



| Monday                         | Tuesday                        | Wednesday                        | Thursday                               | Friday                                       |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
|                                |                                | try to read 1<br>see career      | • shower 2<br>• asleep<br>• throw away | • go to class 3<br>• meet friends<br>• Study |
| • Study<br>• Homework 6<br>--- | • Pick up book 7<br>• Postcard | • Sleep in<br>• Study 8<br>• --- | • Feeling 9<br>• sleep<br>• Breakfast  | • Study<br>• Dinner<br>• Photo 10            |
|                                |                                |                                  |  |  |

## Strategy 3

# The first two weeks —

what you should do while everyone else is trying to find a good seat

*The semester is beginning. Maybe it's even a new year getting started. You've got fresh notebooks and maybe some new teachers and a new class schedule. This is when controlling your courses starts, and organization is the name of the game. Are you ready? Let's go!*

### Learn about yourself



When a new semester begins, what should you do to start it off right? To get you thinking, assign each statement below a number from 1 to 5 according to how important it is to you. The most important actions will get 5s. The least important actions will get 1s.

- \_\_\_ Make a notebook for each course.
- \_\_\_ Introduce yourself to each new teacher.
- \_\_\_ Talk to other students to find out if your new courses or teachers are hard or easy.
- \_\_\_ Look through all your textbooks.
- \_\_\_ Make a daily study schedule.
- \_\_\_ Look over course outlines and paying attention to grading policies, tests, major assignments, and important due dates.
- \_\_\_ Find a good seat near your friends before the teacher creates a seating chart.
- \_\_\_ See your guidance counselor to review your previous semester.

In your opinion, why is it hard to earn a high grade in any course? Again, score these answers 1 to 5 (5s for the items that you consider most difficult; 1s for the least difficult).

- \_\_\_ Difficult tests.
- \_\_\_ Difficult teacher.
- \_\_\_ The subject is difficult for you.
- \_\_\_ Too many other things to do this semester.
- \_\_\_ Too many other difficult courses.
- \_\_\_ The competition from other students is too tough.
- \_\_\_ The subject is not interesting.

### Starting fresh

Every new semester is a new beginning. If this new semester starts a whole new year, your courses, your teachers, your class schedule, and many other things are new. And if last year seems “years away,” that’s okay — because it means a lot has changed in your life. You should hope that a lot has changed in your academic life, too.

Every new semester gives you new opportunities. A new semester means you are moving one more level up that learning mountain. Courses are getting harder, and the demands on you as a student are greater. Or they should be. If they are not, something's wrong. Even if a new semester means mostly the same courses with the same teachers — and even if you have an *A* average — you still need to set new, higher goals for yourself. Starting a new semester with new plans for better things is the best way to develop as a student and control your education.

What should you do to start a new school term? Before you step into that first class, you should completely review the last semester, preferably with your counselor. These are the items you should cover:

- What grades did you earn last semester?
- Were you satisfied with them?
- Could your grades have been higher?
- Were they consistently high, or were they irregular?
- If you got lower grades than the semester before, do you know why?
- Did you really learn the course material or did you cram a lot and work just for grades?
- What do you want to change in this new semester? How do you plan to make those changes?

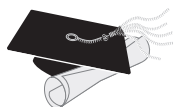
For your review to work for you, you have to answer these questions honestly.

## How to look at the first two weeks

At the start of each new semester, most students don't do a lot of planning, thinking, or organizing. If it's the start of a new year, they get caught up in a flurry of other activities. They renew acquaintances. They decorate their lockers. They jockey for a seat near their friends in each class. They sort through the social groups formed by different classes. They sign up for extracurricular activities. In all the excitement, it's hard to concentrate on courses.

Most students don't get down to business right away. Before they know it, they find themselves facing the first tests in each class. The early weeks *have just disappeared*. Where did the time go?

