

How to Get an “A” in This Course

Be Organized. You will be getting LOTS of handouts in this course. Get a binder or file folder and keep your lecture and lab notes and all handouts from lecture and lab, *in order*, along with your syllabus. Keep everything in one place. Organizing your course materials will help you to organize the information in your head as well.

Do The Time. This course is **very** demanding and requires a serious commitment of your time and energy. Be sure that you can plan a schedule that will allow a *minimum* of 10-15 hours of **quality time** each week to study. You may also wish to take advantage of the study labs and the tutoring labs in planning your study time.

Read and Read Again. One way to begin your study of the material is to read the the webnotes before and after the actual lecture. Only a rare individual can digest all the information covered in a lecture in one ‘monster’ study session. The more times you *actively* go over it the better you’ll understand it and retain it. But actually *read* it thoughtfully, if your eyes are glazing over and your brain is wandering, you’re not really reading it. Try again later.

Attend Every Lecture. The more times that you hear or read about a particular concept the more likely you are to remember it. Lecture attendance also gives you a good idea of which topics the instructor considers the most important or the most difficult. One survey of college students showed that the main factors that correlated with good grades were attendance at every class and sitting near the front of the room. Regularly skipping classes or arriving late tells the instructor **and yourself** that the class isn’t really that important.

Really LISTEN in Class. A warm body in the classroom that’s dozing or texting has *exactly* the same educational value as not attending at all. Take good class notes, *think* about what’s being said, come up with questions to ask to make sure you understand it before the instructor moves on. Taking notes helps you to focus on the main points of the lecture. It will help you to know exactly which topics to focus on when studying. It also allows you to put things in your own words. If you don’t feel like you’re a good ‘note taker’ print out the ‘lecture outline’ and use it to help organize your notes as you take them in class. You might also want to record a few lectures and review them with your notes in front of you to make sure you’re getting everything. Once you know you are taking complete notes, stop recording; you can study much more material in the same time as listening to a single lecture.

There Are NO ‘Stupid’ Questions. It IS stupid to not ask questions when you have them. You *paid* for an answer, so ask.

Don’t Get Lost in the Details. Summarize the material into discrete topics, *learn* them. Start big, select 2 or 3 *major* points from each lecture, make each topic small enough that you can learn it *completely* in one study session. Take breaks between study sessions. Once you know the major topics, then start studying the *rest* of the material. This can be particularly effective if you do this after *each* lecture rather than saving it all until the weekend, or worse, the night before the exam. There is NO defensible reason to leave ‘whole questions’ on an exam completely blank.

Study For the Test Daily rather than pulling "all nighters" the days right before the test. It is almost impossible to absorb all that information on a test in one day, it's much more productive to take it in small manageable ‘doses’. Try to study by topic or chapter to keep up, don’t try to study *everything* every time you study.

Pay Particular Attention to Illustrations used in lectures and labs. Images can effectively summarize the major points of the lecture. A picture really is worth a thousand words. While studying try to recreate important diagrams and figures from memory. Practice explaining *out loud* exactly what each figure is telling you.

Eliminate Distractions. Effective *learning* requires *active concentration* on the material at hand. The time you spend studying should not be diluted by “multitasking” on myriad unrelated distractions. In truth, the brain cannot really “multitask”; anyone who says they multitask is just doing a lot of different things poorly instead of focusing on one thing and doing it well. There seems to be a very strong correlation with cell phone addiction and poor class performance. Since cell phones became a ubiquitous part of modern life, median test grades have gone down 20 - 30%.

Reorganize Your Notes into customized personal outlines of the material. Don’t just recopy notes; invent new ways to organize or categorize the information. Personally customized learning tools are much more effectively than using *commercially prepared* study guides and outlines based on someone else’s ideas of what is important. Be careful to avoid "busy work" such as recopying notes or highlighting the text if its not really helping you to learn. It’s more the *quality* of time you spend than the *quantity* of time that is important in helping you to really understand the material.

Demonstrate Proficiency. When you feel like you are starting to retain the information, stop and quiz yourself. Try to recreate important diagrams and figures from memory. Practice explaining, *out loud*, exactly what each figure is telling you. Form study groups and ask each other questions. Go to the study objectives *after* you think you you know the material and see if you can *write out* a clear and concise answer to each question; verify your answers by showing it to other students or the instructor. Try to explain concepts to someone else, not necessarily even someone in the course, and make sure they can understand it; there is no better way to learn it than to teach it.

