

Letters to Future Students

Letter A:

Dear Future Student,

Congratulations on getting this far. College is going to be a bit harder than high school in some ways and a bit easier in others. Learning how to survive college is also the process of learning how to become an adult. College students have to take responsibility for their own education. The professors do not remind students to do their work. There is no punishment for not doing the work except for a bad grade. Keep in mind, however, that employers are less likely to hire employees who have bad grades. A person's performance in college follows them for the rest of their career.

College is stressful. Students are responsible for getting their assignments in on time and knowing when things are due. The assignments are usually difficult and require concentrated thought. A college student must know how to write. Usually essays are formal, and they are critically examined for correct spelling and grammar. They prepare you for writing on-the-job. Midterms and finals usually count for most of a student's grade, putting pressure on them to study harder. It is best to set aside a couple hours out of the day to study the material that was learned. Plenty of students look over subjects repeatedly until they fully understand them. If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask the professor. We are here to learn, not just to make ourselves look smart. Part of learning is making mistakes. There are plenty of mistakes to be made in writing. Professors often give feedback about their assignments and tell you how to fix the mistakes. The mistakes help you to be prepared for the next time.

Despite all the pressure and hard work of college, it has many good qualities. College students can come and go when they want. They are in control of their own schedule. There are no bells to tell you what time lunch is. On campus, there are a wide variety of food options. For many professors, attendance is not an issue; neither is leaving the classroom to go to the restroom. Even though many professors do not take roll, I still advise coming to every class. Students who come to class are more likely to get good grades and learn more. Many classes also don't have homework

due every single day so there is plenty of time to work on it. I recommend briefly going over the material you have learned before class to better prepare for what's ahead. In college they have classes that will specifically help you prepare for your future job based on your major. Everything you learn will help you in some way with your future job.

As a college student, I survive by remembering why I'm here and knowing the goal I want to reach. To help you achieve your goal in college, it is best to give yourself lots of time to study. Make sure you understand everything that is being taught. Talk with other students and the professor about what you are learning. Get to know your college campus by walking around and exploring. Find places to study and work on class projects in peace. I recommend working on projects ahead of time, because it is very stressful if you do them last minute. Above all, have fun growing in and experiencing college.

Sincerely,
A Current Student

Letter B:

Dear Future Student,

Welcome to college. Be prepared to realize that everything you thought you knew about writing essays is probably completely wrong. Here in college, you'll quickly realize that the five-paragraph style from high school doesn't apply to any serious essays in college. Another thing you're going to realize is that a lot of the essays that you are going to write to have to be in APA format. But don't worry; it's not too different; it's just something new. You can expect some research papers, some persuasive essays, and in general more challenging content. You are going to learn a lot of new things about the different ways to write your essays.

If you want to succeed in college, you are probably going to have to do things differently. First off, don't party so hard that you find yourself about two years behind as you enter what should be your senior year. It may seem awesome while you're doing it, but once you realize that you've been in school for three years and still have three more years of homework and

tests, you'll want to cry. Personally, my high school experience entailed my teachers, parents, and staff being extremely involved in my motivation. Here you will realize that while your teachers do care, they are not about to hold your hand or push you through their classes. There won't be any phone calls home reporting your bad grades; you're just going to fail. You're going to have to learn how to keep yourself in check. I recommend just keeping partying to the weekends, except for those special occasions like your 21st birthday.

Coming from someone who used to get terrible grades and now gets pretty good ones, I think that one of the most important keys to collegiate success is really getting to know your professors' syllabus. The syllabus you're going to see in college completely breaks down every part of the class and shows you what to expect. It explains how things are graded, what most of your major assignments will be, whether your teacher lets you use electronics or not, and much more. On those nights where you're just feeling too tired for homework, you can check the syllabus for your class to see how not doing the assignment would affect your grade. I also recommend going to go class because I think it really does help to be there.

Another thing that helps me is going to my teachers' office hours when I have questions, or sometimes even just to help them put a name to your face. I also think that it is important to expect to put in more time into your college essays and tests. Of course some will be easy, but once you get into your upper divisions and major courses, you will probably see some more challenging material. I like going to the 3rd floor of the library to study because you are allowed to talk, although if you really want to focus, go to the 4th floor. Another thing to keep in mind is that the AIRC is open all night, so if you want to get some late night studying done, that is the place to be.

Now that I've given you all the advice that I've got, all I have to say is *good luck*. I hope that you don't make the same mistakes that I have, but I hope that you get a similar experience to the one that I am currently enjoying.

Sincerely,
A Current Student

Letter C:

Dear Future Student,

College will be much more difficult than high school. I am writing this to warn you that the standards that your old teachers asked of you are nowhere near the high standards of professors. Professors demand hard work and perfection, especially when it comes to writing. There is no excuse for grammatical and spelling errors in college. To be blunt, college will filter out the unqualified and unmotivated. You are no longer held back by the standards of the worst student in the class. There are a lot of things that your high school teachers may have forgiven. In college, you will not get away with only getting a few points docked for not having the correct page length. If the teacher says the paper is required that you write five pages worth of material, you must write five pages. If the recommended amount is seven pages, do not expect a good grade unless you write all seven. Another difference in college assignments is that some teachers will not accept papers that do not follow the rules. Instead of just a bad grade, you will receive a zero.

No longer will you only have one essay due a month. You will have several essays, in different classes, due in a month. College writing also does not just apply to just your English classes. Many classes will require you write at least one paper and will expect the paper to meet all the same requirements of an English class essay (such as a strong thesis statement, a clear purpose, credible sources, and so forth). I had a government class where every assignment was an essay, and every test was a written exam. I highly recommend taking your required English class your freshman year in order to learn the techniques for college writing. Understanding your audience and purpose is very important in college. Your essay should have a clear audience and should always be persuading that audience of something. For example, this letter's audience would be you, a new student, and the purpose would be to persuade you to work harder than you did in high school. Your English class will most likely require a final portfolio where assignments are not fully graded until you turn in the portfolio.

Essays will be very important in your classes, and getting a low grade on one may put you in jeopardy of failing the class. This is the same with tests. You have to study for your tests, or you will get punished. I learned this lesson the hard way by failing my first college test ever because I thought I had it down without reviewing the material. Always study for your tests. If I had studied in high school like I do now, I might be going to Harvard. You absolutely will have to study and do your homework. Classes outside English will not give you a chance to re-do your papers, so take them to the Writing Center in Calaveras Hall and have them looked at by the free tutors there. Also, getting to know your professors and asking for help during their office hours can go a long way.

Researching for your writing assignments is something that you will have to do in college, which you may not necessarily have done in high school. Writing assignments outside of English class will most likely require you to do significant research that is not in your textbook. Last semester, I had to do a policy position paper for my government class. A policy position paper is a type of paper where you write about different expert opinions on one topic and summarize them all in different sections. You will be expected to know how to cite your sources correctly and how to write paper with no plagiarism.

I hope these tips on writing and college will help you understand the importance of working hard and staying dedicated when you come to college.

Sincerely,
A Current Student