

College Matters

**Practical Strategies for Success
in College and Beyond**

2nd Edition



Richard J. Conway

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Richard J. Conway

Introduction

Congratulations.

By enrolling in college, you have made one of the best decisions of your life. It's a decision that will reward you in many ways, including some you probably haven't thought about yet.

Increased earning power, greater career opportunities, respect in the workplace, improved reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning skills, a heightened awareness of the world—these are just some of the benefits of a college education. Earning a college degree also increases your chances of enjoying better health, living longer, being happier, and having more satisfying personal relationships.

College widens worlds. It presents opportunities for you to see life's big picture, in the process enhancing your understanding of what it means to be alive. The college experience is also about discovering talents and interests you never knew existed and imagining possibilities for yourself and the world.

If all of this sounds exciting, you're right—it is. But there's a catch. Simply enrolling in college is no guarantee that you will be successful. To do well in your classes and make the most of your overall experience, you will need to approach college with the right attitude, with an understanding of higher education's assumptions and expectations, with good academic skills, with a genuine interest in learning, and with an openness to all that college has to offer.

In other words, you'll need to be committed to becoming an educated person.

That's where this book will help. *College Matters: Practical Strategies for Success in College and Beyond* offers a blueprint for succeeding in your classes and getting the most out of your college years. The book offers practical advice—a great deal of it, in fact—about virtually every aspect of college, from making a good start in your first semester and understanding your campus environment to succeeding in your classes and growing socially and intellectually.

College Matters also offers concrete suggestions about avoiding the pitfalls of college life and about taking care of yourself during college. In addition, the book shares advice about looking beyond your first semester

and taking full advantage of what college has to offer, both in the classroom and outside of it.

Each entry (there are 130 in all) speaks directly to you as a new college student. Each offers a specific idea for you to consider, to put into practice right away, or to file away for later. Each is friendly: you will feel like you are being advised by someone who remembers what it's like to start college, who really wants you to succeed in your classes, and who recognizes the power of a college education to transform lives.

Perhaps best of all, every piece of advice is presented clearly and concisely—no more than two hundred words per entry. While each entry provides much to think and talk about, even the busiest student will find the material manageable.

So start reading! If *College Matters* is part of a first-year seminar you are taking, make sure you keep up with the assigned sections. If you're reading the book on your own, proceed at your own pace. But make sure you finish. There's much to be learned about college—and college success—from this book; don't miss any of it.

CHAPTER ONE



Getting Started

New experiences often bring a mixture of excitement, uncertainty, and anxiety. Starting college is no different. You may be glad to be in college right now, but you may also be unsure about what to expect. You may be wondering whether you will like college, whether you will be successful here, and whether you will make friends and fit in. You may want to know what your classes will be like and what your professors will expect of you. You may also be curious about college in general—how it differs from high school and how, basically, it all “works.”

This chapter offers advice about understanding the expectations of college, putting your best foot forward, and avoiding mistakes that new students sometimes make. It identifies several successful student practices—behaviors that will help you approach college with the right attitude and make a good start in your classes. Many of these practices will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but they are introduced here to give you an idea of what college is all about.

1

Believe in yourself. Your most valuable asset in college will be the person you see in the mirror each morning. It’s that person who will give you the strength and confidence to accomplish goals you never thought possible. Like many new college students, you may be concerned about what lies ahead and whether you will be able to handle all that college requires. When you catch yourself having these thoughts, remember that person in the mirror and tell yourself that everything will be okay.

1. Which one of the following statements best describes your confidence level about college?
 - I feel very confident in my ability to do well in college. I believe I have all of the skills necessary to succeed.
 - All in all, I feel confident in my ability to do well in college. If I can overcome a couple of bad habits, I should be fine.
 - In general, I'm pretty confident in my ability to do well in college. But I do worry about handling some parts of college.
 - I wish I were more confident in my ability to do well in college. But right now I have doubts about my chances of succeeding.
2. Write a paragraph that elaborates on your answer to the previous question. Use the first two sentences of the answer you checked as the opening of your discussion.
3. Read "On Starting College" and answer the questions that follow.

On Starting College

It's okay to be anxious about starting college.

Even though you have been in school for much of your life, you have never been to college until now. Chances are you have never attended such a large school before (even small colleges are bigger than most high schools), and chances are you've never moved from building to building to get to classes.

Unlike high school, where you knew most of your classmates, you may not know anybody, at least at first, in your college classes. You may also feel intimidated by some of your professors, especially those who seem incredibly smart (and who assume you are too).

If you drive to school, maybe you've had a tough time finding a place to park on campus. If you travel by bus, maybe you weren't sure where you should get off or—once you did—where exactly you were. Maybe your campus seems crowded and confusing, not at all what you expected college to be like.

Relax.

For the record: College is different from high school. But it's not nearly as overwhelming as it might seem right now. In fact, if you give college a chance and make an effort to know the campus, you'll feel at home here in no time.

But remember that in college, you're considered an adult. That means you have to step up and take a more active role in your education than you may have done in high school. It means not waiting for someone to read your mind, answer all your questions, and tell you what to do. It means finding out for yourself.

Here are a few things you can do, early on, to get acquainted with your campus.

- 1. Get a campus map. A good map (every college has one) will give you a picture of your campus and help you figure out the quickest way to get places. You won't need the map forever, but it will be useful at first.*
- 2. Explore your campus. Even if you already toured your campus during your orientation program, you may have forgotten the whereabouts of things. A second trip, on your own or with another student, will help you become more familiar with the school.*
- 3. Check out the "essentials" (food, parking, library, bookstore, etc.). Where can you eat on campus? Where are the best places to park? Where are the library and the bookstore? All are questions you'll have to answer sooner or later. Sooner is better.*
- 4. Find out where you can get information. Every college has an information center, a student activities (sometimes known as student life or campus life) office, and a campus security office. All are places you can go to ask questions, get directions, or learn more about the school. Find out where they're located on your campus. Don't be shy about dropping by and asking for help.*
- 5. Get involved in campus life. The best way to make your college seem friendlier is to get to know other people, and the best way to do that is to become active in campus life. It's never too early*

to join a club or at least find out what's available. A good place to begin is the student activities or student life office, which can tell you the ins and outs of campus life and help you make some contacts.

Every big journey starts with small steps.

College is no exception.

Now is the time to start stepping.

- a. The author notes that new college students can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the size and overall newness of the campus. What has been your first impression of your college?
- b. Have you experienced any of the concerns (size of campus, parking, classes, crowds, etc.) mentioned by the author? If so, which?
- c. What is your reaction to the idea that as a college student, you need to take a more active role in your education? How comfortable are you asking questions and seeking out information you need?
- d. Of the “getting acquainted” suggestions contained in this selection, which have you already put into practice?
 - I have a campus map.
 - I have gotten familiar with the campus (especially classroom buildings).
 - I know where to find the “essentials”:
 - bookstore
 - parking lots/bus stops
 - food services
 - library
 - I know the locations of the information center and campus security office.
 - I know the location of the student/campus activities office.