Come to the Lecture to Listen, Come to the Lab to Work. There is much more information in a lab period than you can really learn in the short time given. Structure your lab time wisely to make the best use of it. Don't waste time in lab with things you can do at home. Come to the lab prepared; that means knowing what activities you are doing that day, *marking* all the terms you need to learn on the illustrations in your textbook, knowing the procedures that will be followed, disposal instructions etc. *before* you begin the lab. The lab is time for "hands on" learning, if you spend half of it figuring out what's going on or doing things you could have prepared at home you are wasting precious time you could have spent actually learning something.

Make Sketches of Lab Materials. Use your *premarked* textbook illustrations to find structures on the models, slides or dissections. Use separate sheets of paper in lab to take notes and make quick sketches to remind you what you did or what you saw in lab. The idea isn't to render 'artistic truths' but to jog your memory as you study for the test.

Study What You've Got. Your instructor has distilled *all the most important information* that you will need to know for the exam and practical. He has summarized it, explained it, illustrated it and emphasized the most critical points. This is as good as it gets. This is *exactly* "what you need to know for the test". It's all there right in front of you. **Study IT.** Stop looking for crutches to avoid the hard work of learning; skip other books and illustrations, stop surfing the web, skip the You-Tube videos, don't buy coloring books or flash cards, get off the damn phone and study what you have. All that extra stuff you waste time on clutters your desk and your brain, sometimes to such an extent that you actually forget which things you're really supposed to know.

Just Do It. Too much information? Confused? Can't keep up? Don't know where to start? Don't wallow in your confusion. Start *anywhere*, even if it means closing your eyes and pointing randomly to your notes to choose. *After* you begin, things should start falling into place and becoming clearer.

Seek Additional Lab Time. Some things you can study at home. Others, like slides, models and dissections, you can learn well *only* in lab. Some campuses offer study labs in which you can dissect and review models and slides at times other than your lab time.

Ask for Help. ACC excels at offering ways to help students succeed in college. If you are having problems in the course, don't wait until the day before the test or the end of the semester to do something about it. See me during my office hours or by appointment to discuss the help you need. If you need even more help, the study lab and the tutoring labs at most campuses offer 'one on one' help or group study time for all ACC students throughout the semester.

Develop Your Own Personal Style. Some study best in quiet isolation, others learn best by studying in groups. Some outline lectures, others record and listen to lectures to firm up their notes. Different methods work better for different people, find out what's best for *you*. However, if the study techniques you are comfortable with are not working, *stop using them*. Try something different even if it feels uncomfortable at first.

Never Give Up! Hundreds have succeeded in this course before you. If you've got the **maturity**, the **organizational skills**, the **determination** and the **flexibility** to try new study methods, you will succeed.

Reread These Suggestions at the beginning of each new set of test material.

How to Avoid Getting an "A" in This Course

1. Come to the class only because 'it's a required course', *knowing* there's nothing of much use or of much interest for you there.
2. Attend class when you feel like it or if there's nothing else going on, you can get it all off the web notes if you need it.
3. Come to lecture and lab with no idea of what is going to be covered that day, they're gonna tell you that stuff anyway.
4. Only write down what the instructor writes on the board, nothing else he says is important, it's just padding.
5. When you go to lab, look at everything once, then you're done, if you're lucky you can get out of lab early to do some gaming or texting.
6. Spend lab time 'catching up' in other classes so you won't have to do it when you get out of this class. You can catch up in this class later.
7. Only study when you feel like it. There's more to life than bustin' your butt on a college course.
8. Use *most* of your study time listening to your recordings of lectures, it's easier than taking notes.
9. Devote *most* of your study time to highlighting and underlining stuff you may or may not get back to.
10. Recopy your notes exactly as you wrote them, if your penmanship improves it means you're learning the material.
11. Spend *most* of your study time looking up answers to review questions or sample test questions. That's all you *really* need to know.
12. Make 100's of flash cards. If you have time after that, go through them once.
13. Develop elaborate mnemonics to try to remember a list of a few terms.
14. Buy a 'coloring book' for the course, be very careful not to go out of the lines.
15. Hunt for You-Tube videos for every major topic covered in lab and lecture and watch them each once.
16. Keep your cell phone with you and 'on' at all times, there might be an important call or text.
17. If you look at it and 'think you know it' then you're good to go, don't sweat the details.
18. Study "all night" before an exam. Drink lots of caffeine to stay awake.
19. Wait until the last exam before deciding its time to "get serious" in this class.
20. Don't worry about grades, there's always a curve, nobody can really learn all this stuff.
21. Always remember, your poor grades are your teacher's fault.