Semester after semester, students are caught off guard by first tests. Yet despite this all-too-familiar pattern, do many students worry about the time warp that seems to put them “behind” even before first tests and first assignments are due? Amazingly, few do. Many will say, “*Nothing much really happens in any course in the first two to four weeks.*” Others say, “*I don't really know how much I need to study until I start getting grades back. If I start getting low grades, I'll try to study more. If my grades are 'high enough,' I know I'm all right doing what I'm doing.*”



**Be college smart.** As important as the end of a semester is, the best students I've known tell me that they concentrate on the *first* two weeks. Getting off to a strong start makes their courses easier and earns these students the highest grades, even in courses they dislike. Generally speaking, students who use their time during the first two weeks of a course to think and plan do the best at the end.

Here's a real-world example: Have you ever heard anyone say, "*That team lost the game in the first ten minutes*"? What does that mean? Usually two things: The team did not come to the game in shape or ready to play. And the team did not size up the opposition very well. So what should you do the first two weeks of the semester? Come to the classroom ready to study on the very first day. And size up the course.

Sizing up the course is easy. At the beginning of any semester, the teacher spends time talking about the course, course materials — like texts — and what he or she expects of students. The teacher also goes through a course outline to let you know when major assignments are due and when tests are scheduled, along with how much each counts toward your final grade. Pay attention to this information. The course outline gives you an overview of the semester and describes the amount of work involved in the course. As you'll learn later, this information gives you the power to control the course.

Remember the Clueless and Typical Students? They don't listen to any of this very well because *they've heard it all before*. The College Smart Student listens for two things in particular: how much material will be covered during the semester and what the teacher expects students to do. The College Smart Student is out there working, and working ahead, even as other students are waiting around for something to happen. There's plenty happening. The Clueless and Typical Students are just not aware that the semester has begun to roll without them.

## Where your stress really comes from

Lots of students spend the first two weeks taking it easy. Many think they are saving their energy for when things "really get going," late in the semester. What they don't realize is that their slow start to the semester actually *increases* their stress later on. Because they don't start on the first day, they seem always to be playing "catch up" in their classes. They think that's the way a semester is supposed to work. In fact, the way to decrease your stress is to get a head start on the semester. Be focused, energetic, and active during the first two weeks.

Some college students who learn this lesson find that getting the right start improves their grades and their life so much that they become almost fanatical about how they handle the first two weeks. They spend as much time studying during these early weeks as most students usually spend on the last two weeks of the semester. (It's a very good idea.) They cut everything out of their daily schedule that isn't essential — especially hanging out with friends who waste lots of time during the first two weeks.

What should you do? While you don't have to go to the extreme of entirely cutting yourself off from your friends, you should start the semester off with a bang. Getting off to a good start means creating a *head start* for yourself. If you do, you'll never feel rushed again. Your grades will go up and stay up. It's hearing the starting gun that will give you a head start. Use the 7 steps described in this Strategy, and after two weeks, you'll have a real advantage — you'll do better with less stress, all semester long.

## Starting the semester smart

When you get off to a strong start in the first two weeks of the semester, you are much like the team that “comes ready to play.” You are getting yourself in shape and sizing up your courses. Here are seven basic steps that will get you ready “to play” at the start of a new semester. Make sure you do each one!

**1. Evaluate your success last semester.** Most students walk out of final exams and close the door on those courses. With a sigh of relief, students say to themselves, “*That’s over.*” They don’t have to think about those subjects anymore. Right? Wrong. If you’re really on top of it, you’ll learn something about yourself from each course. What did you do that helped you succeed in the course? What did you do that hurt your success? Remind yourself of what worked and try to build on that strategy in the future. Recall what you did that clouded your understanding, put you behind, or cost you points on a test. Resolve that you won’t make those same mistakes next semester.

## List your good habits

What kinds of good habits are you looking for? Here are a few examples. Add your own on the blank lines.

*Following a weekly study schedule.*

*Recopying your textbook and class notes each night, reviewing them, highlighting important points, and adding comments.*

*Completing assignments carefully and on time.*

*Rereading each chapter to improve your understanding of the material.*

*Doing more math or science problems than your teacher assigns.*

*Talking to your teachers after tests are returned to see how you could have improved your grade.*

*Making lists or flashcards of things that have to be memorized.*

*Creating outlines or charts to summarize course material.*

*Keeping a calendar of tests and due dates and working ahead.*

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## List your bad habits

What kind of bad habits got in the way of your success? Here are a few common problems that students wrestle with. Think of any bad habits that you have and write them on the blanks.

