

# “HOW TO”

HAVE A SUCCESSFUL  
FIRST SEMESTER  
AT SOUTHWESTERN



COURTESY OF  
THE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS  
& THE PEER ACADEMIC MENTORS

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

| ADVISOR | OFFICE | EXTENSION | EMAIL | OFFICE HOURS |
|---------|--------|-----------|-------|--------------|
|         |        |           |       |              |

| PROFESSOR | COURSE | OFFICE | EXTENSION | EMAIL | OFFICE HOURS |
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**RESOURCES**

|                  |        |                    |        |
|------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| Career Services  | X 1346 | Provost            | X 1567 |
| Counseling       | X 1252 | Registrar          | X 1952 |
| Dean of Students | X 1582 | ResLife            | X 1624 |
| Library          | X 1563 | Student Activities | X 1345 |

Dear First-Year,

*Welcome to Southwestern!*

The purpose of this packet is to provide you with information and resources that we, as academic advisors and fellow students, feel will prove beneficial to your academic pursuits during your time at Southwestern, and particularly during your first semester.

Some of the information you may already know, but a good portion of it relates primarily to your *college* experiences, and more specifically to your academic endeavors at Southwestern.

As a general, rule, it is better to be proactive than reactive when it comes to academic concerns. And as corny as it sounds, “there is no such thing as a stupid question.”

We encourage you to visit, we are on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Prothro Center for Lifelong Learning (Suite 120) or call (ext. 1286) if you have any academic concerns or difficulties this semester. You can also email any questions or concerns to us at [success@southwestern.edu](mailto:success@southwestern.edu). In addition, please make sure to take advantage of the experience and knowledge of your Peer Mentors, as we have been where you are now and can offer you advice and support. You can contact the Mentors via our facebook group (Peer Mentors), our email address ([su-mentors@southwestern.edu](mailto:su-mentors@southwestern.edu)), or through the Mentor assigned to your First Year Seminar.

Good Luck,

Center for Academic Success & Peer Mentors

## HOW TO AVOID ACADEMIC JEOPARDY

- Go to Class! Missing class can result in a very low attendance grade, poor understanding of the material, or even expulsion from the course.
- Complete the assigned reading before each class. You will need to be prepared for class discussion so that your understanding of the material and your attendance grade do not suffer.
- Seek help with study skills. This includes goal setting, time management, note taking, etc. The Center for Academic Success and the Peer Mentors are available for this purpose.
- Talk to your professors. The professors are in the best position to offer suggestions for study techniques for their classes.
- Find a "niche." Students who become actively involved in an organization have a better chance at succeeding academically.
- Plan out when you will take the courses required for your major/minor so you don't get behind. Read about your major/minor in the course catalog to be better prepared.
- Don't take more credit hours in one term than the minimum needed to graduate (15) to make up for bad grades. Taking 16 or more hours in one semester only increases difficulty and stress level.

## HOW TO TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR COLLEGE SUCCESS

As a beginning college student, the newness of it all can easily overwhelm you. The following tips may help you take charge of your college experience.

### YOUR CLASSES

- No one will force you to attend classes or complete assignments so you must force yourself in order to graduate, and to do so on time.
- You alone will be held responsible for class material, so if you don't understand something, you **MUST** ask questions.
- Your workload will be **MUCH** heavier than in high school.

### YOUR PROFESSORS

- Professors want to see you succeed. Talk to them if you're having problems in their classes.
- Professors grade attendance harshly. Skipping class is not the way to avoid doing assignments.
- Professors will expect **MUCH** more of you than your high school teachers.

### YOUR STUDY SKILLS

- Plan to study 2-3 hours for each hour in class.
- Good note-taking is essential.
- Reading assignments that are heavy and complex- skimming is not enough.
- Be prepared to study 100 times harder than you did in high school.

