A simple system to get better grades with less stress and more time for fun
Dedication

To every student who did horribly in high school but did great in college. Jim was one of you.

To every student who did great in high school but did horribly in college. Petr was one of you.

It doesn’t matter how you start, it only matters how you finish.
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Introduction

I’ve lived the college experience from both sides. I’m a college and law school graduate, and I’m also a father of three college kids.

I’ve seen students do poorly in high school but then turn it around and do great in college. I was one of them—I barely graduated from high school.

I’ve also seen far too many great high school students suddenly struggle in college. Kids you would never expect to have any problems. They’d change majors, transfer to a different school, or just plod on getting poor grades, but nothing changed. Some even had to drop out and move back home.

And here’s a shocking statistic: according to the National Center for Education Statistics, fewer than 40% of full-time college students will graduate in 4 years. All that time, money, and energy wasted, without a degree to show for it all.

No one—not students, and definitely not parents—wants the college experience to end like that. And it doesn’t have to be that way. My goal is to make sure that every student succeeds.

And the answer isn’t rocket science: in most cases, when students struggle it’s because they don’t have good study skills.

I know from my own experience that college can be tough. You arrive at college expecting to study just like you did in high school. But college is different. Suddenly the old methods aren’t cutting it. There’s much more to do and it’s a whole lot harder. It’s no surprise that students find themselves struggling to stay ahead.
In most cases, it really isn’t your fault. You may be working hard, but you aren’t working smart. You haven’t really learned how to study in college. I hate to say it, but you’re winging it. And you’re learning that effort doesn’t always equal accomplishment.

You need to learn how to use ways you know will give consistent results.

And now you have Shovel.

Our system isn’t complicated. It’s made up of a set of common sense principles and best practices that apply universally to every college student, regardless of your major.

Shovel gives you the simple steps that you need to take each and every day. They are concrete. You either do them or you don’t. When you do, you’ll get better and more consistent results from the effort you put in.

You don’t have to constantly try to figure out the best way to study in college. You’ve got Shovel, so you have an entire system designed to help you succeed.

You will always know that the effort you put in will get you a specific result. You’ll know what you need to do, how long it’s going to take, and how much time you have to do it.

You will know exactly what works. When you get off track, you’ll know why, and you can fix it quickly. You’ll do things in ways that deliver the best results with the least time and effort.

Same way, every day.

I’m not going to tell you it’s going to be easy. But you will get better grades with less stress than ever before. You’ll have more time to meet new people and truly enjoy your college experience.

And isn’t that what you really want?

It’s time to grab your shovel and get started.
Why It’s Called Shovel

We use a construction metaphor for many of our examples. That’s how we came up with Shovel. But Shovel is much more than a metaphor.

✶ Shovel is a beginning.

It’s the groundbreaking. The start of something new. Building something big.

✶ Shovel is a tool.

Simple and effective. Proven to work and virtually unchanged for thousands of years.

✶ Shovel is an action.

It’s about getting things done. Moving piles of stuff that you may not want to do.

It’s about finishing a big goal, one small scoop at a time.
Want to do better in college? Here’s how.

College. It’s all about the ivy-covered buildings, the football games, the parties. Oh yeah, and the classes, too.

To succeed in college, you have to master note taking, read a mountain of books, write hundreds of pages of papers, and take quizzes, midterms, and finals year after year.

It can feel completely overwhelming when you’re struggling.

And you aren’t alone. I was in your shoes once. And I learned that it’s not about innate smarts—any student can succeed. And every student should.

And yet almost every college student struggles with the workload, whether it’s because of one killer class, demands like a job or playing a sport, or just bad study habits. I know. I was there.

But success in college isn’t a mystery—it’s about a few simple, common sense principles that can work for anyone. We call it the Shovel method. Top students have already mastered this approach, even if they don’t realize it.

First, ask yourself why you want to do better. Is it to keep a scholarship? To stay on an athletic team? Maybe you want to get a really good job after college, or get into grad school.

Second, ask why you aren’t already succeeding. And be honest. Is it because you never find time for studying? Are you skipping classes? Are you spending too much time hanging out and not
enough time with your books?

The truth is, college is hard. It’s supposed to be hard.

But getting A’s is surprisingly easy. With a few simple techniques and behaviors, you can start acing all your classes. You just have to follow a step-by-step method to succeed.

Maybe you feel overwhelmed by the mountain of study advice out there. Endless websites, blogs, and YouTube channels that cover hundreds of topics. Much of it is needlessly complicated.

You shouldn’t have to figure out how to study. You already have enough to do in your classes.

And yet in 2015, 78% of professors in a survey by Achieve said that less than half of their students had the study habits required to succeed in college.

You’re about to get the skills you need with Shovel.

The Shovel method consists of five simple principles that are proven to get results. You’ve probably heard of some of them already.

If you want to know how to study, this is the method that works. It’s about knowing your time and knowing your workload. And then working efficiently and effectively. Once you know how to do it all, then it’s about making it a habit.

Sound simple? It is.

And beyond the method, you also get the system to make sure you apply the approach. The Shovel Study System includes this study guide, the Learning Center, the habit-forming Follow-Up, and your secret weapon: the Shovel app.

Once you’ve mastered the method, we’ll give you the technology to make it easy and to stick with it.

Follow these principles, and you will get better grades. You’ll have less
stress. And you’ll have more time to actually enjoy being in college.

Success in college is ultimately about these five things. Do them well and you win.

**Time**

Do you have time for college? Seriously. Do you?

We all continually overestimate the time we have. In college, you think you have a lot of it, but classes, meals, sports, school activities, jobs, and personal time take up a big part of your day.

Time for study is what’s leftover—and it’s never enough.

You have to know your time before you can do anything else.

Luckily for you, the Shovel Study System gives you the ability to **really** understand and manage your time—that’s the power of the Shovel app.

Unlike a typical student day planner, it shows you how you spend your time and most importantly, how much ‘Study Time’ you have left. Every change you make in the Shovel app will show you how it affects the time you have to get your work done, in real time.

Once you know your time, we can talk about your workload.

**Workload**

There’s a lot of work to do in college.

While students know WHAT they need to do, they have no idea HOW LONG it’s going to take or when they should start. Students continually underestimate how much time studying takes. They think they have enough time to get things done. They are almost always wrong.
Our method shows you how to pull every important piece of information from a syllabus so that you can create a work plan for your semester. And we show you how to figure out exactly how long all that work will take.

No more guessing and no more underestimating the time you need to complete each task for every class.

And the Shovel app makes it easy. It compares the ‘Study Time’ you have available with the time you need to get your A, every minute, every day, in real time. If you’re already planning to wait until the last minute to start, wouldn’t it be nice to know when the last minute is? With the Shovel app, you can.

**Efficiency**

Efficiency is about quantity. That means finding every minute you can and getting the most out of each one. Students waste a mountain of time and they’re constantly playing catch up.

Minutes matter in college.

In this step, we turn you into an efficiency machine by creating a daily routine to plan and use your time. We show you how to remove distraction and increase your focus so that you make the best use of every minute you have. And we’ll tell you exactly when and where to study.

You’ll always have time ahead of you, so you’ll never get behind.

**Effectiveness**

Effectiveness is about quality. That means getting the best results for the time and effort you spend working. You can have all the time in the world, but if you struggle in your studies, it still won’t matter.
Success in college is really about mastering three different areas: classes, tasks, and tests. We’ll walk you through the best methods for taking notes, reading textbooks, and preparing for exams. Do it right the first time through and you’ll save time later when it matters.

You’ll never cram again and exams will take care of themselves.

**Habit**

You can’t just wing it in college.

You need to know what to do, why you are doing it, and the results you expect to get. You need to be doing things the same way, every day.

Just five steps.

You either do them or you don’t. When you do, you get consistent results.

Everything in this guide is simple and repeatable. If you make it a habit, it just works. But that’s a big ‘if.’

We know that human nature is really quite the opposite to what we’d like it to be. It’s hard to form new habits. Knowing how to do something the right way still doesn’t mean that you’ll do it.

To truly succeed, most of us need more than the right methods. And that’s where the Shovel Study System steps in again. We’ll give you the proper study method in this guide, but our Follow-Up, which is included in the Shovel Study System that you are a part of, will help you stick with it. This is not a guide that will die after you read it. It will keep reminding you how to do things the right way until you make good studying a habit.
What Shovel Does For You

After reading the Shovel study guide, you’ll know what you need to do. The Shovel app will help you manage your time and your workload, in real time, like never before. The Shovel learning center will show you how to use the app and the knowledge from this guide to its fullest potential and the Shovel follow-up program will make sure that you make getting perfect grades a habit.

You will be in complete control of your time and your workload every single day.

You will know what to do next, the time you need to do it, and the time you have to get it done.

You will have a set of simple, repeatable behaviors and study techniques that get results.

You will have a study method that you don’t have to think about. You just do it.

We will show you exactly how you are going to do things.

You will get better grades, with less stress, and with more time to enjoy your college experience.

We follow up to make sure that you succeed.

A word of warning: Shovel is not for students who want to cut corners and slide by. It’s about being your best, trying to do everything that is assigned, and learning the most that you possibly can.

College is challenging, but it’s also supposed to be fun. Ultimately,
our goal is for you to get good grades. But we also want you to enjoy your college experience knowing that you’re in complete control of your studies.

If you’re a high school student heading off to college, lucky you. You can avoid the bad habits from the start. Far too many great high school students struggle when they get to college. It doesn’t have to be that way. You can establish the discipline and the habits you need on day one. You won’t be winging it.

If you’re already in college, you can improve your efficiency, regardless of your major. If you’ve been struggling, we’ll show you how to get back in control and get things running like a machine. Even if you already get good grades, we’ll show you how to get them in less time and effort so you have more time for fun.

And we’ll tell you exactly how to do it.
Why Listen To Us?

We’ve been in your shoes—we were both struggling students once.

We aren’t academics or experts in pedagogy, whatever that means. We’re regular guys who learned the hard way that it’s important to do well in college.

So we’d like to tell you about our struggles—starting with Jim.

I thought that all the other kids were just smarter than I was when I got to college. I worked hard, but my grades didn’t reflect it. Mom must have lied—I really wasn’t that smart. And the drugs and alcohol in my teens definitely didn’t help.

The truth is, I was a horrible student in high school, I didn’t study. I didn’t participate in anything. Those years were a complete and total waste. I didn’t even graduate with my class. When I finally finished after an extra semester, my GPA must have been close to a D.

I spent my first six months out of high school working at a gas station. Pumping all that gas gave me clarity—it wasn’t what I wanted to do with my life. Luckily, I had some relatives who suggested I try college in Nebraska.

College? I never thought I would go to college.

But college saved my life.

It wasn’t easy. My first semester was pretty bad. I wanted to do well, but I had no idea how to study. I didn’t have a clue what I was doing. And I was frustrated. I worked all the time, staring at books
in the library past midnight, but somehow I still got less than perfect grades.

Something clearly wasn’t right and I was sick of guessing what that might be.

I tried to find study advice. There was no Internet back then, so I searched the library for books on how to study. But all the advice was long and complicated. Memory methods, speed reading, lots of pep talk and feel-good motivation, but none of it clicked for me.

The solutions were more complicated than the problems, and I was already overwhelmed.

I just wanted something simple and practical.

Don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t looking for shortcuts. I was deadly serious about college. I never missed a single class, ever. I also read every single word that was assigned, literally. I wanted to succeed, and I wanted to do it as efficiently and effectively as possible.

And I was lucky. I had time to get everything done. Other than running and working a part-time job for beer money, I had hours and hours to study. Some of my friends weren’t so lucky. They had jobs, played sports, or participated in all kinds of activities that took a lot of time.

Looking around, I realized that the biggest cause of stress was time. Or, rather, the lack thereof. I saw it everywhere. People were constantly behind and cutting corners to catch up.

And most of that stress was self-inflicted.

That was my eureka moment. Success in college isn’t about how smart you are. You can learn anything that those really smart kids can, it just may take more time.

But almost all students struggle to manage their time. And even if they do have time, they don’t know how to use it efficiently and effectively. That was my problem. I studied all the time, but it
didn’t get me anywhere.

I came up with an approach that worked. It was about flipping a switch and blocking out distractions. I created a schedule and stuck with it. I got organized. I actually studied my syllabus so I was never caught by surprise. I knew how much time I had and how much I needed.

It was the exact opposite of my high school years—and it worked.

I became efficient with my time. I developed effective study routines that suddenly produced good results. I learned how to read my textbooks. I learned how to take notes in class. And all of it was organized around studying for exams with the least amount of stress.

I never crammed, I never stressed about deadlines—I was always finished well before anything was due. The night before an exam, I did a quick review and went to the bar for a beer. Seriously.

The best part was that I still had plenty of time for fun. In fact, I had even more fun. I didn’t waste time hanging around doing nothing all day so that I had to cram at night. I could go party without stressing about a looming deadline. I used small amounts of time to get things done, always with a sense of urgency. That meant I had plenty of time in reserve for the things I really wanted to do later.

I didn’t realize it then, but I developed a system.

I didn’t have to think about it. I did things the same way, every day, and they just worked. I was never stressed out and I consistently got good grades—I didn’t even feel like I had to work hard for them.

After college, I even went on to graduate from law school.

Here’s the point: success in college really isn’t about how smart you are. It’s about how you use your time. How you manage your workload. Doing well requires willpower and discipline.
My goal in this guide is to show you my method, and the system we’ve built to help students succeed. I’m not a professor. I’m just a guy who was in your shoes: struggling in college and looking for a solution.

That’s why I came up with Shovel.

Petr has a way different story than mine—but I’ll let him take over here.

My story is just about the opposite of Jim’s. I was a good student in high school—but I failed miserably in college.

I met Jim the summer after my sister spent a year with his family as an exchange student more than ten years ago. A year later, I came to the United States from the Czech Republic as a teenager to play hockey at a boarding school in Connecticut and I spent my holidays with Jim’s family.

At boarding school your schedule is set. You wake up, eat breakfast, go to class, eat lunch, more class, 30 minutes to get to practice. Three hours of hockey, dinner, free time, mandatory study hall from 9-11pm. Internet shuts off, lights out at 11:30. If you miss class, that’s detention Saturday night—the only night you could really have fun and socialize.

Sounds like hell right? It wasn’t. As a clueless 15-year old kid who was thousands of miles away from his family, that’s exactly what I needed. The school gave me the structure. I just had to show up, put my head down, and work hard.

I was driven. I had a goal—I wanted to get into college and I wanted to get a scholarship because my parents couldn’t afford to pay for college and going back home wasn’t an option for me. So I worked hard and focused on hockey and my studies.

My efforts paid off. Considering that my dad didn’t even go to high school, my life looked perfect at 18. I was drafted by the Philadelphia Flyers and accepted into Harvard.
But that’s when things started to turn sour. I had a knee surgery my senior year in highschool, some bad injuries right after that, and I developed chronic back pain the summer before my first year in college and it lasted for three consecutive years.

My back pain made it impossible for me to get a good night’s sleep and some mornings I couldn’t even tie my own shoes. But there was nothing visibly wrong with me, it was just pain, so I had to keep playing hockey to stay on the team.

Hockey already took up a tremendous amount of my time, but because I had to rehab my back before and after practice every day, hockey took up twice as much time for me that it did for healthy players. I was the first one to show up and the last one to leave which meant that I spent up to six hours a day at the rink.

On top of that, I had a new social life, long bus rides to away games, professors who didn’t care if I showed up to class, and no structure.

You see where this is going...

I failed in college. Miserably.

And here’s the truth: I knew what I was supposed to do. I even met with Jim and he walked me through his study method. But it didn’t help. I knew that he was right, but I didn’t listen to him.

I spent hours and hours stressing out about getting kicked out of school. I got put on probation because of my bad grades and I had to repeat some of my classes.

My back pain wasn’t getting much better, I had more injuries and ultimately, I had to stop playing hockey. I was miserable.

I had a hard time finding a job after graduation even with a degree from Harvard, because I graduated with bad grades. If you must know, I worked as a gardener at my college girlfriend’s dad’s house for four months—picking weeds and shoveling literal horse shit. It was embarrassing.
I wanted to share my story to show you that college goes by really fast and if you’re not careful, it will chew you up and spit you out. Bad habits pile up as fast at the material you have to learn, soon enough you can’t control the situation you’re in, you can’t catch up, and you pay for it with bad grades and poor mental health. As you can see, I’m talking from experience.

Learn from my mistakes.

Believe me when I tell you that a bad GPA won’t do you any favors. It will make it extremely hard for you to find a good job after college and it will make it impossible for you to get into grad school.

I struggled in college because I didn’t have good study habits that I could rely on when things got tough.

So, despite everything that will try to derail you, you have to stay on track and always make sure that you stay on top of your studies because perfect grades are your ticket to a brighter future.

I helped Jim put the Shovel Study System together so that it would be easy for you to stick to good study habits. Jim knows what he’s talking about when it comes to studying—he did extremely well. So, listen to him.

Okay, that’s enough from me.

Long story short: we’ve been in your shoes. Jim struggled in high school but turned it around in college. Petr struggled in college and only figured it out after graduation.

We know from experience how important it is to succeed in college. It’s not just about getting good grades: it’s about setting yourself up for the kind of future you want.

And if you don’t want to find yourself stuck pumping gas or pulling weeds, you have to turn things around NOW.

Which means it’s time to talk about Shovel.
What’s **Shovel?**

Shovel is how you’ll succeed in college.

It’s both the method—the why—and the system—the how.

Shovel gives you the tools to succeed in college, and it’s much more than a list of best practices. Let’s be honest: you already know what you should be doing. Shovel will make sure you actually do it.

The Shovel system is made up of four parts:

1. **The Study Guide.** This explains the What and the Why.

2. **The Shovel App.** The tool for managing the time and workload.

3. **The Learning Center.** It tells you how to use the Shovel app and explains the study methods that get the best results.

4. **Follow Up.** Continuous follow up to make sure you follow through and make it habit.

Here’s what you’ll get with each part of the system.

1. **This Study Guide**

The study guide is your introduction to the Shovel method.

It’s full of the study techniques you need to master to get A’s. We’ll talk about how to manage your time and workload, how to work efficiently and effectively, and how to turn your new skills into habits.
We’ll show you how to break everything into small steps. You’ll tackle your workload step by step and you’ll never get behind.

The study guide gives you the foundation you need to succeed in college.

And it also shows you how Shovel doesn’t stop here—we give you the tools to follow through. Getting good grades is a process. Reading this guide is just the beginning.

That’s where the other parts of Shovel come in.

2. The Shovel App

The Shovel app is the most powerful student planner ever created.

Most college time planning apps are just calendars that only show you what and when you have to do something. Shovel does that, of course, but it does much more.

The Shovel app is both a calendar and a time calculator. It shows you what time you have available to study and how you’re using it. And it even tells you how long every single task will take.

That means Shovel isn’t just about time. The Shovel app is a planner to help you manage time AND workload.

Students are constantly asking themselves the same questions:

• What do I have to do next?

• How much time do I need to do it?

• Do I have enough time to get it done?

• When is the last possible moment that I can start on it and still finish?

The Shovel app shows students exactly how much time they have and how much time they need for every thing they have to do.
And it does it continuously in real time.

3. The Learning Center

All of the time in the world won’t matter if you don’t have the right guidance.

Shovel includes an online Learning Center that covers everything you need to know about managing time, using the Shovel app, and more.

