

How to Ace Any College Course | Psychology Today

Here's a simple way to study and perform well in class. Try this and get an A.

Published on July 13, 2013 by [Ronald E. Riggio, Ph.D.](#) in [Cutting-Edge Leadership](#)

I finished teaching summer school – an intense 3-week course that met every day and had a rapid pace. One of the students asked me to suggest a strategy to “ace” the course. I shared a strategy I learned as a college student, and one that I’ve recommended to students over the years.

The key to this simple strategy is to be proactive. Before each class, read all of the assigned (and suggested) course material. Then, use the course lecture and discussion to reinforce the knowledge that you already gained from the readings. You will find that the lectures take on a different tone. You are now not listening to new information, but to content with which you are familiar.

This repetition will do three things: First, it will rehearse material that you have read (which will facilitate retention) and the lecture will likely contain examples that will deepen your [understanding](#) of the material – creating more elaborate [memories](#) of the course material.

Second, you will be hearing the professor’s version of the class material, and this will give you some insight into what the professor thinks are the important points. This suggests what the professor might focus on in the exams. You likely can’t process the themes in the professor’s lecture if you haven’t read the material beforehand, because learning the new information takes most of your attention.

Third, by reading the material beforehand you are better prepared for class discussion and will participate more. This is important in gaining valuable participation points (when relevant), but it also lets the professor know you are engaged and motivated.

When I used this technique as an undergraduate, and later as a graduate student, I found that the amount and quality of my note taking in class changed dramatically. Instead of pages of notes, with lots of information (some key information, but a lot of notes that weren’t centrally important), my notes were brief, but rich – almost like a summary of main points with some vivid illustrations. This aided in studying for tests, because I could focus on the key points, and re-read and study the text material and not have to go through and decipher voluminous class notes.

Students, try this technique. I think it will change the way you approach the course, and will enhance retention. It should help you to ace any college course. Let me know how it works for you (or share other successful study techniques).