## HOW TO PLAN A BETTER STUDY SCHEDULE

**BALANCE.** Plan a schedule of balanced activities. College life is made up of many different activities, most of which are important for success. Some have fixed time requirements and some are flexible. Some of the most common that you must consider are:

Fixed: eating, organizations, classes, work, church

Flexible: sleeping, recreation, study, relaxation, socializing

**REGULATE.** Pick a regular time and place to study. Establishing habits of study is extremely important. Knowing when, where, and what you are going to study saves a lot of time in making decisions and retracing your steps to get necessary materials. Avoid generalizations in your schedule such as "study." Commit yourself more definitely to "read pages 25-40 of American History" or "complete five chemistry problems." Be specific and set regular study hours.

**HURRY.** Study as soon after class as possible. One hour spent soon after class will be as effective in developing an understanding of materials as three hours a few days later. Look over lecture notes while they are still fresh in your mind. Start assignments while your memory of the assignment is still accurate.

**CONSERVE.** Utilize odd hours during the day for studying. The scattered one or two hour free periods between classes are easily wasted. Planning and establishing habits of using these hours to study will result in more free time for recreation or activities at other times in the week.

**LIMIT.** Limit your blocks of study time to no more than 2 hours on any one course at a time. After 1 ½ to 2 hours of study you begin to tire rapidly and your ability to concentrate decreases significantly. Taking a break and then switching to a different course will provide the change necessary to keep up your efficiency.

**SPACE.** Allow time for spaced review. Schedule a regular weekly period when you will review the work in each of your courses and be sure you are up to date. This review should cover *all* the work done in the quarter up to the point of your review.

**RECITE.** Practice recitation in order to increase memory. Organize your notes in a question and answer format and think in terms of learning the main ideas about the material as you review weekly. When preparing for exams, try to predict the questions the instructor may ask. Use flashcards to aid your self-recitation.

## HOW TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN YOUR LIFE

Studies show that students who are involved in more activities usually make better grades. How do they find time to do it all? Good time management skills!

### ESTABLISH A WEEKLY SCHEDULE

- Schedule your fixed time commitments (class, lab, work, meetings).
- Schedule in study times that correlate with your personal study habits (short increments, daytime, nighttime, etc.).
- Allow time for fun, exercise, and other tasks.
- Be honest. Don't schedule time from 8 to 9am if you're going to sleep in.
- Stick to your schedule- it won't be useful to you unless you use it.

### PRIORITIZE AND SET GOALS AND DEADLINES

- Set daily, weekly, and monthly goals. If you accomplish them, reward yourself.
- Rank all goals in order of importance. Determine when you will do each item on your list.
- Schedule specifically. Don't just write "study"- specify which subject and how much of it you plan to do. Example: Read Latin pages 12-50.
- Set a deadline, but allow yourself enough time to complete each assignment.
- Be reasonable with goals and deadlines, don't set yourself up to fail.

### PLAN AHEAD

- Use the first or last few minutes of each day to plan for the next day.
- Keep a monthly calendar so you can see far in advance when big tests or projects are coming up.

### AVOID PROCRASTINATION

- You will be tempted to procrastinate when you encounter a job too large or overwhelming, so make the task smaller by breaking it down into smaller tasks.
- Visualize yourself doing each task. Think of all the satisfaction you will get from knowing that you're done.
- If you must put off a task, schedule a new time immediately.

***"Failing to prepare, is preparing to fail"***

## TIME SURVEY

To begin managing your time you first need a clear idea of how you use your time. This Time Survey will help you estimate how much time you currently spend in typical activities. Not only will it help you get a better idea of how much time you need for your classes, it will also help you identify "time wasters."

When taking the survey, estimate the amount of time spent on each item. Once you have this amount, multiply it by the number indicated. This will give you the total time spent on each activity in one week. After each item's weekly time has been calculated, add all these times for a grand total. Subtract this from 168, the total possible hours per week.

