

Fourth Edition

College Reading and Study Skills



Kathleen T. McWhorter

College Reading and Study Skills

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Kathleen T. McWhorter

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Preface

Beginning college students require a foundation in reading and study skills that will enable them to handle college-level work. *College Reading and Study Skills*, fourth edition, presents the basic techniques for reading comprehension and efficiency, study, note-taking, written assignments and research papers, and taking exams. The reading and study skills I have chosen to present are those most vital to students' success in college. Each unit teaches skills that are immediately usable—all have clear and direct application to students' course work.

More than twenty years of teaching reading and study courses in both two- and four-year colleges have demonstrated to me the need for a text that covers *both* reading and study skills and provides for *both* instruction and application. This text was written to meet those needs.

Reading and study skills are inseparable. A student must develop in both areas in order to successfully handle college work. With this goal in mind, I have tried to provide complete coverage of both skills throughout the text and to show their relationship and interdependency. In doing so, my emphasis has been on direct instruction. My central aim is to teach reading and study through a “how-to” approach.

The units of the text are interchangeable, enabling the instructor to adapt the material to a variety of instructional sequences. Part One provides an introduction to the college experience and presents skills, habits, and attitudes that contribute to college success. Topics include active learning, demands and expectations of college, time management, and organizational skills. This section also establishes the theoretical framework of the text by discussing the learning and memory processes and the principles on which many of the skills presented throughout the text are based. Part Two encourages students to be aware of and control the reading process. They are shown how to cope with factors such as poor concentration and stress which block comprehension. Reading as a thinking process is emphasized. Topics include prereading, activating background knowledge, formulating guide questions, and monitoring comprehension. Part Three focuses on the development of comprehension skills. Sentence and paragraph structure are described and recognition of thought patterns introduced. Part Four teaches textbook reading skills: how to use textbook organization, how to underline and mark a textbook, how to organize a system of study for various academic disciplines, and how to organize information for efficient learning. Part Five helps students improve their ability to perform in the classroom by describing how to take notes in lectures, how to prepare for and take exams, how to participate in class activities and projects, and how to prepare written class assignments and research papers. Because vocabulary development is critical for improved reading and mastery of course content, Part Six focuses on improving

vocabulary. The final section, Part Seven, discusses reading efficiency, reading flexibility, and skimming and scanning.

The text format was chosen to provide ample practice as well as instruction. Explanation of each new technique is followed by exercises illustrating the use of that technique and allowing the student to test its effectiveness. Students are thus guided in their understanding of the techniques presented and then in trying out each new skill. Many exercises quote excerpts from a wide range of college texts, providing realistic examples of college textbook reading. A second type of exercise is based on a unique feature of this book—the sample textbook chapters included in the appendixes. Portions of the sample chapters are used throughout the book so that the student can practice skills with actual textbook material. A last type of exercise requires the student to apply each skill in his or her own course work.

Several features make this book well suited to the needs of beginning college students. First, the book approaches both reading and study as active processes in which the student assesses the task, selects appropriate strategies, monitors his or her performance, and takes any necessary actions to modify and improve it. Second, the text focuses on reading as a cognitive process, applying the findings from the research areas of metacognition and prose structure analysis to encourage students to approach reading as an active mental process of selecting, processing, and organizing information to be learned. Third, the text emphasizes the necessity of adapting skills and techniques to suit the characteristics and requirements of specific academic disciplines, as well as accommodating the student's particular learning style. Fourth, the sample textbook chapters described above provide an essential link, or intermediate step, between in-chapter practice and independent application of new techniques. Finally, the level of writing and of practice exercises has been carefully controlled, and the sample textbook chapters are selected to be representative of college textbook reading assignments.

A partial Answer Key is included to make the text adaptable to self-instruction and to provide immediate feedback for students as they work through the practice exercises. An Instructor's Manual gives the instructor a detailed description of the text and specific suggestions for classroom use. The manual also contains chapter review quizzes, a complete answer key, and a set of overhead projection materials to enhance and supplement classroom instruction.

