

STARTING THE FRESHMAN YEAR RIGHT!

You've made it this far . . . and now you can't wait to leave home . . . and your parents are probably excited about it too . . . but have you thought about the actual process of leaving home and setting up a new life in another place? You're going to be on your own . . . no parents, no curfew, no set schedule to follow, and very few rules of behavior. So, sounds too good to be true, huh? But how do you plan to survive without the safety nets that your parents and high school have always provided?

The following are some tips to help make the transition a little easier. Many of them have been suggested from former students who had to learn them the hard way.

GET ORIENTED

If one is available, do the orientation program for incoming freshmen. Some are held in the summer, and some are held a few days before the start of the fall term. Some summer programs offer you the opportunity to enroll early as part of the orientation activities. If they do, **take advantage of this opportunity** since you will have better course availability.

Orientation sessions offer valuable information about the campus and its programs and facilities, security, organizations and activities, etc. They are like a road map to the school, and they will keep you from making too many time-consuming wrong turns. They are also a great way to meet other people and start making friends. Of course, orientation sessions at some schools are a lot more fun than at others, but even if they are a little boring, you can still learn some valuable information and shortcuts.

PREPARE FOR DORM LIVING

Most schools ask you to list your dormitory and roommate preferences. If you do not list a roommate preference, one will be chosen for you randomly. You will be asked to choose between single-sex or coed dorms; if you want coed, you may be offered the option of coed by floor or by room. Other options may include all-freshmen or mixed-class dorms, dorms with designated "quiet" floors, and even "substance-free" dorms. You might as well get used to the fact that there will be noise and confusion in all dorms, but some are better than others for actual study conditions. Many students do their studying in designated study lounges in the dorms or in the library rather than trying to concentrate over all the noise.

The roommate situation: Most freshmen have to learn to live in a room with a total stranger, deal with constant noise, and cope with the fact that clean laundry no longer reappears magically in their dresser drawers. You and your roommate will probably have different values, outlooks, and habits . . . and this can mean trouble if you don't learn to discuss and **compromise**. If you find out your roommate's name and address during the summer, write a letter of introduction or email and suggest an exchange of information to help start the term off on the right foot. Talk about your study habits, sleep patterns, and standards of housekeeping (just how deep does the pile of clothes on the floor get before you bother to pick up a few things?) so that there are no surprises.

RESPECT and COMMUNICATION are the keys to successful roommate relationships. If you are unlucky enough to get the roommate from another planet, seek help from your RA, dorm director, or student services director. Your room is the only private space you have in college. If you can't be reasonably content and comfortable there, it's going to affect how you feel about everything and could even affect your academic success.

STUFF. When you get in touch with your roommate, work out who's bringing what. Rooms are often quite small with very limited storage space, so you may not have enough space for both of you to bring

every conceivable convenience from home. Consider sharing certain items especially ones that take up a lot of space like appliances. Make sure you are aware of dorm regulations regarding electrical appliances such as microwave ovens, hotplates, small refrigerators, etc. before you load them into the family van for the trip to campus. Most dorms allow some small appliances, but you'd better read the fine print on the housing regulations first.

You will really need the use of a computer and a good word processing program at school, but check out the availability of computers before you consider taking your own. Some private schools offer computers in the dorm rooms, but most schools can only offer computer labs in the dorms, library, etc. If you have to use a lab, you may have to wait . . . and if you have to wait, you may miss a deadline.

Laundry. You will probably be doing your own laundry (it's a sad thing, to be sure, but Mom just won't be there to take care of it for you). If you're smart, you'll take a crash course on the finer points of doing laundry before you leave home. Pink jockey shorts (for those of you who have never done laundry, pink shorts are a by-product of washing your white underwear with your favorite red sweatshirt) tend to cause a ripple in the men's locker room! It's a good idea to take a couple of laundry bags or plastic baskets with you and **stock up on quarters!!**

Security. Crime is a growing concern on all campuses. Be smart and protect yourself and your property. Keep your door locked and your valuable property out of sight when you are not in your room. Learn how to contact campus security in an emergency, and find out if an evening escort service is available. Most campuses have some sort of security, and those that are larger and/or are located in or near a city tend to have many security services available.

KNOW THE POLICIES AND CHOOSE COURSE WISELY

The college catalog will become your guidebook. It tells you everything you need to know about the policies of the school, which courses you need to take, and what your degree requirements are. **You** will be expected to read it and be responsible for your own progress toward graduation. **Ignorance is no excuse** at this level. Study the catalog (or college web pages) and then meet with your adviser. Making poor class choices can cause you to have to take one or two extra terms of classes . . . and this means more \$\$\$ as well as extending your graduation date.

