

(GST) Seven Steps for Success

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1. Realize the Time Commitment

College computer courses often are listed in the catalog of courses with both lecture and lab hours. But unlike the natural and biological sciences (chemistry, physics and biology) that must meet in a specific lab room designed for those courses, students can usually complete their lab portions at a variety of locations (the college's computer lab, home, work, public library, friend's house, etc.).

The normal rule of thumb is 2 to 2.5 hours out of class studying for every hour in class, and for computer courses this normally means both the lecture and lab hours. Students with less computer experience, certain learning disabilities, or those whose primary language is not English will want to plan for more study time and should use a larger ratio. Thus, you should calculate the weekly hours of commitment needed for a course depending on your circumstances.

2. Understand Your Capacity to Concentrate

You cannot expect to spend long periods of time working on computer course materials. After 4 to 6 hours of working on course materials, your ability to learn drops significantly (and for most to near zero). For some, this number might be smaller or greater. Understand what you need!

3. Plan Regular Study Times

The combination of the time commitment and your ability to concentrate leads to the conclusion that *you cannot cram weeks of study time into a week-end of concentrated study*. Successful students break up their study time into 3 to 4 hour study periods, spread out over the entire week. You must establish a regular routine for each week.

If taking the course at faster pace (8 week summer term) you will need to schedule more study times. This may mean a 3 to 4 hour study period daily for 6 days a week (with only one day off as a day of rest).

You need to stay on top of a course to successfully complete it. Pacing yourself with multiple study times allows for effective learning. Students who procrastinate, and then try cramming through course materials, are rarely "A" students.

4. Learning Requires Variety and Repetition

Completing a *variety* of activities related to one topic actually helps our brain to understand and build memory. In addition to *variety*, *repetition* (exposure over multiple study periods) is essential for our brains to be able to learn and recall the course materials. Again, this understanding and recall are essential to courses that require cumulative learning (you must understand item a before you can learn item b).

Textbooks and professors break-up course materials into chapters, topics or learning modules, often with learning objectives first and review items at the end of each unit. Each chapter or topic might have various tasks or assignments. **Keep in mind, however, that DOING and STUDYING are two different things. Rushing through an assignment for completion is NOT studying. Yes, it is the first step, but reviewing the material, more than once, is STUDYING.** Ask yourself:

- Do you understand each learning objective?
- If you did not understand the reading materials, did you re-read it?
- Did you consider using 3x5 cards to study definitions and vocabulary?
- Did you take notes and do you have them stored in an organized notebook?
- Are there any learning activities (tasks or assignments) available, and if yes, did you do them.
- Did you review the learning objectives before taking any quizzes?
- If the quizzes are computerized, did you study your quiz results?
- **After reviewing quiz results, did you review material and retake the quiz again, if available?**
- **After reviewing assignment results, did you try to redo the assignment (even if you could not submit it for another grade)?**

All of this requires time and effort on your part as the student in any course (distance education or on-campus). You need several study periods a week to learn the materials in any course. The purpose of a quiz is for you to self-assess your understanding of the materials. **If your learning is not complete, change or modify your learning habits.**

5. Interact with the Other Students

In a normal classroom students interact with each other. They often form study groups with other students and meet regularly to help each other study materials. These interactions in most cases are essential to the learning process. If your only interaction is by private conversation or private email with the instructor, you are not fully participating in the course. For distance education students, most learning systems (such as Eagle Online) provide several tools to create this interaction. They typically include announcements, discussion list, email and chat tools.

6. Don't Procrastinate and Don't Get Behind

What should you do if you get behind? Plan regular study periods to catch up. The lack of regular study periods is most likely the reason for why you got behind. Plan when you will do extra study periods in order to catch up, and modify future study habits to avoid this in the future.

7. Attend Class and Take Notes

Taking lecture notes and being able to review those notes later when you are studying provides variety that is needed to learn material. The process of writing the notes actively engages the brain, because you are listening and writing. You can even arrange with at least two fellow classmates that you will all take notes and share notes with each other if absent. In addition to course materials, other administrative matters are discussed in class (such as the announcement of exam date change, hints on exam questions, etc...). These are all important items that should be written down!

If you are taking a distance education course, you need to regularly enter the learning management system (such as Eagle Online) and review the announcements, discussion list postings and email. Most distance education professors assume that anything they have communicated via these tools will have been read by the student within 3 days. **This means you are responsible for having read the items and completing any action requested.**

Good luck and we hope the above will assist you in being successful in your academic career!

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