We tell you even more about the study tips and methods that get the best results. We’ll explain the how and the why, and we’ll take you through everything step by step.

The platform lets you talk to us—and we’ll listen.

We’ll accumulate data on what students do and what works best and always try to get you the best information. However, our goal is to keep it simple. There is a mountain of study advice. We’ll strive to give only those ideas that give the best results in the least amount of time.

And we’ll continually update the Shovel app, the website, our follow up, and this study guide to make sure you’re getting the most out of your college experience.

We’ll always be improving—and you will, too.

4. The Follow Up

We can provide you with good study tips and a great app, but we know all too well from experience that you might not always stick with it. We’ll follow up relentlessly to make sure that you follow through.

That means we’ll keep coming at you in different ways with different material. We give our students continuous in-app and email reminders, specific examples, and positive encouragement all semester long. Our goal is to keep pushing you forward. We’ll make
sure that you do simple things the same way every day, until you
don’t even think about them.

You’ll establish the behaviors and study methods that will deliver
consistent and predictable results, each and every time you do
them.

You’ll have a system that just works.

That’s the secret to Shovel. And it all starts with time.
Step 1/ 

TIME

How Much You Have

How You Use It

What’s Left For Study
College Is a Project: Manage it Like One

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”
— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

We like to think about college as a project management task.

There are lots of moving parts, lots of deadlines, and one goal at the end: graduation, with an A in every class. Yes, that’s a big goal, and to accomplish it you have to learn how to think like a project manager.

A few months after graduating from Harvard, Petr landed a job as an Assistant Project Manager on a new skyscraper in New York City. It was a major undertaking—talk about managing chaos, that was it.

But all of that chaos also had order. Everything on the project was staged as carefully and as precisely as possible. Loads were brought in at the right time based on when they were needed. Workers arrived to do whatever they needed to do at the exact time they were supposed to be there. There was limited space to put things, so keeping everything moving was essential. Trucks and workers moved in and out continuously.

Everyone knew what they had to do, when they needed to get started, and how much time it would take to do it. There was a plan governing everything—it said when each component had to be completed, how many hours it would take to finish, what tasks
were involved from start to completion. Put it all together, and the plan told the project managers if they had enough time to get everything done by the deadline.

It’s not so different from college. You start with a goal in mind: building a skyscraper or graduating from college. But the project is made of a thousand small steps that it takes to reach the goal.

When you’re building a skyscraper, every single small step is planned.

Why not do the same for college?

**Project: College**

Success in college is really no different than building the skyscraper. You have a big project: earning a degree with good grades. But let’s break it down into a single semester or just one class. You have a set time to get it done. Completing it successfully requires that you do a whole lot of small steps in the right order, with a high degree of quality.

Get behind on any one of them and you’re suddenly overwhelmed with a cascade of problems—which creates a whole lot of stress.

Sound familiar?

Managing the steps of a big project is all about managing time. It isn’t enough to just know how much time you have. To schedule each step properly and get it done at exactly the right time, you also have to know how much time you need for each and every task.

In this step, we’ll tackle knowing your time. In the next step, we’ll figure out how much time you need.

**Project Management For Students**

One problem trips up nearly every student. You know what you
have to do, and you generally know how much time you have. But do you know how long things will take?

Students wait until the last minute to open their syllabus to see what they have to do next. Worse yet, they are continually surprised by the volume and difficulty of work that needs to be done. They underestimate the time they need and they start too late to get it done with a high level of quality.

There is no reason that has to happen. Planning a project like college should really be no different than planning a skyscraper.

Make a plan in advance.

Know the required steps.

Estimate the time and effort they will take.

Once you know the time you have and need, the next step is to get each of them done as quickly as possible without sacrificing quality.

So the question was, why can’t these same methods be applied to students? Why can’t a student invest some time in advance to fully understand the requirements of each class, make a plan, break it down into small steps, and manage it just like a contractor?

They most certainly can and should do just that.

And we’ll tell you exactly how.
Almost all academic stress is caused by lack of time. Ask any professor why students struggle and they usually say the same thing—time.

Let me be more specific. The number one cause of stress and poor performance in college is not having enough **study time** to get things done. That’s it. All of those other excuses you tell yourself and your parents are a distant second.

If you tell me you’re struggling in college, here’s the first question I’m going to ask:

**Do you have time for college?**

I don’t mean generally, I mean precisely. Do you?

Do you know exactly how much time you have, how you use it and how much you commit to study? On Monday? Tuesday? Every day? To the minute?

You need to—and soon you will. It’s the easiest thing to know and it’s the first thing you’re going to figure out.

Think about these follow-up questions:

- How much time do you have for study after everything else you have to do?
Know Your Time

- What work you have to get done?
- How much time do you need to do that work?
- Are you efficient? Do you get the most done with whatever time you have?
- Are you effective? Do you get the best result for the effort you put in?

Most students can’t answer those questions—even though they look straightforward.

Success in college starts with managing your time. I know that sounds ridiculously simplistic—and it is. College is no different than any other task you’ll face in business or in your life: look at what you have to do, break it into small pieces, estimate how long it’s going to take, and start soon enough to make sure you have enough time to get it done. When you work, eliminate distractions and use methods that get the best result for the effort you put in.

It should be simple, but that isn’t what students do. They overestimate their time, underestimate their workload, allow themselves to be continuously distracted, and use poor study habits that deliver lousy results for the effort they put in.

Students usually think of time planning as putting things on a day planner, but that just tells them what they already know—it’s a list of deadlines no different from a syllabus.

Our goal is to tell you what you DON’T know: how much study time you really have.

You don’t have to be a math major to know that every student starts with the same amount of time each day. How much each student has for studying is a whole different story. Students play sports, join all kinds of student organizations, and participate in endless activities. And that doesn’t take into account all of those daily tasks like getting ready, walking to and from places, meals, exercise, jobs, errands and appointments, and every other little thing.
And then there are the parties. Lots and lots of parties.

Students continually think they have more time than they actually do—and that they need less time than they have. Shovel will help you get those in sync.

The very first thing you’re going to do is know your time. I mean REALLY know it. How much you have, how you use it, and exactly how much you have left for studying.

It’s a simple exercise, and the Shovel app can do it for you.
How Much Time
Do You Have?

“Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.”
—William Penn

The first piece of the puzzle is figuring out how much time you have available for studying.

And luckily for you, the Shovel app is the most advanced student planner in history. It does things that your paper planner could never do.

There’s no excuse not to study with the Shovel app. It tells you exactly when to study, and even better, it tells you exactly how much time you’ll need to finish the semester on top.

Think like a project manager. The Shovel app is your most important tool.

If you don’t know your time, it’s easy to get caught by surprise. So the first step in the Shovel app is the Time Setup, where you’ll easily figure out exactly how you use your time and how much time you have left for your studies—we call it your Study Time.

To determine how much Study Time you have, you need to start with the big picture and work your way down to the details.
It’s just a big time calculation:

\[
\frac{(\text{Days in a Semester} - \text{Holidays}) \times \text{Daily Awake Time}}{\text{Total Available Time}}
\]

Total Available Time - (Classes + Meals + Activities + Me Time)

= Total Available Study Time

Total Available Study Time may include time blocks that are too small to get something done, so get rid of those and what you have left is your Available Study Time.

After a few simple steps, the Shovel app will know exactly how much Study Time you have every day of the week for the entire semester. The app loads it into your calendar so you can easily adjust it week by week.

Super simple.

Okay, okay, a math equation this early in the guide is probably too harsh. Let’s break it down.

Start with the big picture. Just like that project manager, you’ll want to know when the project starts and when it ends. In terms of college, our goal is to define the total number of work days you have for the semester (or quarter) and how many hours you have free each day. This will set the parameters of everything else that follows.

It might sound daunting, but the Shovel app makes it easy.

Here’s our goal in this step. We need to answer two questions:

1. How many days do you have this semester?

2. How many hours do you have each day to get things done?

Figuring out both of these questions will literally take you just a couple of minutes in the Shovel app.
1. Your Semester

A typical semester runs about 110 to 120 days, and quarters can be only 80 days.

In the app, Semester Range marks the START date and the END date of your classes. Set this up based on your school’s calendar.

The app will repeat your weekly class schedule in this time period.

There is usually a reading and an exam period after this, and the app will extend your recurring schedule without classes based on when your last exam will be, so it will accurately calculate your available Study Time until the last possible minute. It’s all automatic, but we’ll get to that.

For now, set when your classes start and when they end.

You’ll have some holidays and breaks each semester. And let’s be honest—you probably won’t be studying much during those breaks. In fact, it is our goal for you not to study during holidays. You can take them off your calendar by simply identifying them in the Shovel app.

Now you have the boundaries and the big picture of your total time, but that’s just the start. Let’s drill it down a step further. The next thing you need to know is how many hours you have in each of those days to get things done.

2. Your Awake Time

You can only do things when you’re awake—no one expects you to study while you’re sleeping.
The Shovel app makes it super easy to figure out your awake time. Just slide the sliders. The only catch is that you have to be honest with yourself. If you won’t get up before noon on Saturday 99.9% of the time, don’t wishfully set your Saturday awake time for 10 a.m. It ain’t gonna happen, and not being honest with yourself is just going to hurt you.

So now you have a starting point. The total days and the total hours each day.

Is it going to be enough for studying? That depends entirely on how much time you need for other things. There are lots of things that take up your time besides studying, of course.

We absolutely don’t expect you to study for eight hours a day—no one has time for that. But start adding in your other activities, and you’ll be surprised by how little time you have left.

3. Your Typical Week

Once you arrive at school and the first week of nonstop parties passes, you’ll settle into a normal routine—your ‘typical’ week. Sure, college can be spontaneous. How you actually use your time each day can and will change. That said, most students will settle into a daily routine that will be pretty predictable week after week.
After all, much of your time each week isn’t flexible. There are some things that you simply have to do. These are your commitments, and they can take up a lot of your time. We want to focus on those first.

**What Takes Your Time?**

Think of all of the things that take up your time before you can do anything else, let alone study. Every day is different, but most days include the following things:

- **Getting Ready.** I can be ready in 10 minutes. I know people who need 30 minutes just to do their hair.

- **Classes.** You aren’t going to be missing any of those—not if you want A’s.

- **Meals.** You have to eat! Plus, meals are social and break time.

- **Activities.** Clubs, practices, jobs, and anything else that requires you to be there.

- **Walking To and From.** Don’t underestimate the amount of time you spend walking back and forth to every class and other places you have to go. And if you live off-campus, add in your commute time, too.

- **Workouts.** Exercise is a must. It affects the quality of your work—exercise makes you study much more effectively. Join a club sport, hit the gym, run, lift weights. You pick it, but just do it.

- **Errands.** Laundry, shopping, etc. Anything and everything you need to do on a regular basis.

- **Personal Stuff.** Everyone has things they always do—coffee shop, taking a walk, reading the paper.

The list of possible things is endless. The point here is that your
‘have to’ time is going to be a lot of your day, and you can’t change most of it.

We keep it simple by breaking these ‘have to’ things into 3 main sections: Classes, Activities, and Meals. Classes and Meals are self explanatory, Activities are everything else: practices, jobs, club meetings, personal obligations, whatever. Activities are whatever you do on a regular basis that is pretty much inflexible.

This is standard stuff that you can put into any calendar, but the Shovel app makes this process very fast. It puts your weekly schedule into every week of your semester calendar, eliminates your holidays, and takes you through it in steps that really make you think about your week in detail. Once you set up your weekly schedule, you can easily adjust your individual weeks in the calendar without disrupting your setup.

Unlike other day planners and calendars, the Shovel app doesn’t just show you what and when you have things to do. It shows you **how much time** each of them takes and how it affects your entire week. Just check out the graph and the time left at the top of the page.

No paper planner can do that.
Now you know what is more or less inflexible in your schedule.

Time to plan your fun.

**Me Time**

College isn’t just about studying, it’s about having fun—and you’re going to do that a lot. You absolutely should, but you need to understand how that affects your total time as well.

Remember, our main goal in the Time Setup is to help you identify the time you have available for studying. You’ve entered all of the time for the things you HAVE to do, but now we need to enter the things you WANT to do.

We call that Me Time. This is the time you set aside for having fun. You don’t necessarily know what you’re going to do, but let’s be honest—you *already* know you won’t be studying.

Take, for example, Friday evenings. In September, you might not know exactly what you’ll be doing in November, but you can already predict that you won’t be hitting the books on Friday nights. The same goes for Saturday nights and any other time you know you won’t be studying. Block it off and go have fun.

Set up your Me Time in the Shovel app on the same page as above. It’s super easy.

You can have as much or as little Me Time as you want. Just be honest with yourself. You don’t want to schedule too little time for fun.

The nice thing is that Me Time is flexible. The goal is to never have to use it for studying, but if you need it, you always know how much you have and you can use it in a pinch. It’s your reserve if you get behind—or for those weeks where you have three midterms and a paper.

For now, put in your best estimate. You can always adjust it later when you know how much time you really need for studying.
Now you have a pretty good idea about what takes up your time during the week. If you look carefully, there are empty time blocks between all your commitments. Which takes us to the next screen of the app.

**Extra Time**

There is a slider on the Study Time page that lets you determine the size of your minimum Study Time block. This is where you really nail down how much time you have available to get things done.

Petr couldn’t get anything done if he had less than an hour because he had to check his social media, youtube, reddit, get his coffee, wrap up his group chats, warm up his seat, and whatever else he was doing. He called it getting in the zone, but it didn’t help him much from what I can tell. I was able to get things done in a fifteen minute block. Know which one of us you are and don’t lie to yourself. (We’ll address this more in step 3. Efficiency.) For now, use your gut feeling to what is realistic for you and slide the slider to set your minimum Study Time block. Every time block that’s smaller than your minimum will be turned into Extra Time.

And finally, what’s left is your Study Time.

The Shovel app helps you identify Extra Time so you can make a choice about how to use it. Those small chunks of time can make a huge difference in your success. And as I said, we’ll get to that later.

**Study Time**

The moment of truth. The Shovel app automatically converts the rest of your time into Study Time. But will it be enough?
Think about how much total time you started with and see how much of it is already committed to things you have to do. Suddenly your life feels a lot busier, right?

Many of you might not have much left. The things you have to do each day can take up the majority of your time. For student athletes, it may take up virtually all of it.

Here’s the most important part of this exercise. The goal here is to realistically exclude all of the times you have other things to do and the Me Time where you know you just won’t study. Then identify where and how much time you have available to study.

Look carefully at the blocks of time you have left. Those are STUDY time blocks. It’s time to be brutally honest about which ones you will really use, and then...

🌟 **COMMIT**

This is the hard part. And it’s where most students drop the ball.

When you finish your weekly schedule and you decide on study times, then COMMIT to them. Completely, totally, unequivocally. COMMIT. You came to college for a reason.

Don’t let anything or anyone distract you. Just like your job or
your sports practices, you are there when you are supposed to be, without exception. It has to be the same with Study Time blocks. The only way you can plan around them is to KNOW when you are going to use them and **stick to your plan**.

**Change Happens**

For now, figure out your weekly schedule so that you have a solid estimate of how much time you have available for studying.

Your schedule will change during the semester, so review your time on a weekly basis. As you start to settle into a consistent routine, you can make a much more accurate estimate of the time you really have, how you use it, and when you should use it to study.

Regardless of what those changes might be, figure out your new study times and commit again to using them as planned. No exceptions and no deviations. Your studies are your business. Treat them like one.

So, there you go. You now know all of your time down to the minute. You know exactly how much time you are going to commit to studying.

Let me ask you this question again:

**Do You Have Time For College?**

And the answer is . . . ‘I have absolutely no idea’. Ding, ding, ding. That’s correct! I’m so glad you’ve been paying attention.

You don’t know the answer to that question yet, because it’s not enough to know how much time you HAVE.

You also have to know how much time you NEED.

And the Shovel app can give you the answer.

Here’s a checklist for the things you should do now and then continue to step two of the Shovel method—Workload.
The Shovel App Time Setup

Action Steps

Open the Shovel app and do the Time Setup.

Complete all of the sections:

Your Semester

_____ **Enter the start and end dates of your semester (or quarter).**
If you’re starting mid year, just use the current date as your start date.

_____ **Enter the start and end dates of holidays or other breaks.**

_____ **Enter the time you wake up and go to bed for each day.** Be honest with yourself. Enter what you know you do, not what you wish you did.

Commitments

_____ **Enter the names of each of your classes.** Drag each class into your weekly schedule.

_____ **Enter your Activities.** This is everything that you do on a regular basis. Things like workouts, jobs, practices. All of the things that you do that aren’t flexible.

_____ **Enter your meal times.** This isn’t just actual eating time but also the time you spend hanging out with friends before and after. You might be surprised about how much of your week is spent just on meals.
Enter Your Me Time. Think about all of the times when you know you won’t study. Always be honest with yourself. Again, enter what you will do, not what you think you should do.

Review Extra Time. Look at each of the individual small time gaps.

- Decide what is the smallest time block that is practical to use for study time and set the slider for your minimum study time block.

- Look again at the gaps. Are there any that are below your minimum but are still usable? Select them and click Convert to Study Time.

- Close gaps where you can by moving items to different times or days.

Study Time

Shovel automatically identifies all your possible Study Time blocks. Review them. Are you missing anything? Are your times realistic? Be honest with yourself.

Commit. Make a promise to yourself right now. When you pick the times you say you will study, ruthlessly commit. Let nothing and no one pull you away from those times. Know when they are, where you will go, and be there on time. No exceptions.
Step 2/WORKLOAD

Everything You Have To Do
How Long It Takes.
All In One Place
Knowing your time is important.

Knowing your workload is critical.

Think back to the construction project metaphor from Step 1. Project managers have to spend a lot of time making detailed estimates. Consider the skyscraper that Petr worked on in New York City—as part of the project, the builders had to renovate a landmarked building, which meant that they had to repair every area of damaged brick in a fourteen-story building.

How did the project managers figure out how much time that would take?

Here’s how it works: they start small. They figure out how much time it takes to repair one square foot of damaged brick. Then they simply multiply by the total square footage of brick that needs to be replaced. This gives them a good estimate of the total time for the project. Of course, first they had to map out all the areas with damaged brick and figure out the total square footage—a boring, time consuming job that Petr had to do.

The same idea works for college.
And here’s the good news: you have a major advantage over project managers—you don’t have to do Petr’s part. At the beginning of the semester, your professors tell you exactly how much work you’ll need to do in the next 120 days—it’s all in the syllabus.

You just have to figure out how much time it will take to complete that work.

And the Shovel app makes it easy.

In this part of the guide we’re going to cover two critical questions:

1. WHAT do you have to do?

2. HOW LONG is it going to take?

Remember the question: Do you have time for college? In the previous section, you figured out your time—how much of it you have and how you use it. That’s great. You know how much Study Time you HAVE. Now we’ll figure out how much time you NEED. Which means that like a project manager, you have to figure out what you have to do and how long it’s going to take. We call this your workload.

And just like the previous section, Shovel app can do it all for you.

We’ll walk you through every step so you can let the Shovel app calculate exactly how much time you’ll need to ace your classes every semester.

It all starts with knowing the requirements of each class, which are in the syllabus.

**Your Syllabus**

The syllabus is your plan for the semester. It lists everything you need to do in order to successfully manage the project.
It’s a contract between you and the professor. It lists the work that needs to be done, when it’s due, and the details about how to do it. The syllabus even gives you the grade weight of every graded task, so that you know which assignments are the most important.

