Guide to Academic Success

You are about to begin your college career at one of the most selective and highly respected universities in the United States. Your success will depend on your attitude, motivation and commitment. This guide contains studying and learning strategies that have been proven to help students do well at Cal Poly.

*We want you to be successful! We want you to be a Cal Poly graduate!*

You Are Responsible for Your Learning

Tell me and I will forget;
Show me and I will remember;
Engage me and I will understand.
— A Lakota Sioux Saying

I hear and I forget;
I see and I remember;
I do and I understand.
— A Chinese Proverb

Your instructor is an intellectual guide but cannot learn for you. Realistically, an instructor can only take care of the first two lines of the sayings above, the show and tell parts. Your responsibility is to truly master the material in a way that has exercised and expanded your mind. This is very important, very personal, and your deepest responsibility.

How Much Should I Study?

**STUDY 25-35 HOURS/WEEK**

This is really important! One of the greatest challenges of students entering college is realizing how much time they need to study. In high school, you were in class 35 hours a week and did about 5 hours of homework for a total of 40 hours per week. In college, you will only be in class 15-20 hours per week, and college is more challenging than high school. You will need to do a lot more learning on your own. To succeed at Cal Poly, you need to study two hours per unit per week, or 25-35 hours per week. That’s 40-50 total hours per week, which is similar to high school and the equivalent of a full-time job.

How Should I Study?

**It takes time and commitment to learn.**

- Set aside blocks of quiet time — no texting or chatting with roommates.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle and get enough sleep. Avoid all-nighters.
- Set aside most of one weekend day for studying. Don’t go home every weekend or stay out all night.
- Stay organized. Keep a calendar so you don’t miss assignments. File exams, returned assignments, topic outlines, etc., in separate folders for each class.
- Take advantage of your instructor’s office hours.
- Get to know a few people in each of your classes to study with. Prepare for group meetings so you can contribute.

How Do I Prepare for Exams?

If you can explain something to someone else, you probably know it. If you can’t, you don’t.

- Keep up with the material; don’t cram for exams the night before.
- Work with the material a little at a time and ask yourself questions as you read.
- Test yourself; don’t let your instructor be the first to test your knowledge. Make a topic outline and explain it in depth without referring to your notes or textbook.
- Make a list of representative textbook problems and prove to yourself that you can work all types, one after another, without hints or assistance.
How Do I Write Papers and Reports?

Write an outline and several drafts. Give yourself time to use your creativity.

- Do a lot of thinking at first. Write down your ideas, cluster the ideas into an outline, convert the outline into a rough draft, and revise the draft until you are satisfied.
- Do several drafts before turning in the final copy. Allow yourself plenty of time to fully develop your topic.
- Concentrate on meaningful content, good organization, maturity in expression, excellent grammar and vocabulary, excellent and varied sentence structure, conciseness, and well-developed paragraphs.

Why Is General Education Important?

A university education is not training; it is education for life.

Your curriculum consists of three parts: (1) major and support courses, (2) general education and breadth courses, and (3) elective courses. All are important. Your ability to communicate effectively, comprehend science and technology, understand history and current political systems, and appreciate the arts and literature will have an important impact on the quality of your life. We are helping you prepare to have a career, not just a job, and to become a sensitive, thoughtful and contributing member of society.

How Do I Graduate on Time?

College Advising Center: 756-2615

Make it a goal to graduate in four years and make sure you understand and follow the prescribed curriculum. The College of Science & Mathematics Advising Center in Science North (Building 53), Room 211 has professional staff advisors to help you understand your curriculum and stay on track toward graduation. You will also be assigned a faculty advisor, and in time, you may also find valuable mentors among the faculty and staff.

How Do I Get Help?

Dean’s Office: 756-2226; Advising Center: 756-2615

If you develop a problem, get help. Don’t wait until irreparable damage is done. There are many offices and people who want to help you: your instructors, your faculty advisor, department staff members, department chairs, the college Advising Center, the Mustang Success Center, the Academic Skills Center, the dean’s office, the Counseling Center, and the Health Center. Be direct and expressive so that the person you are talking to realizes the seriousness of your problem.

Thanks for reading this. Remember, your first quarter is the most important one. We want you to be successful! We want you to be a Cal Poly graduate!

— Phil Bailey, Dean
College of Science & Mathematics