2

Remember your strengths. You may not realize it, but you are starting college with a host of strengths that will help you do well here. Some of your strengths may be academic (good writing or math skills); some may be technical (good computer skills); some may be personal (determination and motivation); and some may be social (the ability to make friends and get along with people). Whatever your strengths, use them to your advantage, both in and out of the classroom. You'll acquire other strengths as you go through college, but don't overlook the ones you already possess.

1. What are *your* strengths? What personal qualities, habits, talents, abilities, or characteristics will contribute to your success in college? List your strengths, beginning with those you feel will be *most* helpful to you in school. Typical strengths might be self confidence, motivation to succeed, dedication to a career goal, interest in a specific academic subject, or a special talent or ability.
2. From the list you have just created, explain how *one* of your strengths will help you succeed in college. If this strength has helped you in high school or in some other area of your life, include that in your discussion.
3. For many students, college represents an opportunity not only to build on their existing strengths but to acquire new ones. Some students may work on improving academic skills—becoming better writers, for example—while others might focus on other skills: managing their time well or becoming more comfortable in social situations. If you could select a *single* strength that you would like to acquire or improve in your first year in college, what would it be? What will you need to do to accomplish this goal?

3

Be open to college. College offers an experience like no other—a chance to become more knowledgeable about the world, to learn about yourself, to explore careers, and to prepare for the rest of your life. But to make the most of this opportunity, you will have to be open to college's promise and possibilities. Embrace college and it will be one of the most exciting, en-

riching, uplifting, fascinating, and memorable chapters of your life. Keep college at arm's length and it will be little more than a footnote. The right attitude may not be the only thing you'll need to succeed in college, but without it, nothing much good will happen.

1. What does the author mean when he encourages students to “embrace college?”
2. How would you characterize your openness to college right now? Are you glad to be in college? Are you looking forward to meeting other students, getting to know professors, and seeing what your classes are all about? Do you have concerns about your decision to enroll in college in general—or your school in particular?
3. Do you think the author is correct when he says that if you don't have the right attitude toward college, “nothing much good will happen?” Why or why not?
4. *“If you start college thinking everything is going to be pretty good, it will probably be that. In fact, it might even be better than you expected. But if you start off thinking college is going to suck, guess what--it's going to suck. You are going to find faults with everything and everybody. A bad attitude becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.”*

— Mike, senior

- a. Do you agree with Mike's view about the power of expectations?
 - b. What is a *self-fulfilling prophecy*? If you're not sure of this expression's meaning, Google it and find out. Why would this term be important for you to know when you are starting college?
5. Read “College Changed My life” and answer the questions that follow.

College Changed My Life

College changed my life.

That sounds pretty dramatic, maybe corny even, but it's true. My

college years were the most influential of my life. They changed the way I thought, the way I looked at the world, and most of all, the way I viewed myself.

I didn't expect this to happen. When I graduated from high school, I was unsure of myself and uncertain about the future. I had doubts, especially about my ability to even get through college, let alone do well. I'd been an okay student in high school, but nothing great. On graduation day, I wondered if I'd ever make it to a college graduation.

I started college with these same questions. I kept them to myself because I was too embarrassed to tell my friends and family that I didn't think college and I were meant for each other. I also kept quiet because none of my family had been to college—so no one would have known what to say.

In my first semester, I worked hard to keep up and pass everything, but I struggled in classes with heavy reading. I read slowly and had trouble telling what was important in my textbooks. I took tests with my fingers crossed. Once, after getting a D on a sociology test, I almost quit—but didn't.

My second semester began in much the same way, with more uncertainty. But halfway through, something unexpected happened. In my Film Appreciation class, my professor told me that I had good insights and that she enjoyed reading my essays about films I'd seen. She also asked if I had ever considered majoring in Film Studies. I hadn't, but I was thrilled just the same. It was the first time anyone had praised my ability (or even noticed me).

I took another film course, with the same professor, the following year and again did well. Meanwhile, I picked up some reading and study tips in some campus workshops, and I was also starting to do better in my other classes. I wasn't the best student in the pack, but I was holding my own.

Little by little, I was starting to feel more at home in college. I still had my nervous moments, but I felt more confident than when I had started. I had gotten to know other students and had become friends with a few. At their suggestion, I joined the campus Cinema Arts Club and had a good time. I liked most of my classes and I liked learning about the world, especially about how people lived. And I continued to study film, which, with my professor's encouragement, became my major.

By the time I was a senior, I'd fallen in love—with school. I would have never guessed that there was so much to learn about

film (and other subjects). At one time, that thought would have frightened me, but now, it just made me more eager to absorb what I could. I didn't know what I was going to do when I graduated, but I wasn't going to let that get in the way of enjoying my time in college.

I did in fact graduate, not at the top of my class, but with something even more valuable than a straight-A average: a sense of myself. To think that I had once thought I'd no business going to college! But thanks to an interested professor, a fascinating major, some good friends, and—yeah—a few lucky breaks, I'd had a great experience. I hardly recognized the person I'd become.

— Caitlin, recent graduate

- a. Caitlin writes that when she started college, she had many doubts about herself and her abilities. Do you think most new college students have the same uncertainties?
 - b. Despite her self-doubts, Caitlin not only succeeded in college but came to love the experience. What brought about this change? Specifically, how did Caitlin help herself succeed?
 - c. In addition to Caitlin's own actions, what else played a role in Caitlin's "transformation" in college?
6. The following article was written for a "Welcome-to-College" issue of a campus newspaper. Though intended to be humorous, the selection makes a serious point about the importance of attitudes.

How NOT to Succeed in College -A Formula for Failure-

- *Wait until the very last minute to register for classes. Then complain to advisors about having to take courses at inconvenient times.*
- *Tell people—friends, family, anyone who will listen—that you're going to college just to get "the piece of paper."*
- *On the first day of the semester, arrive on campus just before*

your first class. If you can't find parking and are late, blame the school (and skip your first class).

- *Sit in class with your arms folded; look bored; check your texts every few minutes; never participate in class discussions.*
- *Decide that your classmates, especially those who seem different from you, are weird and not worth knowing.*
- *Ignore professors whose views you disagree with.*
- *Avoid listening to new ideas.*
- *Convince yourself that only losers join clubs or get involved in college life.*
- *Be the first out of the parking lot when classes are over.*
- *Tell everyone that college is overrated . . . which is why you dropped out after one semester.*

- a. What is author's point in this selection? What in the article suggests this?
- b. Are you surprised that the student attended college for only one semester?
- c. Write your own formula for a successful college experience. Use the selection you have just read as a model.

4

Value learning. The fact that you have enrolled in college suggests that you are interested in the world and want to know more about it. Your professors believe this about you also, which is why they will ask you to read, think, do research, solve problems, write papers, complete projects, and—in short—show that you care as much about ideas and information as they do. Learning is the heart and soul of college. It's what college is all about.