It’s up to you and only you to make sure it all gets done perfectly.

The problem is that most students don’t give their syllabi the attention they deserve. A professor at Columbia even tested this in 2016 by asking students—in the syllabus—to email him a picture of 80’s TV star Alf. The results, he said, were “quantitatively dismal.”

Most students treat the syllabus as a simple checklist of stuff they need to do next. They look at it only when they need to, which is often the day before something is due, or even after it was due. Is it any surprise that students are continually behind?

But the syllabus is more than a list of deadlines—it’s a roadmap of what you need to do to get an A in that class.

We don’t like surprises. We think it’s a good idea to invest the time up front to really and truly understand the syllabus and what it means in terms of time and effort.

Mark Up Your Syllabi

Print out the syllabus for every class and grab a pen or a highlighter. It is CRITICAL that you slowly and methodically analyze every single sentence of your syllabus and know exactly what it says. Pull out the specific information you need to make sure you don’t miss anything in the months to come. It will save you a whole lot of stress and embarrassment.

“Did you read the syllabus? It’s in the syllabus.”
—Every single professor on the planet

The syllabus is filled with information. It tells you what to do and it gives you hints and warnings about the pitfalls that can totally derail you if you aren’t paying attention. Mark up everything that is important.
Most syllabi contain some variation of the following:

- Contact email, office address, and office hours for the professor (and teaching assistants)
- Recommended methods and times to contact the professor
- Class days, times, and locations, including lectures, sections, labs, etc.
- Textbooks, workbooks, PDFs, and any other course materials you’ll be using
- Chapters and specific pages you’ll cover
- Outside readings you’ll need to do
- Objectives of the class—what you’ll be learning
- Papers, projects, and other large assignments
- Due dates for turning things in
- Penalties for not turning things in, or turning things in late
- Number and dates of quizzes and exams
- Special instructions regarding how things should be done
- How your grade is determined

Make sure that you understand each and every requirement on your syllabus. The syllabus is the professor’s way of telling you how to succeed. Each professor has a different style and different requirements—so listen!

**Contact Info**

Once you have marked up everything on all your syllabi, start putting that information into the Shovel app so that you don’t
constantly waste time shuffling through all those syllabi during the semester. Start with contact information for your professors. It’s super fast and easy to transfer this info into the Shovel app.

You’ll get a neat and organized list.

What Makes Up Your Grade?

One of the most important things in the syllabus is the grade scale. If the puzzle is how to get an A, the syllabus tells you the pieces you need to put together. You should always look at the grade scale right away.
In the syllabus, it looks something like this (from Petr’s old syllabus):

**Grading:** The grading rubric is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Sets</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Hour Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Hour Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is most of your grade exams? Reports? Papers? Is participation a part of your grade? If you screw up on the midterm, can you come back by acing the final?

When you put your Grade Weights into the Shovel app for categories that will have multiple tasks, for example ‘Problem Sets’ from the example above, simply put in the category as you see it. Shovel will assign the proper weight to every task you have due in that category, once you create each individual task in the next step. For example, if your syllabus says that the combined weight of your problem set is worth 15% of your grade, just put in “Problem Sets, 15%.”

Then, once you enter your individual tasks, the Shovel app will automatically calculate how much each one is worth. For example, if there are nine Problem Sets, the Shovel app will assign the proper weight to each (15/9=1.66). Shovel does the math for you and automates everything to save you time.
And here’s the great news: once you start getting your grades back, you can enter them into the Shovel app and it will tell you exactly how you’re doing in every single class.

You won’t have to calculate it yourself by hand, search for the information in your school’s course management program (if your professors even use it), or, worst of all, annoy your professors by asking via email.

The grade scale is full of valuable information. Once you’ve entered it into the Shovel app, it’s time to tackle the tasks listed in the syllabus.

What do you have to do?

Most incoming college students vastly underestimate their workload. You might look at your schedule and think that only four classes—and only twelve hours of class a week—will be a breeze compared to high school, where you had over thirty hours of class each week.
But in college, most of your work is supposed to happen outside of class. The old adage, a favorite among professors, is that you should spend two to three hours outside of class studying for every hour you’re in class.

If that surprises you, you’re not the only one. A 2014 study by the National Survey of Student Engagement said the average college student studies 17 hours per week.

And the average college student isn’t getting A’s.

The fact is, college classes typically have heavy workloads. Every class is different in terms of the material used and the mix of things that will ultimately determine your grade. It may be as simple as reading your textbook, going to class lectures, and taking a few exams.

However, some classes include all kinds of other tasks—lab reports, problem sets, workbooks, other reading materials, research, weekly quizzes, writing papers, attending events, and of course, those exams.

So, let’s figure out what you have to do to earn that A.

**Make Piles**

Literally.

Before you start entering your tasks in the Shovel app, make sure you have everything in front of you. Make a pile of all your materials for each class you’re taking.

1. Your marked up syllabus for every class.

2. Your textbooks, workbooks, and any other assigned materials for each class. Buy your books as soon as you know what they are. Buy used or online—even if they’re expensive. Petr’s teammates told him not to buy his economics textbook. They promised he’d get everything from the lectures. Guess what—he didn’t.
3. Printouts of all your PDFs. Students waste a ton of time printing PDFs right before the deadline, which is usually too late. Something always comes up—no ink in the printer, no money on the account, someone else is printing the bible on only available printer. Here’s a tip. Print out every single PDF reading for the whole semester on day one. Trust me on this. It will save you hours of time later.

You should now have 4 or 5 separate piles on the table, one for each class. The piles are mostly comprised of your readings, but your readings are what your classes are based on, so this is a great visual representation of the minimum work you have to do.

Imagine again that you’re a project manager and your client wants to know if you can get the project done on time. Can you? Well, that all depends on how much time you need to get every individual task done.

You can have all of the time in the world, but if it isn’t enough to get everything done, it isn’t going to matter. You have to first know how long each of those tasks is going to take—and most students have no idea how long their work takes.

**Three Categories of Workload: Your Tasks**

To help keep it simple, the Shovel app breaks your workload down into three main categories. Pretty much every class in college will have all of these tasks in one form or another.

**Readings.** This can be textbooks, workbooks, novels, PDFs, online readings. Basically any and all materials that professors expects you to read before class each day. Readings usually make up the majority of your study time. They are the foundation for every class lecture and will be a major source for questions on all of your exams.

**Assignments.** We define assignments as the things that aren’t readings and that you have to work on outside of class. They may
be one time things like papers, projects, and research. They may also be periodic things like problem sets which might be due every class.

*Tests.* These can be daily or periodic quizzes, midterms, or final exams. Anything you need to study for.

You may need to do dozens or even hundreds of individual tasks for each class. To complete those, you need to understand *exactly* what they are, when they are due, and *how long they are going to take.*
How Long Will It Take?

So you have a nice neat pile for each of your classes. You’ve read your syllabus and you know what you need to do. It’s a good start, but the one thing the syllabus can’t tell you is how long it’s going to take to get things done.

That is the most important information of all!

Pull out a syllabus and look at the list of everything you need to do. Now ask yourself: How much time is it going to take you to do it all? Do you know? Until you can compare how much time you HAVE with how much time you NEED to get things done each day, you’ll always be in a state of uncertainty.

Here’s why this is so important.

Students always tell me that they don’t have enough time to get things done. In most cases they’re wrong. They have plenty of time—or I should say, they had plenty of time. The problem is that they let it all get behind them.

Underestimation 101

Everyone thinks that the reason that students don’t get things done on time is that they procrastinate. Okay, so maybe that’s partially true, but the real problem is not procrastination. It’s underestimation.

Procrastination is when you wait until the last minute to do something—but you actually get it done. It annoys my wife that I take out the trash five minutes before the truck comes, but I always
know I’ll get it done in time.

The problem with most students is that they wait until the last minute to do something and they don’t get it done, or at least not to a high level of quality. They never gave themselves a chance.

Don’t get me wrong. When most students start something, they really do think that they have time to get it done. The problem is they are almost always wrong.

Think back to that construction project. There is one very big difference between a project manager and a student in college. While they both may know exactly what they need to do, only the project manager puts effort into estimating how long it’s going to take to do it.

Does a project manager just pull an estimated time of completion out of a hat? Of course not. In construction, millions of dollars might be on the line. There’s no room for guesses. When they say the foundation will be poured by a certain date, they have a basis for that estimate. They know from experience. They know how long each step that goes into pouring the foundation will take, and they know how many work hours they have each day.

That’s not to say they’re always right, because sometimes they aren’t. But they learn each time and adjust their estimates accordingly, which builds their experience.

You CAN Estimate Time

Think about it. In almost everything you do in your college life, you know exactly how long things are going to take. Breakfast is from 7:00 to 7:30 a.m., your economics class is from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m., soccer practice is from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. You always start and end at specific times. The clock decides. It’s easy to plan around those.
Now think about these:

“Read chapters 3 and 4.”

“Write a 20 page paper.”

“Study for the midterm exam.”

How long do they take?

When do they start and when do they end? Do you have a clue? How could you possibly know? They start when they start and they’re done when they’re done. The clock doesn’t decide. It’s new material, it has varying length and difficulty, and there is lots of it to do. It might take an hour or it might take ten. Who knows?

Isn’t it kind of ironic? These are the single most important things you have to do and you don’t have a clue how long any of them is going to take. Really, you don’t. And worse yet, you have hundreds of these things in multiple classes—readings, papers, projects, problem sets, and a dozen quizzes and exams—and not a single clue of how long any of it is going to take.

How can you possibly plan around that?

Most students don’t even try. The result is a continuous state of being behind and stressed out.

Students think they can get it done, but how can they know? Students underestimate their time, they might also procrastinate, and then of course it’s no surprise when they struggle to get things done.

Quality is low, stress is high. Bad grades follow.

And students do this again and again and again. Imagine if a project manager operated like this. They’d be out of work after one job.

I’ll repeat this yet again: If you’re going to wait until the last minute to do something, isn’t it a good idea to know when the last minute is?
You **can** estimate the time it takes to get things done with a high level of accuracy, and you’ll get even better at estimating over time.

And the Shovel app can do it for you. Just put everything into the Shovel app and you’ll get your answer.
Estimating The Time You Need

There is simply no reason for students to run out of time.

Each and every task listed on a syllabus is going to take a certain amount of time to complete. All students need to do is make a reasonably accurate estimate of what that is going to be—and even though it might seem impossible, it isn’t that hard to do.

As you’ll recall, we grouped your college workload into three main categories: Readings, Tests, and Assignments. And we’ll show you how to estimate the time it will take to do all of them.

Reading Sources

You’re going to do a lot of reading in college. It will be the foundation of everything else you do, and it will take up the majority of your time. Here’s the good news: it’s also the easiest task to estimate the time it will take.

Let’s say you see this in your syllabus:

“Read Chapters 3 and 4 from the textbook *Intro to Economics*.”

How long will it take you to read those two chapters? You don’t have a clue because you don’t have enough information. You don’t know how many pages there are in chapters 3 and 4. You don’t know how long it takes you to read one page in *Intro to Economics*. But millions of students subconsciously make estimates every single day—they glance at the syllabus and say “I’ll read that
tomorrow afternoon,” or “I’ll have time after practice.”

Or, more often, they’ll just start the reading sometime before it’s due and assume that they’ll get it done. And they’re often wrong.

Every class will have assigned readings. Those will come from textbooks, PDFs, or online readings—what we call reading sources. And after you’ve got your pile, it’s time to jump into those reading sources.

**You need to know HOW LONG it takes.**

Everything you read in college will take some amount of time. How long it takes will vary widely depending on what it is.

Each and every textbook and assigned reading has a certain formatting and level of difficulty. Each will read at a different rate. Novels will read faster than Physics. Economics slower than History. Something written in the sixteenth century will take longer than something written in the twenty-first.

**Know Your TIME PER PAGE for Every Reading Source.**

In the Shovel app, we divide reading sources into two main types: **Books** and **PDFs**.

**BOOKS** are your textbooks, novels, etc. Some classes assign one book. Others assign ten. Each will have a different time per page.

**PDFs** have two main formats: Single Spaced and Double Spaced. Single Spaced PDFs take twice as much time as Double Spaced PDFs (because they have twice as much content) so you better know what format each PDF is. I’ve seen syllabi with over 50 PDF readings, but each one of those readings fit into those 2 formats. Just know which format each one falls into so that your time estimates are accurate. This is also one of the reasons you printed out every PDF. Funny how that works.

It’s important to note here that the time per page for the same PDF format will vary depending on the content, but Shovel has
you covered there. Just make sure that you make new estimates for every class that you set up.

In the Shovel app, it’s going to look something like this:

In this example, the student has three reading sources: one textbook and two PDF formats. There may be 50 readings from these 3 reading sources, but we’ll get to that.

Ok. So how do you go about knowing your time per page? Easy. Take each book and each PDF type from every class, read one random page in each, and time it. You can use the timer in the Shovel app, located under the logo.

If you want to get even more accurate, pick five random pages instead of one.

Ready. Set. Go.

Start reading.

🌟 WAIT!

Before you start, let’s define exactly what “reading” really means.

You’re about to spend a bunch of time reading things. You don’t want to duplicate effort later on. You need to make sure that when you read your textbook, you understand it, prepare it for review, and make it easy to study for a test when it’s time. I’ll cover each in more detail in Step 4. Just know that when you time each reading,
you’ll want to make sure your total time includes whatever it takes to do the following:

1. Read each page slowly and thoroughly.
2. Carefully highlight to isolate and summarize the key points you think might be on the exam.
3. Stop to look up any words or concepts you don’t understand. Make note of things you’ll need to ask the professor about later.
4. Write possible test questions in the margin or in a notebook.

Now THAT’S reading. You’ve read it, understood it, and it’s ready for review. And don’t worry, we’ll go into a lot more detail on how to read effectively in Step 4.

When you’re timing yourself, the key is to not rush it. This isn’t about seeing how fast you can finish. It’s just the opposite. It’s about doing it right the first time to save time later when it really matters. And be honest with yourself about how you really operate when you read. Do you take breaks? Do you look at your phone? Try to do things exactly as you would do them to get a very accurate idea of how long it takes to read, highlight, and prepare each reading.

**Timing and Adding Readings**

Now that you know the time per page of every Reading Source and you have a pile of all your readings in front of you, it’s going to be super easy to set up all your readings in the Shovel app.

And here’s where the work really pays off: the Shovel app will calculate how long each reading assignment will take, so you’ll never run out of time to finish.

On the workload page, just click ‘+ add a task.’ A dialog box will pop up and you can start adding every reading assignment on the syllabus.
For readings, start with the due date. If the reading is due in class, the Shovel app will automatically know the time. Select the reading source from the list. If the reading source is a book, copy and paste the description of the reading from the syllabus (Chapter 3 and 4). If the reading source is a PDF, copy and paste the title, author, or whatever will help you identify it. Add notes if necessary.

Make sure to add the page range for each reading assignment. You can copy it from the syllabus, or if it’s not listed, open the table of contents of the reading source and figure out when chapter 3 starts and when chapter 4 ends. If there are multiple page ranges, for example “read pp. 10-20 and pp. 28-43,” you can easily add another page range in the Shovel app. Shovel will automatically calculate how many pages you have to read and how long the reading will take, based on the time per page of the particular reading source.

This is what it looks like in the app.

These inputs are optimized for speed and simplicity. It’s light years beyond what a paper planner can do. And it would take ages if you tried to do this anywhere else. That’s the power of the Shovel app.

Save the reading and add your next task from the syllabus.

**Study tip:** If the reading you just added is a PDF, grab your hard copy and write the Total Estimated Time from the Shovel app on the top corner. When you grab it off of your pile to read, you’ll
know how long it will take. It’s a simple step, and it will enforce your time mindset.

**Timing and Adding Assignments**

Readings are easy, but what about timing things like essays and projects? How long does it take to write a paper?

Obviously these things are harder to estimate, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try. Talk to the professor about how long papers normally take. It may be easier to break each large assignment down into component parts and estimate a time for each.

When you start working on a paper, you can get an idea of how long it takes you to research, make an outline, write a first draft, do the final edit, etc. Put a timer on everything. Use it for future reference. Next time you do a paper, you’ll have a pretty good idea.

Again, put every assignment from each syllabus into the Shovel app. You can set when you want to start working on each assignment and the app will estimate how long each will take.

And even better, the Shovel app will know if you have enough time to get it done. No other app will do that for you.
The Shovel app can literally see into the future. It can tell you: “Hey, just a warning about the paper you have due in a month—you want to work on it for 10 hours and you want to start 5 days before it’s due, but I’ve got bad news. You won’t have enough study time in those 5 days to finish it. Either adjust your schedule for that week or start working earlier.”

Damn, I wish I had this when I was a student.

**Timing and Adding Tests**

Tests are no different. Studying for quizzes may only take an hour or two. A midterm might require 8 hours. A final 20 hours. Each class will be different, but you’ll learn as you go. As you study for exams, you’ll also find out that the time you spent preparing for them in advance saves you a mountain of study time before the test. (More on that in step 4.)

Everything you do in college is affected by time. When you have a handle on how long tasks take, you can make better decisions about when and where to do them or how safe it is to put them off until later. Stop guessing and give yourself half a chance. It’s easy to do.

You’re building a time mindset, and you’ll be glad you did. It helps you develop a sense of urgency about getting things done and prioritizing your day. Minutes matter in college. Know your time and you’ll stop getting caught with too much to do and not enough time to do it.

You can use the Shovel app as your timekeeper and your companion. It will keep you organized and on track.

**Everything Changes**

The time it takes to do something will change over the semester. The first chapters of a book are sometimes easier than those that follow. You may slow down as you start moving into harder content that takes longer. Then again, you might also get faster as your...
study habits improve.

As you move through your semester, just keep time on your mind. Always think about how long something takes to finish. If you sense that something is taking longer, then start planning accordingly. In the Shovel app, you can easily adjust your numbers and see how it affects your entire semester.

You’ll be surprised how much you’re getting done—and at a much faster pace.

Again, I know it sounds like OCD, but the more you think about time, the less likely you are to waste it. Soon you’ll automatically think about how long things take. When you realize how quickly you can knock off those small bites, you’ll stop putting things off and you’ll start getting them done right away.

The thing you’ll notice the most is how your stress vanishes. All of that worrying about getting things done on time will disappear. You know what you need to do. You know how long it takes to do it.

Ask your classmates sometime how long it took them to read the same assignments. Ask them how long they think they will need to read the next one. I guarantee you they don’t have a clue. But you do.

The Time You HAVE Versus The Time You NEED

The biggest cause of stress in college is the horrible feeling of being behind and not knowing whether you can get everything done. It’s a feeling of uncertainty. You’re constantly wondering what’s coming up and how long it’s going to take. You wait too long so you’re always playing catch up. You’re never in control.

Well, that’s about to change.

If you’ve been paying attention, you know that the Shovel app now knows where you have every single Study Time block and how long it is, every day of the semester. And it also knows how much time you will need to finish each and every task and when it is due.

What’s left?

Putting these two together, of course. And again, the Shovel app does it for you. It compares the time you have available in all your Study Time blocks with the time you need to complete each and every task.