Hours of sleep each night \_\_\_\_\_ x 7 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent showering/grooming \_\_\_\_\_ x 7 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent eating/making food \_\_\_\_\_ x 7 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours travel time (weekday) \_\_\_\_\_ x 5 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours travel time (weekend) \_\_\_\_\_ x 1 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent in regular functions  
(organization meetings) \_\_\_\_\_ x 7 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent working each week \_\_\_\_\_ x 1 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent in class each week \_\_\_\_\_ x 1 = \_\_\_\_\_

Hours spent socializing/free time \_\_\_\_\_ x 7 = \_\_\_\_\_

Total = \_\_\_\_\_

Subtract the total from 168

168 - \_\_\_\_\_ =

**THE NUMBER IN THE BOX IS THE TIME YOU HAVE ALLOWED YOURSELF TO STUDY!**

## HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR TIME

1. Draw a vertical line through Friday and Saturday 8pm to 2am- everyone needs to relax some on the weekends.
2. Fill in the blocks of time (dark) that you will use for absolutes, such as class, work, practice eating, sleeping, etc.
3. Fill in the bocks of time (medium) that you will use for important things, such as organizations, significant others, favorite tv shows, etc.
4. Fill in the blocks of time (light) that you will use for less important but fun things, such as facebook, magazines, video games, etc.
5. The empty blocks are what you have left to study!

|       | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|-------|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| 8 AM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 9 AM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 10 AM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 11 AM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 12 PM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 1 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 2 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 3 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 4 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 5 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 6 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 7 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 8 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 9 PM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 10 PM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 11 PM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 12 AM |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 1 AM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |
| 2 AM  |     |      |     |       |     |     |     |

## HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE

1. Using the table below, add the grade points for each class you are enrolled in to get your grade point total.
    - You will need to know the number of credit hours of the course and your estimated letter grade.
  2. Add the credit hours for each course you are enrolled in to get the your credit hour total.
  3. Divide your grade point total by your credit hour total to get your grade point average.
- \* Be careful not to include courses that you are taking Pass/Fail (such as FRAs) because they do not factor into your GPA unless you fail.

### GRADE POINTS

|           | 1 Hour | 2 Hours | 3 Hours | 4 Hours |
|-----------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>A</b>  | 4.0    | 8.0     | 12.0    | 16.0    |
| <b>A-</b> | 3.7    | 7.4     | 11.1    | 14.8    |
| <b>B+</b> | 3.3    | 6.6     | 9.9     | 13.2    |
| <b>B</b>  | 3.0    | 6.0     | 9.0     | 12.0    |
| <b>B-</b> | 2.7    | 5.4     | 8.1     | 10.8    |
| <b>C+</b> | 2.3    | 4.6     | 6.9     | 9.2     |
| <b>C</b>  | 2.0    | 4.0     | 6.0     | 8.0     |
| <b>C-</b> | 1.7    | 3.4     | 5.1     | 6.8     |
| <b>D+</b> | 1.3    | 2.6     | 3.9     | 5.2     |
| <b>D</b>  | 1.0    | 2.0     | 3.0     | 4.0     |
| <b>D-</b> | 0.7    | 1.4     | 2.1     | 2.8     |
| <b>F</b>  | 0      | 0       | 0       | 0       |

### EXAMPLE

| <i>Letter Grade</i> | <i>Credit Hours</i> | <i>Grade Points</i> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| A                   | 3                   | 12.0                |
| B+                  | 3                   | 9.9                 |
| A-                  | 3                   | 11.1                |
| B-                  | 4                   | 10.8                |
|                     | <i>Total = 13</i>   | <i>Total = 43.8</i> |

$$\frac{\text{Grade Point Total}}{\text{Credit Hour Total}} = \frac{43.8}{13.0} = \text{GPA } \underline{3.37}$$

## HOW TO TAKE BETTER NOTES

Mark pages with class, date, and page numbers of relevant text (include title/author if more than one).

### **BEFORE CLASS**

- Read assignments and/or notes of the previous lecture so you will be able to have a starting point or base of reference for your next set of notes.

### **DURING CLASS**

- Listen for points the professor stresses.
- Look for patterns and begin to decipher what types of information the professor will ask for on the test.
- Keep a list in the left margin of any abbreviations you use, definitions of words, etc.
- If you miss some information, leave a blank space in your notes so you know to go back and fill in the information after class.