1. Imagine that you are getting ready to graduate from college. What would you like to have learned during your college years? What skills would you like to possess and what information would you like to

- know? How would you like college to have influenced your outlook on the world and yourself?
2. Some people think that a college education should be almost exclusively about training—that is, giving students specific skills that will help them get jobs. Others believe that college should encourage students to be more knowledgeable about the world and be less concerned about jobs. What do you think? What should be the ultimate purpose of a college education?
 3. Read the “The Halls of Knowledge?” and answer the questions that follow.

The Halls of Knowledge?

You can't beat knowledge.

Going to college is like sitting down to dinner with civilization's best minds. Regardless of what's on the “menu”—history, literature, biology, politics, psychology, art, economics, music, etc. etc.—you are almost always guaranteed interesting conversation and good food for thought. In most college classes, you have the opportunity to encounter the very words and deeds of those who have shaped a part of our world, and to understand, with your professors' help, just why these ideas and accomplishments are so important.

Think about that: a chance to get up close and personal with authors, scientists, artists, political leaders, researchers, and others who have contributed something influential. If you are eager to see what the world is all about, you can learn something new in almost every class you take.

Unfortunately, students don't always see it this way. In my travels around college campuses, I hear students grumbling about taking courses that, in their view, won't help them when they get into the “real world.” Students who already have specific career goals (or at least think they do) are often especially resistant to subjects they see as unrelated to their profession.

“What's the point of learning information that won't help me do my job better?” a student told me not too long ago. “I came to college to study for a career—not to learn a little of this and a little of that.”

On some level, of course, college is indeed the place where ca-

reers are born. It's where many students evaluate their strengths and interests and use that information to choose career paths. Deciding on a major and a career can be a great relief, especially for people anxious about finding a job after college. But when students mistakenly conclude that the only classes that matter are those related to their future professions, they seriously shortchange their education (and themselves).

Given the speed with which technology is changing the world, there's a good chance you will change jobs—maybe even careers—several times over the next few decades. Ten years from now, you could be working in a profession that's dramatically different from the one you expect to be your life's work. Your second or third career may draw upon skills or knowledge you have acquired while taking statistics, modern art, macroeconomic theory, American government, or something else that, right now, seems far away from your immediate career plans. You just never know what the future will bring.

Nor do you know when something you have learned in college will strike a chord with an interviewer, a client, or a boss. Job applicants are sometimes hired because they seem knowledgeable not only about their profession but about the world at large. In the workplace, employees perceived as intelligent and informed usually have a better chance of being promoted than those whose knowledge is limited to the company's business. Clearly, it pays to be smart.

But knowledge has an even bigger payoff. Learning enriches lives. It allows us to see and appreciate life's possibilities, complexities, and mysteries. It improves our ability to think—to answer difficult questions or at the very least, to consider them. It connects us to people who were here before and lets us see what was on their minds. Best of all, it invites us to gaze at the sky and wonder about more than the day's weather.

So remember this: The next time you are sitting in a class and trying to decide if you really need to know about the French Revolution, the Prohibition era, the Cold War, *Brown v. Board of Education*, or whatever else you're studying, the answer is yes. If you are wondering what's so important about DNA, the Middle East, Walt Whitman's poetry, or Sigmund Freud's theories of human development, take a close look and see for yourself. If names like Soph-

ocles, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Michelangelo, Jefferson, Dickens, Thoreau, Lincoln, Marx, Bolivar, Darwin, Mozart, Austen, Curie, Gandhi, Woolf, Newton, Einstein, Picasso, Mead, Churchill, King, Frank, and Mandela don't ring a bell, now is the time to get acquainted.

A world of knowledge awaits.

- a. What is the main idea of this selection? What does the author believe to be the goal of a college education?
 - b. What does the author find disturbing about the views of some students?
 - c. Why, in the author's view, is knowledge valuable?
 - d. What is your reaction to the author's ideas and views? Is he correct? Why or why not?
 - e. At the end of this essay, the author lists a number of names and encourages readers to become familiar with them. What is the author's reason for including these names?
- 4a. How many of the names mentioned in "The Halls of Knowledge?" do you already know? List the names that are unfamiliar.
- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Sophocles | • Jane Austen |
| • William Shakespeare | • Marie Curie |
| • Miguel Cervantes | • Virginia Woolf |
| • Michelangelo | • Albert Einstein |
| • Thomas Jefferson | • Isaac Newton |
| • Charles Dickens | • Winston Churchill |
| • Henry David Thoreau | • Pablo Picasso |
| • Abraham Lincoln | • Martin Luther King, Jr. |
| • Karl Marx | • Nelson Mandela |
| • Simon Bolivar | • Margaret Mead |
| • Charles Darwin | • Ann Frank |
| • Wolfgang Mozart | • Mahatma Gandhi |
- 4b. Of the names you don't recognize, choose **three** and research their accomplishments. Summarize what you have learned. Explain why they are important figures for educated people to be familiar with.

5

Make college a priority. You don't have to be a genius to succeed in college, but you do have to value your education enough to make school a priority. Though paying lip service to college's importance may be easy right now, the real test of your commitment will come later on, when the demands of school require you to make decisions, including some tough ones, about how you spend your time. The bottom line: If you're going to give your education a fair shake, you'll need to make serious room in your life for your classes, along with the rest of college.

1. At this point, how important is college to you? If you had to rank your interest in college (1 = very interested, 10 = very uninterested), what number would you choose? Why?
2. Besides college, what other priorities do you have? Do you see these competing with college for your time and interest?
3. Keeping in mind your answers to the previous questions, list your priorities in the order of their importance.
4. Read "A Matter of Priorities" and answer the questions that follow.

A Matter of Priorities

Your future is now.

Make no mistake: College is big. The decisions you make over the next few years—the classes you take, the grades you earn, the out-of-class activities you participate in, even the friendships you form—will have a huge impact on your life.

Educated people go places. They have options and opportunities that others do not. Not only do college graduates earn more money, on the average, than non-grads, they have more interesting and varied career possibilities. They are also more likely to enjoy their jobs and to be treated well by employers (no small thing for anyone who has ever been dumped on by a boss).

What's more, college graduates tend to live longer and enjoy better health than people whose education ended with high school. They also have more satisfying relationships as well as a more pos-

itive outlook on life.

So why, given all the benefits of college, do so many students undermine themselves by dropping out? Why do so many students leave school after only one semester? Though reasons vary, it usually comes down to a matter of priorities.

Most students start college with the best of intentions. They tell themselves that getting an education and doing well in their classes is their top priority. They are probably sincere about this too. After all, who starts college intending to quit?

But then life intervenes. Friends call on weeknights and want to hang out. Jobs offer more hours and bigger paychecks. Boyfriends or girlfriends complain about taking a back seat to school. Outside activities—bands, teams, that half-restored car in the driveway--clamor for attention.

And so corners get cut. Students miss class, turn in assignments late, skimp on studying, bomb some tests, and hit Thanksgiving hopelessly behind.