But this isn’t just a simple calculation of your semester totals. It’s a sophisticated algorithm that knows exactly how much Study Time you have available to get each task done, at this current moment, taking into account the time it takes to finish each task before it. And it does the calculation continuously in real time.
Know Your Time In Real Time

Here’s an example of how it works:

You have a paper due in a week. You need to work on it for 10 hours to get an A. Can you get it done? The Shovel app will tell you. It will scan your calendar and it will find out that between now and then you have 20 hours of total available Study Time. But then it will also notice that you have a quiz in two days that you need 2 hours to study for. It will also notice that you have some readings this week and they will take 6 hours to get done. So in the end, the Shovel app will tell you that you can only waste \((20 - 2 - 6 - 10) = 2\) hours of your available Study Time between now and then to get your A on the paper and get everything else done on time. That’s not a lot! You better get started.

Shovel shows you how much time you have, where you have it, how much you need, and the cushion of Study Time you can waste. Now that’s power!

The Pile

When you enter your syllabi into the Shovel app, every item from every class is fed into one single view that we call The Pile. Looking at The Pile is way faster and better than looking at each individual syllabus, for a whole lot of reasons.

Everything you have to do is organized by its due date and time. We’re big believers in knocking things off one after the other, and The Pile is perfect for doing just that.

In the Shovel app, you can see exactly what’s coming up the next day, next week, or the next month for that matter. No need to find and look at four or five different syllabi. It’s easy to plan ahead when you can see everything in one view.

With the Shovel app, there are no more surprises. You’ll know exactly what you have to do next, when it’s due, how much time it’s going to take, and how much time you still have to get it done. If
it’s a paper or a project that requires more work, you can even set when you want to get started and the Shovel app will remind you to get to work. You’ll never start late on anything, ever again.

If you get done early with something, great! Just check it off and the time you didn’t need to finish that task will increase your cushion for the next tasks in line.

**The Cushion Graph**

The time you have minus the time you need is your cushion. And you’ll know it for every task. The goal is to always have as much cushion time as possible. Time ahead of you gives you lots of options.

The Pile gives you a list view of your work and time, but the Shovel app goes one step further. It gives you a graphical view called the Cushion Graph. Each dot on the graph represents what’s due next. Hover over each one to see what it is. The scale on the left is the cushion of extra time you have to get each assignment done. Scale it as far out as you like to find the days and times where you may have a problem.

Knowledge is power.

It gives you peace of mind.
Managing your workload means you’ll always be on top of your academic life. Who knows, it might prepare you for the job you’ll get after college.

But to truly succeed, you also have to maximize every minute you have. We’ll cover that in the next Step. But now, let your Shovel app help you out.
Set It Up From The Start

“Either you run the day, or the day runs you.”
– Jim Rohn

It’s going to be a long semester. You’re going to invest hundreds of hours into studying. Before you do, reserve some time in advance to set up your study plan for the semester. It will save you multiples later. Seriously.

DON’T WING IT.

The goal is no surprises.

You NEVER want to find out that you have something to do and not enough time to do it.

You ALWAYS want to have time in front of you to deal with the unexpected.

You will be in control of your time and your work. Never let it be in control of you.

And you’ve got a powerful tool when it comes to managing your time and your workload: the Shovel app. It’s designed for you—the student.

Set Up Every Syllabus Week One, Day One

We believe in setting up each and every syllabus as soon as you can get your hands on them. Get everything you have to do out of the
syllabus and into Shovel BEFORE you start your semester. Yes, it takes a bit of time in the beginning, but it saves multiples of time later.

And let’s be honest: **week one is easy.** Everyone knows it’s true, even the professors. You have fewer readings, classes often let out early, and no one is behind on their work yet.

So use that to your advantage. Spend some time in week one setting up your study plan, and you’ll save yourself a huge headache around midterms when everything gets crazy.

Take time now to save time later.

A typical syllabus usually has about 25 to 50 specific things you’ll need to do. We’ll even show you a timed example in the Learning Center.

As we just discussed, the workload setup for the Shovel app will walk you through entering everything you need to do for all of your classes. It’s designed for speed and simplicity. It will take some time, but it is the fastest way to plan out your semester in such detail.

The Shovel app was built for you, the student, from the ground up. No other app is as fast. And only the Shovel app tells you so much. It will give you huge benefits and insights throughout the semester. There is nothing else like it.
The Shovel App Workload Setup

Action Steps

Go through the Syllabi Setup in the Shovel app.

Complete all of the sections:

The Syllabus

_____ Print your syllabus for every class.

_____ Make Piles. Collect all of the books, print all PDFs and materials you need for each class and put them into piles with the syllabi.

_____ Read the Syllabus for each class—every single word.

_____ Enter your teachers’ info into the Shovel app.

_____ Enter the grading rubric for each class.

Your Workload

_____ Enter every reading source and the time per page estimate into the Shovel app.

_____ Enter every reading into the Shovel app, with its due date and page ranges.

_____ Enter all your tests and assignments. Estimate how long
you’ll need to finish each one and enter how far in advance you want to get started.

Now do it for every class.

Review The Pile. There’s your workload for the entire semester, in one place with tons of information. Organize your semester like never before—done.
Step 3 / EFFICIENCY

Every Minute Matters
Make the most of all of them
Turn Yourself Into An Efficiency Machine

“How did it get so late so soon.”
— Dr. Seuss

You’ve made it this far, so you’re already way ahead of the majority of the students around you. Most of them are terrible at managing their time. They have no idea how much time they have or how much they need to get things done. They’re winging it.

Once you finish your Time and Workload Setup in the Shovel app, you’ll know exactly what you need do and how long it’s going to take to get it done.

The good news is that most students actually have plenty of time to get things done. But that can lull you into a false sense of security. Students don’t expect the unexpected. Things will take longer than planned. Difficulties, distractions, and surprises will pop up daily and throw you off schedule.

Efficiency is about making the most of every minute you have. It is what helps you stay focused and stay ahead so you can deal with the unexpected.

So what do I mean by efficiency? Here are a few definitions:

• Achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense.
• Working in a well-organized and competent way.

• Preventing the wasteful use of a particular resource.

Efficiency for students is really about maximizing the quantity and quality of time.

Quantity is about when you study. It’s finding as much usable Study Time as you can. It’s about the self discipline of sticking to your study schedule. It’s about making hard choices about what, when, and where you’re going to do things each minute of every day.

Quality is about where you study. It’s about removing distractions and staying completely focused on getting the most done with every minute that you have. It’s about having a sense of urgency.

In this step, you’ll turn yourself into an efficient study machine.

And it starts with flipping the switch.

**Flip The Switch**

When it comes to making choices about when to study in college, you have to be either on or off. You must have the discipline to shift yourself into study mode and stay there in spite of the endless distractions around you.

Work. Fun. One or the other.

Know when you work and when you have fun—and don’t let anything pull you out of your planned work time. Don’t let anything pull you out of your fun time, either.

The problem with too many students is that they are always in a zone of uncertainty. They allow distractions to delay them or pull them away from their studies.

When they’re out having fun, they’re in a constant state of
uncertainty about having enough time for the things they have coming up. They think they can get everything done, but they don’t really know for sure.

Know your time and know your workload. When it’s time to study, study. When it’s time to have fun, slam the books shut and go have fun knowing that you’re completely in control of your time and you workload.

With the Shovel app you can flip the switch with confidence.

**Your Daily Routine**

The best way to flip the switch is to establish a consistent daily routine.

College gives you a lot of freedom that you didn’t have when you were in high school. That often causes students to change their normal routine—or not have one at all. That’s the problem.

Now it’s time to establish a routine—and make studying a part of your routine.

For far too many students, studying is what they do after everything else. It’s important that you treat study time the same as any other obligation you have at school or in life.

You might have a class at 8:30 a.m. on two days and other days you don’t start until 11:00. Doesn’t matter. Get up and open for business—same time EVERY DAY.

The typical college kid says “great, no class until 11:00. I’ll stay up late tonight and sleep in tomorrow.” When you stay up late, you can bet you aren’t studying. When you sleep in, I guarantee you aren’t studying.

Getting started at different times each day makes it harder to stick with your plans.
First of all, it’s very hard to have widely varying sleep patterns. Most people just can’t do that. It often makes it hard to get to sleep at night, and it’s way too tempting to sleep in. Varying your sleep times creates a roller coaster of sleep deprivation and poor time management. Plus, a 2007 study at St. Lawrence University found that students who pulled all-nighters had lower GPAs on average.

Secondly, it’s too easy to fall off of your routine. You’ll find yourself sleeping in on days you should be getting up.

Just get up at the same time, every weekday, no matter when you have your first class. I don’t care if you have class at 8:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. Try to get up.

I know I’m probably not going to win this one, but try it sometime.

Go to bed and get up at the exact same time every weekday no matter what time class starts. You’ll feel better and you’ll get more done.

Obviously all bets are off on Friday and Saturday nights—go have as much fun as you possibly can. Reward yourself after a hard week of work and stay up till sunrise for all I care. Blowing off some steam is important too—mostly in college where you make friends for life.

And remember, a routine can be flexible. You might decide you’d prefer your workout after your study block instead of before. That’s fine. You can always make a new routine. But stick to it unless you find a compelling reason to change.
You CAN Plan Your Time In College

One of the most common things I hear from students is that it’s impossible to plan your time in college. College is so spontaneous that you just can’t schedule things so tightly.

My reply is always the same—of course you can. You already do.

If class is at 10:00 a.m., do you plan to be there? When the coach says practice starts at 3:30 p.m., do you plan accordingly or would you prefer to sit on the bench next game? When the boss says work starts at 8:00 a.m., are you there, or do you prefer to get fired?

You already do show up on time. In fact, you might even arrive early.

Students somehow manage to get all kinds of other things done on time—and your Study Time can and should be set every bit as precisely as anything else you do. Treat study time blocks just like any other firm commitment you have.

Don’t be late. Ever.

If your evening library time starts at 6:30 p.m., that means in your seat, book open, pen in hand, ready to go. Or even better, be there at 6:15 to get things set up.

Treat every single Study Time block the same, no matter how big or how small it is. Show up on time and work the time you set. It’s just that simple.
I understand that things can and do change. No problem. Continuously review your study times as you figure out your class workload. If the times aren’t realistic, then revisit your setup and change to a new schedule. If you just keep ignoring the Study Time blocks you set, it screws up your whole schedule. That’s what causes you to fall behind and stress out. Be honest with yourself and adjust as you go.

**Never Waste Time With Greater Value**

One last thing before we move on. The whole issue of sticking to a routine revolves around making choices. Anytime you make a decision, it usually involves some kind of a tradeoff. College students waste a mountain of time because they don’t think about those tradeoffs, and that is what efficiency is really about.

Think of it this way: why don’t you spend an extra $500 to buy first-class airfare if you fly home during the holidays?

I’ll tell you why—because it’s not worth it. Your perception of the value is not equal to other things you can do with that money. For that same $500, you can get about 300 beers at college. Clearly not a tradeoff you’re going to make.

Everything has a value proposition, whether you buy something or do something. The question is always “What else could you do with the same amount of time or money?”

In other words, *not all time is equal.*

Consider this: you’re constantly pulled between different demands in college. Studying, partying, practice, the big game, that paper you’ve been putting off—you make decisions every day about what has more value to you.

And let’s be honest. It’s easy to put off something now and worry about it later. I see students all the time just sitting around, doing nothing, not even having fun—but remember, there is always a tradeoff.
In the case of studying, what is the value of studying now instead of doing something else? You could take two hours for lunch or go take a nap or go into town. But then you’ll have to study later. Is that time more valuable now, or tonight, tomorrow, this weekend?

The problem is that students rarely think about these kinds of tradeoffs. They only think of the here and now. They piddle around campus all day long. They hang out and delay doing homework until later. They're putting time behind them.

Chances are, the piddling you’re doing now doesn't remotely have the same value as what you really want to do later. But once the time is wasted, you can't get it back. Time behind you can never be recovered. You just made a tradeoff. Delaying during the day results in giving up something more valuable later.

Get it in your mind that **time spent studying now is always worth more than doing it later.** Do it now so you have choices later. When those spontaneous things come up that you really want to do, you can go do them.

Now that we’ve got a routine and a plan, let’s talk about *when* to study and *where* to study.
When **To Study**

Minutes Matter
Find and Manage All of Them
“If you spend too much time thinking about a thing, you’ll never get it done.”
—Bruce Lee

You know by now that lack of time is the biggest problem in college. Not having enough, not using what you have, and underestimating the amount you need.

Now it’s time to talk about choosing and using time.

I can’t emphasize enough how important it is to find and carefully review how much time you have and how much time you use. Every single day. Every hour. Every minute. Keep reviewing it as the days and weeks go by and you settle into your semester routine.

It may seem like I’m telling you to study every single minute you have—but that’s not the case. I’m asking you to consider every study opportunity in your day and make a good choice about how you use it. If you don’t wait until the last minute, you’ll have the luxury of choosing—what to work on, when to do it, and for how long.

Always have time ahead of you. I’m big on getting as much done as early and as often as I can. Minutes matter. Find and use every one you can as early as you can. Have the biggest cushion of extra time possible. That eliminates stress and gives you flexibility. You’ll have time to deal with unexpected problems, to prepare for exams, or just to go have fun when you want to.

Don’t let time control you. You should always control it.
Big Time Blocks

Once you set up your time in the Shovel app, some big blocks are going to stand out.

Weekday evenings. This is easy. The best way to avoid distractions is to study when everyone else is studying. This is your time. Get to the library immediately after dinner, and do it as early as possible—6:00 or 6:30 p.m.. Treat the big blocks just like class time. They are mandatory. Never, ever fail to use them. Using your big time blocks is a great way to really get things done and pile up your cushion time.

Find your spot of choice, send your last text, and shut everything off. This is your serious, dedicated time for getting things done. You need to have at least two and a half to three solid, focused hours of study.

The problem with evening Study Time is that most students push it way into the night, even beyond midnight. Don’t be one of them. Start as early as you can.

There is no reason that you can’t finish up by 8:30 p.m. Certainly no later than 9:30. I know that sounds crazy, but it’s true. You can wrap up your work quickly because you also use the smaller blocks of time. That’s where the stress-free A’s are made.

Small Time Blocks

While the big blocks of time are important, the small ones matter more. One of the biggest and worst habits that students have is wasting small blocks of time. They won’t start a task unless they think it can be completed entirely. You have to get out of that mindset.

Your success and your stress in college is determined by how efficiently you use small blocks of time during the day.

One of the most important reasons to do the Time Setup in the Shovel app is help you identify every small block of time you can.
Every. Single. One.

When you finish your time setup, take a look at all of the small blocks of time between everything that you have to do. Depending on the size of your minimum Study Time Block, these small blocks are your Extra Time. Most students will see a lot of them. Before class. Between classes. During lunch. Before dinner. Weekends. An hour here, twenty minutes there. Add them up and see what they are. It’s usually a surprising amount of time. Shovel app adds then up for you.

This is the time that students waste the most.

Sure, some small blocks might be too small. You can’t always study if you have to walk across campus, or if you only have a handful of minutes.

But **look at each and every one** and ask yourself if there is any way you can make it useful.

Remember that the Shovel app helps you find and use your small blocks of time in two ways. The first is the slider that lets you define usable blocks of study time. As you adjust the slider, the Shovel app will remove any blocks of time that aren’t long enough for you.

And you can also convert specific Extra Time into Study Time. The
Shovel app makes it easy. Just click the Extra Time block and hit “Convert”

Far too many students think that small blocks of time aren’t useful, so they go hang out and do nothing. Every minute you can get something done during the day is a minute you don’t have to spend studying at night. And let’s be honest, unless there’s a big pool party during the day, fun in college happens at night.

Most students tend to focus on the big blocks of time in the evening and think they can finish everything then. Maybe you can, but why not leave your nights open for something more relaxing than cramming? You can get ahead on your work without that horrible pressure that you have to get it done, or you can just chill.

Whatever you choose, it’s always nice to have the option.

**PLAN Your Small Blocks of Time**

Don’t just wing it with your small blocks. Find them and plan how and where you’re going to use them—just like you do with big blocks. Think about where you’ll go during that time and what work you’ll get done. “I’ll stay there in class and start my next History reading,” or “I can knock out one problem in my weekly problem set in the half-hour before lunch.” Do it the same way every week.
Remember, all of those small blocks of time can add up to hours during your day. Just one hour is a huge amount of study time in college. It's 20 pages read, it's time to organize your notes, go see the professor, write test questions, start studying for your exam. All in one hour.

Imagine if you have three.

I'm not saying to study every minute of your life. In fact, I'm saying just the opposite. The point is that the more you get done early, the more time you have to take off later or get even farther ahead.

The goal is to go have fun without wondering if you have time to get the next thing done, because it's already done.

Take Small Bites Often

I realize that many assignments are big and they can take hours to finish. However, there is nothing that says you have to do everything in one sitting. Take small bites whenever and wherever you can. You’ll be less overwhelmed and it will feel easier to get done. If you only have 45 minutes, you can still get something done. Read 10 pages. Yes, you can start and stop in the middle of a chapter, a page, a paragraph, or even a sentence. Just do something.

Anything you get done now saves you time later.

It’s All About Fun on The Weekends

There’s a point to getting your studying done during the week: stress free fun over the weekend. I never did a thing on Friday after my last class. I was done. And making sure you never have to study on Saturdays is a big reason to get ahead during the week. For me, Saturdays were almost always Me Time. Same thing Sunday mornings.

If you get your work done during the week, you can take the weekend off without stress or guilt.
But you can also see Saturday and Sunday as bonus time—it has a HUGE potential for getting things done. Even if you only spend an hour or two each day studying—which leaves a lot of time for fun—you can start your next week ahead.

Consider tackling your easier work on the weekend. Finish a reading assignment that you know will be easy, or spend an hour planning the paper due next Thursday. Start self-testing for your exams. If you cross off low stress tasks on the weekend, you can get a lot done and barely interfere with your day at all.

Remember, just a little bit every day will pay a big dividend down the road. It amazes me how much weekend time is wasted just sitting around. You can do a night’s worth of studying on Saturday and not have to worry about it later. Make it a part of your routine.

And Sundays are great for planning your upcoming week. Check the Shovel app to see what’s coming up. Adjust your schedule if there’s an event you want to attend, or delete some Me Time if you’re in a tight spot. Planning ahead saves time—and stress.

The same principle applies for holidays. If you plan ahead and get ahead, you won’t have to study during Thanksgiving break or Spring Break. Help carve the turkey or go to Cabo.

So enough about finding study time, let’s talk about some general principles to get more out of the time you have.
Time Management Principles for Students

“Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.”
— Benjamin Franklin

Get Your ‘A’ in “NO” time

Some hours are more valuable than others. So how do you prioritize studying? The first step is committing to your study time. The next step is breaking the procrastination cycle so that you’re in charge of your time.

Friends will try to pull you out of your routine. Everyone has different schedules, and they will try to make their schedule yours. Don’t go there. Stick to your plan.

When you set your study times, commit. If anyone tries to divert you to something else, just say ‘NO!’

Know your NO time and make no exceptions.

Sooner Is Better Than Later

Get things done as far in advance as you can. Days, weeks, months. There is no limit.

Doing things early ensures that you will always have time ahead of you.
Time ahead gives you the option of making your own choices. Most students don’t have that luxury.

Time ahead is the time for dealing with problems. There is nothing worse than waiting too long to work on something and running into problems you don’t have time to solve.

If you get stuck on something difficult, you’ll have time to figure it out or talk to the professor. Better to have one difficult thing to clear up at 10:00 a.m. two days before class than five things to clear up at midnight the night before.

