades. They choose mentors in their major who they can visit regularly as they prepare for program completion or transfer.



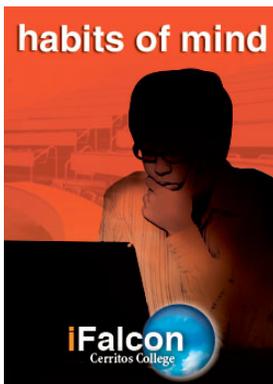
## C: Comprehend

Successful students study for comprehension. They seek to understand course content rather than simply complete requirements. They ask questions to gain understanding, reflect on what they are learning as well as *if* they are learning. They recognize shyness or anxiety about being “wrong,” and despite this, they are willing to tell a peer, professor, or counselor that they don’t understand a concept or skill and want additional explanation or assistance. They visit professors’ office hours to achieve this understanding, seek out assistance from program or campus tutoring services, and recognize that excellence in every area--both in major courses and in general education courses--is an achievable goal.



## O: Organize

Successful students are organized. They not only plan to succeed; they actively create a daily and weekly plan to succeed, and they stick to it. They use calendars--whether printed day planners or online services like Google Calendar, iCal for the Mac or iPhone, or Excel spreadsheets--to map out their schedules daily, including everything from class time, to study time, to travel time, to work and family time. Then they consult that calendar regularly, sticking to it conscientiously. They also have an educational goal, working with a mentor in their major or an academic counselor to plan out all of the courses they need every semester. They focus on their educational purposes, maintain that education plan, and choose classes with an intentional learning purpose in mind: to complete a professional certificate, an A.A. degree, or transfer to a four-year university.



## N: New Ideas

Successful students embrace new ideas. They are curious, seeking out new perspectives and skills. They don’t automatically reject a topic based on past experience, or avoid a course or subject area based on prior failures. They look for ways to turn prior missteps into present successes, learning new skills along the way. They transfer concepts to new learning situations in order to solve problems. They integrate concepts and knowledge to form a greater personal understanding. They challenge themselves and their peers and professors to achieve new personal, academic, and professional growth.

These are the habits practiced by successful students. Recognizing, adopting, and practicing these habits consistently will help you achieve your personal goals.

**Do you FALCON?**

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)

## iFALCON Habits of Success Inventory

Below is a list of common habits and practices of college students. Check all that apply to your study habits.

<b>Focus</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Have reading and assignments done before class; bring materials to class. <input type="checkbox"/> Choose a place to study with no distractions. <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid multitasking by not texting or web surfing at the same time as studying. <input type="radio"/> Miss class or arrive late to class. <input type="radio"/> Use your cell phone during class for texts or social networking. <input type="radio"/> Do not check spelling, grammar, or calculations before turning in assignments.
<b>Advance</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Possess a realistic sense of your strengths and weaknesses. <input type="checkbox"/> Study first, socialize later once studying is successful. <input type="checkbox"/> Use the instructor's corrections to improve your class performance. <input type="radio"/> Procrastinate in reading upcoming chapters or completing assignments. <input type="radio"/> Skip class when you don't feel like going or haven't prepared. <input type="radio"/> Complain about general ed classes as unnecessary or useless.
<b>Link Up</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss grades or assignments with your professor. <input type="checkbox"/> Create a peer study group and meet frequently to review. <input type="checkbox"/> Seek advice from an academic counselor or mentor. <input type="radio"/> Avoid visiting writing, math, or other tutoring services. <input type="radio"/> Turn in assignments without getting others' feedback first. <input type="radio"/> Rarely or never go to professors' office hours.
<b>Comprehend</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Review class handouts, notes, and readings more than once. <input type="checkbox"/> Revise assignments before turning them in to improve them. <input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to class discussions and ask questions in class. <input type="radio"/> Memorize class material even though you don't understand it. <input type="radio"/> Avoid asking questions about points you missed on a quiz or test. <input type="radio"/> Forget to review class notes or readings.
<b>Organize</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize your homework according to how much time each assignment will take. <input type="checkbox"/> Review the classes needed in your educational plan to reach your goal. <input type="checkbox"/> Bring specific questions about the homework or assignment to class. <input type="radio"/> Cram for an exam the night before. <input type="radio"/> Not schedule enough time to complete all readings or assignments. <input type="radio"/> Forget to review class syllabus and schedule for future assignments and readings.
<b>New Ideas</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Connect ideas from one class with knowledge or skills in another class. <input type="checkbox"/> Become curious and interested in what you are learning. <input type="checkbox"/> Share ideas from a class with family, friends, or peers. <input type="radio"/> Resist learning something new that challenges former beliefs or knowledge. <input type="radio"/> Set low goals for academic success, such as passing with a C. <input type="radio"/> Blame others (professor, peers, family) for your academic struggles.

Count up your squares and write the total here: \_\_\_\_\_

Count up your circles and write the total here: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you do?

### **SQUARES: Habits Leading to Academic Success**

**16-18 squares:** Fantastic study habits—you're on the right path to achieving your goals!

**13-15 squares:** Great start; you're on the road to success. How many more strong academic habits can you add this semester?

**10-12 squares:** Some strong beginnings here. Now let's work on adding 3-5 more habits of successful students this semester.

**7-9 squares:** You've got some good academic habits, but not enough yet. Which of the squares that you haven't checked can you commit to adding this semester?

**4-6 squares:** Shaky academic skills. Without stronger study habits, a degree, program certification, or transfer may be very difficult to achieve. Which 5 habits beside the squares could you work on this semester?

**0-3 squares:** Trouble! College and university study will seem very frustrating to you without strong academic skills. Identify five you could begin working on and let's work on adding them this semester.

### **CIRCLES: Traps Students Fall Into that Impede Academic Success**

**16-18 circles:** Danger zone! These weak study skills may limit your potential. Start now to avoid these traps and practice strong study skills (squares).

**13-15 circles:** Some weak study skills here; you are probably relying on quick fixes but not real learning. Try eliminating some of these in favor of stronger academic skills (squares).

**10-12 circles:** With strong academic skills (squares), you're not doing too badly, but not as well as you'd like. Lose some of those circle habits and you'll be in better shape.

**7-9 circles:** Not bad. A few of your study habits may get you into trouble. Try getting rid of 3 or 4 of these and adding some strong study habits (see the squares).