You can guess what happens next.

It's simply not enough to pay lip service to the idea that college is important. It's not enough to tell yourself in September that you plan to work fewer hours, go to class every day, keep up on assignments, get extra help when you need it, turn off the television and your phone when you are reading, and pass up parties when you have tests to study for. If you really want to succeed in college, you'll need to do these things—and keep doing them until they seem like a natural part of your routine.

In other words, you will need to make college your priority.

And mean it.

Anything short of that is dimming the lights on your life.

- a. What is this essay's main idea? What does the author want readers to remember?
- b. Is the title "A Matter of Priorities" appropriate for this selection? Why or why not?
- c. What is the significance of the line, "But then life intervenes"?
- d. What bad choices does the student in this essay make?
- e. What solution to this problem does the author propose?

- f. What is your reaction to the ideas expressed in this essay? Is the author correct? Or is the situation more complicated than the author presents it?

6

Get ready to work! As a rule, college courses are harder and more demanding than high school classes. They assume you are serious about your education and are willing to devote more time to reading, writing, and studying than you have probably done previously. They also assume you are willing to work on your own, are mature and motivated enough to keep up, and are willing to go the extra mile, when necessary, to meet the challenges of your classes. If all of this sounds like a change from high school, you're right. College expects more.

1. *“I didn't have to do much work in high school. But college is different. There's definitely a lot more work. Not every assignment has been a killer (thankfully!), but most require time and effort. You also have to be willing to sacrifice, at least sometimes, if you want to do well. You can't really wing it in college and hope to get good grades.”*

— Nicole, junior

- a. Do you agree with Nicole's characterization of high school as a place that doesn't require much of students? Was this your high school experience?
- b. Nicole notes that most of her assignments have required “time and effort” and that students can't expect to “wing it” and still get good grades. Do these statements surprise you? Why or why not?
- c. Nicole says that students have to be willing to “sacrifice” if they want to do well in their classes. From the list below, check what you would be willing to sacrifice—reduce, or change—to make room for college.
- time at work
 - time watching television
 - time spent online
 - time texting friends

- time with friends
 - time playing sports/working out
 - time with boyfriend/girlfriend
 - time playing video games
 - time with other interests/hobbies
- d. What parts of your life would you not be willing to change to make room for college? Explain your reasons.
2. Read “Moving On” and answer the questions that follow.

Moving On

High school is history.

Whether that’s good news or bad, it’s reality. Whether your high school years were a blast, a bore, or somewhere between the two, they’re over. There’s no going back and changing or repeating the experience. You can only learn from it.

What can you learn? If you are like most students, your high school years were a series of ups and downs: successes, failures, pleasant and unpleasant surprises, several doses of drama, and a host of what ifs. Somewhere in that mix were valuable lessons—about you, others, school, and life. You should learn what you can from your high school experiences, even those that were painful or unpleasant, but don’t obsess over them. Remember: they’re behind you.

College represents a new start. No one in college knows (or cares) what you were like in high school. Nor does anybody know what others in high school thought of you. No one knows if people saw you as the smartest kid, the coolest kid, the funniest kid, the shyest kid, the weirdest kid, the most talented kid, the best athlete, the worst dresser, the class hottie, the class geek—or just somebody in the crowd. No one knows the high school moments you’re proudest of or those that make you cringe. Like every other new student on campus, you’re now just a college freshman, a new face in a new school.

If you are determined to make a fresh start in college, it’s possi-

ble you will need to rethink your overall approach to school. Unfortunately, some new college students arrive on campus with high school habits and behaviors. They act as if it's geeky to show an interest in learning, to participate in class discussions, to ask for extra help, or even to complete assignments. In class, they automatically head for the back of the room, where they spend class time texting friends or chatting with people around them. Some go out of their way to avoid talking to their instructors, maybe out of shyness but probably because in high school, talking to teachers wasn't a cool thing to do.

Don't make these mistakes. College is a world apart from high school. It assumes you are enrolled not because you must but because you want to. It also assumes that you're an adult, that you are interested in learning, and that you are willing to take school seriously and give it your best effort.

Unlike high school, no one watches or monitors you in college. While there are plenty of people on campus willing to help and support you, no one looks over your shoulder to make sure you're going to class and keeping up. Nor does anyone call home if you fall behind or drop out.

Here, you're the one in charge of your life.

If it feels like you have suddenly moved into the adult world (maybe without realizing it), you're right. You have.

This is college: a fresh opportunity to be the person you really are—or want to be.

High school is part of your past.

- a. What was high school like for you? What were its best moments? What were its worst?
- b. Assuming you could start high school over again, what would you do differently? Why?
- c. How, if at all, would you like your college years to be different from your high school ones? What can *you* do to make college the best possible experience?
- d. What is your reaction to the idea of being “in charge of your life” in college? Are you pleased? Relieved? Anxious?

7

Set goals. Staying focused in college, especially in your classes, will be a lot easier if you can establish goals in your first semester. Your goals needn't be elaborate. They can be as straightforward as finishing your semester with a *B* average or completing courses that will allow you to apply to a specific academic program at your school. Goals can also include other activities, such as joining a campus club, making a college sports team, meeting new people, finding a campus job, or exploring a career that interests you. Whatever your goals, it's important that you keep them in mind and strive to accomplish them. Having goals will not only keep you energized and moving forward but help you through some of college's more difficult moments.

1. On a separate piece of paper, list the academic, social, and personal goals that you would like to accomplish this semester. As you make your list, identify each goal as "Academic," "Social," or "Personal." Don't limit yourself: If you have several academic goals, for example, list them all. If one of your goals is more important than others you've listed, place an exclamation point (!) next to the most important goal.
2. From the goals you have listed above, choose the *two* that are most important to you. Explain how you plan to accomplish each of these goals. Your plan, in each case, may involve specific steps. It may involve seeking extra help in a class you are taking, scheduling appointments with a campus service, reducing work hours, or other *actions* (a key word) that will help you achieve this goal. Be as specific as possible.

8

Remember that learning is not a spectator sport. Learning demands involvement. It calls for you to be not only physically present in the classroom but mentally there as well. If you zone out in class, you won't have much to show for your time. But if you ask questions, participate in discussions, and contribute in other ways to the life of your classes, you can't help but learn more. You will also prove the saying that there's more to being in class than simply being in the classroom.

1. The author discusses the importance of students being more than just *physically* present in the classroom. How "present" were you in high school? Did you ask questions, volunteer answers, and participate in

- your classes? Or did you tend to zone out in class?
2. If asked to describe you as student, what would your high school teachers say? What would they say about your attentiveness and energy level in class?
 3. Read “Being in Class” and be prepared to discuss the questions that follow.

Being in Class

In college, there's more to being in class than simply being in class. If this statement puzzles you, look around at the students in your classes.

Look at the people who are sitting in the back of the room, slumped in their seats, buried in their caps or hoodies. Look at those who are constantly yawning, “studying” their latest text message, or checking their makeup.