And here’s a hint: professors *hate* to get emails hours before an exam. First of all, they’re probably not going to write back. But even worse, you’re admitting that you procrastinated and waited until the last minute.

Time ahead lets you deal with the unexpected. Things are going to happen. The car problem, the doctor appointment, the errand you forgot to run. The list is endless.

Lastly, the more you get done now, the more time you have to prepare for exams later. Every day you start studying gives you a tremendous advantage.

Relentlessly keep getting ahead every chance you get. The more you get done now, the more fun you can have later.

**Day is BETTER Than Night**

Doing things during the day is better than doing them at night. Trust me when I tell you that reading at 10:00 a.m. is way easier than tackling the exact same assignment at 10:00 p.m. Even 7:00 p.m. can be much easier than 10:00 p.m.

You’re more tired at night. You got up early, you had practices, you just finished a big dinner. You just aren’t motivated to do hard things at night.
I’d even argue that every minute of the day is the equivalent of two at night. Two hours wasted during the day might mean four hours of work starting at 9:00 p.m.

And given the choice between being free at night or during the day, most student will pick the night.

Something’s always going on at night that will compete with your study time, constantly pulling you to take shortcuts. You’ll quit early and put yourself even further behind. Homework can’t compete with having fun with your friends—and it won't.

**Study As Much As You Can At Night**

Don’t get me wrong. I didn’t say you should take every night off. Just the opposite. You **should** study at night. I just want you to be in control of what you do at night.

Don't get stuck doing what you HAVE to do. Nights are for what you WANT to do. Use every minute you can during the day so you have flexibility at night. Clarify your notes. Figure out what you don’t understand. Catch up if you need to. Get an early jump on exams. Do papers or projects. Get ahead so you have even more time later.

The point is that you are in control of your workload. It isn’t in control of you. It’s way better to be in a position to make your own choices instead of letting circumstances make them for you.

If you use as much time during the day as possible, when the night comes, you really will be done. And there is nothing more liberating.

Go relax, go party, go to the game. There is literally no better feeling. You’re completely caught up, ahead of the game, you understand everything, and you’re ready for anything.
Hard First, Easy Last

As Clifford Cohen said, “Do first what you don’t want to do most.”

Everyone has that one brutal class every semester. Every assignment is dreadfully difficult and you put it off for as long as you can.

With the Shovel app, everything you have to do is in the Pile, organized by when it’s due. Instead of starting with whatever is due first, strategize and use your energy efficiently. If you have plenty of time, always tackle your hardest subjects as early as you can.

Early is when you are at your freshest and your brain is clear. You are more likely to underestimate your time with harder subjects. They’ll always take longer than you think. You’ll have more questions. You’ll need to visit the professor. Plan ahead, and you’ll have the time to do that. Most importantly, there is nothing that gives you a better sense of accomplishment and confidence than knocking off the hardest, most dreaded assignments. It will make the rest of the day a breeze by comparison.

The harder the work is, the earlier you want to do it—both on the calendar and on the clock. There is nothing worse than starting the assignment you hate the most at the time you least want to do it. Get it done. When all you have left are the easy things, you’ll never be stressed. Save the 'easier' stuff for your evening study sessions, and as always, use the evenings for getting even further ahead.

When reviewing your Pile, as long as you have plenty of time, do the hard stuff early.

Take Small Bites

When you have a big goal, the earlier you start the better. Pick the
next thing on your list and just dive in. Taking small bites is the best cure for procrastination. Just get something done. Most students wait until right before the due date to start. Readings can be many pages long and have a lot of difficult concepts. A five-page paper written the night before it’s due will show—and so will your grade.

Breaking it into small bites is easier.

In the Shovel app we focus on breaking out each and every thing you have to do for the entire semester and getting it ready to do on day one.

Every reading.

Every class lecture.

Every paper or project.

Every test.

You can break things down even further. Every chapter, every page, every paragraph. Each one is just a small bite. The smaller you make it, the easier it is to do it and do it right. Just get them done one step at a time. When you do that, the big picture takes care of itself.

This is where your small time blocks come in handy. Getting lots of things done gives you a continuous sense of progress and accomplishment.

More importantly, it helps ensure that you have time to understand new and difficult content. When you take small bites early, you'll reduce the number of confusing concepts that you have to deal with at any one time.

No bite is too small. There is absolutely nothing wrong with reading even a single page if you only have five minutes. Keep nibbling away at whatever is next. It adds up quickly and saves time later when you need it for other things.
Take Periodic Breaks

I am a big believer in taking frequent breaks during study sessions. For me, I got up and walked around. Today, break time might mean checking your texts.

One common system to force periodic breaks is called the Pomodoro Technique. Basically this breaks your tasks into 25 minute work sessions followed by 3-5 minute breaks with a longer break after a couple of hours.

I love the concept, but I’m not a big fan of set time periods. From a practical standpoint, you just aren’t going to stop right in the middle of whatever you’re doing, and there is nothing more annoying than a timer going off when you’re deep in thought.

I still like the concept of using a time goal, though, since it helps keep you focused. But a task goal is even better. Take a break at the end of a chapter or after reading fifteen pages. That kind of goal is a reward for getting your work done—and you won’t be tempted to goof off until a timer goes off.

The length and time of breaks will depend on the type of work and how you feel. Sometimes you’ll be in a groove and you’ll want to keep rolling. Other times you may need more frequent breaks.

Try setting small task goals and rewarding yourself with breaks. You’ll work more efficiently, and you’ll be more focused, as you check off your tasks.

Have A Sense Of Urgency

Urgency is usually associated with stress, but I prefer to think of it as something that can help keep you calm. Urgency for students should be a feeling of awareness of what you have to do, what’s coming up, how much time you have, and how much time you need to get it done.
It’s that little voice in your head that tells you to keep moving forward. It actually removes stress because it ensures that you always stay ahead. Never let your sense of urgency rest.

Here’s an example: I’m an instrument rated pilot. When you’re flying in the clouds, bad things can happen quickly. If there’s ever a place to stay ahead of your work, it’s up there. When I was learning to fly, my instructor taught me to always repeat these three words:

“Next Two Things”

What are the next two things that you need to do to stay ahead of the airplane? I say it dozens of times in my head on even a short trip. As soon as I check off those things, my brain fires again: “Next two things.” Got those done—next two things. This forces me to continually look at what I need to do next and keeps me ahead of the airplane and away from the danger curve.

It’s also useful for students.

Try it yourself. When class is coming to a close, when you’re walking across campus, when you’re finishing lunch, say it yourself, "Next two things." What are the next two things I can do to stay ahead of my workload?

“I’m going to clean up these notes and then read 10 pages after the next class.” Next two things.

“I’ll write up these test questions right after breakfast, then start reviewing my test questions for the exam next week.”

There are always two more things to do.

Just get into a mindset of always deciding what those are and keep getting them done.

So right now—what should you or could you be doing? If you don’t know, then you need to start asking “Next two things.”

Not Enough Time?

The typical college student should have enough time to get all of their assignments done before they’re due. Confession time: I was lucky. I was able to read every word that was assigned to me in college and law school. My time wasn’t taken up by a lot of other things—I didn’t have to work a job or juggle college sports. Other students may not have that luxury.

Student athletes are a good example. The amount of time they’re expected to commit to practices, workouts, team meetings, and games can be overwhelming. The same can be true of students who work time-consuming jobs. They literally don’t have enough time to finish everything.

Many busy students are forced to use weekends and other times when their friends are out having fun just to catch up. At some point, something has to give, and it’s usually the quality of their studies.

It’s even more important for busy students to know their time at the beginning of each semester.

So what should you do if you literally don’t have enough time?

First, you have to know your time—knowledge is power. If you know when you’ll be busy, planning out your schedule in advance will give you time to rearrange your study times.

Second, maximize the time you do have by using Shovel and following the five steps.
Third, use your resources. College gives you a number of resources that very few students use.

**Talk to the Professor**

Be honest and tell them you’re going to be in a time jam and you need to be as efficient as you can. What do they suggest? They’ll appreciate that you care and that you’re thinking it through. Many professors are happy to give you tips on the best way to do things or how to prepare for exams.

Just ask.

**Use Tutoring Resources**

Every college has some kind of an academic help center. See what resources are available at your school, and be prepared to use them if you have to. If you don’t have time to figure everything out yourself, getting help is often the best way to speed up your learning curve.

You can also use on demand video resources like Khan Academy, YouTube, and others. Know in advance what those are and be ready to use them if needed.

**Team Up With Others**

If you have a time problem, your teammates, coworkers, and friends probably do, too. Find others in your class who are also busy. Everyone is looking for a solution, and you can work together to get through it.

Students often have a mountain of stuff to read. Split up your readings or other assignments and have everyone do one of them and write up summaries. Obviously you have to make sure you aren’t violating any class or school rules, but work together when you can.
Study for exams together. Highlight the readings, summarize important points, write possible test questions. Make sure everyone is doing things the same way. Standardize an outline. Find people who are on your level.

Be ruthless. Dump people who don’t pull their weight.

Set a time to come together in a study group. Go over assignments. Teaching others is often the best way to learn something yourself. If each person is responsible for a specific reading and has to explain it to others, they’ll do a better job of making sure they know it.

Self test. Ask each other possible test questions and make sure everyone can give the answers verbally.

Just don’t let it become a social session. Know what you’re going to get done before you walk into the room. Take charge, keep it on track. A good study group can be very focused and intense. It can get you to really drill down to the most important material. And it can actually eliminate distractions and help you get more done.

Use The Shovel App

Trying to manage your time and workload is impossible to do in your head. You have to use a better tool to manage everything.

That tool is the Shovel app.

Students typically try to manage their time and workload on a piece of notebook paper. Others use an online calendar or some kind of day planner.

The problem is that just seeing a deadline doesn’t help you finish the work.

The Shovel app lets you manage your daily schedule—and it manages your study time and workload as well. You’ll always know
what’s coming up, when you have time to do it, and how long it will take. You’ll never get caught wondering what to do and when to get started.

Live on the Shovel app and you’ll always be in control of everything you need to do.

And now it’s time to talk about where to study—because that can make or break your efficiency.
Where to Study

Eliminate Distractions

Be Ruthless
Now you know when to study—during big and small blocks of time, as soon as possible, efficiently and effectively.

But where should you study?

If it isn’t clear by now, you’re going to be spending a lot of time studying in college. Picking the right place to study is one of the most important things you can do. Where you study is every bit as important as when you study.

The choice is first and foremost about creating a physical and mental separation between work and play.

It’s also about eliminating distraction, which is key to studying effectively in college. It prevents wasting time and can dramatically increase your concentration and retention.

Finally, it’s about maintaining your sanity. You need to find study spots that are private but that aren’t so isolated that they’re lonely and depressing. You have to find the spot that feels right for you.

That spot is going to be different for everyone. It might change with your mood and what you’re working on. There are a hundred options on campus, so if it doesn't feel right, move on until you find a set of study areas to fit any need or mood.

I know one place that I consider the very best place to study, but
first let's talk about where NOT to study.

**NEVER Study In A Dorm**

They put a nice desk in your room. You might think “I’ll just use that.”

Bad plan.

Do NOT study in a dorm. Seriously. Under absolutely no circumstances should you ever even attempt to study in a dorm room. You can kiss your A’s goodbye. If there is only one study tip you can manage to follow, it should be this one. Dorms = Distraction.

You will muddle on the Internet. You will talk on the phone. You will listen to music. You will text. You will watch TV. You will lay on your bed and fall asleep. You will read everything but your assignments.

Worst of all, you will have an endless stream of friends pulling you in different directions. Their schedules become yours. Your friends and even perfect strangers will be parading into your room without end. Close your door and you’ll still hear them outside.

You’ll pile up a mountain of unproductive time.

Dorms are depressing for studying. They are claustrophobic. Small, dark, and dank. Always a mess. You can’t get up and walk around. You get one window, and the view probably sucks. If you try to study in your dorm, you'll find yourself socializing, which puts you even further behind.

Leaving your dorm should be your first priority in the morning. Take everything you need for the day. Coming back to the dorm should be your last priority in the evening. If you have to go back during the day, move quickly with stealth and get the hell out of there as fast as you possibly can.

You cannot study effectively in a dorm. The same thing applies if
you are living at home, in an apartment, or anywhere else. There is too much opportunity for distraction.

Now, some people might be disciplined enough to study at home. But most people aren’t.

You need a mental distinction between work and rest. Go to the library to work. Go home to rest. Regardless of where you live, completely separate your study life from where you reside. Go elsewhere.

Disclaimer: I LOVE Dorms

Don’t get me wrong. I know it sounds like I hate dorms, but I don’t. I love them. Dorms are a blast. Some of the best memories and best friends you will ever have will be made in that dorm. Savor every minute of every year living in one.

That’s my point.

Your dorm should be a social place. It’s home, not work. It is your refuge from a hard day of class and studying. It should be a place to relax, rest, and enjoy. Books closed, done for the day.

Go ahead—text, watch TV, muddle on the Internet, talk on the phone, laugh with all of your friends. Distract people who study in their dorm. Just don’t study in yours.

Ever.

The Best Place To Study—The Library

Use your desk for your piles. That will prevent your from using it. Grab what you need and head out to the library.

I love libraries. As Shelby Foote once said, “A university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library.” Libraries are absolutely the best places to study. Why? You can flip that switch between work and play. The library creates a complete separation
between your personal life and your academic life.

Libraries bring focus to your study time. Cold, efficient, get it done, sink it in deep—uninterrupted and highly effective study. The kind that gets you A’s and lots of them.

Everyone in the library has a big bubble around them that protects them from annoying outside influences. “Shut up and don’t bother me” is thick in the air. The silence is deafening.

Learning perfection.

Libraries are one of the few remaining places on the planet where even the most obnoxious people will respect quiet. It is the last place on campus where your friends are going to come in and chat it up. Studying in the library is the pinnacle of good study habits. Nothing is better. It brings focus like nothing else.

Libraries are also beautiful places. Colleges invest millions of dollars in their libraries. They are among the most special buildings on campus. Some are old and historic. Others are new and modern. And there’s almost always more than one library on campus—so test them all.

There are multiple floors, a hundred windows, and endless views to pick from. You can vary all of them based on your mood and what’s convenient.

There are still lots of students hanging around, but unlike your dorm, they aren’t talking to you. You can still see them, but you can ignore them, too. They get it. They are the smart ones, not the time-wasters.

A library keeps you contained and focused, but you can still take a break. You can get up, walk around, read a magazine or newspaper. Many have coffee shops right there.

Libraries are where the research stuff is—the books, the
Location Matters

magazines, the journals. And they’re full of librarians just waiting to answer questions. Everything you are going to need for your A—all right there.

You can always find a spot that feels right for you in the library. You can hide in a dark corner or find a bright open area. There are dozens of spots, all with a different feel, all under one roof.

My library study spot was at the very back table in the wide open area of the main library. Nobody sitting behind me. A big window for natural light. A wide open view in front of me all the way to the door.

I could look around and see everyone coming and going. I was near the newspaper and magazine area. I could get up and take a break. I’d walk around, read the paper, and get right back to work.

In fact, I used that table so much that it became mine. People literally knew that I lived there and it was rarely used by anyone else.

I had other areas as well. Some were open and others were hidden away. It depended on what I was studying and how much focus I needed. The point is, every spot felt right. It took me a while to find some spots, but once I did, I found I was perfectly comfortable in any of them. You need to do the same.

Getting into a library needs to be a part of your plan. Go there for all of your big blocks of time. Use them for your small blocks of time whenever they are convenient.

Go to the library.

Other Study Spots

I love libraries, but it doesn’t always make sense to go there. For example, you may have a small study time block and you don’t want to waste that time walking across campus to get to the library.

Find as many spots as you can where you can quickly take
advantage of extra minutes and still avoid interruptions. Think of them as your study hideaways.

The Classroom

One of the easiest spots for a quick study session is right in a classroom. You’re either going into one or leaving one many times each day. You might as well arrive early and use the time to get something done. If you have an hour or two before class and you know the room’s empty, go there. The best part is that you’ll never waste a minute, since you can literally use every single one right up until class starts.

If the professor’s late, you’re getting work done, not just sitting there waiting. Best of all, it pretty much guarantees you’ll get the best seat in the room. It won’t be taken an hour before class starts.

If you just finished class, stay right there and get something done. The chair is warm. Use it. Get 5 more pages read or clean up your notes. Why waste time walking somewhere else?

As we’ll discuss shortly, after each class you’ll want to review and clarify your notes as well as prep them for review. Just do it right then and there in that quiet, empty room.

Other Places On Campus

If you do have to clear out of your classroom, there are dozens of great places to study on every campus. They’re not as good as the library, but they’re good enough. Make a point of finding them.

The places I’m talking about are everywhere. Small groups of tables in some obscure building. A random cubicle next to a window. An outside patio when the season and the weather are right. There are dozens of study spots hidden all over campus. They’re worth finding, and you should actively seek them out. They give you the variety that you’ll need to keep you sane.

These are the places where you make the best use of those small blocks of time. When you need to clean up your notes after class,
get in 10 pages of reading, do a quick review for a quiz.

Look at your schedule for each day. Walk the route you’ll take going to and from your dorm to your first class, to the dining hall, to the next class. Literally, walk the route. Go into every building and search out all of those hidden spots. Hang around and see which rooms are vacant before and after your class. It’s a great way to get to know your campus and see things you may never find otherwise.

**Don’t Wing It. Plan It.**

Now make a plan. Not just WHAT you’re going to study and WHEN, but also plan the WHERE.

The hour before your first class? That hour and a half until your second? The thirty minutes before lunch?

Where are you going to go? What are you going to do? Don’t waste time walking to your usual study spot if you can find closer alternates. Find some great places to get things done as quickly as you can.

Remember—minutes matter. Do anything you can in every block of time you have each and every day.
Turn Off Distractions

“There are always distractions, if you allow them.”
—Tony La Russa

Finding a good study spot is about eliminating distraction.

You leave your dorm and go somewhere else to do just that. You’ll kill the whole point if you bring the distraction with you. And the solution is one simple rule: turn it ALL off. Your phone. The wifi on your computer. Your smartwatch. Whatever pulls you away from your study time is a distraction, and it’s time to get ruthless about turning them off.

How can you get some quiet, serious study time to yourself if your cell phone distracts you and follows you everywhere you go?

I know I have almost no chance of winning this one, but I have to try. Stop texting. Stop the Insta. Stop the Snapchat. No #studylife selfies. Really—stop doing it while you study. People text hundreds of times a day. Threads that go on forever. It continually breaks your concentration and consumes a mountain of time.

Seriously, count it yourself sometime and see how much time you spend on your phone each day. Open your iPhone. Go to Settings / Battery and click on the clock icon. It will show you the actual minutes of screen time in the last 24 hours.

Add it up and you’ll be shocked. I realize a lot of that may not be during study time, but be honest with yourself about how much your phone distracts you.

There is nothing more detrimental to studying than your cell
phone. Every time you look at your phone, you’ve taken your eyes off of your book and broken your chain of thought.

Turn that thing off. Seriously.

There are apps that you can download to block things off at certain times—but you already have that. It’s called Airplane Mode—or OFF. Just use either. Or even better, put your phone in the bottom of your bag and actually ignore it.

Whether you’re studying for two minutes or two hours, don’t respond to anything.