The fourth edition of this text includes changes and additions that reflect current emphases and directions in research on adult learning processes. A major focus of the text is on active reading. A new chapter on strategies for active reading is primarily concerned with metacognition—monitoring, evaluating, and improving students' level of cognitive functioning. Specifically, students are taught to activate their background knowledge, to establish purposes for reading through the use of guide questions, and to select appropriate reading strategies. Positive and negative comprehension signals are described, and specific monitoring techniques are suggested. Steps to follow when comprehension is poor or incomplete are emphasized.

Across many academic disciplines there is also a growing interest in collaborative learning—learning through structured group activities in which students exchange ideas and view one another's thinking and learning processes. Students who are accustomed to formal classroom situations are often less familiar with this form of instruction; consequently, a new chapter has been added on participating in class activities and projects.

Revisions in the fourth edition also reflect changes in the college student population. Because many students enter college with little knowledge of what academic work and college life involves, the text contains a new section on academic demands and expectations. A section on managing and coping with stress has been added to help beginning students find other aspects of college less frustrating. (One of the sample textbook chapters also deals with this topic.) Revisions furthermore address the topic of procrastination and add a new section on listening skills. Listening is approached as an active information-intake process requiring a deliberate focus and intention. Finally, the two sample textbook chapters included in this edition add flexibility and diversity in both content and format, providing an opportunity for students to adapt reading and learning strategies to suit particular academic disciplines.

In preparing this edition, I appreciate the excellent ideas, suggestions, and advice provided by my reviewers: Esther M. Eddy, Greater Hartford Community College; Rosemary Wolfe, Anne Arundel Community College; Paulette C. Babner, Cape Cod Community College; Gloria Tribble, Youngstown State University; Suzanne Parrott, Delaware State College. I am particularly indebted to Joseph Opiela, my editor at Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown College Division, for his insight, guidance, and support in preparing this fourth edition.

K.T.M.

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PART ONE

Succeeding in College

Many students find their first few weeks in college a confusing and frustrating period. Even excellent students who achieved high grades in high school discover that college is a difficult and challenging experience.

Getting started in college may be difficult for you because it is a completely new situation. The physical surroundings are new and it is easy to feel lost. Many times, too, you don't have many friends with whom to share experiences and ask questions. Also, college classes are conducted differently from high school classes. Your professors may not act like high school teachers, and they may seem to expect different things from you. Finally, you find that you have not only a lot more work and responsibility, but also a lot more freedom. You find that the amount of reading, writing, and studying required is much greater than you expected, and you realize you have a lot of choices and decisions to make. You choose your own courses, your own time schedule, and even whether or not to attend class.

The purpose of Part One is to give you some tips on how to minimize the frustration and confusion that most students experience as they begin college. This part includes specific suggestions that will help you start your courses in an effective and organized way.

Each chapter discusses particular aspects of getting started in college. Chapter 1 offers many specific suggestions on how to approach college learning and study and how to get organized to become a successful student. You will also learn how to get information, how to become familiar with policies and procedures that affect you, how to get help with problems, and how to take advantage of services available on campus. Chapter 2 is concerned with time efficiency and is designed to help you handle the extra demands of the heavy work load required in most of your courses. Chapter 3 identifies the ability to learn as the key to academic success, describes how learning occurs, and presents the basic principles of learning. It also explains how these principles are behind many of the techniques presented throughout this text.

1

How to Succeed

Use this chapter to:

1. *Learn what is expected of you in college.*
2. *Become an active learner.*
3. *Get off to the right start.*
4. *Learn about campus facilities and resources.*

To be successful in a new part-time job, you must learn quickly what the job involves and how to perform specific tasks. You are expected to be organized and to work effectively and efficiently. You must also become familiar with other personnel and with the facilities in which you will be working. You must learn where items are kept and how to get things done. Similarly, as you begin college, you must learn what is expected of you and how to accomplish it. College is a new experience, and to be successful you must learn what it involves and what is expected of you. Learning through reading and studying is your primary task, and you must learn to handle this task efficiently. It is also important that you get started in an organized manner, thereby making the learning easier and more effective. Finally, you must become familiar with the facilities and resources available on your campus.

COLLEGE: NEW DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS

College is a unique learning experience. Whether you have just completed high school or are returning to college with a variety of work experience or family responsibilities, you will face new demands and expectations in college. The following sections describe these demands and discuss how to cope with each.