Notice the students who look bored all the time and who never ask or answer a question.

Count the number of people who can't let a class session pass without making a bathroom run or who are the first ones out the door (and into the parking lot) when class is over.

Now look at those students who sit near the front, take notes, ask questions, add to discussions and—in general—participate in the life of the class. Look at those who seem really interested in what's being taught and who sometimes stay after class to speak with their professor.

Now ask yourself: Which students have been in class and which have just been in the classroom?

To be sure, not everyone who sits in the back of the room or who's quiet in class is a slacker. Some very serious students are naturally quiet, preferring to listen to what their professors and (sometimes) other students have to say. The student who yawns regularly may be just as interested as others, but exhausted from working extra hours to afford next semester's tuition. These students may be as serious about college as anyone else, even those whose hands are routinely up. Appearances can sometimes be deceiving.

But appearances also matter. Almost everything you do in class (even little things) says something about you. When your actions

suggest that you're itching to leave the room or more interested in your latest text message than your Psychology lecture, you're saying, loud and clear, that you're mentally absent. When you're too busy fussing with your eye liner to share your thoughts about the short story your English class is studying, you're telling the world (and more importantly, your professor) that you're just marking time.

These aren't good messages to send, no matter how perfect your attendance record might be. For in college, there's more to being here than just being here.

- a. Which one of the students described in this essay most closely resembles you? Are you the student who sits near the front and who asks questions, volunteers answers, and contributes to class discussions? Are you the student who is attentive but quiet? Are you the person who sits in the back and socializes, or if not that, who counts the minutes until class is over? Whatever student you identify with, what impression do you think you make on others, especially your professors?
 - b. How would you interpret the line, "For in college, there's more to being here than just being here?" What point is the author making by concluding with this statement?
4. While speaking to a group of new students at a college orientation program, a professor offered the following advice:

"Expect to be informed, enlightened, energized, and inspired in your classes, but don't expect to be constantly entertained. College classes certainly have their lighter moments, but a laugh a minute they're not. Enjoy your classes, but remember that you're in college to get an education. Don't expect a show."

- a. What is your response to this statement? Do you think students expect their classes to be entertaining? Do your classmates get bored easily?
- b. Do you think that college professors have an obligation to keep students engaged and perhaps even entertained in class? Why or why not?

- c. If you could respond to this professor's comments, what would you say?

9

Know that results matter. While most college professors recognize the importance of effort, few are willing to hand out high grades based solely on students' good intentions. College values achievement. It rewards results. Before giving *A*'s and *B*'s, your professors will want to know that you have actually learned the course material, not just *tried* to learn it. That means being able to pass tests, write good papers, and in general, demonstrate the skills and knowledge that you have acquired. Trying hard still matters, of course, just as it did in high school. But in college, effort is only half the equation; you have to produce as well.

1. What is your reaction to the author's comments? Do you agree? Disagree? Why or why not?
2. Some students say that college emphasizes achievement far more than high school ever did. Would you agree with this perception? In your experience, was it possible to do well in high school simply by making a good effort?
3. *"Schools don't do students any favors when they give out grades based on effort alone. It's obviously important for students to try hard, but in the end, it's achievement that matters. That means that students really **need to learn** those French verbs, math formulas, literary terms, and biology definitions they're studying—not just **try** to learn them. Regardless of whether students plan to be engineers, nurses, accountants, or dieticians, they need to know their subject. There's no substitute for knowledge."*

— Foreign Languages professor

- a. Are you surprised by the professor's comments about achievement being more important than effort? Do these remarks strike you as harsh? Why or why not?
- b. Can you think of a situation in which effort, as opposed to achievement, might be enough for someone to pass a college course?
4. "But I tried" is a justification some students offer when arguing for a better grade on a paper or exam. If you were a college professor, how would you respond to such a comment?

10

Go to class. Attendance counts—it's that simple. While a good attendance record in itself won't guarantee straight A's, you can't go wrong by going to class regularly. Besides learning more, you will make a good impression on your professors, even those who don't take attendance all of the time. P.S. If this advice sounds like a no-brainer, just ask the legions of former freshmen whose spotty attendance records made their first semester a disaster.

1. Does your college have an official attendance policy? If so, find it in your college catalogue and/or student handbook and summarize it.
2. While many colleges have an official attendance policy, individual professors often set their own attendance rules. The attendance policy for each course can usually be found in the syllabus or course outline distributed at the beginning of the semester. List the courses you are taking this semester along with the stated attendance policy. If you aren't sure of the policy for a specific course, check your outline or ask your professor.
3. In the following statements, two college professors explain their policies on attendance. Which policy do you believe is more beneficial to students?

"I tell students on the first day of the semester that they have three unexcused absences. After that I begin deducting five points from their class participation grade each time they miss class. This may seem tough, but I believe that by having a firm attendance policy, I'm preparing students for the world that they will face after graduation. No employer is going to put up with workers, no matter how smart or talented they are, who don't come to work regularly. Attendance is a fact of life, one that college students need to learn quickly. In fact, it should be one of the lessons that every professor should teach."

— Professor A

"I don't have an attendance policy in my classes. Students can attend every session if they wish or they can attend whenever they want. The bottom line is that they have to know the class material well enough to do well on exams. If they feel they must attend every class session to learn the material, that's fine. If they can learn it by coming to class sometimes (or hardly at all), that's their choice. College students are

adults in just about every way. An important part of being an adult is making one's own decisions and taking responsibility for those actions. Class attendance is one of those decisions."

— Professor B

4. *"I felt really free when I started college. For the first time, I could come and go as I pleased. Best of all, none of my professors said anything if I missed class. But then in October I found out that I was being dropped from my Bio class for being absent too much. And in November I got kicked out of English—same reason, too many absences. Luckily I did okay in my Psychology and Health classes, where as long as I passed exams and kept up on assignments, my professors weren't fussy about attendance. But passing only two classes wasn't good. And getting used to different attendance policies was definitely not easy. I probably should have looked more carefully at my course outlines."*

— Kevin, sophomore

- a. After hearing Kevin's story, what advice would you give him? Is his inability to keep track of different professors' policies his chief problem? Explain.
- b. Kevin is not the only new college student to believe that his professors would not mind if he missed class. In fact, a good number of new students seem to hold the same view. What could colleges do to emphasize the importance of class attendance?

11

Read your course syllabi. A syllabus is a document that outlines the course you are about to take. It tells you what you will be studying; what books and other materials you will need to obtain; what assignments you will be required to complete; what rules (attendance and other) you will need to observe; how you can reach your professor outside of class; and how your final grade will be determined. You'll receive a syllabus, also known as a *course outline*, early in the semester, usually at the first or second meeting of each course. The syllabus is important. Read it and hang on to it.

