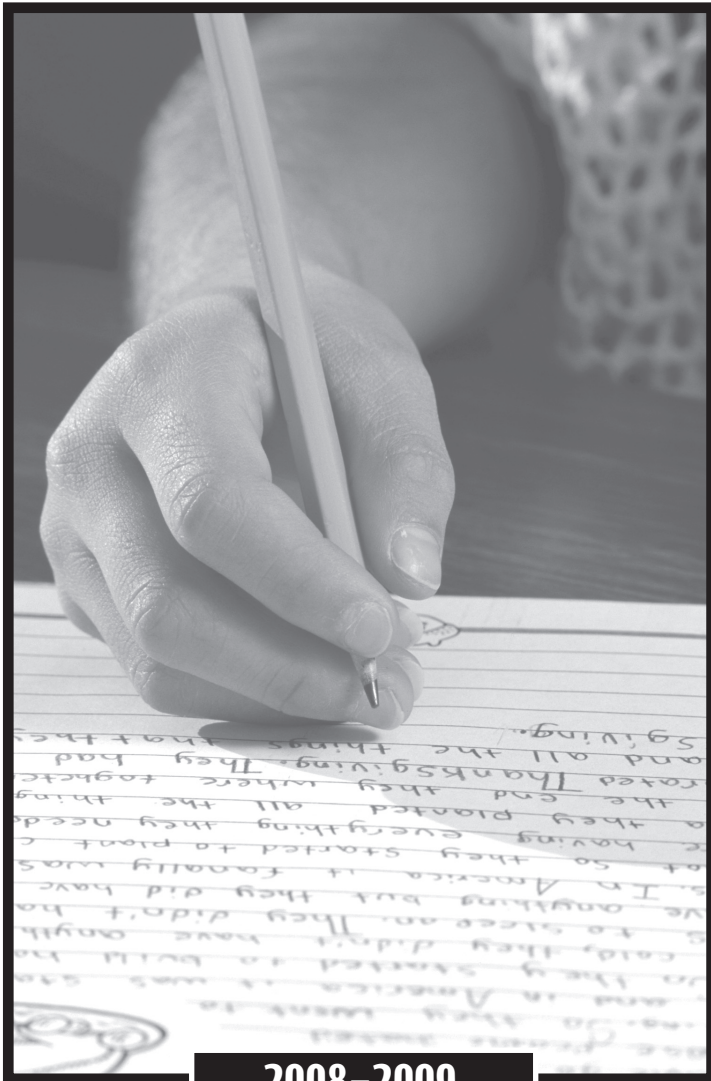


# Tips For Success At Mercer



**2008-2009**

**A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Effective Study Skills**

Produced by the Office of Student Affairs

# Welcome to



You may be a recent high school graduate about to start your very first college courses, a new transfer student, an older student beginning or returning to school after many years, or a continuing student at Mercer. Regardless of the courses you are enrolled in, you have something in common with every other student at the college: **You want to do your very best to achieve your academic goals with a feeling of personal pride and accomplishment.**

The faculty and staff at Mercer County Community College also want you to succeed. We are here to assist and to encourage you in every way that we can. As you follow the steps provided throughout this booklet, you will find some practical ideas and suggestions to get you off to a good start – tips that you can put to use quickly in order to achieve academic success.

**1 Develop and exercise good study habits!**

Stay awake. Listen. Start a study group. Make chapter outlines. Find a way of reinforcing course material that works for you.

**2 Don't be afraid to ask for help!**

Start with your instructor. Get to know your program coordinator. Check in with your Student Advocate. Visit the Learning Center (FA129). Visit the Library.

**3 Don't be afraid to ask questions!**

Speak up in class. Contact your instructor outside of class.

**4 Come Prepared!**

Read all assigned readings before class. Make lists of questions to ask during or after class. Be prepared to discuss the material in class. Be ready for quizzes and exams. Have assignments ready to turn in on time (and keep a copy for your records). Don't miss class simply because you don't have your homework completed.

**5 Come to class!**

Try not to miss any classes. Develop a system of back-ups in case your main system for childcare or transportation fails you. If you do miss class, contact the instructor as soon as you can.