The Secret To Using Time Efficiently

The secret to using time efficiently isn’t a secret at all—it’s as easy as planning ahead and deciding when and where to study and eliminating distractions.

But too many people don’t do the easy things that save a huge amount of time and stress. Things like flipping the switch, or finding the best places to work. Things like starting with the hardest work.

If you follow these suggestions, you’ll be stunned at how easy studying suddenly feels compared with what you were doing before.

And that’s only Step 3. Now it’s time to talk about working effectively.
Step 4/EFFECTIVENESS

Mastering Notes, Textbooks, and Exams
Efficiency was all about the what, when, and where. Now it’s time to learn HOW.

Even with all the time in the world, some people don’t work effectively—which leads to high stress and low grades.

That’s exactly what happens with many students. They manage their time to perfection but then study in ways that cause them to use more time than they should to get the same results.

They aren’t effective.

Effectiveness is about getting the best results with the least amount of time and effort.

Our goal is to make sure that you study in a way that gets you the best results for every minute of time you put in. If you do things right the first time, it will increase your retention and dramatically reduce the time you’ll need to review it all later.

This step is about study methods—and there are a lot of them. There are tons of books, websites, and YouTube videos covering all kinds of different techniques for different types of classes. We can’t
possibly cover all of that here—instead, we’ll stick with simple techniques that get the most results.

Our goal is to stick to the Pareto Principle, more commonly know as the 80/20 Rule. The principle states that 20% of the input is responsible for 80% of the results obtained.

That is, there are a certain small number of study habits and methods that are going to give you the most benefit in the least amount of time. Sure, it depends on the class, the types of assignments, the materials, and the person doing them. But overall, these approaches can help you study much more effectively.

Let’s start with the three main areas of college that almost every student has to deal with:

🌟 **The classroom.** You’re going to spend a lot of time in class, and it’s important that you do things in a way that eliminates distractions so you can take the best notes possible.

🌟 **Your readings.** Usually that means a textbook, but it will also include PDFs or other outside readings. We’ll make sure you only have to read it once and that you prepare it for easy review.

🌟 **Your exams.** That’s where it all comes together. If you’ve been doing everything else right along the way, exams will take care of themselves. Instead of being the most stressful part of your academic life, they’ll quickly become the least stressful.

Yes, you also have papers, lab reports, projects, and all kinds of other requirements depending on the classes you’re taking—but for now, let’s start with these major categories.

Your classroom lectures and your textbooks are your foundation, and they need to be rock solid. Everything else you do flows from them.
In The Classroom

“80 percent of success is showing up.”
—Woody Allen

You’ll spend hours in class during your college career—and even if it feels like nothing compared to the amount of time you had to be in class back in high school, these hours can make or break your academic life.

So it’s time to talk about your effectiveness in the classroom. If you just sit back and let the material wash over you, relying on the principle of osmosis to absorb everything, you’re going to be screwed when it’s time to study for your exams.

You can’t get A’s if you don’t master the classroom.

Show Up

It amazes me how many students skip class. Many think class just covers the same material they read in their textbook and others simply don’t care. But you’re paying for every class in college. Skipping class is like burning money—and kissing your chance at an A goodbye.

If your parents are paying for your education or maybe even the school is and you don’t show up to class. That’s like spitting in their face. And if you took out a loan and will be paying for your education yourself, do yourself a solid a secure your investment by showing up to class.

Here’s the truth: most professors can predict which students will
fail the class simply by attendance.

NEVER miss a class, for any reason.

Don’t sleep in, don’t go into town, don’t do anything that causes you to miss a class. I never missed a single class in college—ever. Not one.

Every single study habit in this guide is connected to the others. Missing just one class starts a cascade of problems that multiply. You can’t take good notes if you don’t show up. You can’t ask questions if you’re not there. You won’t hear the questions that others ask. You won’t be able to prepare for review or self-testing.

There are also subtleties that you can only pick up in class. Hints about what’s most important to know, what might be on the exam, or unique ways of approaching a problem.

Think of it this way: before an exam, your professor is the only person who knows what will be on the test. So why would you avoid your professor?

Class is where professors introduce new approaches and explain things in ways you won’t see in your textbook, and then, yep, put them on the exam.

I realize that some students can’t always make it to class. Student athletes are a good example. If you know you have to miss some classes, make sure you find someone who takes good notes and see if they’ll share them with you for pizza or beer. And yes, if you’ve got the stomach flu, stay home, for everyone’s sake.

Other than that, go to class.

The First Rule of College: What you skip WILL be on the exam.

Never, ever, miss a class for any reason. It’s your job.
Be Prepared When You Show Up

Professors like to say that there’s no such thing as a stupid question. That’s not true. A stupid question is the one where the answer is in the textbook that you should have read before class.

I’m always amazed at how many people show up for a lecture without having read the assigned material first. Then they wonder why they’re confused and look like idiots in class.

That won’t be a problem for you. Look at Shovel and know what you’re covering during each lecture. Get it done before you get there—the earlier the better. The more prepared you are when you show up, the easier class will be. You’ll understand everything, take better notes, have fewer—or better—questions, and you’ll be able to actively participate, which is often a part of your final grade.

Sit Front and Center

I’m going to beat this one to death because it is so easy.

In any competition, there are words for the people in the front—they are the leaders and winners. The people behind them are the losers. The same is true in classrooms: losers move to the rear. The farther back you go, the less prepared students are, and the more time is being wasted.

Grades go down the farther back you sit.

Don’t go there. Park yourself in the front of every single class you take in college. It delivers tremendous benefit for ZERO effort. This is the low hanging fruit for any student. It’s the single easiest thing to do, and it delivers benefits in a whole lot of different ways.

When I was in college I sat in the front row center seat every single time. I didn’t care what anyone thought. It requires absolutely zero effort but the payoff is huge.
Here are just a few benefits of sitting in the front row:

- You remove all distractions.
- You aren’t tempted to text or browse the internet.
- You are totally focused on the professor.
- You’re in the best place to see and hear everything.
- You can take perfect notes.
- You can record the lecture perfectly if you need to.
- You can take photos of the board clearly.
- You can ask questions easily.
- You can get to the professor first after class.
- You stand out. The professor knows you’re the student who cares.

Walk to the front and sit yourself down in the front row, directly in front of the lectern if someone hasn’t gotten there first. And most likely no one has. This rule goes for each and every class you attend.

It doesn’t matter if there are three empty rows behind you – and there probably will be. Go to the front.

It doesn’t matter if your best friends sit in the back without you. Don’t let their stupidity become yours. Bring them with you instead. They’ll appreciate your lead.

Sitting in front is one of the most important things you can do. It delivers the most bang for zero effort. Have that become a part of your routine. Just something you do, no questions asked. Any classroom you enter, always sit front and center.
You’ll be attentive, undistracted, and totally engaged. Complete clarity.

Seriously, what’s the problem with sitting up front? The only reason you want to sit in the back is the fear of getting called on, which is really a fear of not being prepared. That isn’t going to be an issue for you anyway. You’ll be way ahead of everyone.

**Turn It All Off**

I never sat in the back of the class when I was in school, but I have a few times recently just to see what was going on back there. I suspected there’d be a lot of noise and distraction, and wow, was I right.

Sure, lots of students appeared to be focused on class, but they had all kinds of stuff open on the side. Students on the Internet—on chats, on web browsers, social media, you name it. Many were texting. Some were studying for other classes. Some were just talking to each other. Another was barely awake.

Do it yourself sometime and observe. It’s chaos, and the farther back you go, the worse it gets. Most of them don’t think it’s a big deal—they call it multi-tasking.

I call it setting yourself up for anything but an A.

To me, every little distraction detracts from focusing on what’s going on in class.

If you’re stupid enough to sit back there, at least do yourself a favor and turn off the phone, close the browser, and focus on taking good notes. Just do your best to ignore the distractions around you.

Or learn from the experience and move up front. Go there and stay there. Every class.
Taking Notes In Class

Taking good notes in class is one of the most important things you can do.

The problem is that every class is different both in terms of the material and how it’s presented. A professor may use slides and provide students with a link to download them in advance. They might provide a printout, a downloadable PDF, or a Word outline. Some write key terms on a whiteboard. Some just talk.

But you absolutely have to take notes every class, every time.

Use the system that works best for you. Really think about how you’re going to be taking notes for each class in advance. Understand how each professor conducts their lecture and what materials they use. The syllabus should tell you a lot, but if in doubt, ask the professor as soon as you can. Have a system in place that works best for the way each particular class is conducted and do things the same way every time.

If you’re going to print off slides, will you write directly on them? Will you need a spiral notebook for notes? Will you use your laptop and reference the specific slide? How and where are you going to store those printed slides when you’re done? Do you have a file folder? Are you taking photos and storing them on the cloud? What word processing software are you going to use? Google Docs? Word? Pages? Evernote?

The list of possibilities and the technologies you’ll use will vary. We’ll cover a lot of them in the Learning Center.

In short, have a system, so you don’t have a disorganized mess on your hands.

The Cornell Note Method

There are a whole bunch of note taking methods out there. However, I personally believe one is the best. Everything you do in
college should have the end in mind, and that is the exam. The key to good note taking is to do it in a way that allows you to easily review and self-test every concept you learn at a later date.

The best way to accomplish that is using the Cornell Note Method. It is simple and it delivers consistent results.

There is a bunch of different layouts, but we’ll keep it simple. For now, let’s just assume you’re taking notes in a spiral notebook. Try to use one that has the spiral on top, as the spiral is never in the way. Draw a line down each of the pages about two thirds of the way over. Use a ruler or just draw a sloppy line with your pen. The point is to separate the page into two sections so it looks something like this:

The concept is simple. You’ll be taking notes on the left side and writing test questions on the right. I’ll explain that later.

You can add some references at the top, like the main topic, the date, and maybe the chapters or page numbers in your textbook that correspond—or not. It depends on the class. The key is to just make sure you take all of your notes on the left side of the line.

There is no hard and fast rule here but we think that this is the best way to do it if you are right handed—having the blank space
on the right side means that your hand never slides off the side of the notebook when taking notes, especially when doing it very quickly as most students will.

Experiment with what works best for you.

**Capture Everything**

There are different kinds of note-takers. There are those who just take a few and those who look like stenographers in a courtroom. I’m more like the latter. I’m a big believer in writing down EVERY-THING and doing it fast and furiously—but ONLY if you review your notes after class.

A 2017 study published in *Psychological Science* found that stenographer-style note taking doesn’t stick in your brain like taking notes by hand, because it’s too easy to turn off your brain and simply record. Don’t do that.

But aim to write down at least 75-85% of what comes out of the professor’s mouth. And write fast. Sometimes it’s a waste of ink, but usually not. This approach forces you to really focus on what’s being said. You just don’t have time to daydream or look around the room.

You might think you can skip taking notes if you just read about the topic and highlighted it in your textbook. Do it anyway. Doing it twice will help you remember it even better. Besides, what you see in the textbook may not always be what you get in class. Good professors often come at a concept in ways that you may not always find in your textbook. Or they’ll even completely challenge the content in the textbook.

Don’t assume that anything will be the same. Take notes on everything you hear.

And don’t forget the First Rule of College: what you skip WILL be on the exam.
Students are often tempted to record the lecture if it’s allowed. Some lectures might be recorded by the school for later viewing. You can do that, but it’s really just a temptation to take poor notes. It’s not efficient. And let’s be honest: are you really going to listen to that lecture a second time and take your notes then?

Don’t let audio be a substitute for good note-taking. It’s fine to catch things you might have missed, but it isn’t useful for prepping for review. For that, you need good notes.

Just do it the first time through.

**By Hand**

As I mentioned above, whether you take notes by hand or on your computer will depend on the type of class, the content of the lecture, and your particular preferences. If you’re on the fence, that same 2017 *Psychological Science* study found that students who took notes by hand were significantly better on recall tests—which is exactly what you want in college.

I always prefer a pen, not a computer, for taking notes. I’m sure I can type way faster than I can write, but writing by hand is much more flexible. Not many lectures involve just writing words—you might also diagram, graph, or draw things. Writing equations is a pain on a computer. Paper gives you flexibility.

Things will be moving so fast you actually may not be able to keep up when typing. You’ll need to use your own form of shorthand and abbreviate when you find yourself getting behind. You can come back and fill it in later.

More importantly, writing just helps me remember the material. It’s fast, it’s furious, it’s focused. That’s why it’s my preference over a computer. My advice is to get a notebook for every class, draw a line down on each page, and start writing.
Okay, Use Your Laptop if you have to

I realize that my argument for taking notes by hand isn’t always valid. There are some classes where it’s just better, faster, and easier to type your notes. If and when you do use a laptop to take notes, at least give yourself enough margin on the page to come back and write test questions or add additional notes.

I highly recommend Google Docs for a lot of reasons. It’s easy to set up a two-column layout using tables. Check out our video in the Learning Center for more.

You can also use a template. Create your own or find one online. Search Cornell Notes Google Doc Template. Find the one you like and just use it. We have a video of how to do this in the Learning Center as well.

Now go ahead and type the notes on one side, but leave plenty of room on the other side to type in your test questions later. Everything else is the same.

Understand Everything

Taking notes in class can often be a frustrating experience. College is hard. It’s supposed to be. I was totally confused during a lecture, completely without a clue, many times. There’s nothing wrong with that. The problem is when you don’t bother to figure it out quickly.

It’s amazing how many people walk out of class without understanding the lecture. They don’t want to interrupt, or they think they’ll look stupid if they ask questions.

One thing I never did was leave a classroom without understanding everything we’d covered. I never said, “I’ll figure it out later.” As soon as class was over, I’d be on that professor fast asking questions. Yet another reason to sit in the front row.
If you don’t understand something, clear it up right then and there. You might assume that if you just keep listening, things will become clear—and sometimes, in fact, they will. But usually they don’t. The confusion just grows.

If it isn’t the right time to ask a question, make a note in the margin and do it right after class or as soon as you can. Remember, even the biggest idiot can learn anything if given enough time. If you’re managing your time well, you can, too. Know the material and do it right away while it’s still fresh in your mind. Waiting can only make it worse.

**Ask the Professor**

It’s amazing to me how many students have never gone to visit their professor. Ever. Nobody knows what you need to do to get an A better than the professor. Go meet your professors as early and often as you can. Ask about anything that’s not clear in your syllabus. Find a reason to go visit them, the sooner the better. Don’t be nosy or anything like that, just ask genuine questions that will help you clear up what you don’t understand. You’ll be able to study smarter, not harder.

- Ask about test formats, papers, and projects. Ask for examples.

- Ask about anything that you don’t understand.

- Ask about other resources on campus or online to help you better understand what you don’t know.

Talking to the professor will give you hints about what’s important and what isn’t. I can’t count the number of times I’ve asked questions only to hear, “Don’t worry about that. Just focus on this,” or something similar. Which saved me a huge amount of time and stress.

If you have to go straight to another class but you still have questions, you need to get to the professor’s office as soon as possible. Don’t wait. You need to know it NOW. Have that sense of urgency.
The syllabus will have times and methods of contact and the professor’s office hours. I’m a big believer in asking questions in person and not by email if you can. One question usually leads to others. Besides, conversations often elicit other information.

And if your professors see you—in the front row of class, in office hours—they’re more likely to think of you as a good student.

Professors are also mentors in their subject areas. They can give you a lot of practical advice about your career. Develop a strong academic, professional, and personal relationship with every professor you can. Make sure your professors get to know you and know that you care. It will be easy to ask them for recommendations for internships, jobs, and grad school when you need them. Those recommendations are invaluable and you’ll only get them if they know who you are.

You paid a lot to get access to your professors. Take full advantage of it.

**Use Other Resources**

If you’re struggling in a class, it’s helpful to get different perspectives. Websites and blogs cover every academic topic known to man. YouTube likely has hundreds if not thousands of videos on whatever you’re having problems with. Khan Academy is an awesome resource with thousands of videos on every subject at every level.

Every school also has some kind of an academic support center. Go there and find out what their resources are for your classes. Do it before you need help so you’ll be ready if you do need it. They’ll give you the names and contact info for teaching assistants or tutors for any subject.

All of this is yet another reason to talk to your professors. Ask them on the first day of class, “Hey, if I can’t figure this out, what other resources on campus and online do you recommend to help me learn the material?” Make a list of those additional resources
and use them early and often.

**After Class**

Class is over. You think you took great notes and you understood everything, but you aren’t done yet. Do a couple of things right away while that last class is still fresh in your mind. Make sure you close up any loose ends before you move on to something else. In fact, stay right there in that empty classroom if you can. Why waste time walking somewhere else?

**Review Notes IMMEDIATELY**

The time to review notes is immediately after you’ve taken them. You were writing frantically. Lots of new concepts. Lots of abbreviations and shorthand. While everything’s still fresh in your mind, scan through your notes. It’s hard to decipher your hieroglyphs a week after class.

Stop and fill in areas that may not be clear. Make sure you don’t have any open questions. Do you need to see the professor?

**Write the Test Questions**

When you used the Cornell templates, you wrote your notes on one side. That empty area on the other side is where you’re going to write test questions.

First of all, let me say that the single most effective way to prepare for exams is self-testing. This is a whole other topic in itself, but trust me on this. The best way to study for an exam is to take an exam. If your professor provides actual practice exams, you certainly want to do those. However, self-testing with your own notes is even better. Take the time to do it.

Nothing is more important right now than preparing your class notes for self-testing.
That’s what the left side of that notebook is for. Look at the notes on the right side. What questions might be asked about that material? What form do you think it might take on the exam? You may already know that from your syllabus. If not, ask the professor or other students who have taken the course before. On the left side, write the question. It’s just that simple.

Some examples of using the Cornell method use “trigger words” and not test questions. Personally, I like to write specific test questions, because it is most like the actual exam.

So how do you write these questions? Just the way you think you’ll see them. Exams can be given in all kinds of formats: multiple choice, fill in the blank, problem/solution, identification terms, essays. The possibilities are endless. Also, the content and concepts of your notes may be in many different forms.

Just write a test question in a way that makes sense for the material you’re looking at. Define the meaning of . . . What are the three things that . . . ? Explain the concept of . . . What are the five components of . . . ? What caused . . . ? Which is most important? Why? Compare this with that...

If your exam will be a bunch of small essays, write out possible essay questions.

Consider a history class that will include identification terms. You can guess which will be on the exam after every lecture and write a quick description of the most significant points. There, you just made flashcards that you can use to review, and it took barely any time.

Professors often give questions designed to come at the topic from a different direction. Look at the content and think about the ways you could be tested on it. Look at past exams and ask other people. Ask the professor what type of exam you will take. Get as much information as you can about what to expect.

Make sure to write your test questions as soon as possible after the class is over when the material is still fresh in your mind. Don’t
wait until you start studying for the exam. And definitely don’t assume something may not show up on the exam.

Write a test question for every single concept in your notes.

Writing your own questions forces you to complete and clarify your notes right away. It forces you to start thinking about the material in ways that it will likely appear on the exam. It improves retention.

By reading the questions and answering out loud, you will have far greater retention than if you just read and re-read the material. When you can answer a question by heart, it won’t matter how it appears on the exam—you’ll know the answer.

**Do Your Next Assignment ASAP**

Okay, so this is kind of a repeat of time management. Instead of getting up and walking out of the class with the rest of the herd, stay put and dig right into the next assignment. Really, try it sometime.