*Studying irregularly or haphazardly.*

*Putting off assignments until the last minute.*

*Taking poor class notes.*

*Coming to class unprepared.*

*Not paying attention in class.*

*Cramming for tests at the last minute.*

*Not writing enough drafts of papers.*

*Not rereading course material.*

*Missing deadlines and being penalized.*

*Not asking questions to clarify assignments early on.*

*Not talking to teachers about your progress.*

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Now make a chart of your good and bad habits. Put it in your daily planner or tape it to the inside cover of your subject notebooks. Read it often. Use the information you discovered about yourself to remind you what you should and shouldn't be doing to succeed this semester.

One more thing: If you are surprised or puzzled because any of last semester's final grades were lower than you expected, schedule a conference with that teacher. Talk about how you did on the final exam, and if you had problems, ask for advice on improving the way you study for that subject. Even if you'll never have that instructor or subject again, you'll learn something that you can apply to other courses.

But remember this very important point: Talking to a teacher about grades is NOT a complaining session. Teachers don't give low grades because they don't like you or because they're having a bad day. When it comes to grades, teachers have two main goals: to be accurate and to be consistent. *Focus on your purpose: You're going to the teacher to learn what you did wrong and try to improve, not to argue a grade.*

**2. Take some time early in the first week to slowly page through all the books, manuals, and materials that are used in the course.** Don't wait until you're told to use a particular book before you open it. Look over all the course materials. Be familiar with the whole package from the start. It's like planning a trip. You want to know where you're going and how you're going to get there — and how to prevent unpleasant surprises along the way. You do that by learning as much as you can about your “journey” even before you start traveling.

**3. Read and reread all the information a teacher hands out at the beginning of the semester.** These course outlines, directions, summaries, and grading policies are your teacher's way of emphasizing what the course will be about and how it will be organized. This written material is your first opportunity to “tune in” to the teacher's “academic station.” Highlight or underline the important points. File these pages somewhere safe so you can go back to them anytime throughout the semester. Review this information often. It will keep you focused and in control of the course. You'll always know what's going on and what's coming up.

If you have questions on any of these all-important details, *see the teacher right away.*

**4. Use a monthly calendar to map out what's going on in all your courses.** Buy a monthly planner in an office-supply store. Some are designed just for students. The important thing here is to see the entire month in one glance.

Using your course outlines, jot down dates in your planner for all tests and major assignments for each month in the semester. Once you've entered this information, your calendar gives you a bird's-eye view of every month. You now have a master calendar, showing you what's going on in ALL your courses.

Because your calendar gives you an overview of the *whole month*, it alerts you to weeks with heavy loads and warns you when tests and assignments are just around the corner. You now have the advantage of looking ahead. Students who don't know one week what's going on next week always get into trouble. They fool themselves into thinking that there's not much to do this week *because they don't know what's due next week!* Keep on top of your courses by always knowing what's coming up.

You can update your calendar if your teacher adds more important “events” as the semester progresses. Choose a planner with dates that have lines to write on so you can fit several items on each day. Some days may be busier than others.

**5. Before two weeks have gone by, have one private conversation with the teacher.** You have to get over the idea that talking to teachers is “uncool” or a manipulative way to get higher grades. Students who consistently earn *As* tell me that talking privately with teachers gives them a better comfort level in all classes, even with the hardest teachers. Why? Talking to each teacher privately, face to face, makes students feel more at ease. The teacher is no longer so distant. You can say things privately to a teacher that you would not say in class. By sharing information about yourself, you turn the teacher into exactly what he or she should be: a person interested in your success, your academic ally who will help you learn and succeed in a subject. The teacher is not your opponent.