If you have any questions, or if you would like more help with academic or personal problems, contact your instructors, your academic advisor or speak with a counselor.

**Good Luck . . .  
and have a wonderful year at Mercer!**

# Manage your time more efficiently -- don't let time manage you!

As a student at Mercer, you probably find yourself with many more things to do and decisions to make than you have ever had before. You may have to juggle a number of different responsibilities: job, family, studies, school activities, your social life, and -- of course -- class attendance. Also, it will be up to you to remember to turn in assignments on time, schedule meetings with advisors, notify the college if you move, register for classes, and pay your tuition on time.

All of this may sound confusing and like a lot of work, but here are some simple steps to follow to help you plan and find the time to do it all:

## Step 1. Use a calendar to plan your time.

- ♦ With a daily and weekly calendar, take time to schedule all of your activities (Sample on page 3). Carry it with you at all times and keep it current with all changes and new dates entered promptly.
- ♦ Write in the important dates for the semester -- exams and dates when papers and other assignments are due.
- ♦ For each day of the week, fill in the hours when your classes meet, when you have to work, and when you plan to do other things.
- ♦ Once a week, take a few minutes to review your schedule and plan your time for the next week. Set aside time to study, to prepare for classes, and to relax.
- ♦ Be reasonable in planning your time. Don't try to cram too much into your schedule. Once you know how much time you will actually need for studying and for your job, then you can decide to add other activities.

## Step 2. Set priorities for each day.

- ♦ Each morning, perhaps while you're eating breakfast, review your daily schedule and make a list of what you need to do that day.
- ♦ Decide which things are most important and plan your day to be sure those things get done.
- ♦ Enter important dates into your cell phone, Blackberry, PDA, or planner.

# Sample Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8:00 am			DRESS AND EAT				
9:00 am	ENG 101		ENG 101		ENG 101	↑	
10:00 am	PSY 101	1ST 101	PSY 101	1ST 101	PSY 101		
11:00 am		↓		↓			
12:00 am				LUNCH			
1:00 pm	STUDY	WORK	STUDY	WORK	STUDY		
2:00 pm	BIO 113	↓	BIO 113	↓	BIO 113		
3:00 pm	ACC 111	↓	ACC 111	↓	ACC 111	EIGHT HOURS	
4:00 pm	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	OF STUDY	
5:00 pm	RELAX OR	↓	RELAX	↓	RELAX OR	<del>DISTRIBUTED AS</del>	
6:00 pm	READ		DINNER		READ	NEEDED AMONG 5 COURSES	
7:00 pm	STUDY	STUDY	STUDY	STUDY	RECREATION		
8:00 pm	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓		
	ENG.	PSYCH.	SCI.	ACCTG.	RECREATION		
9:00 pm	LIBRARY REPORT	STUDY SCI.	ENG. STUDY	STUDY PSYCH.	RELAX		
10:00 pm	RECREATION OR REVIEW			CLASS NOTES		↓	
11:00 pm				SLEEP			

### **Step 3. Stick to your schedule; don't procrastinate.**

- ♦ Don't let the less important things in your schedule throw you off course. If you're having trouble getting started on an especially difficult or unpleasant job, try:
  - giving yourself a deadline;
  - doing at least a little to get started. (Once you've actually started, it won't seem as hard as you thought);
  - breaking a big job into smaller parts;
  - doing it at the time of day when you have the most energy;
  - working with a partner.
- ♦ Don't waste time "getting ready" to do things. Keep your class materials together and your desk or study area ready at all times.
- ♦ Learn to say "NO" to distractions -- to friends and extra activities that you don't have time for.

### **Step 4. Use your planning to create good study habits and establish a routine for getting things done.**

If you want to learn more about good study habits, two good books to look for are *How to Get Control of Your Time and your Life*, by Alan Lakein, and *Studying Smart*, by Diana Scharf-Hunt.

It's been proven that students who take a student success seminar, enroll in study skills workshops and get involved in student activities are found to have higher grade point averages and are more likely to graduate.