**4-6 circles:** Great—not too many bad habits here. Which can you work on eliminating?

**0-3 circles:** Fantastic—you are avoiding weak skills that could limit you. With strong study skills (squares), you have a handle on how to succeed!



## iFALCON Expectations for Academic Success

College is difficult and requires time and dedication. It is your responsibility to do everything possible to succeed; your professors counselors, and college staff are here to help you achieve your goals and offer guidance. Below are the minimum expectations for participation in college/university classrooms; if you choose to meet these expectations, you begin to perform as a college student.

### Classroom Expectations:

- \* Be in class 5 minutes before it starts.
- \* Use the bathroom before class begins. Unless you have a genuine medical condition, do not get up during class; it interrupts the professor and distracts other students. Plan to sit through the full class or until a break is provided. And if you do have a medical condition, make arrangements with your professor in advance.
- \* Before class begins, turn the smart phone off (no vibrate mode--shut it down completely) and put it away. Everyone knows when you're lap texting; if you need to lap text, go home.
- \* Plan to miss *no* classes during the semester--every absence is a problem. For every class missed, expect your grade to drop because you've missed important class material.
- \* Scheduling medical appointments, job interviews, family errands, or other activities during class time is not acceptable. If you are serious about academic success, your priority is being present for class.
- \* Avoid side conversations in class. Your whispering is obvious to everyone and disrespectful.
- \* Review the class syllabus and the course schedule weekly. Understand all class requirements and expectations.
- \* Talk with your professor. Ask questions during class or after class. Visit the professor's office hours to review assignments. Get to know your professor; this will identify you as a student who wants to succeed.

### Arrive Prepared for Class:

- \* Bring the right book and be ready to open to the assignment.
- \* Have a notebook open and be ready to take notes. Take notes on the reading assignment, too, and review them before class.
- \* Expect that for each hour you spend in class, you study for a minimum of 2 hours weekly. Consider the following guide as a breakdown of *minimum* expectations for the time you should spend studying outside of class weekly:

3 units: 6 hours  
 6 units: 12 hours  
 9 units: 18 hours  
 12 units: 24 hours  
 15 units: 30 hours

Many students intend to be successful in college, and yet their behavior sabotages that goal. If you can't dedicate the kind of time, focus, and personal responsibility required to achieve success, reconsider whether you are ready for college. You are responsible for your own success; are you ready to do what it takes to achieve it?



## How to Visit Your Professor's Office Hours

What is the most common complaint of college and university professors?

- A. Too few papers to grade during the semester.
- B. Too few people friending them on Facebook.
- C. Too few students visiting their office hours for assistance.

If you chose (C.), you are correct. All full-time professors have office hours that they set aside each week for one purpose: to help students. And yet, many professors find that no students show up. So, there are experts in the discipline ready to assist students in understanding the textbooks or lectures, preparing for quizzes and tests, and reviewing drafts of essays and projects...and yet college students often don't bother. And while part-time professors often don't have set office hours or offices, they are often willing to help students after class or through e-mail.

Successful students link up with their professors early in the semester and return for their assistance and feedback throughout. Want to be successful? Start visiting your professor *now*.

### ***Most important: Go.***

Many students are anxious or fearful of being intimidated by their professors outside of class; they can't hide in the back of the classroom any longer when going solo to the prof's office. Other students feel like they are bothering the professor or wasting his time.

Professors have office hours for one reason: to help students. They want to talk with you about your progress, to help clarify your understanding, and to guide you to success. But if you don't show up, they can't do their jobs. Make the decision to visit each of your professors at least once each semester, more often if possible.

## ***Check office location, office hours.***

Confused about where your professor is or when she has office hours? First, check your class syllabus; this usually lists the professor's office number and office hours, typically on page one.

Don't know how to read the office number because it starts with letters and ends in numbers? The letters stand for the building that the office is in. Check out the college map; there's a link to it on the Cerritos College home page ([www.cerritos.edu](http://www.cerritos.edu)). It will tell you what each building code stands for.

Also check to see if your professor has a website. Go to the college home page and click "Employees & Webs." Then search by your professor's last name. If she has a website, it will be listed next to her name; click it to see if she has posted her office location and hours there. This site will also include her campus extension number, which you can call to ask about office hours.

## ***When possible, make an appointment.***

Some professors want you to drop by during office hours whenever you wish; others might prefer an appointment in advance. While dropping by to see if your professor is available is often fine, it's a good idea to let him know in advance that you would like to stop by. The class syllabus will typically include the professor's e-mail address, or you may find it on his website. Send a brief, courteous, professional e-mail to request an appointment during his office hours, and let him know what you want to work on.

Of course, you can always ask him before or after class, as well.

Can't make your professor's office hours because of a schedule conflict? Rearrange work hours or child care to fit in a visit, if possible. If you have another class at the same time or it is impossible to change your schedule, contact your professor and see if there are other times in his schedule that you could visit. Professors are happy to see you at other times if they can arrange it, but they'll need advance notice.

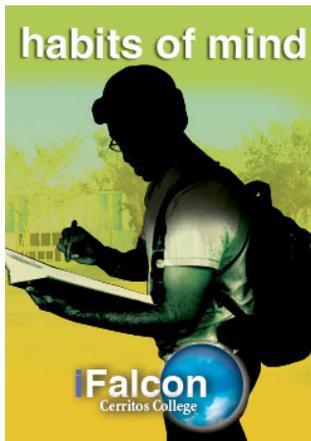
## ***Go prepared and ask questions.***

Keep in mind that other students may want to see your professor, and that she can't review the whole semester in 20 minutes. Similarly, she isn't a mind reader; you have to tell her what *you* would like to discuss. Be specific about the questions you have, the class material you would like to review, or the assignment you would like help with.



Have specific questions? Write them down in advance so that you remember them. Be sure that they are *not* questions you can find the answers to easily by reviewing the class syllabus or the assignment. “When is the paper due?” or “How long does the essay have to be?” are questions you can probably answer by looking at the class schedule or assignment. Try to ask questions about the subject of the class or your assignments, to clarify or expand upon your understanding and to develop new ideas.

If you are curious about your class grade, bring copies of all work that has been graded. If you want help with an assignment, bring a copy of the assignment with you. It would also be a good idea to bring the class textbook, too, should you need to refer to it.