Set Your Own Operating Rules

College is very different from your other educational experiences and from jobs you may have held because there are few clear limits, rules, or controls. There are no defined work hours. Except for scheduled classes, your time is your own. Often there are no penalties for missing classes or

failing to complete assignments. You do what you want, when you want, if you want to at all. For many students, this new freedom requires some adjustment. Some students feel they should spend all of their free time studying; others put off study or never quite find the right time for study.

One of the best ways to handle this freedom is to establish your own set of operating rules. For example, you might decide to attend all classes, regardless of whether attendance is taken. Here are other examples of rules successful students have set for themselves.

- Study at least three hours each day or evening.
- Start studying for a major examination at least a week before the exam.
- Complete all homework assignments regardless of whether you get credit for them.
- Make review a part of each study session.
- Read all assigned chapters before the class in which they are discussed.

Write your rules on paper and post them above your desk as a constant reminder. Consider these as goals and work toward accomplishing each.

EXERCISE 1 _____

Directions: Analyze the assignments and requirements of each of the courses you are taking this semester. Make a list of five to ten operating rules you intend to follow this term or semester. Include at least one rule that applies to each of your courses. Monitor the effectiveness of these rules during the next two weeks and make any needed changes.

Take Responsibility for Your Own Learning

In college, learning is mainly up to you. Instructors function as guides. They define and explain what is to be learned, but you do the learning. Class time is far shorter than in high school; time is often insufficient to provide numerous drills, practices, and reviews of factual course content. Instead, college class time is used primarily to introduce content that is to be learned and to discuss ideas. Instructors expect you to learn the material and to be prepared to discuss it in class. *When, where, and how* you learn are your decisions. This text will help you in making these decisions: Throughout you will be presented with numerous learning strategies and how to apply them.

Focus on Concepts: Each course you take will seem to have an endless amount of facts, statistics, dates, definitions, formulas, rules, and principles to learn. It is easy to become convinced that these are enough to learn and to become a robot learner—memorizing facts from texts and lectures, then recalling them on exams and quizzes. Actually, factual

information is only a starting point, a base from which to approach the real content of a course. Most college instructors expect you to go beyond facts to analysis: to consider what the collection of facts and details *means*. Many students “can’t see the forest for the trees”; they get caught up in specifics and fail to see the larger, more important concepts. Be sure to keep these questions in mind as you read and study:

Why do I need to know this?
Why is this important?
What principle or trend does this illustrate?
How can I use this information?
How does this fit with other course content?

Focus on Ideas, Not Right Answers: Through previous schooling, many students have come to expect their answers to be either right or wrong. They assume that learning is limited to a collection of facts and that their mastery of the course is measured by the number of right answers they have learned. When faced with an essay question such as the following, they become distraught:

Defend or criticize the arguments that are offered in favor of capital punishment. Refer to any readings that you have completed.

There is no one right answer: You can either defend the arguments or criticize them. The instructor who asks this question expects you to think and to provide a reasoned, logical, consistent response using information acquired through your reading. Here are a few more examples of questions for which there are no single correct answers.

Do animals think?
Would you be willing to reduce your standard of living by 15 percent if the United States could thereby eliminate poverty? Defend your response.
Imagine a society in which everyone has exactly the same income. You are the manager of an industrial plant. What plans, policies, or programs would you implement that would motivate your employees to work?

Evaluate New Ideas: Throughout college you will continually meet new ideas; you will agree with some and disagree with others. Don’t make the mistake of accepting or rejecting a new idea, however, until you have really explored it and have considered its assumptions and implications. Ask questions such as:

What evidence is available in support of this idea?
What opposing evidence is available?
How does my personal experience relate to this idea?
What additional information do I need in order to make a decision?

BECOMING AN ACTIVE LEARNER

A freshman who had always thought of himself as a B student was getting low Cs and Ds in his business course. The instructor gave weekly

quizzes; each was a practical problem to solve. Each week the student memorized his lecture notes and carefully reread each assigned chapter in his textbook. When he spoke with his instructor about his low grades, the instructor told him his study methods were not effective and that he needed to become more active and involved with the subject matter. Memorizing and rereading are passive, inactive approaches. Instead the instructor suggested that he think about content, ask questions, anticipate practical applications, solve potential problems, and draw connections between ideas.