# Get The Most Out Of Your Classes

## A Word About Attendance...

**The single most important factor in how well students do in college is class attendance.** Quite simply, if you're not in class, your instructors can't teach you. Not all of the information you will need to know is in your books; and the explanations faculty can give you may be the deciding factor for whether or not you really learn and understand the materials. The best advice we can offer is this:

**Step 5. Never miss a single class unless it is absolutely unavoidable -- and be on time!**

**The first few classes of the semester are especially important.** That's when your instructors will explain about your classes:

- what they expect from you -- what you will be expected to learn;
- what the assignments are and when they are due;
- when exams will be given and what kind they will be;
- what the course requirements and objectives are;
- how grades will be determined; and
- how to contact your instructor.

This is also a time when instructors are beginning to learn who their students are and what they are like. **It is your chance to start off on the right foot in order to be seen as a serious student by your teachers.**

**Step 6. Be an active learner:  
Come prepared, and participate in class.**

- ♦ **Do all of your homework and complete it on time.** By doing this, you will avoid falling behind in each class, and you will be able to get the most out of class discussions and lectures. This is particularly true for math, science, accounting, technology, and other courses in which you must master one level before you can learn the next.
- ♦ **Refresh your memory.** Review your notes from the previous class session to refresh your memory, and to see the direction the course is taking.

- ♦ **Participate actively in class.** Sit near the front of the class, pay attention, and join in class discussions and lectures.
- ♦ **Don't be afraid to ask questions.** Ask your instructor to explain any parts of your assigned reading, course requirements, or class discussions that you don't understand.
- ♦ **Make appointments to see your instructors.** If you need more help, your instructors are ready to help you. Even if they can't help you, they can direct you to someone else who can. That's part of their job!
- ♦ **A good time to make an appointment is during your instructors' office hours.** Office hours should be listed on their office doors. Also, **learn your instructors' names.**
- ♦ **If you've missed a class,** or if you know in advance that you will have to miss a class, talk to your instructor. Find out what you've missed and how you can make it up. Ask, "What can I do to make up the class work?" rather than, "Did I miss anything?"



# Improve Your Study Habits

It is a generally accepted rule-of-thumb that for every hour you spend in class, you will need to spend at least two hours studying and preparing for class. Of course, some classes will require more of your time, others less. To help you use that time well, we have several suggestions:

## Step 7. Techniques for studying effectively:

- ♦ **Plan a daily schedule.** Set up regular study times for each of your classes – perhaps a couple of hours every morning and evening. Plan your most difficult subjects for times when you have the most energy and the least disruption. Remember to include time for long-term assignments.
- ♦ **Understand your assignments clearly.** Know when each one is due. If you aren't sure about something, ask your instructor to explain it. Do all of your assigned homework and don't let late assignments lower your grades.
- ♦ **Try to see the “big picture.”** As you study, try to see how information you learn in the beginning of your courses provides the basis for information that comes later. Once you see how facts and ideas fit together and are related, you will find it easier to understand and remember what you learn.
- ♦ **Practice concentration.** During your scheduled study times, make every effort to concentrate. Locate a quiet area so that you don't become distracted. Don't allow your mind to wander or daydream. Also, try not to waste time preparing to study.
- ♦ **Review class and reading notes.** There is absolutely no substitute for spending quality time reviewing what you have learned before and after class. Be patient. Read, think about what you've read, recite and review. Review class and reading material from previous assignments at least once a week. When test and final exam times come, you will be well prepared. You won't have to spend time relearning material from the beginning of the term.
- ♦ **Remember to keep up with your assignments.** If you fall behind, it's sometimes very difficult to catch up. Try not to worry about how much or how little time other students spend studying. Every person learns at his or her own pace.



# Improve Your Reading Habits

## Step 8. Techniques for reading effectively: (Reading a textbook is different.)

- ♦ **Preview your textbooks.** Read the introduction, table of contents, chapter headings and subheadings to see how the content is organized; look for key themes.
- ♦ **Skim each chapter before you read it, and**
  - look at the introduction, headings, subtitles, graphs, charts, diagrams, and any questions that are listed at the end;
  - use pictures, charts, diagrams, and graphs as a way to remember information. Create your own visuals if it helps you.
- ♦ **Make notes.** Read the chapter, but while you're reading:
  - write down important facts or ideas in your notebook;
  - make notes in the margin or highlight important words, phrases, facts, etc. to make them easy to find;
  - stop every now and then and see if you can explain to yourself what you've just read;
  - write down anything you don't understand so you can ask about it in class;
  - write down anything that sounds like a good test question -- **and the answer!**
- ♦ **Preview your notes and reread chapters to:**
  - answer your own questions;
  - see how what you've read relates to the course outline and goals;
  - relate the information in the chapter to your class notes and what you read in earlier chapters.
- ♦ **Don't fall behind in your assignments;** in fact, try to read ahead whenever possible.