Make it a point to meet with your adviser regularly and well before each registration period. No one will be looking over your shoulder to make sure you are meeting your requirements. This is your responsibility!

If you are at a large school, try to choose at least one small course (one of which there is only a small number of students) in your first term so that you can get to know at least one instructor well and a few people with whom you can work closely. This will make you feel less like a number and more like a real person.

PAYING YOUR COLLEGE BILLS

Even if your parents are paying the bills or you are on scholarships, all expenses are in your name. Take responsibility for monitoring these and see that they are taken care of in a timely manner. Check all statements and receipts for accuracy since schools can make mistakes. Keep all receipts and statements in a special file in case you have to provide documentation. When packing for college, make sure you take along copies of your financial aid statements and receipts for college bills already paid.

SET UP A MEAL PLAN

Most schools offer a variety of meal plans, including special plans such as vegetarian meals. Some meal plans are covered as part of your housing contract. There is a variety of options available, so make sure you understand how many meals per week are provided and in what locations. It's a good idea to get a meal plan for the first year so that you are guaranteed at least a couple of well-balanced meals a day even if you have overdrawn your account!!!

There is a popular idea that freshmen automatically gain 10 to 15 pounds. Unfortunately, this is true in most cases . . . but it's not the fault of the meals provided on the meal plan. It's the result of poor eating habits and too many junk-food meals. So . . . if nothing else . . . taking advantage of a meal plan might keep you from putting on unwanted pounds!

SAY GOODBYE TO SPOON FEEDING

Remember when you left the nurturing atmosphere of junior high and headed to high school? What a shock it was to move from smiley faces on your papers to just a grade with maybe a few scathing remarks about your immaturity of thought? And you thought the teachers would never quit preaching about taking responsibility for yourself? Remember? Well, guess what? Making the transition into college is going to be even more a shock!

It will be your responsibility to learn . . . no more spoon feeding . . . no more Mom nagging you to get your homework done . . . and no more trying to get an extension on your English paper because you had to stay late for play practice. NOBODY CARES what the excuses are. They simply expect you to follow through with your responsibilities.

You will receive a syllabus (fancy word for an outline of what the class will cover, what the assignments are, and the deadline dates for tests and projects) at the beginning of the class and **you are expected** to use it. There won't be reminders from the professor. That means you're expected to show up to class with your outside reading done and to be prepared for all exams. No ifs, ands, or buts!! It's that simple. College professors expect you to act like a college student, and they have no tolerance for students who are unprepared or who show up to class without an assignment but with an emotionally wrenching story to explain why.

LEARN TO BUDGET YOUR TIME

The biggest mistake that most freshmen make is **misuse of time**. The typical freshman takes 15 credits--or 5 courses, or 15 hours a week--compared to about 30 hours of weekly class time in high school. That sounds like a lot of free time . . . until you discover that for every hour of class time, you may have to do two hours of reading and studying. Another shock is that no one will be looking over your shoulder making sure you go to class or do your reading!!! Assignments will be given weeks in advance and no one will hover over you to make sure that you work each night. For most freshmen there comes a dangerous moment when you realize that if you can't make yourself work, then you might as well pack up and go home. The key to making it all work is to **get organized** and practice **time management** skills.

Use a planner. It doesn't have to be one of those fancy things that cost \$50, but use some kind of planner or assignment book to keep track of **everything** especially assignments, projects, tests, papers, etc. Get in the habit of using it everyday to write down all obligations.

Use your course syllabus or outline: At the start of each term, the professor will hand out a syllabus, or course outline, which tells what will be covered in each class session and gives reading assignments and the dates of papers, quizzes, and tests. Transfer these dates and deadlines into your planner immediately . . . and you will save yourself a lot of wasted time.

Set up a schedule: Your time in high school was structured . . . classes all day and homework at night. In college, you will have much more free time during the day in between classes. Don't waste it. Set up a daily schedule that includes study and reading time in between classes so that you don't save it all until the evening.

Upperclassmen will tell you that, as freshmen, they had trouble going from the structure of high school to the lack of it at college. Many freshmen with limited study skills and time management skills (Mom always reminded them to do things!) simply fall apart when tempted by the constant availability of social distractions. They party too much, skip too many classes, and suddenly it's too late to do anything but panic and fail. Don't make cutting class a habit. If you do, you aren't getting your tuition's worth and you'll regret it at test time.

It's probably impossible to catch up on 6 weeks worth of reading the night before a mid-term even if you do an "all-nighter," so save yourself the acute distress of setting up a daily schedule that includes study time. You will discover that having a daily schedule actually frees up time for you to do other fun things.