1. Review the sample syllabus below. Then answer the questions that follow. Be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

Dunkirk University
Division of Humanities - Department of Communication
Arts

COM 212 Fundamentals of News Writing
- 3 Credits -

Pamela N. Johnson, Ph.D
Office: Marcus Hall, Rm. 301
Telephone: 679-4799, ext. 410
Johnsonp@Dunkirk.univ.edu
Office Hours: Monday, 1-3 p.m.;
Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.;
and by appointment

About COM 212

“Fundamentals of News Writing” examines the craft of journalism from multiple perspectives. The course looks at how journalists think about news, how they come to see stories, and how they go about researching and reporting them. It focuses on how journalists work with sources—people with facts, data, and opinions—and how they use this information to lend substance and credibility to their stories. Most important of all, it provides opportunities for students to practice the journalist’s craft: to research and report actual stories about events and people at the college and in the community.

Texts (available in campus bookstore)

An Anthology of Classic Newspaper Stories. Sloan and Berry.
Reporting the News in the 21st Century. Brown and Weiss. 2nd edition.

Course Requirements

1. Regular attendance (no more than three unexcused absences)
2. Completion of assigned readings and participation in class activities and discussions.
3. Completion of assigned writing and editing assignments (five in all). Due Dates: Sept. 7; Sept. 14; Sept. 26; Oct. 3, Oct. 10

4. Submission of newspaper stories (five in all). Due dates: Oct. 17, Oct. 31, Nov. 9, Nov. 21, and Dec. 7
5. Successful completion of final exam (Thursday, Dec. 14)

Grades

Final grades in this course will be based on the following:

Newspaper Stories	=	50%
Writing/Editing Assignments	=	15%
Final Exam	=	20%
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	=	<u>15%</u>
		100%

Newspaper Stories

Students will write a) one campus news story; b) one campus profile; c) one feature story; d) one campus sports story; and e) one consumer story. More information about these stories will be forthcoming.

Final Exam

The course will conclude in December with a written exam. The exam will call for students to demonstrate writing and editing skills.

Things to Remember

1. Attend class regularly. Attendance is an important part of this class. Your presence in class (and participation in class discussions) adds to the overall quality of the academic experience. While you are permitted three unexcused absences, you should plan to attend all class sessions. For every absence beyond three, your class participation grade will be reduced by five points.
2. Keep up with assignments. Late papers will be accepted but will be penalized one half letter grade for every day they are late.
3. Read newspapers daily. There's much to be learned from reading and examining the work of professional journalists. Read-

ing a good newspaper will teach you much about the craft of journalism.

4. Take advantage of the services of the writing center, located on the second floor of Allen Hall. The professional staff offers help with all kinds of writing.
5. Speak up in class. The success of our course depends, to some extent at least, on students' willingness to be a part of the "life" of the class. Please share your thoughts and ideas.
6. Feel free to speak with me about your writing or your overall progress in the course. I will be available during my office hours and also by appointment. You can also reach me by email or telephone.
7. Remember that all students are governed by the university's academic integrity code. This includes the university's prohibition on plagiarism. For more information about the code, see the student handbook.
8. Turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices before coming into class. Please do not send text messages in class. It is distracting. If you are caught texting, you will be asked to leave class.
9. If you have a documented disability and believe you need special accommodations in this course, please contact the Disabilities Support Office located on the first floor of Edgar Hall.

1. Use the sample syllabus to answer the following questions:

- a. What is the name of the professor who is teaching this course?
- b. What are the professor's office hours? Where is her office?
- c. How can you get in contact with the professor outside of class?
- d. What books are required in this course?
- e. How many news writing and editing assignments must students complete in this course?

- f. How many newspaper stories must students write in this course?
 - g. How will final grades be determined?
 - h. What is the professor's attendance policy?
 - i. What are the due dates for newspaper stories?
 - j. What is the professor's policy on late assignments?
 - k. Is there a final exam in this course? If so, what do you know (from the syllabus) about it?
 - l. What campus resources are available for students needing extra help?
 - m. Does the professor offer students any advice about improving their writing skills? If so, what does she suggest?
2. Select an outline from one of the courses you are taking this semester and answer the following questions:
- a. What is the name of the professor who is teaching this course?
 - b. What are the professor's office hours? Where is his or her office?
 - c. How can you get in contact with the professor outside of class?
 - d. What books are required in this course?
 - e. How many assignments must students complete in this course?
 - f. How will final grades be determined in this class?
 - g. What is the professor's attendance policy?
 - h. What are the due dates for assignments?
 - i. What is the professor's policy on late assignments?
 - j. How many tests will be given in this class? When are tests scheduled?
 - k. Is there a final exam in this course? If so, what do you know (from the syllabus) about it?
 - l. What campus resources are available for students needing extra help?

12

Get organized. Know when and where your classes meet, know your professors' names, and know their telephone numbers, email addresses, offices, and office hours (times professors set aside to meet with students outside of class). Write this information in your notebooks. Keep it also in your planner, your phone, or some other place where you can find it easily. You won't need this info every day, but when you do, you won't have to hunt for it. P.S. Besides recording information about your courses and professors, get some phone numbers and email addresses from your classmates as. In addition to getting to know people in your classes, you never know when you'll need to get in touch with someone about an assignment or something else that can't wait until the next class meeting.

1. If you had to contact each of your professors before your next class meeting, would you be able to do so? If so, how would you get in touch? What contact information (office telephone numbers, email addresses, etc.) do you already have? Where is that information located?
2. Using the course outlines that you have already received this semester, add the following information (for each course) to your notebook, your phone, or some other secure place:
 - Course name and number
 - Professor's name
 - Professor's telephone number and email address
 - Professor's office location and office hours

13

Get used to writing things down. Though you may have done okay in high school just by paying attention in class, you'll need to do more than that in college. Most college courses present far more information, even in a single class session, than you could possibly remember without notes. While some courses will provide more notes than others, all will present at least some information worth recording. Keep a pen and a notebook handy or use that laptop you're carrying around.

1. New college students sometimes say that they are surprised by the

amount of information (class notes, due dates, etc.) they receive in their classes, even in the first few sessions. Many say that this differs from high school, where they rarely had to take notes or write much down. Have you received more information in your college courses than you did in high school classes? Explain.

2. Some students say that they have a way of telling what class information is important and worth recording. How are you able to determine what you need to write in your notebook or in your phone?

14

Come to class on time—and prepared. Coming to class on time says a great deal about your commitment to school. So does arriving with your notebook, textbook, and other required materials. But that’s only part of being prepared. Since many professors base class notes and discussions on readings, homework, or other outside assignments, you also need to come to class having completed whatever has been assigned for that day’s session. If you are prepared, you’ll get a great deal out of each class meeting. If you’re not, you will spend the time wondering what everyone else in the class is talking about (and hoping you don’t get called on).