The material you just covered in class is probably related, so things are fresh in your mind. Try it. Stay right there in the classroom. Wait for the throngs to depart and then read ten pages. Heck, you might read twenty. Practice some spontaneous get-it-done-now efforts. You’ll be happy that you did when your friends want you to do other things later on.

Remember, it’s always better to have time ahead of you and not behind. The time ahead is always stress-free. This is where time gaps come into play. Use the hour before the next class to get started on the next assignment.

Every minute matters.

Even if you only read a few pages now, it will make a huge difference later. There’s no better feeling than being finished with something and knowing that you can use your extra time any way
you want. Stay ahead. Go have fun, get even further ahead, or start reviewing for exams.

**Back It Up**

If you’ve been writing in a notebook, you’re putting a lot of time and effort into taking great notes and preparing them for easy review. How would you feel if you lost them all?

The danger of using a spiral notebook is the risk of theft or loss. Just like the rest of your digital life, you have to back it up.

I know this may sound anal, but after each class, open up your notebook and take a photo of each page with your cell phone. It takes only a few seconds, and the risk of loss far outweighs the effort.

Use iCloud, Dropbox, Evernote, or one of the many other services out there to automate your backup. Storage won’t be an issue; you can simply delete them when you’ve finished the course. Just don’t have a disaster at exam time. If you can’t afford to lose it, then back it all up.

If you’re taking notes on your computer, use Google Docs so it’s already saved to the cloud. If you’re using Word or Pages, never save the file directly to your laptop. Save it to iCloud, OneDrive, or your cloud of choice.

**Wrap It Up**

Remember, every class is a unit. A class isn’t complete until you package it all up and make it exam-ready. No loose ends. You have great notes thanks to the Cornell method. You completely understand everything. You’ve reviewed and clarified your notes to make sure they’re complete and any shorthand is clear. You’ve written the test questions while the material is fresh in your mind.
After every class, ask yourself this question: If I were to take an exam on just the material from this lecture, would I get an A?

**Summary**

- Never miss a class.
- Always be prepared when you arrive.
- Sit front and center to remove all distractions and focus on the lecture.
- Take notes using the Cornell method.
- Capture everything said and written on the board.
- Understand everything. Ask questions immediately if you don’t.
- Visit the professor and use other resources.
- Complete and clarify your notes right after class.
- Write test questions while the material is still fresh in your mind.
- Always be ahead and never behind.
- Back up all notes with a photo and directly to the cloud.

*Same way, every day.*
Readings

“The books you don’t read won’t help.”
—Jim Rohn

You’re gonna have to read a lot in college.

In many cases, you may literally have more than you can read. I know that sounds strange, but some professors deliberately assign a large volume of supplemental reading materials. They don’t always expect you to read all of it, but it’s still assigned.

When I was in college, readings were always just from a textbook. Today they can also be PDFs or online reading sources. Regardless of what they are, it’s important to treat them all the same way. Your readings are the foundation of your class. Every lecture, every paper, every project will use those readings. Your exams will be based almost entirely on them.

Print Out Everything

I know that I’m repeating myself here, but it’s very important that you print out all your readings if you haven’t done that already. (At this point you should have all your readings stacked nicely in piles organized by class).

Don’t read anything on your computer or tablet. Your retention will not be the same, studies prove it. And you won’t be able to read in the most effective way, which we will describe here. So, do yourself a favor and print it all out. And buy all your books.
**Time Everything You Read**

From now on, every time you read something, either use a stopwatch or write your start time on the first page of the reading and the end time on the last page to know how long each reading takes. (Shovel has a stopwatch you can use.)

This takes no time and the benefits are huge.

I always did this, even back in the day, because I developed a TIME MINDSET as I talked about. This let me plan with deadly accuracy. Based on my reading time on one reading, I always knew how long my next reading from the same book would take me. I could gradually see the material getting harder so I would adjust my estimates.

Shovel App makes it easy, but more on that later. Just make sure you type every reading.

**Read EVERY Word**

Reading everything sounds ridiculously obvious, but it’s amazing how many students don’t read everything in their textbooks. They just think they’ll get it from their class lectures. They won’t.

I read every single word that was ever assigned to me in college. Literally. Every single word. Not only did I think it might help me get a decent grade, but I actually wanted to learn something for my tuition money—and I wasn’t even paying it myself.

If you’re a student who’s just trying to get by, you are only cheating yourself. Have some passion for really learning. Open the book and read it all. Cutting corners is for losers.

As we talked about, one of the main reasons that students skip readings is failure to plan their time. They wait too long, or have too much to do, so they just don’t do it at all. Solve that first and getting it done is no problem.
The beauty of the Shovel app is that you can plan all of your readings well in advance. Once you break it all down and know exactly what you have to do, readings are actually the easiest things to estimate.

I get that those thick, expensive textbooks can be intimidating, but the reading assignment will look a whole lot easier when you break it down into small steps.

Petr was always behind on his readings, but when I divided his book into how many pages he had to read each day, it was only five pages. When he saw that, he felt pretty stupid saying that he couldn’t get his readings done.

Just focus on taking it one step at a time. Every reading is a step. Every page is a step. Every paragraph is a step.

Plan ahead and you’ll always have time to get it done.

**Highlight**

No matter what you have to read in college, there is one thing for certain—something on that page is going to be on the exam. Sooner or later you’re going to have to revisit that page to study it.

It takes time to do the reading, sure, but read it right the first time and you won’t have to re-read it when it’s time to write a paper or study for the exam.

That means doing a good job of highlighting (or underlining) from day one.

In high school, kids usually aren’t allowed to highlight their textbooks. In college, you have to. It’s just that important.

It amazes me how many used books I see that still look brand new. It’s crazy to me how someone can read a textbook without highlighting and still get an A. I knew some people like that, but I sure
wasn’t one of them.

I know those textbooks of yours are expensive and you want to trade them back in looking like new, but that just isn’t going to happen. Kiss them goodbye. They’ll need to be sacrificed to get you that A.

And let’s be honest: it’s a little crazy to stress about a few bucks in buy-back costs when you’re paying thousands of dollars for that college class. Consider it the cost of succeeding in college: you’re going to get less when you trade in your textbooks, but you’ll also get better grades.

I know which one I’d choose.

There are a lot of contrary opinions on highlighting. Some think it’s a waste of time, that it really isn’t effective. I couldn’t disagree more strongly. Highlighting does more than just draw attention to important points. Highlighting adds value in many ways.

**Concentration**

It’s often hard to read new and complicated material. When you highlight, it forces you to concentrate. Really concentrate. You can’t just breeze through it and you certainly won’t be daydreaming. You have to have an intense focus and read with a purpose. You are constantly looking for the most important points and the best ways to abbreviate them. You will always be asking yourself after reading each and every sentence if this content is likely to appear on the exam and how it might be presented.

You are already preparing for the exam.

**Repetition**

When highlighting, you’re forced to read the material twice. Often on your first pass, you’ll read the paragraph entirely so you’re clear about what is important. You then go back and highlight only those words that qualify as triggers for what you need to remember. That alone is worth it.
Review

Really, the most important reason to highlight your books is to speed review. This is where hours are saved. If you don’t highlight and isolate the important concepts in your textbook, how do you know what to review for your exam?

This goes double for writing papers. Underline the most important, relevant concepts and it will make finding material for your papers a breeze.

High school students scan over their textbooks searching for things they don’t know. You don’t have time to do that in college. You could waste literally hundreds of hours during your college career reading and re-reading irrelevant material.

Highlighting by definition will key you in on only those points that need to be reviewed the most. You’ll automatically ignore the rest.

How to Highlight

Highlighting doesn’t necessarily mean a yellow highlighter. You can use a pen, a pencil, or a green highlighter. Some use multiple colors for different things. I always used a mechanical pencil. I recommend it because you can’t remove pen or marker. Many times you start reading and highlighting only to find out that the very best material was in the next paragraph. I also like a pencil because you can write notes, question marks or other comments on a page without stopping.

To those of you who are used to highlighting, this may sound simplistic. Bear with me here because the fact is that most students just don’t highlight their books at all. They simply read them.

But just staring at the page doesn’t really count as reading.

You have to be diligent about clearly identifying the most relevant content in each paragraph. This is the tough part.
I see highlighted books where entire paragraphs are yellow. That defeats the purpose. It’s important to try to eliminate the filler from the critical concepts and do it in a way that still makes it readable.

Most books contain way more words than you’ll ever need for the test. I’m not saying the material isn’t important, because it is. That’s why you should read everything that’s assigned to you. However, most words in a paragraph give context—background info, explaining the reasons for something, or setting the stage for the central point that the paragraph is trying to make. Words lay the foundation.

You are looking for the salient points in each paragraph and each sentence. Everything may be important, but you’re looking for the triggers—those words and phrases that provide the meat of the concept and help you remember the rest when you need to.

Always ask: What might be on the exam?

Sometimes it seems like you have to highlight the whole thing, but you can usually pick out the key words and phrases and highlight them to understand and remember the concept. With practice, you’ll craft whole sentences that make perfect sense using words or even parts of words spread across one or many paragraphs.

There’s an art to pulling the most from the least words and still making it readable. We’ll give you examples in the Learning Center. It’s never a perfect process, but the more you do it, the better and faster you’ll get at it every week.

Highlight EVERY page of EVERY textbook. NO exceptions.

Understand Everything

Reading is good. Understanding is better.

I know this may be stating the obvious, but I am always amazed by how many people just read past things they don’t really
understand. They assume they’ll figure it out later, get it during class, or at the very least, that it won’t be on the exam.

You need to understand everything you read in college. Everything. That includes the definition of every word in every book. Don’t skip over a word hoping it isn’t important. Never move ahead until the content is clear.

When I was in college, the first thing I did when I walked into the library was get a dictionary off the shelf and take it to my study table. As I read, I literally looked up every single word I didn’t know. I know that dates me. You have it way easier now with a dictionary at your fingertips. But still, don’t let your screen distract you. Turn off all the time waster apps.

The main reason students pass over something they don’t understand is—as always—underestimating time. Students think they have plenty of time to get those twenty pages read by tomorrow. Then they find out they actually don’t. Something else pops up, the material is harder than they thought, or they have questions they can’t answer.

They have to take shortcuts. No time for highlighting, no time for looking things up. Bad habits come back and they compound. Skipping past complicated material is one of the most common elements in getting behind.

The solution, as always, is to assume that everything will take longer than you think. Take a smaller bite, start earlier, and slow down. Know the time it takes to cover difficult material and plan accordingly. Don’t waste time reading a textbook if you don’t have the time to understand it and prepare it for review. You’re just piling up confusion and pushing the work to an even later date.

You’re wasting more time.

Reading is the one thing that you can always get ahead on. You can’t go to a lecture in advance, but you most certainly can read your textbook as far ahead as you want. Get ahead and stay ahead. You’ll be prepared for every class, understand the lectures better,
and leave yourself way more time to clear up the confusion.

**Write Test Questions**

Okay, so you’ve read every word. You’ve highlighted the salient points. You understand everything. You’ve cleared up any confusing concepts with your professor.

Do you think any of that material might be on your exam?

Of course it will.

So now, just like with your class notes, it’s time to write some test questions. This is where your highlighting really pays off. Writing the test questions is one of the most helpful study techniques you can use. Go back over each page of your textbook and look at every highlighted section.

Ask yourself how the professor would ask about this content on the exam and WRITE THE QUESTION DOWN. If you’ve done a good job of highlighting, you’ll have the material pretty well narrowed down already. The question should jump right out at you.

Write the test questions in the margins if you can. Some books might not have room, so it’s always smart to keep a notebook nearby as you read. That way, you’ll have all of your questions in one place.

Keep it simple. Just flip to the back of your class notebook, turn it upside down, and start at the back page. Link the content to the question in your notebook. Just number each question to connect it to the reading.

If you’re typing on a laptop, create a Test Question document in Google Docs. You can type questions or you can dictate them, assuming you won’t be annoying anyone. Google Docs has a very good voice recognition app. You can quickly review your highlighted pages, think of questions, and dictate them onto a page. That too will save you time.
Writing test questions will both dramatically reduce the time you need to study for the real thing and increase your retention. We’ll give you some examples in the Learning Center.

**Wrap It Up**

As with everything else that you do, make sure you treat each and every session with your textbook as a single unit that should be completed before you move on. Read it, understand it, highlight it, and write test questions. Spend a little time now to save time later.

As always, ask yourself, “If I took an exam on just the material that I covered today, would I get an A?”

The answer should always be “Yes.”

**How long did it take?**

So, remember how you set up the time per page in the Shovel app for every reading source? Well, now it’s time to always make sure that your estimates are accurate. If you did what I told you to do, you timed your reading. So, how long did it take to do a reading the way I told you to do? Probably a little bit longer than if you just read it the normal way. But trust me. This is the best way to do your readings. It will save you multiples of time later on, when you’re studying for your exams, which is what really matters.

Record your time in the Shovel app. It’s easy. Just click ‘+PARTIAL’ —if you didn’t finish your reading or ‘DONE’ —if you finished it. Enter how long it took you.
Time Per Page

Once you enter the ‘Time It Took’ the Shovel app will calculate the ‘Average Time Per Page.’

Is it the same as your ‘Estimated Time Per Page’? Yes—Awesome. Your next readings from the same reading source have accurate estimates in The Pile.

Is the time per page NOT the same as your estimated time per page? Are you way off? Not to worry, just click the AVG. TIME PER PAGE box.

![Table showing readings](image)

4m 30s will be used as the new Estimate for future readings from Econ Textbook.

The Shovel app will do the rest—it will adjust all your reading times from that same reading source accordingly, so that The Pile has more accurate estimates going forward.

This is what it means to know your time. You are always in control. You are planning ahead based on the most accurate data you have.

Know What’s Ahead

When you’ve finished reading your current assignment, just take a quick scan of the pages ahead. Is this new and complicated material? Will it take even more time than you estimated in The Pile? Should you start earlier and allow extra time just in case? Your instincts will tell you right away if you can expect problems. Always look ahead to avoid getting behind.

One of the advantages of setting up all of your readings in the Shovel app is that it forces you to really get a good overview of how long each reading will take. Individual chapters can be radically different in terms of their difficulty, especially as the weeks go by.
Your estimates of how long things take may be way off in the pages to come.

Don’t get caught by surprise. Look ahead and know what’s coming so you can plan accordingly.

**Back It Up**

Just like your class notes, you invest a lot of time and effort into reading and highlighting your textbook. You’ve created an extremely valuable asset. What if you lost it? Unlike taking notes in Google Docs, you can’t automatically back up your textbook to the cloud.

Ask yourself: If you lost your textbook today, would that affect your ability to review and get a perfect grade? If you’ve done things right, the answer should be a resounding “Yes.”

I know this may sound anal, but there is nothing wrong with taking a photo of every page and backing it up to the cloud. You can have all of your photos automatically back up to either iCloud, Dropbox, or Google Drive. We’ll also cover backup methods in the Learning Center.

I realize that most students won’t do this, but if you choose not to, all I can say is guard that book with your life.
Exams

“Well, tests ain’t fair. Those that study have an unfair advantage. It’s always been that way.”
—Allan Dare Pearce, Paris in April

Okay, the moment of truth. It’s exam time.

You might be thinking that this is where you need to put in a lot of work, but you’re wrong. Exam time should be easy. You’re ready. You’ve probably been ready for a long time.

One of the most important things you should be doing is small but frequent reviews of all of your material as often as you can. Studies have shown that this will improve your ability to retain information over time.

✨ Hint: The test questions you’ve been writing in the margins of your reading materials and next to your lecture notes will be important here...

Spaced Repetition

Not to oversimplify, but college is about the 3 R’s—Read, Retain, Regurgitate. Putting stuff in your head and retaining it long enough to put in on the exam.

Getting it in there is easy. It’s keeping it there that’s hard.

There are two ways you can try to retain information for an exam. You can wait until the last minute and try to cram it all in, or you
can take small bites over a long period of time and keep repeating that until test day.

Any guess which is better?

When I was in college, I’d never heard of spaced repetition, but it’s just a fancy name for frequent review. I always did that anyway.

The concept is pretty simple. Whatever you learn, you’re going to forget it over time. If you want to retain the information, study it over time.

Spaced repetition is frequently done with flash card apps that present the ones you get wrong more often than the ones you get right. You can do something similar on your own. When you took notes and read your textbook, you wrote test questions. Some of those may be easy and some hard, even within the same chapter. Start reviewing them until you get a feel for the effort that will be required.

There have been all kinds of studies on this stuff, but here’s the key: study early and study often.

It’s important for you to self-test as frequently as you can. How often? That will depend on the class and how well you remember the material.

In simple terms, you’ll know how often. If in doubt, more is better.

Spaced repetition is important, so you need to make sure you have time to do it.

I’ve been harping a lot about the importance of time in college: getting things done early, using every minute as soon as possible, not wasting time, and always having as much time ahead of you as possible.

Spaced repetition is why.

When you do things right, you’ll find yourself done even days
ahead of your deadlines. You’ll have plenty of study time blocks where you can decide what to do. You could get even farther ahead, or you can start using some of that time for your frequent reviews. You need to balance both.

Whenever you have extra time, don’t waste the study block. Pick a class and start doing a review. It can literally be a couple of days after your first set of notes. Just do a quick self-test and see how you do. Get some early indication of what you know and don’t know.

There is no hard and fast rule. Remember that everything you do in every class in college leads up to an exam. There’s no such thing as too early or too often.

If you have time, start using it to study. I’ll explain how next.

**Start With A Complete Review**

One big benefit of self-testing early and often is that you find and fix any problems well before the exam. There are no loose ends. If you wait until right before the exam to start studying, you might be in for some painful surprises.

The first thing you need to do is a complete review of your materials—the class notes and your textbooks. You’ve covered a lot of ground. Time to go back and take a high-level view of everything that will be covered on the exam.

Do you remember it all? Do you recognize all of the concepts? Missing anything? Any more clarification needed? Do you need to schedule a visit to the professor? Take some time to review, refresh, and confirm.

The beauty of the work you’ve done so far with your readings and your notes is that you can speed through your review and get a good idea about how much time you’ll need to spend studying for that test.
Do You Have Enough Time?

After doing your complete review, go to The Pile and look at your ‘Estimated Study Time’ for that test. Do you think you estimated enough? Did you estimate too much? Adjust it if you need to.

Then, every time you spend time studying for your test, slide the slider based on how long you studied for. This will give you a good visual representation of what you’ve done and how much is left. If it looks like you’ll need more time that you estimated, just adjust it.

You can even create small subtask in for each test or assignment, so that you can separate bigger tasks into more manageable steps. Just cross them off as you are done with them.

The Pile will keep you on track and will always let you know if you need to change your schedule or adjust your estimates to get your A.
Self-Testing

If you have the opportunity to take practice exams or review actual previous exams, start there. That will give you the best idea of the format of the exam and how the professor approaches the questions. Ask the first day of class. You'll get a lot of information about how to structure your own questions going forward.

Practice exams are good, but they’re still not a substitute for self-testing with your own questions.

You’re going to know it all—by heart. That’s the best way to make sure you can ace any exam, regardless of the form it takes. Studies have shown that being able to explain the specific concept by heart is the best way to remember it.

Read the Questions, SAY the Answers

First cover the right side of your notebook with a piece of paper. Start looking at those test questions and don’t let yourself sneak any hints. No peeking. Scan down the left side and slowly and carefully read the next test question.

Now say the answer as a complete sentence. Remember, no short-cuts here. I want you to say the answer as if you’re explaining this to someone who doesn’t have any idea about the subject.

