



The person inside the student

(You're not just bones and organs.)

Here's another chance to find out more about yourself. The more you know about yourself, the better student you'll be. This section helps you think about yourself in new ways. You are more complicated than you know!

Take a closer look at yourself. To get your mind warmed up, work on these questions. They will help you zero in on yourself as a student.

- 1) What's most important to you? *Rank each aspect of your life using a scale of 1 to 5.* (5 is most important to you, and 1 is least important.)
 your health your part-time job
 your education your social life
 your athletics your family

- 2) Regarding school in general, *circle the letter of the description that **best applies** to you as a student.*
 - a) a student who enjoys everything about school — always has, probably always will
 - b) a student with strong likes and dislikes about school: teachers, courses, studying, tests
 - c) a student who likes school as long as it teaches practical skills that lead to your personal goals
 - d) a student who finds school less and less interesting as you get older

- 3) As a student, how would you describe yourself? *Circle the letter for only one answer.*
 - a) a student who earns *all* high grades and works to keep them high
 - b) a student with *mostly* high grades, but not always
 - c) a student whose grades could probably use a good “jump-start”
 - d) a student who would rather not think that much about grades

- 4) If academic achievement and good grades are important to you, why? *Rank each statement using a scale of 1 to 5.* (5 is most important to you, and 1 is least important.)
 You find academic achievement (learning) personally satisfying.
 You enjoy the admiration of teachers, family, and friends.
 You look forward to the potential for financial reward later in life.
 You like collecting academic awards (honors, scholarships, etc.).
 You look forward to moving to a higher level of education or into a career.

Keep your answers in mind as you read the rest of this chapter. In a few pages, you'll see what you've just learned about yourself.

Being a student isn't the only thing you have to do!

Do you understand yourself as a person? As a student? Do you think about such things? Knowing more about yourself as a person makes you smarter about how to live your days — and your life. The better you understand yourself as a student, the better your education and your life will be. So let's get to know you better.

First, let's take a big step back and look at your whole life, beginning with all the roles you play as a person:

- Son/Daughter (Parents won't let you forget THAT role.)
- Brother/Sister (That's a role you might want to forget now and then.)
- Athlete (Go team!)
- Best Friend (Hey, what's new?)
- Boyfriend/Girlfriend (Ahhhh!)
- Employee (I'll get right to it.)
- Club/Group Member (Let's do a fundraiser!)
- Musician/Artist (Beautiful!)
- Religious Person (Silence.)
- Computer-Game Player, TV Watcher, Hobbyist, etc. (Just relax.)

You might not regularly think about these roles, but when you do, you discover that your life is filled with activities linked to all the roles you play. How do you feel about these many roles? Some, you love. Some, you don't. Some, you hardly ever think about until you're asked, like now.



Be college smart. You're a complex person, and life asks a lot of responsibility from you. Even if you weren't a student, your days and weeks would be filled with activity. Add your life as a student, and you start to wonder how you can manage it all. But it's no longer a matter of "if" you can. You have to. And you have to figure out how, **BEFORE YOU GET TO COLLEGE.**

You're at that point in life when you cannot just sit back and watch life go by. Yet you can't just dive in and let it sweep you up and toss you around like some roaring river, either. Are the waters in your river rough or calm? Are you just floating along, or barely staying on top of the water? It's time to take control. So that no matter how fast, rough, or deep the river, you can still get from one place to the next — and not just any old place, but specific destinations (goals) that you choose for yourself.

In the river of your life, you need a boat — a sturdy and reliable one. And right now that boat is your education. It will get you from here to there. Can you steer the boat? Can you navigate the boat so it gets you where you want to go, even the short trips? What about the long trips? Where do you want this boat to take you in life? To travel safely, you have to know how to be the captain of your boat.

To be the best student you can, or to be the captain of your educational boat, you must —

- make sensible decisions.
- manage your responsibilities.
- organize your time.
- set goals.
- evaluate your progress.
- be aware of your achievements.

That's a lot, I know. Just take a look at one of your typical days. Use the **Weekly Activity Map** that follows. Choose any school day (just one for now), and fill in each hour of your day from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Be accurate and honest. Take some time on this. You may find that because your activities are not neatly divided into hours, certain boxes in your day may contain more than one activity. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- _____ Put in your class hours.
- _____ Add the hours you usually study.
- _____ Mark the hours you watch TV or are on your computer.
- _____ Record naps, long phone calls, or any time hanging out with friends.
- _____ Don't forget hours you spend working a part-time job, practicing with your team, playing your musical instrument, or volunteering.
- _____ List the times that you eat.
- _____ Include times you spend just relaxing.