1. Many college faculty include lateness in their attendance policies. What are your professors’ policies on lateness? If you are not sure, check your course outlines.
2. *“I thought my Politics professor was kidding when he said on the first day that no one would be allowed to come late to class. But about two weeks later this kid walked in fifteen minutes after the class started and my professor told him to leave. I was surprised. I’d never seen that before, not in high school anyway.”*

— Corey, freshman

“I tell students that if they come to class unprepared, they run the risk of being asked to leave. I’m not trying to be nasty or anything, but there’s just no point in having students sitting in class if they haven’t completed that day’s reading or assignment. It’s frustrating to ask a question and to have students who haven’t kept up just look at me blankly. It must be pretty embarrassing for students also.”

— Marketing professor

Are professors unreasonable when they tell students who are late or unprepared to leave class? Why or why not?

3. If you were a college professor, what would you say to students about coming to class on time and being prepared for class? Would you stress these points? Why or why not?

15

Learn to listen. Listening is an important skill to possess in just about every situation, but it's especially critical in college classes. If you want to improve your listening skills, start by getting rid of distractions. Phone problems? Silence your phone and put it in your backpack until class is over. Chatty classmates? Escape to the other side of the room. Room noise? Take a seat near the professor. Above all, avoid the back of the classroom, where attention spans go to die.

1. Read "Finding the Best Seat in Class – Test Taking Central" (www.testtakingcentral.com/finding-the-best-seat-in-class.html) and answer the following questions:
 - a. Do you agree with the statement that students who sit in the back of the classroom are "generally those who don't plan to pay much attention to the lecture?" Why or why not?
 - b. What are the two most valuable pieces of advice contained in this article? Why are these items valuable?
2. *"It's almost always the slackers who hide in the back of the room. They're usually not prepared and trying to be invisible."*

— Jodi, junior

"It's true that some people who sit in the back aren't serious. But that's not true of everyone. Many people just aren't comfortable sitting up front. I think they are shy. But they're still very serious about learning. You can't generalize."

— Victor, sophomore

Whose view is more correct—Jodi's or Victor's? Why?

3. *"It never ceases to amaze me. I walk into a classroom with plenty*

of seats, and seventy-five percent of the students are huddled in the back two rows. Students say that they sit in the back out of habit, but I don't believe that. I think that on some level, a lot of students are uncomfortable being in school. So to ease their anxiety, they sit in the back rows. I'm not even sure they're aware of their reasons for their behavior. It's unconscious."

— Psychology professor

- a. Do you think many students sit in the back of the classroom simply out of habit? Or does this behavior reflect, as the professor suggests, a lack of comfort about being in school?
- b. When you enter a classroom, where do you usually sit? What determines your choice of seats?
- c. In your experience, is it easier to listen and stay focused if you sit near the front of the classroom?

16

Expect to read a lot in college. When you come right down to it, reading is still the primary way most people acquire information. Books, textbooks, magazine and journal articles, newspaper stories, essays, fiction, websites, blogs, other online postings—you will encounter them all in your classes over the next few years. If you are not much of a reader, it's time you became one. Reading on your own will not only improve your overall speed and comprehension but make you more informed. And who can quarrel with knowledge?

1. Which of the following statements best describes your reading habits?
 - a. I read a great deal on my own and I read different materials—books, newspapers, magazines, and websites.
 - b. I read a fair amount, but I usually limit my reading to a certain kind of material or subject.
 - c. I read now and then, but only when I find something that interests me.
 - d. I read only when situations (school or work) require it.
 - e. I do everything I can to avoid reading.

Elaborate on your answer. If you read almost exclusively about a certain subject (e.g. sports or music), what do you enjoy about that material? If you read only for school or work, why don't you read more on your own? Or if you go out of your way to avoid reading, what do you dislike about this activity?

2. Some people believe that a nation of non-readers is destined to be a nation of uninformed citizens. Others say that while reading is still important, it isn't as vital as it once was. What do you think? Is it possible to be knowledgeable without reading very much?
3. What is your reaction to the author's comment, "If you're not much of a reader, it's time you became one?"
4. Over the next week, spend at least thirty minutes a day reading. Read whatever interests you—a novel, a short story, a newspaper or magazine, a blog, etc. At the end of each half-hour period, write a few sentences about not only what you read but whether reading was becoming easier and more natural as the days passed. Be ready to discuss your reading experiences in class next week.

17

Get to know your professors. Many college faculty encourage students to keep in touch through email or to speak with them during their office hours. Take them up on their offer. Most professors will be pleased that you care enough about their subject to ask questions or share ideas. And while you're at it, put to rest the high school belief that students shouldn't talk to teachers except when it's absolutely necessary. It was a bogus idea in high school; it's even more bogus here.

1. Have your professors encouraged you (and other students) to speak with them outside of class? Have your professors provided telephone numbers, email addresses, and office hours (all usually listed on the course syllabus)?
2. The author writes that some students may be reluctant to speak with professors because they rarely talked with their high school teachers. Do you think this is so? Or do students avoid talking to teachers/professors for other reasons?
3. Choose a professor to interview—a favorite teacher or just someone you would like to know better. Explain the reason for your meeting

and make an appointment beforehand so he or she has some uninterrupted time to speak with you. Prepare your questions before the interview, but also be ready to go with the flow of your conversation. Ask the following questions in the interview, but feel free to add your own questions as well:

- a. How did you get interested in your subject? What about it appeals to you?
- b. When did you decide on a career in college teaching? What led you to this decision?
- c. Where did you go to college and graduate school? After you graduated from college, did you go directly to graduate school?
- d. How did you come to teach at _____ College/University?
- e. What courses do you teach at the college?
- f. What do you enjoy most about teaching? What is most satisfying about being in the classroom?
- g. What do you want students to gain from your classes?
- h. What do you expect of students in your classes?
- i. When you think about the best students you have taught, what was special about them? What qualities did they bring to the classroom that made them stand out?
- j. If you could give students one piece of advice about succeeding in your class (and college in general), what would it be?

Write a short essay (one page—250 words) summarizing what you learned from your professor. What did you find most interesting and/or surprising about your conversation? Did your interview change your view of your professor? If so, explain.

18

Appreciate your professors' passion for their subjects. Even if you don't share your professors' passion for science, history, literature, art, or whatever else you are studying, respect their dedication. Most college faculty have devoted a large portion of their lives to learning about an academic subject or discipline. After completing their formal studies, they've continued to read, write, and learn about their area of interest. Some have passed up careers in other professions, including some highly paid ones, to pursue their passion and share their knowledge with others. Remembering all this will give you a better understanding of the people in the front of the classroom and of why they care so much about what they're teaching.

1. *"It's hard to generalize, but I'd say that my professors in college seem to take their subjects more seriously than my high school teachers did. There are exceptions, obviously, but I'd say that's usually the case. I can tell by the way my professors talk in class that they think a lot more about their subjects. And they've studied longer. Most have doctorates."*

— Sal, junior

- a. Have you noticed any differences between your high school teachers and your college professors? If so, what are they?
 - b. Sal says most of his professors in college have doctorates. What is a doctorate? Is it the same as becoming a medical doctor? If not, how are they different? What does getting a doctorate involve? If you're not sure of the answers to these questions, ask one of your professors.
2. Interview one of your professors about his or her academic interests and background. If possible, choose someone whose subject area interests you. Explain the reason for your meeting and make an appointment beforehand so he or she has some uninterrupted time to speak with you. Prepare your questions before the interview, but also be ready to go with the flow of the conversation. Consider asking some of the following questions:
 - a. When did you become interested in your subject?
 - b. Was there a specific experience—a class, a teacher or professor,

or something else—that inspired you to study this subject?