Slow it down, think about it, say it, and you’ll learn it.

The biggest benefit of self-testing one question at a time is that you won’t waste time studying things you already know.

Have you ever watched someone study for an exam? Students look at each page of their class notes and textbooks, scanning the material that they need to know for the exam. They scan one page and then turn to the next and the next and the next wondering if they know what’s on there. And it never works.
Don’t have this conversation:

“What are you doing?”

“I’m studying for the exam.” (Paging through textbook)

“Really? Do you know all of that stuff?”

“Yep, I think so.”

“If you know it, then why do you keep looking at it?”

That’s the problem. Most students spend endless hours looking at material they already know, or . . . that they don’t know. They aren’t really sure.

You’ve probably been there yourself. You tell yourself, “Okay, I know that concept. Yep, I know those. Uh, that one I better spend a bit of time and re-read that. Should be okay with that one.” And on and on it goes. Why do students do this? It’s completely ineffective and a waste of time.

Here’s a clue: it’s because they have never separated the material that they DO know from what they DON’T know. The only way they’re able to find what they don’t know is to keep paging through the same material until they notice something that they think they don’t know. Then they stop and spend some time on that. Then they start looking again. Page after page after page. Then they repeat it again the next day, constantly looking at pages that don’t matter.

That isn’t how material really sinks in. First of all, just re-reading it is a poor way to remember it. Secondly, continually looking at things you already know is a monstrous waste of time and effort.

What if instead you could focus your complete attention on only the things you DON’T know? What if instead of just reading it, you had to recite it by heart so that regardless of the form of the exam, you would absolutely know the answer?

Remember all of those test questions you wrote? That’s where they
come in. Did you take the time to write those test questions on the side of your class notes? How about when you read the textbook?

Writing those test questions makes it easy to review what really matters in the most effective way possible.

**Check Off The Questions You Know**

Now all you have to do is just look at the questions. When you’re absolutely sure you know the answer to a question, just put a checkmark next to it.

As you scan down the left side of your notes, stop and ask yourself the questions that you still don’t know and skip right by all of those questions you checked off earlier. You won’t waste any time continually looking at material you already know.

You can now focus ONLY on what you don’t know. Isn’t that where your time should be spent? When all of the questions are crossed off, you just took the test. And guess what—you got an A!

Just make sure you aren’t crossing off questions during your periodic reviews. Only check off questions during the last week before the exam when you’re absolutely sure you will retain the material come exam time.

**Don’t OVER-Study**

The beauty of doing it this way is that you won’t over study. Most students actually study too much. They get so worried that they might be missing something that they keep going over things again and again. It’s hard to believe that studying for exams can be a waste of time, but it often is.

Sooner or later you will reach a point of diminishing returns. It’s time to stop. Your time is better spent elsewhere. When you know the answer to any question by heart, you know you’re done. You don’t have to guess.
Trust your system and trust your instincts. If you took good notes, read carefully, and wrote good test questions, you’re done. Don’t waste even more time continually looking at things you already know. Use that time to start reviewing for a different exam or getting ahead on your other assignments. Move on.

**Final Review**

The night before your exam, all you need to do is take a quick glance down the test questions and review the few remaining difficult concepts. Then call it a night.

You’ll never need to cram.

I don’t remember ever studying for any exam past 8:30 p.m. the night before. And you won’t either. My goal for that night was to be completely confident that I knew everything days before. My ritual the night before an exam? I went out for a beer. Seriously. I didn’t even think about school. I was ready and I knew it.

When I walked down the hall late at night, I’d notice lights on under many of the doors. Everyone was up cramming, probably on the wrong things, and not really learning it anyway. Crazy. Inefficient. Ineffective.

Guys would often come to my room asking if they could review my test questions and copy my essay outlines. Sure, if you think it’ll help you this late, here you go.

It never did.

**You Got Your A**

You WILL get A’s. And it will be easier than ever before. You managed your time. You knew everything you had to do. And you knew you had time to get it done.

You broke it down into small bites and knew how long it would take.
You showed up at every class and sat front and center. You were totally and completely undistracted. You took copious notes and prepared them for review. You highlighted your textbooks.

You got the hardest things done early so you had plenty of time at night if you needed it. Usually, you didn’t. You were way ahead so you went out and had fun. You understood everything because you started so far ahead that you never ran out of time to clear things up if you needed to.

You wrote the test questions, and with all that extra time, you self-tested often and many weeks ahead. You never crammed at night, ever.

You knew you were ready.

You focused all of your time on the things you didn’t know and never wasted a minute on what you already knew. It didn’t matter what question was on the exam because you knew it all by heart anyway.

You will never worry about an exam ever again.

**Post-Exam Review**

No matter how well you did on your exam, take the time to reflect on it. Is there anything you learned from it that will give you an advantage on the next one? Was the form of the exam as you expected? Did the material come mainly from your textbook or class notes? Did the hints your professor dropped during class or office hours show up on the exam?

If you did miss some questions, ask yourself why. Go back and find the material in your notes or your book and understand why you missed it. Did you not think it was important? Did you fail to highlight it? Was it part of a test question? Understand exactly where and why you didn’t get it right because there is no reason not to know the answer.
This is especially important when you get the exam back. Read every single word your professor wrote on that exam—and this goes for papers, too. Your professor is telling you exactly what you need to do differently next time, and most students never even look.

Remember, anything less than perfect is an opportunity to improve.

When I took my private pilot written exam, I got a 90% and I was happy about it. When I told my instructor, he gave me a very stern look and replied, “Which 10% of flying an airplane do you not want to know?” Good point, and one that will stick with me forever.

Don’t accept anything less than perfect. Use everything you missed as a learning opportunity.
Manage Your Workload

Studying is not just about checking off each assignment. It’s also about managing your workload—which means looking back at what you’ve done and looking forward. Put in a little planning time and you’ll see the payoff right away.

Which means you have to wrap up your work—and look forward.

You should always wrap up your work. That means leaving no loose ends when you finish an assignment. As you study, there will be times when you won’t understand things. It happens to everyone. Sometimes you have to move on and worry about it later. That’s fine, but it’s important that you never leave loose ends for too long. Make a note in the simple To Do list on Calendar page of the Shovel app to get it resolved.

Nothing is done until you can answer ‘yes’ to these questions:

- Did I read (or do) it all?
- Do I understand it all?
- Is it prepared for review? Did I highlight the most important content and write test questions?
- If I took an exam on just this material, right now, could I get an A?
Wrap Up Each Week

Treat each week like a mini semester. Look back and make sure everything is wrapped up. Are you caught up on all of your readings, your papers, projects, and any other assignments? Do you completely understand everything? Are all of your notes clear? Are they prepped for review? Ditto your textbooks?

As always, ask yourself again: “If I had to take an exam on just the material we covered last week, would I get an A?”

Don’t start the new week with confusion from the week before. Make sure you are only looking ahead and not worried about things behind.

What's Ahead

Last week is wrapped up. Now look ahead.

One thing we know for sure about time in college is that everything changes. So look ahead at your schedule each and every week. Every Sunday night, do a quick review of the Shovel app. And don’t worry, we’ll be sending you a reminder.

This should only take a minute or two. Look at each day of the week and ask yourself what might be different next week. What’s coming up that isn’t a part of your normal schedule?

Maybe it’s basketball season and there’s a home game. Is your friend’s party this Friday? Did you remember that dentist appointment on Thursday?


Were your time estimates last week pretty accurate? Is there any reason you might want to adjust anything?

Always be in control of your schedule. Always have time ahead of
you. Once a week do a quick preview of the week ahead.

**How Did You Use Your Time?**

Next, think about your time. Be honest with yourself and change what you think needs to change.

Did you stick to your schedule? Are you actually using your study blocks? How much time did you spend doing something that you wish you had used for something else? Did you run out of time anywhere? Why did that happen?

Taking time to assess your efficiency will make you even more efficient in the future.

However, and you can quote me on this...

*NONE of this will matter unless you follow through.*
Step 5/MAKE IT A HABIT

Same way, every day, gets the A.
How To Make New Habits

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.”
—Aristotle

None of this is going to matter unless you do it.

People buy books with good intentions, but they often don’t follow through. Developing new habits requires dedication. It’s very difficult to change the way you’ve been doing things your whole life.

If you decide to make a change, you sometimes have to do it step by step. Especially if it’s a big change.

Shovel will help you make a big change by doing small things each day.

Robert Collier once said, “Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.” The same is true for failure. You didn’t fail that midterm because you didn’t cram hard enough the night before—you failed because of a hundred small steps, starting with skipping class, not doing the reading, not reviewing your notes, and not asking questions.

By the same logic, you can succeed by taking those small steps—and Shovel is here to help.

Once you commit to making a change, we will make sure that you’re willing and able to do it. That requires a few extra things.
Repetition

A habit, by definition, is something that you do without even thinking about it.

And to make the new way automatic, you’ll need a lot of repetition.

You have to be able to do it again and again and again until it just takes over. It may take 30, 60, or even 90 days before you just do it without thought. You’ll know it worked when you don’t even remember when you weren’t doing it.

A 2009 study at University College London determined that it takes, on average, 66 days to create a habit. That might sound like a long time, but here’s the good news: college is a lot longer than 66 days. Start making good habits now, and you’ll benefit for years.

It Has To Be Simple

No matter how much a new habit helps, you won’t do it unless it’s simple.

That same University College London study found that it’s much easier to get in the habit of drinking a glass of water after breakfast than doing fifty sit-ups.

That’s why this study guide focuses on the simplest study habits and techniques—they deliver the best results for the time you put into them, and it’s easier to turn these tips into habits.

Sure, you have to enter your schedule and workload into the Shovel app, which will take some time, but you only do it once, at the beginning of the semester. The time you spent is rewarded in multiples of time saved later.

Get Rewards

You’ll never stick with anything unless you get some
gratification, both in the short term and in the long term.

Getting a perfect grade is great, but it’s too far away. You need short term rewards, too. Getting things done completely, taking short breaks when you finish tasks, having more free time at night, staying far ahead in your classes, having less stress—all of those things are short term gratifications that help you build good habits.

And the A’s will help, too.

**Small Steps**

Your focus shouldn’t be on the big goal, it should be on the steps needed to get there. Big is hard. Small is easy. What are the specific steps you need to take that will get you to that big goal?

Set your own rewards for getting things done. They may be as simple as taking a longer break, reading a magazine, getting a coffee at the local coffee shop, taking a long lunch, quitting study early that night. Whatever works for you.

Always try to make an association between effort and reward. Make yourself earn the things you might otherwise just do anyway.

That’s why our system breaks everything into small actions. Doing any one action by itself will help, but doing them all together will deliver great results. Just start with as many small actions as you’re comfortable doing.

The results will get you doing the rest soon enough.

**Have A System**

You can’t make a habit by reading a single book, or even many books. Habits are made by action—doing the same thing over and over until you don’t even think about it.
It’s often hard to develop one new habit, let alone dozens of them, but that’s what you’ll do with Shovel. In the end, it’s not just a new habit, it’s a system.

A system is simply an organized way of getting things done that delivers predictable results day after day. McDonald’s is a system. So is Chipotle. They know that if they do things a certain way each and every day, they can deliver a consistent product anywhere, any time, again and again. And they continually look for ways to increase their efficiency.

A college study system is no different. It’s created by identifying those behaviors and study habits that deliver the best results with the least effort and doing them the same way every day.

Too many students are just winging it. They continually guess-timate the time they have and the time they need. And they’re almost always wrong.

Managing time is the single most important habit you need to have in college—and after graduation. You need a plan. You can’t manage it in your head.

The Shovel app does it for you every day, in real time.

**See Results**

The earlier you can actually see that something new is working, the faster it will become a habit. Again, I don’t just mean on your final exam. It may be as simple as just knowing that you are more in control of your time than ever before. It’s seeing that your notes are complete, well organized, and ready for review.

Better yet, it’s getting perfect results on daily quizzes or midterm exams.

It may be the confidence you’ll feel reviewing your material. Or the self-testing, which gives you the boost of feeling prepared for an upcoming exam long before you have to take it.
Don’t Forget Reminders

Doing small, simple things is great, but only if you remember to actually do it.

It’s easy to fall back into your old ways. When you’re trying to develop new habits, you should continually remind yourself of the things you need to do. And there are a lot of ways to use reminders.

Visual Reminders

These are things you create yourself and keep in view. These can be notes, checklists, a stopwatch, and any other tangible objects that you keep visible. You can hang a checklist on your door so you see it when you leave.

Or set this book in the middle of your desk.

That’s a start, but like all of the other clutter in your life, you’ll stop seeing it. You need more.

Setting up a calendar is a great way to keep reminding yourself of things. The Shovel app is even better.

Use the Shovel app for everything you do. Live on it. It shows you all of the normal things you need to do, and it also shows what work you have coming next and how much time you have to finish it.

It’s a constant reminder to keep checking things off.

Automated Reminders

The Shovel app is very powerful. It can trigger reminders based on your actions or inaction. It can tell when you’re running short of
time and send random reminders to focus on certain study habits.

Shovel also has a ToDo list where you can enter any task you need to complete. You can even use it to help you focus on a specific habit that you want to work on this week.

**External Reminders**

Then there are the external reminders. That's like mom calling to remind you to do something. It's also the external emails that will be coming from us. They hit your inbox and you have to process them. We'll be hitting you with a variety of content designed to keep you focused on what you need to be doing.

External reminders are probably the most useful. You don't expect them and you don't know what they'll contain. They arouse curiosity and it's hard to ignore them.

Sure, you can choose to ignore them, but just seeing them in your inbox and reading the subject line will still serve as a reminder. Reading the body of the email is one more. Clicking on a link is yet another. The point is, it continually reminds you, whether you act on it or not.

Mission accomplished.

**Vary The Media**

It's important to deliver content in different ways. Reading this guide is a start, but you need a variety of reminders in terms of the visual appearance, the types of content, the style, the tone (serious and humorous), as well as the type of media—print, audio, video, landing pages, etc.

Varying both the message and the medium will help keep repetitive reminders new and interesting. That's what we'll do with our reminders.
Engagement

Lastly, the most important thing that helps develop a habit is taking action.

That's what all of the reminders are intended to accomplish. It's great if we can get your attention and remind you, but our goal is you taking action.

You read this guide to become a better student. Don't be someone who puts the book back on the shelf. Engage with it and all of the content we're providing.

Most importantly of all—ACT.

Do things, don't just read them.

When you start seeing success, you'll take engagement to the next level. You'll be commenting on posts, giving suggestions, sharing your own experiences with others, reading what others have to say, answering survey questions. You'll be engaged in your own process.

You'll find that you've become a master at being a good student. That's when great things really happen.

All of these different types of reminders work together in the most important way—variety. Familiarity makes things invisible. The more ways Shovel can come at you, the more likely we'll get something through your already cluttered digital stream.
One Habit at a Time

Developing good study habits is a process that may take some time.

Every student is different. Some will jump into this guide and try to do everything we suggest immediately. If you can, that’s great.

Others may have established bad habits that they find hard to break. No problem. Just start somewhere. Pick a few habits that you think may help you improve an area where you feel weak. It’s a start.

For some students, just turning off their cell phones and disconnecting from social media while studying may be torture. For others, the hardest part might be adopting a new style of taking notes.

Even making habits is about breaking things down into small steps—so start with one small change, and then keep adding more.

Just try it. Just one thing. Or two, or three. Do them and see if they produce a positive result. Keep doing it until they become habits. Then do others.

Slowly but surely, they’ll become a part of your routine.

You’ll have a system that works for you.
Keep It Up

“We have a strategic plan. It’s called doing things.”
—Herb Kelleher

Congratulations! You’ve made it through the study guide.

But we’re not done yet—the study guide is only the beginning.

Shovel is designed to be a system—it’s not just this study guide and the steps we’ve covered, it’s also the Shovel app, which manages your workload, and the Learning Center, where you can turn for help, and the Follow Up, which keep you on track.

Don’t stop once you finish the study guide. Use the system, and see how it turns your academic life around. You’ll be surprised at how much easier your life becomes with the Shovel system.

Now is the time to make sure you have everything set up in the Shovel app. If you need a reminder, look back at Steps 1 and 2, which include Action Plans for the Time and Workload Setups. Or use the Checklist at the end of this study guide.

Make sure to bookmark the Learning Center for a lot more tips and videos on how to apply the Shovel system. If you need help, hit us up through Intercom (the purple button in the bottom right corner of the screen on our website or in the app). We’ll be there to answer your questions.

You’ve got all the tools you need. The method and the system. Now it’s time to start tackling college, one small step at a time.
The Shovel Promise

Here’s what we promised you at the beginning of the study guide. With Shovel, you will be in complete control every day—you’ll know what to do next, how long it will take, and when you have time to do it.

Shovel gives you simple study techniques that get results—it’s a system that you don’t even have to think about. You just do it.

We promised to show you exactly how to do things—when it comes to studying, setting up the Shovel app, and managing your workload.

And here’s the payoff: you will get better grades. You will have less stress. And college will be a lot more fun.

But you have to stick with it.

So make sure you start day one of the semester with the Shovel app already loaded with your syllabi and all the tasks for your entire semester. Visit the Learning Center every to get even more details. Read the reminder emails we’ll send.

Do the work, and you’ll get the payoff.

Shovel For Life

Shovel is about doing well in college—and if you follow the approaches we’ve discussed here and use the Shovel app, you will.

But the habits you’re building will help you long after graduation.

Just about any job you get after college will require time management skills, the ability to estimate your workload and the time it will take to complete, and the skills to work efficiently and effectively. In fact, if you can master those skills, you’ll probably get a lot of raises and promotions, too.
Think back to being a Project Manager on that skyscraper in New York. In order to be a good project manager, you need the same time and workload management habits we’ve covered in the study guide. You also have to be efficient and effective. Otherwise, you can’t do your job. Every job requires you to manage your time and your workload well.

That’s the point: these techniques are not just about getting good grades—though you’ll get plenty of those—they’re about being successful at whatever you do after college, whether that’s grad school, the corporate world, or building a skyscraper.

So stay in touch. We want to hear what Shovel does for you.
The Checklist

Your One-Stop Shovel Refresher
Your One-Stop Shovel Refresher

**Time**

_____ Enter the start and end dates for your semester or quarter—before the first day of class.

_____ Do the Time Setup in the Shovel app and add your classes, activities, meals, and Me Time.

_____ Figure out your Extra Time and Study Time for the semester—and commit.

_____ Review and adjust your schedule as you go.

**Workload**

_____ Read the syllabus for each class—your professors will thank you.

_____ Put all your course material for the semester into piles.
Enter every reading source and know your time per page for each.

Enter all your readings, tests, and assignments into the Shovel app, with time estimates.

Review The Pile—that’s your entire semester’s workload in one place.

**Efficiency**

Set a daily routine for yourself—and stick with it.

Use Shovel’s time management principles to speed through your workload.

Find your study spots and USE THEM.

Wrap up your work each week and look ahead to the next week.

Remove Distractions.

**Effectiveness**

GO TO CLASS. And while you’re there, take good notes.

Read everything thoroughly, preparing it for review as you go.

Study using Shovel methods and start acing your exams.
**Habit**

_____ Commit to the Shovel system and stick with it.

_____ Make a plan for your reminders—and get ready for reminders from us.

_____ Stay in touch with Shovel—tell us how you’re doing.

*Best of luck. Don’t hesitate to contact us.*