### ***Get organized.***

No one is impressed by the backpack stuffed with papers. Your professor is eager to help you, but he is not going to appreciate that you took 10 minutes to find a copy of an assignment or an essay. Worse, if you show up to talk about a quiz or essay and forgot to bring it with you, or to talk about a subject in the textbook but forgot that at home, too, you will likely be wasting everyone’s time. Avoid that by being organized: have a folder for your class work and bring it, as well as all assignments and textbooks, to the meeting. Your organization will impress your professor.

### ***Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.***

After visiting their professors once, many students find that they feel more confident about their work and better able to succeed. They also discover that the connection outside of class is a valuable one; not only have they been helped with the class material, but they have a connection with an expert who can help them in the future.

Successful students benefit from their professors’ office hours in every class, but also as they prepare to apply for transfer to university or professional degree programs. Knowing your professor provides a great resource for choosing a major, and that professor may also be willing to write a letter of recommendation for future scholarships or employment opportunities.

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## How to E-mail Your Professor

On the first day of class, many professors will tell you their preferred method of communication outside of class is e-mail. The ability to communicate your ideas and questions effectively through e-mail is a valuable skill to develop. Use the following tips to help you develop **quality** e-mails.

### ***Address yourself well.***

Write from an academic account (.edu) or develop a professional e-mail address on a free site. You are in college now, so drop the crazy e-mail names. Your professor shouldn't be receiving e-mail from [Stud\\_muffin@yahoo.com](mailto:Stud_muffin@yahoo.com) or rowdygirl2000 @gmail.com. A simple address at a site like Gmail or Yahoo that is composed of a variation on your full name is a good way to present yourself.

### ***Check your class resources first.***

Before sending your e-mail, be sure you don't already have the information you need. Did you check your **syllabus**? Did you check your **professor's website** or **TalonNet**? You might already have what you need; if you do, asking for it again will make you seem lazy or unfocused.

### ***Use the subject line.***

The subject line of the e-mail should be informative. Most professors receive a lot of e-mail and are looking to delete spam as quickly as possible. **Do not leave the subject line blank.** If you have nothing in the subject line, your e-mail may be tossed out with the other trash. The best subject lines will, in a few words, state the purpose of your message. "Question about Essay #3 for English 52" or "Need to meet during office hours."

### ***Greet the professor politely by name and title.***

"Dear Professor Jackson" is probably too formal. Try "Hello Professor Jackson" or "Hi Dr. Jackson." Never greet your professor with "Hey," and avoid using the last name without a title. "Hey Jackson" is **not** a good way to start, and never address your professor by his or her first name unless you have been explicitly invited to do so.

### **Briefly and politely explain why you are e-mailing.**

Think about your audience. **What does your professor need to know to respond to your question or concern?** Be sure you are asking a question. “I don’t get it” is a statement, not a question, and it isn’t clear or specific. Also, don’t ask your professor to review an entire lecture. If you have a more involved question, you should make arrangements to speak with your professor in person during office hours.

### **Choose a professional tone and style.**

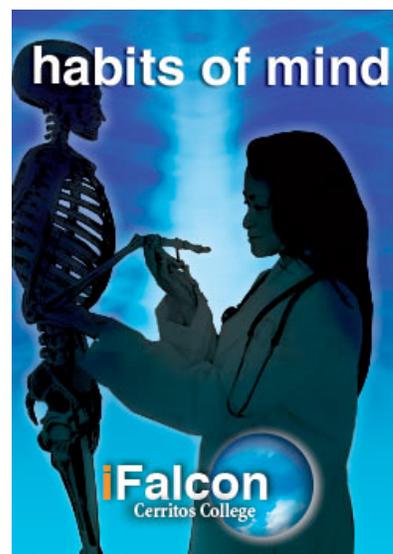
Remember this is a **professional correspondence**, not a text message to a friend. You need to correctly spell out all of the words. Avoid text lingo like “lol,” “r,” or “u.” Your writing should be grammatically correct and well structured—so **proofread** your e-mail before you send it out. Avoid emoticons, exclamation points, and fancy stationary. It’s cheesy and unprofessional.

### **Allow time for a response.**

Your professor is not sitting by the computer, eagerly awaiting your e-mail. During the week, you should wait *at least* 24 hours for a response, often longer. If you e-mail over the weekend, you may not get a response until Monday. If you have not heard anything within five days, you can resend your message. The rule here is to **not procrastinate** and expect an instant response prior to a due date or deadline.

### **Do not use e-mail to vent, rant, or whine.**

You may very well be frustrated about a situation, but **e-mail is not the place to deal with it**. If you find yourself writing an angry e-mail, don’t send it. Remember that what you write and send becomes public, and you never know who will end up reading it. A better option will be to speak with your professor **in person**. If you need to write about a sensitive issue, it is a good idea to have someone else read over the e-mail before you send it.



### **Don’t be insulting, or worse, clueless.**

If you have missed class, do not send your professor an e-mail asking if you missed anything. Of course you missed things, and if you miss class too often, this behavior will impact your grade. If you must miss class, make arrangements to get together with a classmate to catch up.

### **Who are you?**

Be sure to **sign your e-mail**. Use your first and last name, and if you are already enrolled in the professor’s class, include the name and time of the class below your name.

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## Feeling Stressed? Resist the W.

As the semester progresses, many students begin to feel overwhelmed. Maybe midterm exams didn't go as well as they'd hoped. Or a big essay assignment or class project is on the horizon. Or the demands of work or family are conflicting with the time needed for school.

When students get stressed, often they look for a quick and easy solution to deal with that stress. And unfortunately that often leads them to drop a course or two and take the W. Or simply to stop showing up to avoid the stress. And that can have **huge** implications for their future goals.

### W and Transfer:

Planning on transferring to complete an undergraduate degree? A transcript with Ws can be a problem. Cal State and UC admissions are more competitive every year. If you and a peer have the same GPA, but you have Ws and she doesn't, you may find your chances for transfer admission much lower. And several Ws on a transcript may suggest to a university that you have a problem taking your studies seriously.



### W and Professional Certification:

Is dropping a course even an option for you? Some professional degree programs don't accept Ws at all; if you drop the class, you may be dropped from the program. Others are very competitive and may not even admit you with Ws on your transcript. And what do you imagine a string of Ws says to a future employer or graduate program about persistence and dedication?

### W and the California Budget Crisis:

The deeper the budget crisis gets, the more courses must be cut. If you don't complete that required math, English, or general ed. course, or that essential course in your major, you may not be able to enroll again next semester. Or the semester after. Or the next one. How long are you willing to put off achieving your academic and professional goals?

