

City Tech Tips for College Success

City Tech Office of First Year Writing, 2022 Presentation by Carrie Hall

Why did you decide to come to college?

My guess is that you wanted to grow as a person, to provide more opportunities for yourself and for your family. That's great! And City Tech is a great place to do that. According to a 2018 study by Stanford, the CUNY system is the best in the country for economic advancement.

But here's the catch:

To get those rewards, you'll need to do the work. I understand that you probably also have another job, as well as many other major obligations, but if you want to get an education from us, you'll only get out as much as you put in. That's just the fact. "Doing the work" means you come to class, pay attention, ask for help and do your assignments, basically. In my experience, the people who do this do well, and the people who don't, don't (no matter how smart they are or what their grades were like in high school.) In this presentation, we'll offer you some tips as well as troubleshooting advice in case things go wrong.

Tip 1: Come to class (physically)

Do your best to come to class on time, whether it's online or in person. Not only does this show your professor you care, but also-- THIS IS WHAT YOU'RE PAYING FOR! There's no way for you to learn the material-- or for your peers to learn from you-- if you're not there! Remember that you're responsible for all the material covered in your college classes- even on the days you've missed. Of course, things sometimes happen. We get that. But if you find yourself constantly struggling to make it to class on time, talk to your professor. You are missing important material.

Tip 2: Come to class (mentally)

What would happen if, every time you had to prepare a document for work, you didn't do it? Or if every time you talked to your boss or a customer, you were wearing headphones or texting (spoiler alert: your professor can ALWAYS see you on your phone, even if we don't always say something.) What would happen if, the day of your big work presentation, you just didn't show up and then emailed your boss a week later and said "oh I was sick?" The answer is the same in every case: you'd get fired. And in school, this kind of stuff makes it hard to succeed! And there's no reason to do that. The only person you're hurting is yourself.

Troubleshooting: What if I miss class ?

Of course, things may happen that are out of your control, and you might miss a class or two. Remember, you're responsible for everything covered in your classes whether or not you're there, so you'll want to make sure that you keep caught up. So how do you do that? Check the course website or syllabus and catch up with homework and readings. Email a friend in class to ask what you missed. After doing those things, email your professor and ask informed questions about the missed class.

What if I miss A LOT of class?

Unfortunately, you might find yourself in a situation where you miss A LOT of class. If you miss more than two or three classes in a row and you are physically able to send an email, you should write to your professor and let you are unable to come into class due to an emergency or crisis. You don't have to disclose more than you're comfortable with, but you should let them know something is happening. When you are able to come back, you should meet with the professor to catch up on what you've missed. Sometimes, you can't do

the work needed to finish a course. You need to focus on work or family or your health. In this case, you may decide to withdraw. This is no reflection on your worth as a person or ability as a student. We will be here to welcome you with open arms when you're able to focus on college again-- don't worry!

Tip 3: Participate

Some of your professors will have a participation grade. Others won't, but either way, participation affects your grade. This is because the better (not necessarily more) you participate, the better the professor understands who you are. When it comes time to grade your work, they have a feeling for your ideas! So what does it mean to participate? Participation isn't about talking the most, or saying the smartest thing, it's about listening, communicating and building the conversation. So, build upon things your prof--or other students say ("yeah! I was thinking the same thing-- that makes me think of another idea too!") or answer-- and ask questions.

Troubleshooting: What if I'm shy?

Did you know that more Americans are afraid of public speaking than they are of DEATH? It's true! So it's no wonder if you're afraid to talk in class. That said, it's an important skill you'll need in almost every job. The stakes are very low here, so it's worth trying to get over your anxiety. Remember, you have nothing to lose by saying something "wrong." Chances are, someone else is thinking the exact same thing you are. That said, some people have anxiety that goes far beyond a little heart-racing when it comes to raising their hands. If that's the case, there are other ways to participate-- small group work, office hours, emailing your professor, discussion boards and so on. You might mention to your professor that you are looking for alternative ways to participate.

Tip 4: Check the syllabus!!

This one is so important, we've made a whole presentation about it (see: "It's in the Syllabus!") To sum up: the syllabus seems boring, but it is full of important information, like due dates, grading policies, late paper policies, and course schedule. Whenever you have a question throughout the semester, check the syllabus first! Then, check the website-- sometimes your professor will post updates there. You can always ask your professor a question-- but check the syllabus and website first.

Tip 5: Understand Deadlines

You're in college now! This means that, unlike high school, assignments are due when they're due, without a lot of wiggle room. Some professors may have some leeway with this, but some may not. Never assume you can turn something in late, especially a major paper. You need to ask your professor for an extension. You may fail the assignment if you don't turn it in.

Understanding deadlines: What is "scaffolding?"

When your professors, especially writing professors, design homework, they're thinking about a concept called "scaffolding." This means that every homework assignment builds on the last one-- usually toward what you will do in class. The goal is to help you improve your writing, but also to take small steps toward your final essays. In other words, all of your homework is meant to help you work toward your major unit assignments. For this reason, many professors don't take a lot of late homework. It also doesn't make sense to turn homework in after you've turned in your major papers, since it's not very useful then. More importantly, you're making the final papers a lot harder on yourself if you don't do the homework! Most students report that they find it's very easy to get to the final draft once they've done all the steps along the way.

Troubleshooting: What if I really can't make a major paper deadline?

Things DO happen. Computers fail. Emergencies arise. If you miss a deadline, or you are struggling, don't just give up. Talk to your professors! Remember that we're on your side but there's no way for us to know what you're going through if you don't tell us. You don't ever need to tell more personal info than you're comfortable with, just that you are "having a personal issue" or "having a hard time keeping up with the work." It is always better to ask for an extension before the paper is due than to not turn it in at all. Whatever you do, don't just not turn the paper in and disappear.

Tip 6: Get to know your professors!

This one is important enough for its own presentation as well (see "What are Office Hours?") It's important that you get to know your faculty-- and that they get to know you. This will help them put your writing in context, and help them give you the benefit of the doubt if you miss a class or an assignment. How do you get to know an instructor? Ask questions in class! Go to office hours. Stay after and talk about your assignment. Send an email (there's a presentation on that too. See "How to Email Your Professor") Anything that gets your face out of the crowd!

Tip 7: Find study skills that work for you

We'll provide you some links to study skills on this site, and your professors will have a lot of tactics for you to try. The key here is going to be for you to figure out what works for YOU. You may find out you write best in the morning-- or late at night. You might discover you work best in silence-- or listening to music. You may write better if you write your first draft by hand-- or on your computer. What works for your best friend (or even your professor) may not work for you. Keep track of what helps you write and what doesn't!

Tip 8: Try new things

Even though you'll want to find the study skills that work best for you, don't get too stuck in your ways. Make sure you try everything your professor suggests at least once! If they suggest you write everything you can think of about your topic without stopping for ten minutes-- try it! If they suggest you try writing without music for a day-- try it! If they suggest you go for a walk while thinking about your essay topic-- you've got the idea-- give it a try. All of these things probably aren't going to work for you, but you won't know what IS going to work for you until you experiment. You never know. You may be surprised to find what helps you the most!

Tip 9: Ask for help!!!

This is the most important tip of all. If you are confused or if you feel you're falling behind-- ask for help! You can ask your professor or your advisor. If you need tutoring help with writing, you can go to the City Tech Writing Center. You are not alone and we don't expect you to do this alone! We will list more resources for you on this website