

## Using Your College's Resources

*The price of college has risen over 1,100% since 1978. Why? Well, aside from gouging you for money, colleges are offering more resources now than ever before. Since you're paying an arm, a leg, and a pancreas to go to college, you might as well check out what your college is offering you.*

### **1.) Use your library's books, research databases, and other services. They can be surprisingly helpful.**

\* In libraries, you can use desktop computers, check out a laptop, check out books from almost any library in your state, check out DVDs, use workrooms for group projects, and more.

- Don't worry: you won't be labeled as a nerd for using the library. It tends to be crowded, actually.

\* Believe it or not, librarians and their employees enjoy helping people with their library needs. There's a reason why they chose to work in a library.

- Never hesitate to ask them for assistance. Worst-case scenario: they say they can't help.

\* Libraries tend to have certain spaces where you're supposed to be quiet. Respect this rule: don't chitchat there.

- If someone tries to talk to you in the quiet area, then keep the conversation short, go elsewhere, or offer to talk later.

- If someone calls you, don't let your phone keep ringing as you leave. Answer it, and ask if the person could hold on a minute as you leave the area. Going into a nearby restroom is one option.

- On the flip side of the coin, if someone else is talking in the quiet zone, politely tell them to shut their trap. Say something like, "Excuse me, we're trying to study. Could you talk somewhere else, please?" They're adults, so it's about time they figured out how to respect the needs of other people.

\* A pile of used textbooks can sell for a decent amount of cash, so don't leave yours lying around. The same goes for other valuables, especially if you brought your own laptop.

- You might wonder why nobody would stop a thief if you were to get up and use the bathroom.

Well, first off, how many people were even paying attention to who was using your materials?

Second, how do people know the thief isn't someone you know who has permission to use your materials? Third, how many people want to get wrapped up in a dramatic confrontation with a potential thief, especially if other bystanders don't think anything's wrong?

- Backpacks tend to contain a lot of goodies, so I'd recommend packing yours up and taking it with you if you need the potty.

\* Do not check out library materials for your friends. If you give them a book you checked out, but then they fail to return it, you get to pay the fines. That just makes things even more complicated as you ask them to pay you back and return their stuff to the library.

- They can go to the library themselves!

\* Whether you're physically located inside your library or not, you can access academic databases such as Academic Search Complete. These provide links to scholarly articles on tons of subjects.

- These are invaluable for effective research because they tend to go much deeper than anything you'll find on normal websites. *So when you need to research something, a library database should be your first stop, not Google.*

- Many article entries even show you how to cite them in MLA form, APA form, and so on. Be sure to download the articles as PDFs for later reference. Make sure the PDF files open properly, though: they sometimes just don't work.
- Sort the PDF files by ones you've read and ones you haven't while researching for a big project.
- See a librarian for additional help on how to use these databases. Many 100-level English teachers will show you how to use them, but you should learn before you have to write a paper in any subject.
- If your college's library doesn't offer free use of academic databases, don't worry: many public libraries do. Get a library card from your local library before leaving home so that you can access its materials online. Also see if there is a public library near your college.
- Ask a college librarian if the book catalogues of nearby public libraries come up when you search for books at your college. If not, you may want to use the public library's website too to see if they have any additional books on the subject you're studying.
- Public libraries saved my behind once when I needed to find academic books written in Spanish. My college didn't have what I needed, but a public library did. So don't assume your university has everything.
- When you need books for research, don't let laziness prevent you from finding the right ones. Sometimes, a great book provides more information than a dozen websites.
- Ultimately, you'll save time when you're writing papers if you have the best sources at your disposal as opposed to vague, shallow material.

\* Yes, books are still useful.

- Books tend to go much deeper than free pages online.
- They're usually peer-reviewed by scholars and examined by publishers, so they're often more reliable than random websites.
- Also, professors like it when you cite books in your papers, just like in their good ol' days.
- If you're not in the library, you can still put in your student ID to access its academic databases and collection of books from anywhere via the Internet. That way, you can be sure you'll find a book before going to the building.
- For more information on effective research, please see my page entitled "Researching for Essays and Other Projects."

\* Some colleges offer free printing. If this is the case at yours, then be sure to use it!

- Why use up your own paper and ink if your ludicrously high tuition is paying for free printing?
- When you find a research article worth reading, it's best to print it out so that you can underline or highlight important sections while taking notes in the margins.
- Be considerate: double-side print, and don't print over fifty pages at once in case someone else needs to print stuff too.
- If you find someone else's printed pages still in the printer, just set them aside.
- My college never had a rule dictating that your printing had to be relevant to school, so I'd use it to print out drafts of my novels that were over 200 pages long! Heck, video game guides weren't off-limits. Just don't print anything trashy or private.
- My college only let you use its printers if you were on one of *its* computers. You could not connect your computer to its printers. So, I always backed up my schoolwork to a flash drive that was in my pocket at all times (in a tiny pouch so it wouldn't fall out by accident). I could plug it into a school computer and print from there easily.
- Of course, cloud-based backup options might be convenient for you as well.