And you know that after two Ws in a course, you can't take it again, right? *Right?*

### Before you go for the W:

**Link up with your instructor** about course options and your grade.

**Check out tutoring resources** that might help you boost your class comprehension and performance.

**Talk with an academic counselor** about your Educational Plan and how a W—or a lower grade—might affect your graduation plans.

**Consider your weekly schedule.** Where can you cut back on work or family responsibilities to spend more time studying?



**Don't take dropping a course lightly. Beat the W.**

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## FOCUS: Recognizing Procrastination

If you're like many college students, procrastination can be a major problem. David Glenn, a writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, reports that college students who procrastinate practice "avoidant coping styles"--meaning they avoid things that can stress them out in order to cope. But the problem for procrastinators can be even more complex, he writes:

Such avoidant styles translate not only into late term papers but also to higher rates of smoking, drinking, and a tendency to postpone seeing a doctor for acute health problems. Ms. Sirois and Mr. Pychyl also found that procrastinators have significantly higher rates of digestive ailments, insomnia, and cold and flu symptoms than the student population at large.

In other words, the behaviors that create procrastination can also be the same behaviors, according to some research, that translate to physical health problems.

But they don't necessarily avoid because of fear or anxiety. He writes, "College-student procrastinators might postpone difficult work not so much because they fear a poor grade six weeks down the line as because they have low tolerance for the immediate pins and needles associated with sitting down to work on a given evening." No one wants to do something that can be unpleasant, so we avoid it. Of course, the avoidance of completing an assignment leads to other unpleasantness--late essays, all-night cram sessions for tests that aren't as successful as we might hope, and other less-than-successful study habits.

And when students don't avoid directly by simply putting off the work, they avoid in other ways: by "studying" alongside tv, texting, e-mail, music, Facebook. Their divided attention keeps the "painful" stuff of studying soothed with the pleasure of "multitasking." Unfortunately, studies also show that multitasking simply means that students' **focus** is compromised, and any work they pretend to complete will be less successful than that done with full attention to the task at hand.

You can read the full article at the following link:

<http://www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/writing/Resources/essays/procrastinate.html>

Check out our iFALCON video on two students' experience with procrastination and **focus** by clicking on the link below or on the Focus student videos page. Do you recognize the problems they complain about?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6fxset5lvs>

Many students are assigned essays with weeks of advance warning for an essay's due date. What do they most often do? Put off working on the assignment until a week, or days (or, in worst cases, hours) before the due date. Then they'll be rushed and will underperform.

And even those students who claim they write best under pressure are often underperforming, even though they don't know it. A study by Bruce Tuckman, quoted in the Chronicle article, concludes that these students really are only developing rationalizations about their success:

...procrastinators seek to exonerate themselves, thus maintaining a positive self-image and avoiding punishment, by deflecting blame through actions such as excuse making...and rationalizing. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that procrastination is associated with poor academic performance...

Telling themselves "I do best under pressure" or telling an instructor that grandma died (the 3rd one this semester!) is just a rationalization to avoid the stress of getting the work done. Similarly, engaging in multitasking with online or other media may also be a rationalization; "I worked so hard last night!" sounds better than "I spent 15 minutes studying and 3 hours on Facebook! LOL!"

For Tuckman, the conclusions are clear:

The key to change may well be getting procrastinators to recognize the inaccuracy and dysfunctionality of their rationalizations. To accomplish this it would appear necessary to get procrastinating students to try doing their academic preparation on a more timely basis and noting the results.

You can read Tuckman's study here:

[http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/references/procrastinator\\_APA\\_paper.htm](http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/references/procrastinator_APA_paper.htm)

Check out more on successful focus at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)

h a b i t s o f m i n d



## FOCUS: Studying, Memory, and Success

Many students know they should study in order to get good grades. But unfortunately, many don't know *how* to study effectively. They know they took notes and did the assigned reading for a class, but they can't recall any of it when test time comes, and writing assignments all seem to get low grades. They feel like failures, and because no one wants to feel like a failure, they look to withdrawal as an option.

Unfortunately, many students depend only on **short-term memory**. They write down lecture notes during class and don't look at them again. They passively read the assigned chapter once a day or two before class and never review or think about it again. They imagine they are being good students. But they don't recall what they heard or read, and they become frustrated when that information is gone.

The problem, however, isn't with the student's ability; the problem is one of biology.

Studies indicate that short-term memory can hold about 2 "chunks" of information; less if the information is brand new. It also indicates that the new information can start to fade away in about *12 seconds*. No wonder you don't recall the lecture notes or the chapter readings!

What's worse, *interference* can cause you to lose what you were trying to remember. Any outside stimulus that interrupts your concentration—a cell phone ringing, someone talking too loudly, hunger pangs—will interrupt the short-term memory process and cause you to forget. Think about the last time you studied: were you by the computer with a browser opened to your e-mail? Was your iPhone pinging with new texts? Were you scanning Facebook status updates while reading a complicated textbook? These outside stimuli might be interfering with your ability to recall notes and readings long term.

However, memory can be improved significantly if you **focus** on the material that you want to learn. Rehearsing your information, memorizing it, and actively studying it over and over again will extend the time that you can keep it in your memory. With enough practice, that information can become part of your *long-term memory*.

How do you **actively study**? By doing something in addition to listening or reading. For example, take notes in the book margins, on a post-it note in the book, or on a separate notebook page. Use the **SQ3R technique**:

- **Survey** the chapter headings and summaries before reading.
- **Question** the main ideas of the chapter and how it might relate to your class subjects, and look for study questions at the end of the chapter.
- **Read** actively, taking notes by outlining the chapter, using chapter headings to organize your notes.
- **Recite** the material by talking out what you know with a peer study group also reading the chapter.
- **Review** the material by studying your notes, re-reading the chapter, and noting anything that is unclear or that you have questions about. Ask those questions in class or in the professor's office hours.

These are the kinds of active learning strategies that will help you recall your class information more effectively. And practice those skills regularly over time and on a daily basis.

It's important to spend enough time outside of class to review what you learned in class and to study or begin preparing for the next class. When you are in class, you will feel more confident about the material and be engaged in the class environment; in other words, you feel like you belong there.

With effective preparation, students can know the class material well, write strong essays, and succeed in tests and quizzes. But it takes time, dedication and **focus**.