Get help: When in doubt, **ask for help**. Every school had some kind of assistance for students experiencing trouble--tutoring programs, writing centers, math centers, on-line homework assistance. Some dorms even have these programs available within the dorm. Some professors also offer help sessions prior to exams. Also, there are always study groups you can join. **The bottom line is that help is there if you ask for it.**

Remember that weekends don't begin on Thursday and end the following Tuesday! Keep up with your studies from the beginning and the intense workload won't defeat you.

LEARN TO BUDGET YOUR MONEY

This is another area where no one will be looking over your shoulder telling you what to do. You and your parents should sit down well before you leave for school and establish a realistic budget. Make sure you settle who is responsible for paying what (telephone calls, trips homes, and unexpected expenses).

Most businesses will not accept out-of-town checks, so plan to open a checking account in a bank near campus. Keep your checkbook balanced and up to date . . . and don't abuse an ATM card!!! Most freshmen say this was their biggest mistake next to time management.

It's not a bad idea to "hide" a couple of hundred dollars in your bank account for an emergency. Don't add it in . . . just pretend it isn't there. Most freshmen say that you WILL experience some kind of money emergency, and you will be glad you did this.

AVOID all offers for low-interest credit cards. You will be swamped with offers for these . . . and they will sound very attractive and enticing, but they are a fast road to needless and painful debt. **JUST SAY NO!**

Budgeting your money is a **necessary life skill**. Making a good start on it in college can positively affect the rest of your life. Your name will be on all college records and on any credit cards you personally apply for, so you are establishing a credit record. A poor credit record can haunt you for years, so use good judgment!

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SOCIAL SCENE

Yes, you are there to get an education, but you are also there to meet new people and gain new experiences. Take advantage of opportunities to meet people such as orientation activities, mixers at your dorm or at the student center, and, if you're interested in Greek life, the parties involved in rush for fraternities and sororities. Another way to meet people that has some great educational benefits also is to join a study group for one of your classes that is a challenge. Meeting people right away is the best way to fight homesickness and to avoid the feeling of being just a number.

EXPLORE EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMS

At large universities you will find a wide range of free and inexpensive activities to attend and many organizations to join. There are clubs, societies, competitive sports, intramurals, lectures, plays, concerts, performing groups, student government, etc. Also explore such offerings as radio and television stations, newspapers and literary magazines, and political groups. Smaller schools will also offer many opportunities for you to indulge your special interests. Sometimes this type of exposure helps you decide on a future career, so take advantage of the many things that are offered. These kinds of activities broaden your knowledge base and help you meet people.

LEARN TO MAKE WISE CHOICES

You will be called upon to make good choices about your courses, your use of time, and your use of money. You will also be faced with many other personal situations where your choices can have far-reaching consequences. The temptations will be many and varied. Keep your wits about you and your priorities straight and make decisions that reflect your values and your objectives for your education.

College is more than a place to get an education. Most students rank their "learning-from-living" experiences as just as important as the "learning-from-books" experiences . . . and most reflect that their success was highly dependent on their attitude and motivation.

If you encounter situations that can have unpleasant results or situations that you don't know how to handle, seek help. There are plenty of qualified people either in your dorm or in a counseling center who can help you deal with problems.

SHOULD I TAKE MY CAR

There are advantages and disadvantages to having a car at school the freshman year. The obvious advantage is that you can get to places in town and make it home on weekends whenever you feel like it if you don't live too far away. One of the biggest disadvantages is finding places to park it. Almost all campuses have strict parking regulations. Trying to use your car as a way to get to and from classes is more of a hassle than it's worth, and you'll probably end up getting scores of parking tickets as a result. Another disadvantage is that you will find yourself being used and abused as a convenient taxi service by your carless friends (who always seem to forget to chip in for gas!). It's a tough decision, but most schools urge freshmen to leave their cars at home for the first year.

Your problem is solved if your college does not allow freshmen to have cars on campus. In that case, don't take it because it's too much of a hassle to find a place to safely park it off campus. If your school does allow you to have a car, then you have to weigh the advantages and disadvantages (and the added expense of gas money and upkeep) and make your own decision.

Remember that most schools offer campus transportation services, so getting around on campus should not be a problem. Lots of students use bikes instead because they're cheaper to operate and easier to park!!!

MEDICAL AND DENTAL INFORMATION

If you're going to a school that is a considerable distance away, you might want to take copies of your medical/dental files just in case . . . and especially if you have any ongoing medical/dental issues. Check with your parents so you know what your medical/dental coverage is before you go off to a school . . . especially emergency care coverage.