True, not all teachers are easy to talk to. However, most enjoy talking to students outside of class. Here are some possible topics:

1. Talk to the teacher about what interests you in this course.
2. Let the teacher know if this is a new subject for you.
3. Tell the teacher if you are finding the course difficult.
4. Ask about tips on how to study or how much time the teacher expects you to spend on the subject each night or each week.
5. Do you like this subject enough to study it in college? If so, ask the teacher what kind of courses you would take if you majored in it. And, as a college graduate, what careers would be open to you?
6. Ask how the subject relates to “real life,” or how you’ll use this information later on.
7. Have you noticed that this subject ties in with other courses you are taking? Talk to the teacher about how the content of the two courses fits together.

Then, if you should find yourself slipping in the course, or even getting a low grade on a test, talking to a teacher you already know on a personal level is easier than talking with a teacher you’ve never spoken to before. (You’ll find more about talking to teachers in Strategy 5.)

**6. Schedule a time to see your assigned counselor.** Your high school counselor is your personal academic guide. Stay in touch with your counselor throughout the semester. A counselor can help you out of difficult situations, far more than you know. Consult your counselor regularly. (Three times a semester if you’re doing well. Once a month if you’re having problems.) What do you talk about? You should discuss the results of your own personal evaluation of last semester. Maybe your counselor can give you additional insights. Talk about your courses for this semester and the courses in which you feel weak or strong. Unlike teachers, who will talk about how to study for a particular course, counselors will give you general advice, an overview of different approaches to studying all your courses.

Decide how many times you should see your counselor. After your first meeting, schedule other appointments for the rest of the semester. Use them to talk about your progress in your courses and perhaps do some pre-college planning. To stay focused on your future, talk about your goals for college and for a career. Reporting regularly to your counselor keeps you on track. (More about this in Strategy 6.)

**7. Make a chart for your grades.** Yes, each teacher has your grades in a grade book, but the idea here is for you to track your progress and know your grades week by week. Just because you got an *A* on that last test, you shouldn’t feel you can slack off, especially if your three earlier grades were lower. Tracking your grades lets you know where you really stand. (More on this in Strategy 10.)

## **Need help? Don’t delay.**

You’re driving along in your car. It starts to make a bad sound, so you pull over and call a road service. You know you’re in trouble and need expert help.

The same is true in school. You begin a new course, and within a few days, you're dragging behind the class. Or you begin a new section in a course, and suddenly, you're really confused. Or maybe it's the start of a new semester, and you quickly know that you don't have all your courses under control. In this case, and many others, you need expert help.

Your education, like a car with smoke pouring out of its hood, could use the services of an expert. Find one and get some help. Don't hesitate, and don't be embarrassed — you'll avoid some horrible situations.

Where do you start? Go to your teacher and your guidance counselor. They are ready to help you, and the more willing you are to take their advice, the quicker you will solve any problems.

Whether it is consulting your teachers privately or scheduling appointments with your counselor, DO IT. Be smart enough to get out in front of your problems early while they still can be solved. Learning how and when to get help is a skill that will come in handy in college, where things get harder still. Soon it will become as simple as changing a tire!

## What about you?

Return to the section that began this Strategy, the section that asks you why you think it's hard to get high grades in your courses. See if you know better now how to handle each difficulty.

**Difficult tests.** Your one-page calendar will help you see when tests and assignments are due. Start studying early and mark your calendar to remind yourself of when to begin preparing for them. For example, if you're all jammed up with papers and assignments in Week Four, you'd better use time in the first three weeks to study for that "big" history test coming up in Week Five. Otherwise, you'll be overwhelmed. Here's the larger point: *It's time to change your thinking.* True, your calendar keeps you aware of assignment dates and test dates in your courses. But if you think of every day, every class, and every time you sit down to study as *preparing for your next test*, there's no need to scramble at the last minute to prep for a test.

**Difficult teacher.** Once you've established a personal connection with a teacher, asking even the most difficult teacher to help you through the rough spots of a course will be easier. Know what? He or she will do it! Teachers respect students who plan ahead and ask for help and advice.

