

Tips and Technology for Managing Time, Focus, and Sleep in College



Center on Technology
and Disability

*Assistive and Instructional Technology
Supporting Learners with Disabilities*

Starting college is exciting and life changing, but college life can also be challenging. Below are tips for managing college life.

Time Management, Concentration and Sleep: How Are They Connected?

Ask students about their experience with finals week. You will likely hear similar themes:

- They waited too long and crammed too much work into too little time
- They stayed up late every night trying to catch up, and the lack of sleep made it even more difficult to concentrate and complete their studies.

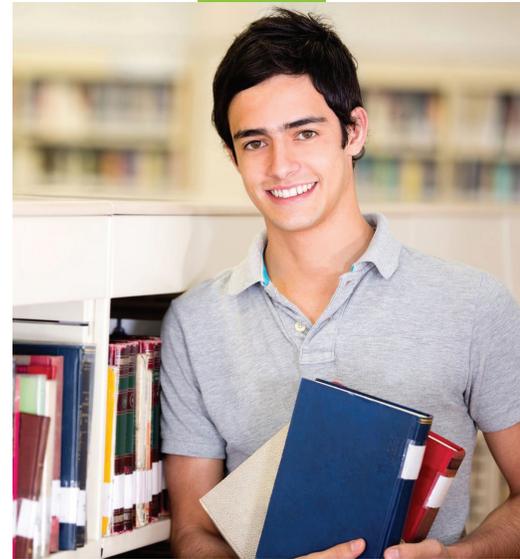
These incidents can become an every week experience for students who don't wisely manage their time, focus, and sleep. Fortunately, technology options and strategies can help you stay on top of things.

Here are some strategies and tools to help you manage your first semester in college.

Time Management

Think about where, when, and how to study during a typical week. While there is less class time in college than in high school, there is even more work to do. Outside activities can be tempting, and you will need to manage your time wisely to be a successful student. Building study routines into the day is a way to consistently complete work on time. These tips will help you stay organized:

- Enter your class schedule into a digital or paper calendar.
- Schedule study time at times that work for you, making sure you are rested, focused, and ready to think and work hard.
- Consider studying after an enjoyable activity, such as exercise, or before an enjoyable activity, such as lunch with friends.
- Spread out study sessions across multiple days or during multiple times a day to help your brain remember what you are learning.



It pays to think about where, when, and how to study during a typical college week.



Strategies and Technology for Better Focus

Concentration and focus are essential to studying successfully. Identify and understand what distracts you, and what helps you concentrate.

If visuals are helpful to you, make a simple two-column chart. On the left, list things that tend to distract you while studying. Think about what, where, and when you feel most distracted. In the right column, write down some things that affect your school work.

For example:

- Do you like to have music or no noise at all?
- Do you work best in a study group or by yourself?
- Are you able to concentrate better in the mornings before class?
- Does movement during studying help you focus?

Using the chart, draft a short list of things to do before and during each study session to minimize distractions and increase concentration.

Many students use technology and specific strategies to help block distractions and increase concentration. For example:

- Smartphones and web browsers have the ability to block distracting websites or applications for specific amounts of time. Search with keywords such as “block distracting websites or apps” to find the tools for your devices. In addition, many smartphones have a “do not disturb” mode to block incoming calls and text messages.
- It can be hard to get started studying. It may help to list things to complete during the session. Break the list down into smaller steps. Speak aloud the step you are beginning or completing to help you stick to your task list and complete work faster.
- Use a timer to plan work sessions followed by quick breaks. Schedule 20 to 25 minutes of work followed by a 5-minute break. That way you’ll have a work flow with breaks that reduce fatigue from trying to concentrate for



Identify and understand what distracts you, as well as what helps you concentrate.



long periods of time. Keep breaks to the time allowed, and try to avoid distracting activities like social media.

- Look for multiple locations around campus that provide positive environments for studying, and build them into your study routines. The more you study at these locations, the more you will associate them with concentrating on your schoolwork.
- Use a talking clock that announces the time aloud at set intervals (such as every 10 minutes), to help build awareness of time's passage. The announcements also can be a cue to redirect attention to your studies if you are off task. Free talking clocks are available online and as apps for mobile devices.



Sleep is Important to Your Studies

Good sleep is necessary to recharge your brain so you can focus and learn effectively each day. Sleep is especially important for individuals whose disability affects concentration.

Finding enough time to sleep is difficult for many college students. Nearly 70 percent of students report not getting enough sleep. (Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4075951>). Setting specific sleep goals and routines can help ensure good sleep habits that support concentration and focus.

Consider some of the different goals and strategies below to ensure getting enough sleep to succeed in college:

- Get at least seven to eight hours of sleep each night.
- Try to fall asleep and wake up at about the same time each day to ensure you're getting the right amount of rest.
- Nap wisely. Naps of 20 to 30 minutes are a great way to feel rested during the day. Longer naps can interfere with night time sleeping.
- Consider having a sleep ritual at the end of the day. Establish a 30-minute routine that is free of overstimulating activities and electronics to help you wind down and transition into a restful sleep.

Setting specific goals and routines around sleeping can help ensure good sleep habits that support concentration and focus.



- Avoid caffeine and other stimulants within four hours of going to bed.
- Before going to bed, write down a list of worries or thoughts that might keep you awake. Tell yourself you will think about and deal with them tomorrow.
- Wear a fitness bracelet that tracks your sleep. Concrete data about sleep habits can help you develop healthier sleep habits.



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