STUDY AND TEST TAKING TIPS FOR COLLEGE

Different students study in different ways, and each person has a system that usually works for him/her . . . or at least it did in high school. Studying for college level course work will require a slightly different approach since the classes usually don't meet every day and no one is nagging you to get your work done. The following suggestions are ones that ALL college sophomores have learned if they survive their freshman year. Save yourself a lot of stress by reading them and making them a part of your freshman experience.

***Keep up on your reading.** Next to attending class regularly, this is the most important thing you need to do. It is impossible to catch up on 500 pages of reading the night before a midterm or final. Don't put yourself in this position!

***Good class notes are essential.** Rewrite or revise your notes after each class. While you're doing this you're actually studying.

***Review your notes periodically throughout the term.** Highlight important points. Every time you review, you're studying for the midterm or final. It saves trying to cram before the test.

***Avoid test-panic by getting enough rest the night before and by eating a decent meal prior to the test.** Sugar products can lower your blood sugar level and produce anxiety, which affects your ability to think clearly.

***Stop studying an hour before the test.** Seeing something you don't know at the last minute can set off needless anxiety.

***Read the entire test through before starting.** Then go back and prioritize the questions according to their test value and what you know well enough to answer immediately.

***On essay tests, jot down a brief outline of your thoughts before you start writing.**

A PARTING THOUGHT

The transition from high school to college is an extremely complex experience, and the first six to eight weeks of the freshman year is the most critical period. The first semester time has the greatest impact in terms of a student's stability, mental health, self-concept, goals, and retention rate. Knowing what to expect the first semester and recognizing and adopting good strategies for facing the challenges will enable most freshmen to live through the experience and will minimize the stress and discomfort!

Going off to college is a chance to enter a new environment with new people and make a new identity, if you so wish. It's like wiping the slate clean and starting anew, an opportunity we don't get very often in life.

Good luck to you, and may your freshman year be a great experience!

SUGGESTED CHECKLIST FOR RESIDENCE HALL LIVING

Appliances:

Hair dryer

Radio with an obnoxious alarm

CD player

Microwave (if allowed)

Small refrigerator (if allowed)

Travel iron

Bed/Bath:

Blanket/Comforter

Pillows and pillowcases

Sheets (have extras)

Towels

Toiletries

Clothing:

Normal clothes/shoes

Rain gear

Swimsuit

Athletic wear

Comfortable shoes for walking/playing

Desk supplies:

Calculator

Wall calendar

Daily/weekly planner

Desk light (portable)

Dictionary and thesaurus

Stationery, envelopes, plenty of stamps

Paper clips, pens, pencils

Stapler/staples

Ruler

Scotch and masking tape

Paper and notebooks

Eating-related items:

Dishware and utensils

Drinking glasses/coffee mugs

Snacks

Laundry Supplies:

Detergent

Fabric Softener

Hangers (plastic)

Iron and ironing board

Laundry bag/basket (s)

A supply of quarters/dimes

Room Furnishings:

Bedspread

Memo board

Posters/pictures

Small rug

Extra waste basket

Extras:

Backpack for books

Paper towels

Games/cards

Sleeping bag

Sports stuff

Insect repellent

Computer

A little bit of home:

Photos of family/friends

Personal mementos

Your address book

(These help fight homesickness)

Keep in mind that dorm rooms are usually small with limited storage space. You can't take everything!!!!

Plastic storage boxes or crates are a handy thing to take and can be stored under your bed.

HANDY THINGS TO TAKE

THAT MAY NOT BE ON A DORM SUPPLY LIST

*Power strips and extension cords. There are **never** enough outlets in dorm rooms. Make sure, however, that you don't overload the circuits. It's embarrassing if you become known as the kid responsible for the dorm's three-hour blackout.

*Fan(s). Older dorms may not have good air circulation even if they are supposedly air-conditioned.

*Hammer, pliers, screwdrivers. These will come in handy when you're getting your room set up.

*Bathrobe and flip-flops. No, you probably don't use a bathrobe at home . . . but it's a long walk down the hall to the communal bathroom. Most dorms don't have private baths for each room!!! And the flip-flops are for standing on wet (and sometimes slimy) floors in the showers where lots of other people have been. **Take them . . . you'll be glad you did.**

*Shower caddy. Another thing you don't have at home because you have your own bathroom. They're a great help carrying all that soap, shampoo, conditioner, etc., back and forth down the hall to the bathroom.

*First aid kit (including aspirin and Pepto Bismol) and small sewing kit. It's amazing how handy these two items can be. Remember, Mom's no there to take care of you!

*Umbrella(s). You will be walking everywhere . . . and it does rain at some time in every city or town. Take a spare because you will undoubtedly lose the first one right away.

*Flashlight. A handy item when the electricity goes out . . . which can be frequently . . . especially in older dorms where the wiring may be a little outdated.