## **2.) Make use of the various services offered by your college for your academic, financial, physical, and mental needs.**

\* Most colleges have a career center that's supposed to help you determine what you can do with your degree, how you can find a job, how to format your resume, and more.

- The career center often goes unnoticed, but remember that one of the main reasons why you're at college is to gain the skills necessary for your career. Your diploma by itself won't make your job search a breeze.

- Most colleges never make you go to the career center, so it's your job to go to it.

- It may also help you find a grad school if that's your plan.

- Don't try working out all your post-college plans during your final year. I'd say that, by the end of your junior year, you should know what you're doing next and how you're going to do it. For instance, do you know where the money will come from? If you're still unsure about your plans, then you have a project to tackle the summer before your senior year.

- I think you should also have a backup plan in mind, given how the world can be a topsy-turvy place at times.

\* Many colleges offer a writing center to help you with your papers. Use it!

- Their services can be helpful in any step of the writing process. Maybe you're having trouble conducting research or organizing your outline. Maybe you need someone to help you edit a rough draft. Whatever the case, people are there to help you and discuss your work.

- I consider myself a skilled writer, but I still found my school's writing center useful.

\* Tutoring is available in many other forms as well, even for things like time management. Check your university's website to see how to find a tutor and if you need an appointment.

- Again, this is usually a free service, so be sure to use it. You shouldn't pay to fail a class.

\* Most colleges have a financial services center to talk about money-related matters such as debt, student loans, and more debt.

\* If you're not feeling well, physically or mentally, then use the on-campus medical center.

- The psychological counseling center can be helpful at any point of your college career. College can be a stressful time for many students, so don't be the slightest bit embarrassed about seeking counseling. It's often free and can be very helpful. All psychological offices deeply respect the privacy of their visitors.

- It's much more effective to seek treatment *before* you have a meltdown as opposed to after.

- If you're not happy with the services this center provides, then seek help somewhere else. Taking care of yourself should be one of your highest priorities. If your mental or physical health breaks down, everything else tends to fall apart as well.

- Let me say it again: your health is important. Take care of yourself.

\* Browse your campus's website for additional resources. Your super-duper astronomically high tuition is paying for them, so you don't want to miss out on anything!

## **3.) Ensure the books you read at college are reasonably priced and allow you to take notes in them.**

\* To save money, buy your books online rather than from the college's bookstore.

- University bookstores are convenient, but their stuff is often ludicrously overpriced.
- Back in my day, a new book on Amazon cost less than a used version of it from my college's bookstore. So, I would recommend using the Internet for your book shopping needs.

\* Make sure, however, that the books you purchase are *the exact same edition* as the ones you'll be using in class.

- If it's a different edition, you won't have any clue where to go when the professor tells you to turn to a certain page, and the older edition may have less content.

- If you're looking online and find yourself unsure what edition a book is, then use the college bookstore instead just to be safe.

\* I would recommend avoiding eBooks unless it's super easy for you to highlight and take notes in them. Can you highlight and take notes in an eBook as quickly as you could in a real book? If not, then stick to the physical world.

- Also, check to see if there is a limit on how much highlighting or copying and pasting you're allowed to do with an eBook. Reaching that limit would make the book much harder to use.

- Plus, make sure that if the professor mentions a page number in the physical edition, you can access it in your eBook immediately. You might get lost during a lecture if the professor starts talking about page 255, but you can't find it in your eBook.

\* If you have to read a super old piece of literature for an English class, don't just download it online for free. You'll miss out on footnotes, commentary, and other things in modern editions that help the reader along. In especially difficult works, such as Shakespeare's writing, the footnotes and such are absolutely necessary. The few bucks you'd save from a download just aren't worth all the trouble you'd put yourself through.

\* If you order your textbooks online, do so as soon as the book listings for your classes are available. You never know how long shipping will take, whether or not it will be shipped properly, and so on.

\* You should be taking notes and underlining in your books, so if you buy them used, then make sure the condition's okay. Don't let someone else's distracting markings screw you up in a super-expensive class just to save a little money in the short term.

\* On a related note, don't shy away from underlining and taking notes in your books just so you can sell them later for a bit more money. This will only save you a few bucks, which is nothing compared to how helpful effective underlining and note-taking within textbooks can be.

**Your expensive university has a lot to offer for your studies and other needs. Whether you're in a library or walking around the campus, you'll see many opportunities to get help. Don't be shy about using them!**

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