# Take Better Class Notes

## Step 9. Practice good organization in taking notes.

- ♦ **Keep a separate notebook for each course.** You may want to attach the course syllabus to the inside cover of the notebook.
- ♦ **Do assigned readings before class.** This will help you to know which information is most important and which you'll need to clarify in class. Make good use of your daily schedule.
- ♦ **Take good lecture notes.** Don't try to write down everything your instructor says. Instead, listen carefully and take note of:
  - key words, phrases, definitions;
  - ideas that are repeated and emphasized;
  - ideas and facts important enough to be written on the board;
  - examples and ideas that tie facts together.
- ♦ **Try to organize your notes as an outline.** Less important facts should be indented under more important ones; **OR** write major topic headings on the left side of the page, and notes about the topic on the right.
- ♦ **Allow sufficient writing space.** Leave wide margins or extra space so that you can write in extra information, your own comments, and references to your assigned reading.
- ♦ **Make use of index cards.** As you take notes, listen for things that sound like good test questions and jot them down in the margins. Later, you may want to put them on 3" x 5" cards that you can use (along with the questions you wrote down while reading your textbook) to prepare for tests.
- ♦ **Study your notes.** As soon as you can, after your class is over, review your notes to be sure you understand them. If you think you missed something, check with another student or with your teacher. You may also find that recopying your notes helps you to understand the material better -- it's also a good way to study your notes.

Whether you simply review your notes or recopy them, use a marker or underline to highlight especially important facts, ideas, and possible test questions so you can find them easily.

# Develop Your Test-Taking Skills

Taking tests and exams is an important part of college life. Tests give you and your instructor a reliable way to measure how well you are learning the material -- and they may determine what your final grade will be. You want to do well on your tests, and there are a number of steps you can take that will definitely help you to do your best.

## Step 10. Prepare for testing.

### Before the Test

- ♦ **Make a test schedule at least one week in advance.**
- ♦ **Avoid cramming.** Don't wait for the last minute to begin studying. "Cramming" may help some students, but most information learned this way is quickly forgotten and seldom understood. Be sure you know what material the test will cover -- if in doubt, ask your instructor.
- ♦ **Review your class and study notes.** No matter how often you've reviewed them before, it's worth looking at them again to refresh your memory. Review your notes for possible test questions.
- ♦ **Review previous tests.** Ask your instructor if tests from previous semesters are available for you to look at. Reviewing old tests will give you an idea of what the test will be like.
- ♦ **Study for the test with other students, and**
  - help each other understand the material;
  - ask each other practice questions;
  - talk to your instructor about information you still don't understand.
- ♦ **Get a good night's sleep before the exam or test so you can think clearly.** Do your best on the day of the exam.

### On the Day of the Test or Exam

- ♦ **Arrive early.** Get to class early enough to relax and get organized. Bring everything you will need for the test -- pencils, pens, calculators, etc.
- ♦ **Try to relax.** Stay calm and listen carefully to all instructions, especially those about how much time you should spend on each question.