### **AFTER CLASS**

- Skim notes to be sure that they are complete, legible, and understandable.
- When reviewing, ask yourself “what did I learn and how does it relate to the other material of the course?”

Studies show that rereading notes immediately after class improves the ability to retain information tremendously. Without review, 80% of the information will be lost within 24 hours.

Use your notes as the basis for a study group agenda.

## HOW TO MARK YOUR TEXT MORE EFFECTIVELY

- Highlight or underline only after you have read the entire paragraph.
- Highlight only the main points.
- Highlight key phrases or words that make a complete thought.
- As a rule of thumb, you should never highlight more than one-third of a paragraph.
- Make notes in the margin summarizing the main points of the paragraph for easier access to the information.
- Make notes in the margin like "important, supporting evidence" or "?" to call attention to that area if you need to ask the professor about it.

Using these hints will help you get more actively involved in reading. You will find yourself remembering more, learning more, and studying more efficiently for your tests.

## How To Read More Effectively: SQR3

### **SURVEY**

- Survey or pre-read the assignment.
- Look at the title, introduction, section headings, summaries, and study questions.

### **QUESTION**

- Use who, what, when, where, why, and how to turn each heading into a question.
- Try to think of questions that relate the material to other material from the course.
- Jot the questions in the margin and try to answer them as you read.

### **READ**

- Be active- highlight or underline key terms and ideas.
- Summarize important points in the margins.

### **RECITE**

- Close your book and recite the main points of the section.
- Answer the section questions and the questions you wrote in the margins.

### **REVIEW**

- Go back and review the questions and answers and highlighted ideas.
- Review your notes/margin summaries within 24 hours after you read.

## HOW TO THOROUGHLY PREPARE FOR TESTS

Check the boxes next to the areas that you need to improve upon.

- Study consistently and effectively. Always use the study skills that work for you.
- Get eight hours of sleep the night before the exam.
- Eat a light breakfast. This helps prevent low blood sugar and gives you energy.
- Allow enough time to get to the test without hurrying.
- In the exam room, sit where you usually sit. You will feel most comfortable there.
- Bring a watch and keep track of the time. Plan how you will use your time and pace yourself so that you are not rushed on any part of the exam.
- When you get the test, immediately jot down key words and phrases.
- Read the directions carefully.
- Answer the easy questions and mark those you don't know so you can come back to them later. You may pick up answers in other parts of the test. Take your time, but answer all questions. Always check your test over before handing it in.
- Do relaxation exercises any time you need to during the test. Breathe deeply and talk to yourself in a very supportive way.

**GOOD LUCK! YOU CAN DO IT!**

## HOW TO TAKE AN ESSAY EXAM

Essay exams evaluate your understanding of concepts and your ability to think critically. Don't study for total recall of names, dates, facts and figures as you would for an objective test. Study for main ideas and look for relationships between ideas.

- Make a quick outline. Think before writing.
- If you have trouble getting started, jot some ideas down to get your mind going.
- Start with what you know. You will think more clearly.
- Write legibly. Professors will grade only what they can read.
- Watch the time so you are able to address each main point.
- Pay attention to key terms in the question. Make sure you are answering the question asked.
- Include an introduction and conclusion, even if brief, to help ensure a logical order to your essay.
- In your introduction, clearly state your thesis statement, which should directly address the question.
- By the time you write your conclusion, you want to be sure that you have answered the question and addressed your thesis. Don't leave any idea hanging.
- Support general statements with specific examples.
- Use the technical vocabulary of the course.
- Include additional material from class not covered on the test as much as possible.
- Use relevant comparisons and/or contrasts from other course, readings, or your own experiences.