**Subject is difficult for you.** Attack hard subjects with energy at the outset, particularly the first two weeks. Use your course outline to read ahead each day so you are always prepared for class. You'll already know something about what the teacher is introducing. Bring questions to your teacher, either in class or privately. Pay attention to how long it takes to prepare for this subject so you can allow enough time in your day for it. Doing all these things will help you get ahead early in the semester and will keep you moving at the teacher's pace. Once you're behind in a difficult subject, you're in serious trouble. Stay ahead, and you stay on top!

**Too many other things to do.** If you spend the first few days of the semester listening to what is expected of you in each course, you will have a better sense of how to pace yourself with non-academic activities throughout the semester. You'll be less likely to over-schedule your time.

**Too many other difficult courses.** If you jump-start *all* your courses, you will lessen the difficulty of each and do better in all.

**The competition is too tough.** However stiff the competition from other students, getting serious from the first day gives you the competitive edge over all those guys sitting around waiting for something to happen. Use the 7 tactics in this Strategy and adjust your thinking. Remember: Like the team that wins the game in the first ten minutes, *you've come to play*.

Managing the critical first two weeks is the way to get the upper hand in all your courses. With the right start, you'll control the semester. It won't control you. You'll get better grades, and the semester won't be so stressful or frustrating.

*Listen to Dr. Bob —*

### **Why you need to practice this Strategy for college**

In college, there's no dead time at the beginning of the semester, no get-acquainted classes, no review of what the teacher hopes you already know. The semester starts on DAY ONE and moves at a pace that is very much faster than high school. I never grow tired of reminding students that college courses cover much more material than high school courses during the same or shorter period of time. In high school, you may spend five weeks studying a novel. Your college English professor will cover that novel in about a week, maybe two — that's three to six classes. Will you be ready for that pace?

You have to learn to start strong, or you'll be hopelessly behind from the very start. Follow the steps in this Strategy to get yourself and your courses organized. Review your performance last semester and learn from it. Get off to a strong start by familiarizing yourself with the materials in all your courses, and complete your calendar to anticipate the work that lies ahead. Start studying *right away* so you do well on first tests. (Don't get into the bad habit of relying on extra credit to boost low test grades. There's no extra credit in college.) Meet with your teachers, and schedule an appointment with your guidance counselor. Start tracking your grades as soon as you begin getting them, so you know where you stand. There's plenty to do in those first two weeks! And now you know it.

**PSST!** Now that you know how to think about the first two weeks, review the highlights to get those 7 steps in your head. You may not be reading this Strategy at the start of the semester, but you'll want to be mentally prepared when the next semester begins. (You can do steps 1, 4, 5, and 6 no matter where you are in the semester.)



**PSST!**



## Up close and personal

### **Chad: Oui, oui! This is French — new courses always take more time.**

Chad had two years of Spanish in high school, but he was tired of Spanish and wanted to take a new language to fulfill his college foreign-language requirement. Chad chose French. His girlfriend in high school had taken French, and she had liked it. Besides, Chad thought it might be cool to be able to go to restaurants and order wine with a French accent.

Day One in French 001: Chad finds himself a seat in the back of the room, and the instructor comes in speaking to the class in French. Chad looks around and sees many, but not all, students nodding with understanding.

Day Two: Chad realizes that the days of high school foreign language are long gone, and his instructor is moving at a good clip. Many of the students in this class have already had one or two years of high school French. Chad thinks to himself, *"This is going to be hard."* He slips further behind with each class.

Week Four: Chad is getting a **D** in French, passing by the skin of his teeth. Finally, the professor writes *"please see me"* on Chad's quiz. (It is an unusual request. Typically, professors don't ask to see students. Students are supposed to do the asking.) Chad talks to his professor, who recommends that Chad get a tutor. Chad takes the advice because he doesn't know what else to do.

Two days later: Chad meets with a French major, a senior, whom he likes a lot. He sees the tutor regularly. Chad's lucky. The university's language department provides tutoring as a free service. At another university, Chad might have to pay the tutor an hourly rate.

Week Seven: No question about it, the tutor has helped. Chad's quiz grades have improved, and Chad earns a **C** on the midterm test.