Check out more on successful focus at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)



## ADVANCE: Developing Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Many students imagine that there is a specific pile of knowledge they have to gather in order to succeed. If they can just memorize enough of that knowledge, the reasoning goes, they'll be successful. How do you spot that attitude? Have you ever heard (or asked) questions like these?

"Is this going to be on the test?"

"How many quotes do we have to use in the essay?"

"If I write 4 ½ pages, does that count as 5?"

These questions really say, "I only want to do what's necessary to pass, and no more." Unfortunately, learning and success require much more than doing only what is necessary to get by.

In 1956, an educational psychologist named Benjamin Bloom created what he called a "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives." Since then, we often refer to it simply as **Bloom's Taxonomy**.

Why is this important? Because this set of educational objectives can help you to understand how to **advance** your learning beyond the basics to gain expertise that will help you achieve a professional certification or transfer to a four-year university.

Bloom believed that effective learning included six steps:

**1. Remembering knowledge:** This is what many students imagine as learning. They identify important information, memorize it, and repeat it for exams. Unfortunately, if students stop here, lifelong learning isn't likely to take place; the knowledge, crammed into short-term memory, will fade once the exam or class is over with. To recall it, the student will have to study the material all over again.

**2. Understanding knowledge:** This is the first step to real learning. The student must not only define or identify basic knowledge, but explain, summarize, describe, or illustrate how that knowledge works or why it is important.

**3. Applying knowledge:** If you can apply your knowledge to a real-world situation or problem, it means that you can actually use what you know to solve problems or

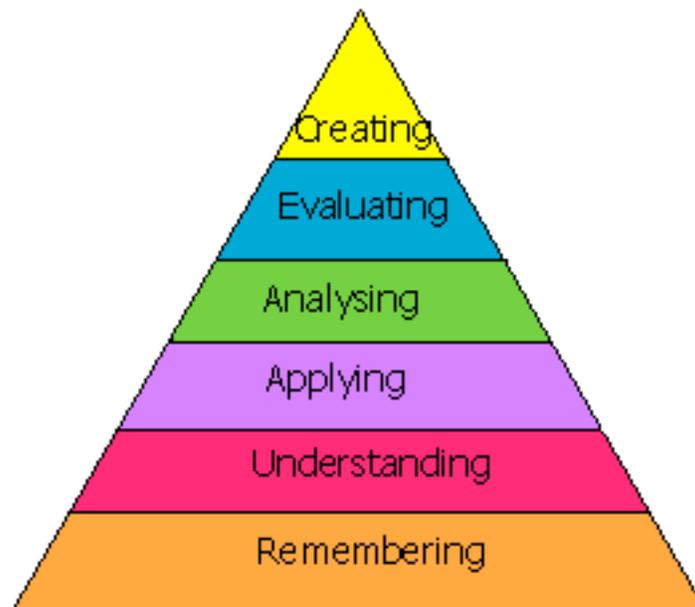
demonstrate solutions. The knowledge has become meaningful; you have a good reason to retain it.

**4. Analyzing with my knowledge:** Now that you know how to apply the knowledge in the real world, you can begin to use it to understand other aspects of your world. You can use that knowledge to compare or contrast it with other situations or problems; you can categorize it according to various aspects of life; you can study how new situations or problems relate to what you know.

**5. Creating new knowledge:** How do we create new knowledge or information? By taking what we already know and becoming creative with it. We design new understandings of our lives or situations, we invent new solutions or ways of seeing, we speculate or hypothesize about causes and effects. At this stage, we're able to recreate our basic information and develop results that are uniquely ours.

**6. Evaluating other knowledge:** This works at the same level as synthesis; as we create new information, we evaluate it and others' new information based on criteria we have set up. We can make informed judgments, critique knowledgably, and recommend specific action and solutions.

Richard C. Overbaugh and Lynn Schultz, professors at Old Dominion University, represent Bloom's Taxonomy like this:



Notice that the most basic step—knowledge, or remembering—is the foundation of the triangle. The higher you go on the triangle, the more advanced your knowledge becomes. Skilled thinkers—those who demonstrate expertise in their areas—strive for the higher abilities of analysing, evaluating, and creating.

So, a successful student needs to learn new information by memorizing it for her exams. But she can't stop there; if she hopes to achieve that professional certificate in nursing or automotive technology, or to transfer to UCLA or Cal State Long Beach, she needs to

practice her knowledge by understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These will be signs of her **advanced** learning and success.

Check out more on successfully advancing academic skills at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)

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Overbaugh, Richard C., and Lynn Schultz. "Bloom's Taxonomy." Old Dominion University. [www.odu.edu](http://www.odu.edu). 17 Dec. 2008. [http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms\\_taxonomy.htm](http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm)

More information on Bloom's Taxonomy is available at the following university and college websites:

<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/cogsys/bloom.html>

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/questype.htm>

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/BloomsT/index.htm>

<http://nerds.unl.edu/pages/preser/sec/articles/blooms.html>

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/gsi/tatalk/bloomstax.pdf>

[http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms\\_taxonomy.htm](http://www.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm)

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3b1t3\\_blooms-taxonomy](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3b1t3_blooms-taxonomy)

<http://mcckc.edu/longview/CTAC/blooms.htm>

<http://www.engin.umich.edu/~cre/probsolv/open/blooms/index.htm>

<http://www.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/curric/newtaxonomy.htm>

<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/newsletters0607/newsletter18.html>

h a b i t s o f m i n d



## LINK UP: Independence vs. Interdependence

Many students imagine that the perfect college student—the kind of student who earns As—is an independent genius, born with the skills and abilities to succeed. Everything comes easy to the perfect college student; essays are written the night before they are due, exams are only briefly studied for, if at all, and her photographic memory allows her to read a chapter of the text once and recall everything there.

Students who don't see themselves as successes are discouraged by the idea of this independent genius; they figure they must not be college material if they can't get As with ease, and they often give up.

