

12 Tips to Survive Freshmen Year of College

(From someone who learned the hard way)

Here are 12 tips I wish someone had told *me* as a freshman before I ran wild with my microwave popcorn and frozen yogurt. Strategies I learned (sometimes the hard way) that can make a world of difference in navigating your first year, and even beyond:

1. Freedom is fun... until it's not. Create a daily routine — and stick to it.

Yes, you can technically stay up until 3 a.m. every night, skip breakfast, and binge-watch your favorite show and neglect your homework, but future-you is going to be very annoyed and pay the price. A little structure won't ruin your freedom—it will actually enhance it! Set realistic sleep/wake-up times, meal routines, and study hours. Consistency helps ease overwhelm and prevents exhaustion.

2. Use a planner. Seriously.

Don't assume you'll remember everything—your brain has better things to do! Whether you prefer to use a digital or paper tool, *write things down*. Add important dates, deadlines, and anything involving registration to a planner or phone calendar with alerts - and remember to *check it daily*.

3. Stay organized.

Organize your notes, syllabi, and materials in color-coded folders and binders. Assign a specific color for each class and put all papers and materials in their designated place consistently throughout the semester so they don't pile up in your work space never to be found again.

4. Cramming is not a study strategy. Plan your study time.

Cramming at the last minute might've worked in high school, but in college, information overload is real.

Break big projects and long-term assignments into small, manageable tasks. This makes them less intimidating and much more doable.

Create a study calendar and start preparing for exams a few days or even a week in advance. Spaced repetition is a good technique for reviewing materials before a test. Small amounts of daily studying, over a span of a few days, is much more effective than panic-stuffing the information at the last minute and helps your brain actually *retain* the information.

5. The library is for studying. (Mostly)

Sure, it's a great place to socialize —*a little*, but it's also a good place for doing homework and studying. If possible, find a “quiet zone” with limited distractions, for maximum productivity when it's time to get to work. You'll thank yourself when finals roll around and you're not trying to learn an entire semester of information in one night.

6. Limit distractions.

No matter where you are working, turn off phone notifications and find a quiet spot to study. Consider using apps or website blockers on your computer if you're prone to distractions.

7. Fuel your body like a champ.

As delicious as microwave popcorn and frozen yogurt are, they are not a food group. Your brain function improves when it's fueled with healthy food. So does your mood. Aim for some actual meals with protein, fiber, and maybe even a vegetable now and then.

8. Get to know your professors.

Drop in during their office hours. They are human too and appreciate getting to know their students on a personal level. Don't wait until the last minute to meet them for the first time while frantically seeking out help!

9. Seek out Academic Support and accommodations early.

Contact your college's Disability Services Office for accommodations as soon as possible if you qualify for extra time on exams, note-taking assistance, or other accommodations. Use the tutoring center for help with writing or math. It's not a sign of weakness—it's smart! As with going to office hours, don't wait until the last minute when it's an emergency. If you receive a grade that makes you cringe, seek out help as soon as possible to get back on track.

10. Surround yourself with people who actually go to class and do the work.

You don't have to ditch your fun-loving friends, but make sure you also have people in your circle who show up, do the work and know where to find the syllabus. Their habits will rub off on you more than you think.

11. Don't assume. Check the syllabus and exam schedule.

Final exams don't always happen during the last class of the semester. There will be an exam schedule. These days it's most likely posted on the school's website. Either way—find it, check it, plan for it and show up on time.

12. Take Care of your mental health and give yourself some grace.

Adjusting to college is a big transition — be kind to yourself. Seek support from friends, family or mental health professionals if you're struggling. Take care of yourself and celebrate the little wins. And remember: everyone messes up, misses class or bombs a quiz. You're not a failure, you're just figuring things out. The key is to learn from it, and make meaningful changes for next time.

Final Thoughts: College is about learning—not just grades. Yes, GPA matters, but so does learning how to manage your time, advocate for yourself, and survive on your own without parental guardrails. Those lessons will stick with you way longer than a midterm grade.

"You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go." ~Dr. Seuss