For the rest of the semester, he meets faithfully with his tutor. By the end of the semester, he has earned himself a solid **C** in the course. At first, Chad is greatly relieved. But then he realizes he has three more semesters of college French to go! He has to continue building on his weak background in French 001. *Is this the way it's going to be for three more semesters? Yes. Will the amount of time Chad spends with his tutor increase as courses get more difficult? Probably.*

Chad's alternative is to chalk up French 001 as a learning experience and sign up for Spanish 001 second semester, which he does. But Chad paid a price that affected more than his French course. In struggling to save his French grade, he robbed time from his other courses, so all of his grades suffered. Chad's **C** in French was not the only **C** he got. In his first semester in college, his grade point average was already low.

### **Dean's commentary**

In the early days of the semester, Chad did what he always did in difficult situations: *He hoped somehow things would turn out okay.* Chad had never worked much in high school for grades, so he never thought about having to study harder and put in more hours than usual to keep up with a subject he knew nothing about.



Chad should have talked to his instructor or his college adviser after the first two or three days of the course. Either probably would have sized up Chad as being pretty clueless and recommended that he transfer to Spanish 001, which he could still do in the early days of the semester with his adviser's approval. Spanish 001 is where his two years of high school Spanish would have placed him. Chad's high school Spanish would have given him an easier transition into a college-level foreign language before the course started to move beyond his knowledge.

But because Chad didn't talk to his instructor or his adviser in the first two weeks, he didn't know any of this.

Other students in the class who had no French background did very well. Chad just didn't know how: He needed to put in more effort. Sure, learning French at a college pace was going to be more difficult than learning college Spanish and building on his background of high school Spanish, but he could have succeeded by improving his study effort. The good news is that Chad's tutor helped Chad hobble along and pass the course. But the bad news is that Chad used the tutor as a crutch, never really getting the idea that he still was not shouldering the responsibility for his own learning. The tutor created the outside-of-class learning experience that Chad could have — *and should have* — created for himself by studying more and putting in more effort.

*But Chad's problem is far from over:* Chad is typical of so many students who must take courses in sequence: like chemistry, math, and foreign language. French 002, 003, and 004 follow French 001. When you get behind in one course, it affects not only this semester but the next semester, and the semester after that.

Getting behind is deadly. It forces students to change their majors, their degree programs, and their career plans. It creates stress and that awful feeling of "always playing catch-up." Not controlling courses costs you time: It can add extra semesters and therefore extra cost to earning a degree. And it all happens because some students never learned how to start a semester, assign enough study time to each course, and get off to a strong and immediate start.

So jump-start ALL your courses every semester. Start studying on DAY ONE. Organize your time and your study strategies, look frequently at your calendar, and always be ahead of the game. If you think you're having trouble, see your teacher or counselor right away. You can never win the game of catch-up without paying the price somehow. What did Chad do? He hoped for a miracle. That never works.

## **Meredith**

### **The battle of biology, retreat or advance?**

As a first-semester college freshman, Meredith chose biology as the first of two science courses she was required to take for her degree. Not only was biology her favorite science in high school, she was also pretty sure that she wouldn't have to do much math in it, unlike what she'd heard about other science courses. (Meredith avoided math-related courses at all costs.)

In high school, Meredith liked dissecting animals and learning about the environment. She thought college biology would be more of the same. However, she discovered that in her college



course, she was surrounded by biology majors, as well as students who planned to go on to medical and dental school. They were taking the course to learn, not about frogs and earthworms, but about the structure and function of cells. Meredith's first mistake was not carefully reading the course description in the college bulletin. Her second mistake? If she had looked at the course outline, she would have noticed that "frogs" weren't mentioned. Lastly, she was equally careless about looking through the textbook she bought for the course. She didn't open it until she heard about the first test.

Because she felt confident about her high school biology background, Meredith approached her college course the way she approached all of her courses — gradually. She only started thinking seriously about studying in the third week of the semester, after she had made friends with everyone on her dorm floor, signed up for lots of social clubs, and partied through the weekends. That's when she began to realize how different this material really was from her high school biology.