But there's one problem with this independent genius:

*She doesn't exist.*

A successful student who frequently receives As spends a great deal of her time **focusing** (the F of iFALCON) on the information and strategies that will help her succeed, and she **organizes** (the O of iFALCON) her time and resources carefully. One of her best-kept secrets is one you can use: ***she rarely studies alone.***

Successful students aren't worried about being individual geniuses. Instead, they realize that they can rely on their peers to help them prepare assignments and study for tests. They form success teams that help them by:

- \* linking up for in-class peer group work
- \* planning study groups for class preparation and review outside of class
- \* meeting as a group with the instructor for assistance
- \* visiting with campus tutors to comprehend the material better

Skip Downing, author of *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life*, writes, "The fact that most students study alone is indeed unfortunate because research shows that students who engage in collaborative learning and group study perform better academically, persist longer, improve their communication skills, feel better about their educational experience, and have enhanced self-esteem." The ability to identify people who can help you succeed in college, in your career, and in your life is referred to as ***interdependence***. Learning when it is appropriate to rely on others' support is a key to student success.

There's no reason to imagine yourself a bad college student if you aren't an independent genius. Instead, think about how you can practice interdependence in this course to discover real paths to success.

So, how can you practice interdependence in your studies? Who can you link up with to help you study and to achieve success? Try these approaches to build your success network and to become an interdependent learner:

-  In each class, identify 2-4 students who seem success-oriented. That doesn't necessarily mean they are straight A students, but they must want to master the class material and be serious about being in class on time, every day, and prepared. Ask them to be a part of a peer study group for that class. Share school and work schedules, and schedule a time to meet. Be sure to identify a specific goal (for example, plan to have read and taken notes on Chapter 3 of *American History* and come with questions and outlines). Schedule a regular weekly meeting time and place for your study group.
-  Exchange e-mail addresses or phone numbers with class peers to share resources, help answer questions, or inform each other about class topics should one of you be absent.
-  Visit the Cerritos College Success Center and ask about writing, math, reading, study skills, and other tutorial services (free).
-  E-mail your professor or see him after class to schedule a time to talk about an upcoming assignment, to ask questions about the reading, or to review notes that you would like clarified as you prepare for upcoming quizzes or tests.
-  Visit the iFALCON home page ([www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)) and check out the iFALCON Club, a student club aimed at helping students build their academic networks and discover success.
-  Visit the ASCC website ([www.cerritos.edu/activities](http://www.cerritos.edu/activities)) and check out academic clubs, including those that are focused on your major or on an area of your interest. Attend a club meeting and consider joining; that academic network will help you link up, too.



## COMPREHEND: Study Skills for Academic Success

There are two things that can help to sabotage a college student's success:

First, most college students have busy lives. In addition to college classes, they work full- or part-time jobs. Some students work 40-hour weeks (or more) on top of 3, 4, or 5 college classes. Additionally, they have family responsibilities, caring for their brothers or sisters, their parents, or their own children. And on top of this, they have social lives, or at least hope to have them if they can squeeze in the time. Work and family (and sometimes social lives) often take priority over college classes, which don't seem to be bringing immediate support (money or care) to their lives.

Second, many college students assume that they can get by studying for college classes just the same way they did for high school classes. In fact, many imagine, studying for college should be easier; after all, high school classes met every day, while most college classes meet only once or twice weekly.

These misconceptions are the two major culprits leading to failure or mediocrity for college students. So, how does a college student who wants to succeed deal with these influences?

### 1. Define Realistic Study Time

In high school, many students get by studying for an hour or two daily for *all* of their classes—if that much. In college and university courses, that number is highly unrealistic.

Many students are unaware of the standard for college and university courses: **Study 2-3 hours for every 1 hour your class meets.** When professors assign readings and activities for class, this is the *minimum* expectation they have for your preparation. So, if your class meets twice weekly for 1 ½ hours each day, you should plan to study for 6-9 hours minimum for that class alone each week.

Here's a student's sample schedule and expected study time:

<b>Classes:</b>	<b>Number of Class Hours/Week:</b>	<b>Minimum Number of Study Hours/Week/Class:</b>
Woodworking 102	3	6 to 9 hours
English 52	4	8 to 12 hours
Math 80	3	6 to 9 hours
Art 100	3	6 to 9 hours
	<b>Total minimum study hours per week:</b>	<b>26-39 hour of studying outside of class!</b>

As you can see, a student taking four college-level classes is expected to put in nearly as much time studying outside the classroom as a full-time job.

So, think about the priorities in your life. If work, family, and socializing are taking up all of your time, how can you expect to be a successful college student? What steps could you take to balance your priorities and to spend more time studying for classes?

## 2. Prioritize Classes as Steps Toward Future Goals

Because college classes don't provide a paycheck this week or this month, it can be easy to prioritize a job over an education. Similarly, because students are often pressured by family members to be as actively involved in the family as they always have been, it's easy for college students to give in to those expectations and spend less time on homework.

However, it is important to remember that this week's classes are one necessary and important step toward achieving the long-term goals you have set for yourself.

*As a college student, your classes and your success are your job.*

Missing a class or forgetting to prepare for class with 2-3 hours of study time doesn't just mean that you slipped this week; it means you are that much further behind in achieving your goals. Even if you don't see how some of your required classes will help you reach your professional goals, know that completing a professional certificate program or transferring to a university is dependent on your success in **this week's** and **today's** classes. Imagine some Cerritos College students' long-term goals:

- Achieve Automotive Technology degree and certification; work for Saleen Company
- Transfer to UC Berkeley as a Psychology major; go to grad school for M.D. or Ph.D. degree
- Transfer to Cal State Long Beach for an Education degree and credential and teach high school math
- Complete Culinary Arts degree and certification and manage a kitchen for a Los Angeles restaurant

None of these are achievable without success in classes *today*. So, if you plan to skip class today or to avoid studying in favor of some other priority, ask yourself three questions:

1. What long-term goal am I trying to achieve, and how badly do I want it?
2. How might missing this class material affect my ability to reach that goal?
3. How can I prioritize my schedule to reserve an appropriate amount of time and attention on a daily basis for my studies?