- ♦ **Quickly review the entire test first to see** what the questions are like and what instructions you will need to follow. If you don't understand something about the test, ask your instructor.
- ♦ **Read instructions carefully for each question so you know exactly what is being asked.** Pay attention to key words such as **some, all, never,** and **always.** Don't try to read something into the questions that isn't there. Make a tentative decision about how much time you can afford to spend on each question.
- ♦ **Do easy questions first.** Don't get bogged down by questions you don't understand or that are difficult. Put a mark next to those questions and **do the easy questions first,** taking your time so you don't make careless errors. You can go back to the difficult questions later. Many students tell us that after they have done the easier questions, they feel confident and relaxed enough to tackle the harder ones; and sometimes, the other questions provide clues that are helpful.
- ♦ **Read objective test items carefully. On multiple-choice and true-and-false tests,** be sure to read all the items carefully before deciding on the best answer. Avoid reading things into test items, and look for the best answer.
- ♦ **On Essay Exams...**
  - Think about the questions and briefly outline your answer before you begin writing;
  - Don't spend too much time on this, but know what you want to say and how you will cover the important points;
  - Use examples and facts from class discussions and assigned reading;
  - Make sure you answer the questions thoroughly. If you omit any portion of the questions, your instructor will assume you do not know the answer;
  - Be neat; use standard English grammar, and proofread what you've written.
- ♦ **And For All Tests...**
  - Review your answers at the end of the test/exam.
  - Leave time to review your answers before you turn in your test. Check to make sure you haven't forgotten to answer any of the questions.

## **When Your Graded Test Is Returned**

Tests may determine your grade, but they can also help you learn more. Look at the questions you had wrong. Try to understand why you missed them, and make a point of learning the correct answers before the next test. Once again, ask your instructor for help if you need it; or make an appointment with your instructor to discuss what you are having trouble with, and get some suggestions for how you can improve.

Don't be discouraged. Realize that reaching a goal is not always without setbacks. Keep your energy focused positively.

## **Using the Testing Center**

The Academic Testing Center is located in LA216 (ext. 3295) at the West Windsor Campus and KC311 (ext. 6695) at the James Kerney Campus. To gain access to the Testing Center, students must present a valid MCCC I.D.

# Maintain A Positive Attitude For Success

Students who succeed at college do so because they have a positive attitude. They realize that no college or curriculum is perfect. Students who succeed value their education and look for opportunities and services to enrich their lives. When they experience times of doubt and discouragement, they do not concentrate on negative feelings. Your attitude will affect your entire college experience. To be successful, keep it positive!

- ♦ **Take control of your own life's direction and success.** You alone are responsible for how well you do at Mercer. Know what you must do to succeed in each class and stick to it!
- ♦ **Develop the personal determination, persistence and strong work habits needed for success in school and in life.** Always keep trying, believe in your own abilities and use every assignment and test/exam as an opportunity to demonstrate your capability.
- ♦ **Find out what your options are if you are having problems.** If you feel overwhelmed, don't suddenly stop attending classes. Never hesitate to ask for help and information from your instructor, counselor, division chairperson or dean. Admitting that you have a problem and asking for help will not be held against you; rather, it may be the single most important step you take toward guaranteeing your own future success.
- ♦ **Maintain a balance between your study hours and work hours, if you must work while attending Mercer.** In general, full-time students -- those taking 12 or more credits -- should not work more than 20 hours a week. Try to schedule your work hours so they don't conflict with your classes and study times. Remember to allow yourself some leisure time also!
- ♦ **Register early each semester so you can arrange your academic schedule to make juggling your job and classes as easy as possible.** Members of your family may not understand the new demands your college courses will place on you. Try to work out your schedule in advance and share it with your family.
- ♦ **You have made a smart decision by enrolling as a student at Mercer.** Keep your academic goals high on your list of priorities. It's up to you to choose success. We hope these suggestions will give you

# Some of Mercer's Support Services To Help You Succeed

**Academic Support Services (FA129)** can be contacted for general help and information, or help with finding a study group at 609-586-4800 ext. 3422 or email, [stinsona@mccc.edu](mailto:stinsona@mccc.edu). A detailed schedule listing our tutors' areas of expertise and hours is available as a handout. A schedule is also available at [http://www.mccc.edu/pdf/tutor\\_schedule\\_ww.pdf](http://www.mccc.edu/pdf/tutor_schedule_ww.pdf)

**Counseling Services (SC229, SC238), Kerney Campus (KC216)** provide professional counselors at both campuses to counsel you regarding your personal, social, career and academic growth. They are well-trained and will do whatever is necessary to ensure your success at Mercer. Counselors are available day and evening hours.

**English as a Second Language-ESL (SC252)** students may use the Writing Center for assistance in ESL courses. Students may also go to the Kerney Campus (KC311) for assistance. Day and evening hours are available.