She hadn't read the course outline carefully in the first two weeks, and she was surprised to learn from another student that the first test was scheduled for Week Four. This was already Week Three. The instructor hadn't warned students about the upcoming test yet. He'd put the course schedule in writing, and he believed that students were supposed to keep track of such things.

Later, she told me about the test. She didn't know how to answer the first multiple-choice question, and by the time she reached question 50, she was sick to her stomach and asking herself, "What do I do? Do I drop this course? I don't think that I can drop it. It's a requirement. I'm really messed up." Her grade was a **D**.

Still, Meredith was determined, so she decided to try to turn her biology grade around. I told her that I thought she might recover, but this was her dilemma: She was going to have to make up for the studying she'd lost in the first three weeks of biology. At the same time, she was going to have to keep up with each day's new material for the class. It was going to mean lots of work.

There was another complication. The extra time Meredith spent on biology took study time away from her other four courses. She was going to have to risk low grades in her other courses to save biology. What's more, I was pretty sure Meredith was in much the same situation in her other courses: Behind! She had realized too late what she should have been doing during the first weeks of the semester. But she couldn't turn back the clock.

So Meredith dropped Biology and devoted that extra study time she gained without Biology to her other courses. The result was pretty good grades in her remaining courses. But she still had a **W** grade (showing she had **W**ithdrawn from Biology) on her record. That grade was a wake-up call for Meredith, and she was smart enough to hear it. Never again did she "take it easy" at the beginning of a semester.



### Dean's commentary

Students want college courses to start out slowly like high school or middle school courses — and then *gradually* move more quickly and get harder. College courses are not like that. They start out fast and move at the same quick pace all semester long. Yet many students never quite under-

stand that accelerated pace, so when the first major college test or assignment comes due, these students are not prepared. They are “behind” in the course. As a result, the grades on that first test or assignment tend to be low.

So, four weeks into the semester, students are already behind in learning the course material, and they’ve got a low grade. Now their problem is how to catch up, and the truth is that *in college courses, there is no catching up*. Students can’t do anything to eliminate that first low grade. It’s always going to act like an anchor and pull down their future grades. The chances of earning really excellent grades later in these courses are slim. Here’s why: Students have missed learning the material in the early part of the course, and because of the quick pace of the course, they have little time to go back and learn what they’ve missed. They have to keep looking ahead, studying for each new day. Repairing the damage earlier in the course and keeping pace with new material is too much to do. Often, the result is dropping the course, which puts students behind in their whole degree program, making them add semesters to complete their college degree.

Studying a course is like constructing a building. You build it one story at a time. You begin with the foundation. Constructing a strong foundation creates a building that will last many years. However, if the foundation isn’t strong, then the first story doesn’t sit on a solid base. It teeters. None of the other stories will sit atop each other any better. So it is with learning: When you miss mastering the lessons early in a course, you’ve weakened the foundation for the rest of the course. The building is likely to crumble and fall.

Each building, each course, is under construction every semester. However, if you don’t pay attention to constructing them well, they begin to topple over. As you divide your time, trying to save each building, with a little more cement here and a little more support there, you are always running from one teetering building to another, trying to prop them up. If, next semester, you must continue constructing one or two of these buildings — like moving to the next course in foreign language or math, your buildings sway even more. They are taller buildings trying to stand on a wobbly foundation. Eventually they will fall, and as they collapse, they may bring down the other buildings (courses) that stand around them.

Don’t get behind in your courses. Poor foundations and low grades in first tests and assignments are a major reason that 25% of college freshmen don’t return sophomore year. In fact, it’s a mistake that becomes a pattern for lots of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. They repeat this mistake each semester. Because of their low grades, they are forced to drop courses, go to summer school or add extra semesters to make up classes, change their original college plans, and even lose their career dreams. Most can’t figure out why it’s happening. They just know that things have gotten “too hard.”

High school is the time for you to develop those study behaviors and learning skills that college demands. They don’t come automatically. They require time and effort. So keep in mind that as a college smart student, your “job of learning” is no different than the work that a serious athlete brings to a sport or the effort that a musician spends working with an instrument. To win the game or make great music takes time. And that time begins on the first day of each semester.

**RU READY?**