### 3. Take Care of Yourself Physically and Emotionally

With so many demands on them, college students often neglect to take care of themselves. Draining the body and overwhelming the mind can create stress that makes the student less productive and ultimately less successful. Remember simple goals for keeping sharp:

- **7-8 hours sleep** nightly is recommended for effective cognitive ability
- **Eat.** Harried students often skip breakfast, sometimes lunch, to try and fit everything in. Avoid fatty, fast foods, in favor of foods rich in calcium, potassium, and magnesium, which aid in physical and mental performance. Small snacks throughout the day help keep the body running.
- **Hydrate.** Water improves alertness and wakes you up, particularly before classes or study.
- **Exercise regularly**, whether using the Cerritos College weight room or athletic facilities, joining a gym, or taking regular walks. Keeping the body active keeps the mind active.
- **Take study breaks.** You don't have to study for 2-3 hours in one sitting. Find your optimal period of concentration and focus. For some people, that may be 30 minutes; for others, it may be 50 minutes. Build in a break during that time in which you move away from your study area, drink water, stretch, and take your mind off the subject briefly for 10 or 15 minutes. You'll return more refreshed and ready to comprehend more material with such occasional breaks.
- **Avoid distractions.** Unless you are working on the computer, sit away from it and e-mail/Facebook/MySpace/iTunes and other distractions. Find a place where you focus well. Some people need a room with absolute silence; others need to be in a place where there is some activity around them.

Check out more on developing successful comprehension at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)

h a b i t s o f m i n d



## COMPREHEND: Understanding the Steps of an Assignment

*Daisy Gavilán has just been given a writing assignment in her English class: compare and contrast two movies that share a similar theme in 5 pages, creating a strong thesis to focus her ideas. She loves movies, so she's a little excited about the topic. She just watched The Devil Wears Prada on DVD—it's one of her favorite movies. But she's immediately concerned: how do I write a 5-page essay in two weeks, and where do I start? Can I write about The Devil Wears Prada? What am I supposed to compare it to? She knows that this worry could turn into procrastination; that's gotten her into trouble before.*

Often beginning a project or assignment is the most difficult step to take. Many students become overwhelmed by the enormity of a project, and rather than face that unpleasant sensation, they put off starting the assignment until later. Procrastination can create real problems; assignments never get easier as the deadline grows closer, and success can become more and more difficult to achieve as a result.

Breaking down the steps needed to accomplish a task is often a great way to **comprehend** the goals and the steps needed to achieve them. This activity will help you practice that process.

Here are Daisy's notes about the assignment as she breaks it down and better understands how she can complete the assignment:

### 1. What are the basic requirements of the assignment?

*Write 5 pages  
Compare and contrast two movies  
Identify a theme or main idea  
Create a strong thesis*

### 2. What is my subject in a comparison and contrast essay?

The Devil Wears Prada  
*One of my favorite movies! I like that Andi starts out confused but changes herself. She becomes more independent. She's not willing to*

let other people control her. She's in a bad situation but she finds a way to go for her dreams.

#### Legally Blonde

Elle totally doesn't fit in at Harvard university. But she goes for her dreams anyway, and she proves that she's not just a dumb blonde.

She's like Andi.

#### Made of Honor

Hannah decides to get married to a Scottish guy she met, but Tom—her best friend—realizes too late that he loves her. He has to figure out how to win her over. Sort of like Andi having to prove to her boyfriend that she's really not the superficial person he thinks she is.

#### Juno

I like this movie! Juno is totally bitter and separates herself from everyone, but by the end she's able to deal with her pregnancy and gets back to her boyfriend. Vanessa starts her new life without her husband, too.

### 3. What's my theme or main idea?

In all of these films, women sometimes have to fight to become who they want to be. Well, maybe not so much in Made of Honor, but in the other ones. People don't expect much of them, but they have to prove them wrong and grow into their own person. I think The Devil Wears Prada and Legally Blonde will help me with this best. I can compare how these two women are totally proving themselves to other who think they are no good. I can contrast them by showing how Andi isn't very popular at first and doesn't fit in, but Elle is very popular until she gets to Harvard.

### 4. What's my timeline?

It's Monday and we got the assignment today. I've got two weeks. Here's my plan:

Tuesday: write my outline

Weds.: watch Legally Blonde again and take notes

Thurs.: write my introduction and thesis (1 page)

Sat.: write part 1: contrast differences in Andi and Elle's backgrounds (1 page)

Sun.: write part 2: compare other people's stereotypes of Andi and Elle (1 page)

Tues.: write part 3: compare Andi's changes with Elle's changes (1 page)

Weds.: write part 4: compare Andi and Elle's independence (1 page)

Fri.: revise and get feedback from the Success Center's writing tutors

Sun.: revise and proofread with peer study group (1 pm @ Starbucks)

Mon.: turn in final draft

Now that Daisy has done some brainstorming about the essential elements of the assignment, she can plan out the steps for writing her essay. Instead of trying to write 5 pages overnight on Sunday, she only has to write out a page at a time...and she even gives herself time to revise and visit the Writing Center for feedback. She has **organized** her plan (the O in iFALCON) and will be much more likely to reach her goals than if she had followed her first instinct to procrastinate. This essay will be much easier to write because she fully **comprehends** the goals of the assignment and how to reach them.

Check out more on developing successful comprehension at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)



## ORGANIZE: Keeping Track of Your Academic Life

We often pride ourselves on multitasking—on doing several things at once. However, studies have shown that multi-taskers often do lots of things less effectively than if they focused fully on one high-priority project. They can also lose their sense of priorities, trying to balance unimportant things (like texting a friend about last night’s episode of “American Idol” or posting a status update on Facebook) with important things (studying for an exam). As a result, those who multi-task too often can feel out of control and frustrated, rather than feeling successful.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported in April 2005 that multitasking—what they refer to in the digital age as “infomania”—can actually harm your ability to focus on and learn from a specific activity. See the article at

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/4471607.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4471607.stm)

**Organizing** one’s priorities is a simple way to take control of what is important in your life. For students who take several classes, work part- or full-time jobs, have families, and hope to have some kind of a social life, getting control of your daily schedule is a necessity.