**Kerney Learning Center (KC311)**, located on the third floor of the James Kerney Campus, provides computer-assisted instruction, tutoring and testing for courses in reading, writing and math. All credit students may obtain assistance in using the computer system and receive individual tutoring throughout the semester.

**West Windsor Campus-Learning Center (FA129)** offers tutoring in all levels of reading, writing, and mathematics, plus chemistry, biology, physics, accounting, economics and computer science. Specialized tutoring is also available for introductory math and English courses. Tutoring at MCCC is *free* and is on a "drop in" basis. No appointment is necessary.

Tutoring is individualized instruction in an academic subject that supplements classroom instruction or lecture hall experience. Tutoring is an integral part of the educational process. Working with a tutor does not have to be viewed as something that occurs only when you are experiencing difficulty.

Tutoring is not a substitute for attending classes, taking class notes, completing assignments or studying independently.

**Library (WW) (JKC)** MCCC's libraries provide resources and staff to support your academic needs. Included in the collection are over 60,000 books, compact discs, newspapers, periodicals, audio and videocassettes. There are VCRs, a tape duplication machine for copying foreign language tapes, graphic calculators, and CD players to complement collection resources. Additionally, many instructors place articles and supplemental readings on reserve at the circulation desk.

Remember that the library is an extension of your classroom. Library staff works with faculty to make sure that you have access to the information you need to thoroughly research a topic and improve your ability to make better grades.

There is also a 56-seat computer lab located in the library. (Temporarily available in LA232 while the Library is under construction) **A valid MCCC identification card is required for admission.** Policies and rules for using the lab and accessing the Internet are available in the lab and must be read before using the computers. Lab monitors are available to assist you with questions.

**Programs for Academic Services and Success (PASS) (SC238)** includes the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs, the Student Support Services (SSS) programs related to helping students adjust to college academically, socially and Retention Services. Peer tutoring, mentoring, counseling and special workshops are available.

**Special Services (FA129)** provides continuing support to students with documented learning and physical disabilities. Various support services have been established to assist students according to individual needs:

- Academic Accommodations
- Academic Advisement
- Professional Tutorial Support
- Assistive Technology

**Students with special needs enrolled at the college can access services by:**

- Self-identification: It is the responsibility of the student with a disability to identify herself/himself to the Office of Special Services and to request appropriate accommodations.
- Providing documentation: Eligibility for services and accommodations for students with disabilities is based on the student providing appropriate documentation. Documentation can include medical reports, learning and psychological evaluations, or physical therapy evaluations. School IEPs and transition plans are not documentation of a disability.
- Completing the intake packet: Available from the Office of Special Services, this packet contains some of the necessary paperwork needed by our office, including the *Request for Academic Modifications*.

**Student Advocates** are qualified counselors located in each academic division to assist students in personal, career and academic matters. (see front of booklet)

**Transfer & Career Services (SC229)** provide service to students wishing to transfer to other institutions of higher learning and services to students exploring majors and careers. An appointment is necessary for individual counseling. Workshops are provided throughout the year.



# Learn About Mercer: Read The College Catalog and The Student Handbook

The College Catalog and the Student Handbook may be the most valuable books on campus. In them you'll find important information about:

- ♦ The Academic Calendar -- including dates for exams, registration, and holidays or vacation periods.
- ♦ Rules and regulations of the college -- including what to do if you need to withdraw from a class.
- ♦ Information about grades and staying in college.
- ♦ Requirements for each degree and certificate program.
- ♦ Course descriptions.
- ♦ Services that are available on campus and where to find them.
- ♦ Who's Who on campus -- who you need to see for answers.

If you don't have a catalog or a Student Handbook, stop in the Admissions Office, 2nd floor, Student Center or the Information Desk, 1st floor, Student Center. At the James Kerney Campus, pick up a copy at the Student Services Office, room KC 218. Since these books are updated periodically, be sure you have the latest edition. **And be sure to read them!** They may not be the most exciting books you'll read this year, but you'll be glad you did.



For more information also check out  
**[www.mccc.edu](http://www.mccc.edu)**