## KEY WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Analyze    | Break the information into parts showing the hierarchy and relations among the ideas. Tell what assumptions are necessary in order to accept an idea as valid. |
| Cite       | Give evidence related to. Quote or refer to authorities on.  |
| Classify   | Place within a group with others having similar characteristics.   |
| Compare    | State similarities and differences.  |
| Contrast   | State differences.   |
| Criticize  | State your opinion on the merits of.   |
| Define     | State the meaning of a word or concept.  |
| Describe   | Give an account of. Give a word picture of.  |
| Discuss    | Consider from various points of view.  |
| Designate  | Point out. Specify. Name.  |
| Enumerate  | List.  |
| Evaluate   | State advantages and disadvantages of.   |
| Explain    | Make clear. Define. Tell how it works.   |
| Illustrate | Use a word picture or diagram.   |
| Interpret  | Clarify a point or idea. Give ideas.   |
| Itemize    | List in detail.  |
| Justify    | State evidence. State good reasons for.  |
| Prove      | Establish truth by giving factual evidence and logical reasons.  |
| Summarize  | Briefly give main points. Sum up.  |
| Trace      | Follow the course of. Follow the trail of.   |

## HOW TO NAVIGATE TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

- Answer quickly.
- Read Carefully.
- Look for qualifiers (absolute qualifiers often indicate false statements).
  - All
  - **Always**
  - Most
  - Sometimes
  - **Never**
  - Rarely

## HOW TO PREDICT TEST QUESTIONS

- Watch for clues from instructor during class.
  - Repeating certain points.
  - Writing information on the board.
  - Making gestures.
  - Posing questions to students.
  - Extensively covering some material from readings.
- Save and review all quizzes, papers, lab sheets, and graded materials.
- Practice working problems using different variables.
- Brainstorm test questions with other students.

## HOW TO CONQUER OBJECTIVE TESTS

On objective tests, teachers provide answers from which you choose the correct one. One part of the question, the stem, gives basic information. You pick your answer from among distracters, or possible answers. Test-wise principles help you make educated guesses among distracters when you are not sure of the right answer. The following information contains such tips for objective tests.

**IF YOU DON'T KNOW AN ANSWER, SKIP IT AND GO ON.** Cross out obviously wrong choices. This saves you time later. Don't waste time mulling over an answer. Answer the questions you know first. This builds confidence and maximizes the use of test time.

**WHEN YOU RETURN TO QUESTIONS YOU SKIPPED, TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE ANSWER IS NOT.** If you can eliminate one or two distracters, you increase your chances of guessing the correct answer.

**ELIMINATE DISTRACTERS THAT DO NOT MATCH GRAMMATICALLY WITH THE STEM.** If you use simple grammar to help you make a choice, you find the correct answer more easily.

**RESPONSES THAT LOOK LIKE THE WORD TO BE DEFINED ARE USUALLY INCORRECT.** Allusion, elusive, and illustration all resemble the word illusion. These are called "attractive distracters" because they look appealing. Attractive distracters are almost always poor choices.

**WATCH FOR DISTRACTERS THAT MEAN THE SAME THING.** Careful reading sometimes shows that some distracters say the same thing. None of these can be correct.

**USE WHAT YOU KNOW TO ANALYZE AND MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT INFORMATION.** See if you can relate other information and eliminate several of the choices.

**WATCH YOUR TIME CLOSELY.** Don't spend so much time on harder questions that you cannot finish the test. When you're stumped, move on to the next question.

**WATCH FOR DOUBLE NEGATIVES.** What is  $-2 \times -2$ ? The answer is  $+4$ . Negative times negative equals positive. The same is true in writing. That means two negative terms make the presented idea positive. For example, consider the phrase "not unimportant." Something that is not unimportant is important.

**THE LONGEST CHOICE IS OFTEN THE RIGHT ONE.** An instructor often includes a lot of information to make the correct answer clear.

**A MIDDLE CHOICE (B OR C) IS OFTEN THE CORRECT ONE.** Instructors sometimes feel that putting a right answer either first or last makes it too obvious. Thus, they tend to place distracters before and after the correct answer. When unable to determine the answer any other way, pick a middle answer.

**READ CAREFULLY AND LOOK FOR GIVE-AWAY CLUES.** Sometimes instructors provide information about one question when asking another.