Active Versus Passive Learning

How did you learn to ride a bike, play racquetball, or change a tire? In each case you learned by doing, by active participation. College learning requires similar active involvement and participation. Active learning, then, is expected in most college courses and can often make the difference between earning barely average grades and top grades. Table 1-1 lists common college learning situations and shows the difference between active and passive learning.

The examples in Table 1-1 show that passive learners do not carry the learning process far enough. They do not go beyond what instructors tell them to do. They fail to think about, organize, and react to course content.

TABLE 1-1 Characteristics of Passive and Active Learners

	<i>Passive Learners</i>	<i>Active Learners</i>
Class lectures	Write down what the instructor says	Decide what is important to write down
Textbook assignments	Read	Read, think, ask questions, try to connect ideas
Studying	Reread	Make outlines and study sheets, predict exam questions, look for trends and patterns
Writing class assignments	Only follow the professor's instructions	Try to discover the significance of the assignment, look for the principles and concepts it illustrates
Writing term papers	Do only what is expected to get a good grade	Try to expand their knowledge and experience with a topic and connect it to the course objective or content

Active Learning Strategies

When you study, you should be thinking and reacting to the material in front of you. This is how you make it happen.

1. Ask questions about what you are reading. You will find that this helps to focus your attention and improve your concentration.
2. Discover the purpose behind assignments. Why might a sociology assignment require you to spend an hour at the monkey house of the local zoo, for example?
3. Try to see how each assignment fits with the rest of the course. For instance, why does a section titled “Amortization” belong in a business mathematics textbook chapter titled “Business and Consumer Loans”?
4. Relate what you are learning to what you already know from the course and from your background knowledge and personal experience. Connect a law in physics with how your car brakes work, for example.
5. Think of examples or situations in which you can apply the information.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Review each of the following learning situations. Answer each question by suggesting active learning approaches.

1. Having a graded exam returned to you by your history professor. How could you use this as a learning device?

2. Being assigned “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., for your English composition class. What questions would you try to answer as you read?

3. Completing a biology lab. How would you prepare for it?

4. Reading an article in *Newsweek* on crime in major U.S. cities assigned by your sociology instructor. How would you record important ideas?

GETTING STARTED

Many college students begin their first semester feeling rushed and confused. Being a successful student requires careful planning and organization. Here are some suggestions that will help make your first term or semester less hectic and will get you off to a good start in college.

Attend Information and Orientation Sessions

If the college offers any orientation activities, such as campus tours, a get-acquainted-with-the-college workshop, or a back to school social event, try to attend. The activity will give you a chance to meet faculty and students and pick up useful information about the college.

Get Your Life Organized

Arrange your housing, transportation, finances, and part-time job schedule as soon as possible. Unless these are settled and organized, you will find it difficult to concentrate on your courses. Problems with any of these can disrupt your life and take valuable time to solve once you are involved with the semester.

Attend the First Class

Attending the first class of a course is crucial to surviving in that course. Attend it at all costs, even if you are late. Many students think that nothing is taught the first day. They may be correct in that the instructor does not present the first lecture, but they fail to realize that something much more important occurs. It is during the first meeting that the instructor introduces the course, discusses its organization, and explains requirements (tests, exams, papers).

Get to Know Someone in Each Class

During the first week, try to get to know someone in each of your classes. You will find it helpful to have someone to talk to, and you will feel you are part of the class. In case you miss a class, you will have someone from whom you can get the assignment and borrow notes. Also, this person may be able to explain ideas or assignments that are unclear, or you may be able to study with him or her.

Purchase Your Textbooks

As soon as possible after the instructor assigns the text, go to the bookstore and buy it. Do this even if you do not have an assignment to complete right away. Then you'll have the book and can begin an assignment as soon as it is given.

Get Materials for Each Course Organized

You should have a notebook for each class—either spiral bound or loose leaf. You will use it to take lecture notes and to record outlines or summary-study sheets you might prepare from the text or lecture. Be sure to keep the instructor's course outline, or syllabus, as well as the course assignment and/or requirement sheets in a place where you can readily refer to them. The syllabus is particularly useful because it specifies course objectives and provides an overall picture of the course. Also, date and organize day-to-day class handouts; these are important when study-