- c. Did you major in this subject in both college and graduate school? About how many years did you spend in school (college and graduate school together) studying this subject?
- d. Within your field, do you have a specific area of interest? If so, how did you come to select this?
- e. What do you find most interesting about your subject as a whole (or your specialization)?
- f. Some professors write and speak about their subject outside the classroom. Are you involved in these activities?
- g. What has been the most satisfying moment of your career?
- h. What has been the biggest challenge of working in your field?
- i. If you were starting college tomorrow, would you study the same subject?

Write a short essay (one page—250 words) summarizing what you learned from your professor. What surprised you the most about your conversation? Did your interview change your view of your professor's commitment to his or her subject? If so, explain.

19

Do more than just pass. To be sure, passing is always better than failing. But if you see nothing wrong with doing the bare minimum—with being content to simply “pass” or “get by”—you’re shortchanging yourself big time. Not everyone can excel in every class, of course, but almost everyone, at least at times, can be more than just average. If the best you can say about your overall performance in your classes is “I’m passing,” you need to have a serious talk with yourself.

1. The author writes that students should not be content to “just pass” or “get by.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Read “I’m Passing” and answer the questions that follow.

I'm Passing

So what's so bad about getting C's in college, anyway?

You're passing, aren't you? And isn't that the only thing that matters?

And anyway, doesn't somebody have to be in the middle of the pack? Why not you?

It's not as if you couldn't do better if you tried. Of course you could. You might not be a straight A student (not many people are), but if you were willing to work harder, put more into your classes, and extend yourself a little, you could certainly earn higher grades than straight C's. You'd probably even learn more.

You're not dumb, to be sure—just not as committed as you might be. You know you don't work up to your potential, never have.

But, hey, you're passing. You're getting by. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Or is there?

Being content to settle—being satisfied with just getting by—is habit forming. You may think it's a behavior that you can turn on and off, but it's not that simple. The attitudes you acquire in school, including college, can become part of your overall approach to life. Get used to trying your best in your classes and you're likely to do the same in your career, your relationships, and everything else you do. Get used to just slipping by in college and you can easily find yourself sleepwalking through life's other important moments.

And remember this: it's an incredibly competitive world you're entering. You may pass your classes by doing the bare minimum and you may even graduate at some point, but what are you planning to say when an employer asks why you earned such lackluster grades? Pointing out that you nevertheless managed to pass probably won't make much of an impression. Nor will mentioning that you cut a lot of corners while you were in college.

What's wrong with just passing? What's wrong with a transcript filled with C's?

Nothing and everything.

- a. What is the main idea of this essay?
- b. What, according to the author, are the disadvantages of just trying

to “pass” (as opposed to doing your best) in college?

- c. What is the meaning of the closing line (“Nothing and everything”)?
- d. Do you agree with the ideas expressed in this essay? Why or why not?
- e. Would you say that the author of “I’m Passing” is talking to you (or people you know)? Explain.

20

Know your demons. Like almost everyone else, you probably have habits and behaviors that sometimes keep you from accomplishing as much as you would like. Maybe you spend too much time online, too much time playing video games, too much time talking to friends, too much time shopping, too much time watching television, or too much time worrying. Maybe you work too much, study too little, or miscalculate how much time life’s “business” (including your classes) will take. Replacing bad habits with good ones is easier said than done, but knowing what behaviors you need to change is a good first step. Self knowledge is always a plus.

1. What are *your* demons? What bad habits or self-defeating behaviors keep you from doing your best in school or—in general—from being as productive as you would like?
2. Can you think of a situation in which one of your demons caused you to shortchange yourself in school or some other area of your life? What happened? If you could relive that moment, what would you do differently?
3. Overcoming bad habits and self-defeating behaviors can be a challenge, but it’s not impossible. Discuss how you might change a behavior identified in Question #1. Focus on some concrete action you might take to replace that behavior with a more positive and productive one.

21

Push yourself. If good athletes can give it their all when they are tired, hurting, distracted, or simply not 100%, so can good students. Life in col-

lege isn't always going to be easy, but you have to try your best even when you are not at your best. On those rainy mornings when you are tired, have a ton of work to do, and half wish you'd stayed in bed rather than dragged yourself to class, pat yourself on the back for having done the right thing.

1. The author says good students are like good athletes: both give their best efforts, even when their circumstances are difficult. Does this comparison surprise you? If you have participated in a sport—or done anything else (played a musical instrument, for example) that requires dedication and perseverance—can you see the comparison to success in college classes? Explain.
2. Read “Grit” and answer the following questions.

Grit

One of your biggest tests in college won't take place in the classroom.

Instead, it will happen some morning when you have overslept and realize you'll have to hustle to make that 8 a.m. History class.

Or, it will happen when you have just had an argument with your boyfriend or girlfriend and have to compose yourself to finish that English essay that's due tomorrow.

Or, it will take place when you encounter a challenging piece of assigned reading and realize that understanding the selection will take more time and effort than you expected.

Your response to these situations (and ones like them) will measure your “grit index”—your ability to get beyond the discomfort of the moment and meet the task at hand. Successful students routinely demonstrate their grit. When faced with adversity, they find ways to get themselves to class, complete their English essays, and plough through those formidable readings.

Less successful students, in contrast, go back to sleep, leave their essays unfinished, and close their textbooks, feeling defeated by circumstances. Their favorite word is often “Whatever.”

College poses many challenges, not the least of which are handling difficult situations and trying your best when you are not at your best. How you respond to these challenges—whether you are willing to step up or just give up—can make the difference between a successful college career and a marginal one. In college, as well

as in the rest of life, a little grit can carry you a long way.

Athletic coaches often motivate players by highlighting the distinction between “contenders” and “pretenders” or by posting locker room signs with expressions like, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” These are clichés, of course. And yet, there is some truth to these sentiments, not only on the playing field but in the classroom. The world does indeed often belong to those who are willing to break a sweat in pursuit of a worthwhile goal.

- a. What is the main idea of this essay? In what paragraph is that idea stated most clearly?
 - b. In the fifth paragraph, the author makes reference to the “grit index.” What is the meaning of the word *grit*? Does the use of this word make sense in this essay?
 - c. How would you characterize your own grit index? When faced with adversity, challenges or disappointments, how do you respond? Can you think of an instance in which you were able to overcome a setback and fulfill a goal?
3. Read the essay titled “Resilience and the Role It Plays in Your Life—Very Well” (www.verywell.com/what-is-resilience-2795059). Explain how the author’s views relate to success in college.