It’s really a simple thing to do. The best way to gain control is to use a **daily planner**. You can buy an inexpensive date book/planner at the bookstore, Target, Staples, and many stores. But you don’t have to buy a planner; many people in the business world who are developing projects use **Microsoft Excel** or a similar spreadsheet program to create a plan. It allows them to type in hour-by-hour and day-by-day schedules for their projects, including planned meetings and important deadlines. Once they’ve made the plan, they print it out and keep it handy in a 3-ring binder or on a bulletin board, and they can easily make changes. That schedule often looks like this:

Hour	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
8:00 AM	Get Mike to school						
8:30 AM	To Cerritos	To Cerritos	To Cerritos	To Cerritos			
9:00 AM	math	review English	math	review English	Work	Study	
9:30 AM	study	English 100	study	English 100			
10:00 AM	Math 40	English 100	Math 40	English 100	Work	Study	
10:30 AM							
11:00 AM	Math 40	English 100	Math 40	English 100	Work	Study	
11:30 AM		Lunch		Lunch			
12:00 PM	Lunch	math	Lunch	Art study	Work	Study	
12:30 PM	review History	study	review History				
1:00 PM	History 101	Review/prep. Art	History 101	Art study	Work	Work	Study
1:30 PM							
2:00 PM	History 101	Review/prep. Art	History 101	History study	Work	Work	Study
2:30 PM	Review notes		Review notes				
3:00 PM	Club meeting	Art 101	math study	History study	Home	Work	Study
3:30 PM							
4:00 PM	Home	Art 101	Home		Study	Work	Study
4:30 PM	English prep		math study				
5:00 PM	English prep	Art 101	math study	Work	Study	Work	
5:30 PM							
6:00 PM	dinner	Home dinner	dinner	Work			
6:30 PM							
7:00 PM	English prep.	History review	English prep.	Work			Study
7:30 PM							
8:00 PM	Art prep.	History review	English prep.	Work			Study
8:30 PM							
9:00 PM	class reading	class reading	class reading	class reading			Study
9:30 PM							

This student has scheduled out his week in detail, noting when he has to take his little brother, Mike, to school, when he's in class, when he works, and when he studies. Consulting this plan every day will give him greater control over his work as a student and over his daily life, making him feel much more successful.

One secret of getting control of your school and work life: plan a specific time every day to spend 15 or 20 minutes consulting your schedule. If you're a morning person, maybe you do this at 7 am every day. If you are more awake in the evening, maybe you consult it at 10 pm every night to prepare for the next day. Whatever works for you, plan to

review your schedule and all of your class assignments and deadlines on a daily basis. This will help you begin to be in control of your own success.

## Use a smart phone?

Many students find that an online calendar service allows them to synch their schedules with their iPhone or Android phone, allowing them to call up their schedules on a moment's notice. Check out free online calendar services where you can create your schedule and access it directly from your smart phone, including:

Google Calendar: [google.com](http://google.com)

Yahoo! Calendar: [yahoo.com](http://yahoo.com)

Cozi: [www.cozi.com](http://www.cozi.com)

AOL Calendar: [aol.com](http://aol.com)

Want more options? See what Mashable.com offers in its list of online calendar options:

<http://mashable.com/2007/10/08/online-calendar-toolbox/>

Check out more on developing successful organization skills at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)

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h a b i t s o f m i n d



## NEW IDEAS: Higher Education and Brave New Worlds

Read the following fictional case study:

*Ali Karakus was a bit anxious about his Political Science class on Wednesday. The syllabus indicated that the class would be discussing the United States' approach to global terrorism, and even before he read and took notes on chapter 7 in the textbook, he knew the class would have to discuss Islamic terrorism. He was proud of his family's Turkish roots and knew that his Muslim beliefs did not value violence against others. But he also knew that it was easy for many people to stereotype others, and while he had never directly experienced bigotry at Cerritos College, he had heard a few muttered comments in high school and remembered his family's anxiety after 9/11. He debated whether to attend class that day; so far, his attendance record was perfect, and he didn't want to jeopardize it. And he really loved Poli Sci—he even imagined it might become his major, a part of him aspiring to hold political office one day. But he also didn't want to be turned into a stereotype, a scapegoat, or the sole representative of millions of people worldwide.*

*Daisy Gavilán experienced something like this anxiety in her speech class. On Tuesday, a student presented an oral argument about why the U.S. needs to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico and why illegal immigrants are ruining life in southern California. On Thursday, there would be a counter-argument offered and the class would have time to share its ideas. Knowing that her aunt was undocumented made this issue far too personal; she knew it would upset her, and she really didn't want to deal with that. But she also needed to succeed in the speech class to transfer to UCLA, and she didn't want to miss out on important class time.*

*If he knew Daisy and Ali, Adam Valk might sympathize. His English class is set to visit the Museum of Tolerance on Friday after reading Elie Wiesel's novel, Night, and prior to writing their next essay. Unlike Ali and Daisy, he could hide his German heritage a bit more easily—many just imagined him another blond Anglo in LA, which generally was ok with him—but as soon as people began talking trash about all the "evil" Germans, he found himself getting defensive. Especially since he knew that for many people, "German" was just another word for "Nazi." And especially because his grandparents had fled Germany in 1938 to reject the*

*political regime. He knew his grandfather's stories about protesting Hitler's rise to power...wasn't that enough for his essay?*

Believe it or not, these student experiences are common at colleges and universities. College or university experience isn't simply about gathering a pile of **knowledge**—memorizing enough information to pass on to the next level by repeating it on tests and in essays. Higher education is better thought of not as a product—that pile of knowledge—but as a process of **knowing**. It introduces us to **new ideas** that challenge our old, sometimes limited, understandings, and helps us discover new ways of seeing the world.

Just as Ali, Daisy, and Adam want to challenge others' limited perspectives—their stereotypes—their own perspectives are likely to be challenged, too, broadening their understandings about classmates and their experience of the world.

Of course, in challenging our old perspectives, it can also be a little threatening. We all want others to see things our way; we often don't want to acknowledge that we have room to grow, too. But opening ourselves up to new ways of thinking and new experiences helps us to become intelligent, well-rounded members of our communities and our cultures.

But this growth isn't possible if the classroom is a threatening place. Anyone who reasonably feels demeaned, dismissed, or abused will react emotionally by becoming depressed, sorrowful or angry. Those emotions lead to withdrawal or avoidance for most people; after all, who wants to put up with that?

So, the process of knowing requires specific ground rules that allow for two things to happen:

1. College students are able to discuss openly and fully a subject without artificial restrictions in a genuine attempt to reach understanding;
2. College students are able to engage in respectful, courteous, and mature discussions free from personal attack, irresponsible generalization, or offensive language.
3. College students must be willing to challenge their old ideas by acknowledging and honestly considering new ideas in a discipline, even if those new ideas threaten what they have been taught or what they were brought up to value.

With these very broad guidelines, students like Ali, Daisy, and Adam—all of us, really—can begin to explore **new ideas** that may feel dangerous or difficult, knowing that we do so in a safe environment that will open us up to intellectual and personal growth.

Check out more on acknowledging new ideas at the iFALCON website:

[www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon](http://www.cerritos.edu/ifalcon)