**CROSS OUT CHOICES THAT YOU KNOW ARE INCORRECT.** Choose from the distracters that remain.

**WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS.** When you have answered all the questions you know, return to those you skipped. Reread them carefully. Try to devise an answer in your own words. Then look for a matching response. If none exists, make an educated guess based on test-wise principles. If you cannot make an educated guess, pick an answer. Decide now what your “lucky” letter is going to be. In the future, when you need to guess, pick it. Since few instructor-made exams penalize for guessing, never leave answers blank.

**REVIEW YOUR EXAM BEFORE TURNING IT IN.** Did you answer all questions and consistently mark the letter of the selection you intended?

**READ ALL CHOICES BEFORE ANSWERING A MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION.**

Sometimes an instructor asks for the best answer in the directions of an exam. If you jump at the first seemingly correct response, you may overlook possible better answers.

**IF A MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION CONFUSES YOU, CONSIDER THE STEM AND EACH DISTRACTER AS A TRUE-FALSE QUESTION.** This helps you think about each piece of information separately.

**FOR TRUE-FALSE SECTIONS, READ EACH QUESTION THOROUGHLY.** Watch for key words such as always, never, seldom, and frequently. Statements with such words as always and never are often false. These words are called absolutes. That means that they leave no room for other possibilities. This is why they are frequently false.

**FOR MATCHING SECTIONS, TRY TO DETERMINE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COLUMNS.** Sometimes a matching exam is a hodgepodge of terms and information. Other times, it focuses more on dates, locations, events, people, causes, effects, etc. Identifying the relationship helps you focus your thoughts in an organized manner.

## HOW TO MANAGE TEST ANXIETY

**RECOGNITION.** Listen to your body and **figure out what you are feeling anxious about.** If your anxiousness is a result of lack of preparation, then that is a rational response. If, however, you have adequately prepared for your exam and still feel panicky, your response may stem from something other than the testing situation itself.

**PREPARATION.** The best tool in test anxiety management is preparation. **Try to avoid last minute study** for an exam. It will be impossible to master a great deal of material immediately before a test. Review lecture notes, texts, and any study guides. Think about what questions might be asked and try to answer them.

**ATTITUDE.** Your frame of mind concerning an exam can have an effect on how well you do. For instance, **self-defeating thoughts (I can't do this) will likely impair your performance** and lead to even more anxious feelings. Remember that a test is only that – one test. There will be others on which to base your final grade.

**PHYSICAL NEEDS.** Students sometimes neglect their physical needs when preparing for an exam. **Remember to maintain good eating and sleeping habits.** A hungry, tired student will not do as well on an exam as a rested, well fed one. Also get plenty of exercise, and once you have adequately prepared for your exam, do something relaxing.

**TEST DAY.** Avoid caffeine, sugar and nicotine. An excess of any of these stimulants sets off a process that can result in rapid fluctuations of sugar levels, which in turn will produce symptoms of anxiety and panic (rapid pulse, sweaty palms, etc.) Arrive at the test location early. This will give you a chance to pick a seat location away from distractions.

When you receive the exam, first review the entire test. Be sure to thoroughly read the directions twice. **Do not rush through the exam.** Wear a watch and check it frequently to pace yourself through the test. Concentrate on the sections of the exam you can answer well. Answer questions you know first and return later to work on the questions you aren't sure about.

If you feel yourself becoming panicky during the exam take a slow, deep breath. Focus briefly just on breathing from your diaphragm. If you begin to have negative thoughts about your ability to handle the exam, stop and deal with controlling your thoughts. Replace negative statements with positive ones.

## HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE STRESS

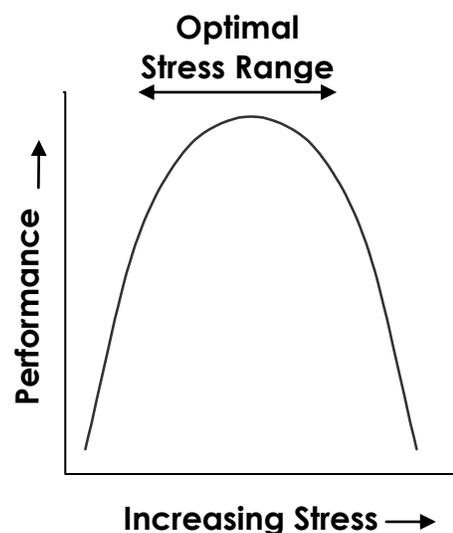
**STRESS IS A GIVEN.** Classes, tests, pressure to make good grades, romantic relationships (or the lack thereof), career plans, homework, leadership responsibilities, parents, money, jobs, roommates, bills, family problems, the frustrations of daily life- all are stressors that most students know quite well. Stress is a fact of life, and it's unrealistic to think you can totally eliminate it.

**STRESS IS GOOD AND BAD.** At low to moderate levels, stress helps us get motivated and moving. This is the stress you feel when you realize that you haven't started the calc homework which is due tomorrow. This stress is what you need to get focused and started. Sure, having homework to do involves some stress, but it is mostly beneficial.

As stress increases, however, most people's performance tends to become impaired. This is the stress you feel when you realize at the beginning of class that there's a test TODAY and you haven't studied for it. Your heart starts to beat faster, you start to feel anxious, and you can't even think straight enough to answer the questions you would otherwise know. Stress at this level is out of control.

**THE KEY IS TO KEEP AN OPTIMAL STRESS LEVEL.** Think of athletes before an important game. If they start feeling too much stress, they're likely to be too tight to play well. On the other hand, if they can keep their stress at a level that's just enough but not too much, they're more likely to get into the flow of the game and play at their best. But how do you keep your stress level in the optimal range?

Stress is like a wave in the ocean. It can't be eliminated, and at times it can become overwhelming. What to do? Learn to surf by staying on top of the stress curve rather than being buried beneath it. **Keep reading.**



## HOW TO ACHIEVE OPTIMAL STRESS

**RECOGNIZE YOUR STRESS SIGNS.** Not everyone reacts to stress in the same way, and not all signs of stress are obvious. Tune into your own signs of stress so that you'll know when your stress level is starting to rise. Shallow breathing, tight muscles, extra perspiration, headaches, difficulty concentrating, irritability, anger, eating too much or too little, avoiding things, smoking more, drinking more alcohol, problems sleeping, dry mouth, upset stomach, staying mindlessly online, withdrawing from people, moodiness, worrying, indecision, forgetfulness, rapid heartbeat, low motivation. These, and others, can be signs of stress. Notice yours and catch them early.

**BREATHE.** Obvious, perhaps, but **essential**. The goal is to breathe lower (from your diaphragm rather than your upper chest) and slower. Practice. You'll feel the difference.

**GET ADEQUATE SLEEP, NUTRITION, AND EXERCISE.** Just because your fifth grade health teacher told you this doesn't make it wrong. You can't even begin to achieve optimal stress without these three.

**SET PRIORITIES AND MANAGE TASKS** (rather than letting tasks manage you). Ever know anybody who tries to take 18 hours, work 40 hours a week, and still have a social life? It can't be done, and it's a bad idea to try. You have to put tasks and projects in priority order, work on those near the top of your list, and let those at the bottom wait until later- sometimes much later. Also, people are not born knowing how to manage time. It's a skill like any other and can be learned.

**ELIMINATE SELF-TALK THAT'S SELF-DEFEATING.** This doesn't mean that you should walk around mumbling stupidly positive things to yourself. However, do listen for self-talk that's unnecessarily harsh or critical. Ever hear yourself say things (to yourself) like "duh!", "I'm such an idiot", "what a loser", "if I blow this test, I'll never get into graduate school", "I always screw things up", etc.? Does it help you to say these things? Probably not. So if you need to make editorial comments about yourself, at least try to be fair and realistic.

**REACH OUT.** When you start to feel stressed it can really help to talk with friends and family. Or, if you want to talk to someone who can be totally objective and who can help you master these basic stress management skills, you can also talk with a professional counselor. At SU, counselors are available for individual **confidential** conversations. Call 512 -863-1252.