Weekly Activity Map

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>	<i>go to bed</i>
TOTAL							

Where your time goes

When you've finished, you'll have a visual map of your busy day. Surprised by the number of things you do in 16 hours? Checking out what you do in one day tells you a lot about how you use your time. For the hours that you are in school, you're required to be in certain places — classes, labs, study halls. If you have a job, that time is also planned for you. Are you an athlete? Better get to practice. How many hours in your day are really yours to decide on?

You're becoming more mature, and your life is changing. Becoming mature means taking on more responsibilities, whether or not you want to. You have to start acting more like a person who is leaving behind the impulsive habits of a child. When you grow out of those childish habits, you can become the captain of your boat. You begin to learn how to read maps, plot a course, navigate the boat, and make decisions. If you just let the water take you wherever it's going, you might not like the places when you get there.

Being a "captain" means that you recognize that all your life roles are important, including your student role — and you manage them. Yet the student role is the one that too many teens treat like an annoying brother or sister. Yes, your education can be demanding, even annoying: all those different courses, teachers, tests, and homework assignments. But like your brother or sister, your education is not going away. It better not, because your life depends on it.

The learning skills you develop and the information you accumulate in school will help you throughout your life. As an adult, you'll be a person who is interested in all kinds of things, and these interests will prevent you from ever being "bored." Plus, learners make great employees. Learners are intelligent and creative, always looking for better opportunities — just as employers are always looking for employees who can learn new jobs and do them with creativity. Learners are versatile people. They find that moving from one job to another is easy. And because employers value them, learners can "pay" their way in life. Having knowledge helps you become a person who owns a car, a house, and all the items that fill houses.

In short, your education is the boat that gets you to many destinations on the river of life. But acquiring an education takes intelligence, stamina, and a respect for what you're doing.

Be college smart. When you are older and have a career, your job will take up much of your day. Right now, your job is being a student. And you have to treat that responsibility like someone who is employed and is getting paid for your efforts. Because that's exactly what's happening: You *are* going to be paid for your efforts. Your pay is the kind of exciting future you make for yourself.



Looking at the bigger picture

Jobs demand time, skill, and effort. If you look at your student role as a job, you have to look at a whole work week to really see what's going on. So now it's time to fill out the rest of your week to create a weekly activity map that shows you how you use all your waking hours. Filling in a week's worth of activities is going to take you a little while, but filling in the boxes honestly will take you a long way to understanding yourself not only as a student, *but as a person with many*

responsibilities that must be managed along with academic ones. (Don't neglect using the week-ends. You live in a 7-day week.)

Directions. Finish filling in the **Weekly Activity Map**. Record everything you do during a week's time. Fill in all the hours.

- Add up the hours you spend on each activity and put those totals in the blanks below.
- The blanks in the last row are for other activities that take time in your week but are not listed, like household chores.
- Total the hours you spend studying each day. Record them on the blank below each day on the **Weekly Activity Map**.

_____ in class	_____ on the job	_____ TV time	_____ computer time
_____ study time	_____ sports time	_____ socializing	_____ relaxing
_____ music/art	_____ hobbies	_____ eating	_____ family
_____ other	_____ other	_____ other	_____ other

Are you surprised by how much time you spend on some of these roles? Think about the time you spend being a boyfriend or girlfriend — and that includes phone conversations and online time. Did you imagine that you really spend that much time on email? Or on the athletic field? Or playing computer games, watching TV, or listening to music? Now that you've accurately described your week, keep it in mind as you read on.

A note about your Weekly Activity Map

If you filled in the boxes pretty easily, that means two things: (1) You already have a fairly good idea of how you spend your time and (2) you have some pattern to your life. You're off to a good start. Other students who say "*I don't know — I do different things at different times, depending on how I feel*" have got a ways to go.

Why time is important

Think about this. A good competitive college, one that will give you an education worth the large amount of money you'll be paying, would expect you to study at least 30 hours a week as a freshman.

So let's work backwards. In order to be ready for that 30-hour challenge, you should be studying at least 25 hours a week as a high school senior, 20 hours as a junior, 15 hours as a sophomore, and 10 hours as a freshman. Are you doing that? If you're not, you're not going to be ready for college, **no matter what your grades are now**. Get used to putting in the time for study. If you don't, you'll be one of those students who starts college but

- a) needs extra years to earn a degree,
- b) loses his or her career dreams because courses were "too hard," or
- c) fails to graduate.

Are you a straight-*A* student? Why not? You're too old to say that lower grades happen because you're "*just not good in a certain subject*." Grades are as much a matter of time and effort as they are of talent. If a subject is harder for you, do you study it more? If you know yourself, you'll know which subjects need more time. We'll talk more about the subject of learning and time in Strategies 7 and 8.

Fitting it all in — it's up to you

Let's put things together. The point is that knowing yourself is important: whether you're a very good student who wants to stay that way or a student who needs to take better control of time. Recognize all the roles you play in life and how they fill your day. If you want to improve as a student, you have to control not only your student role, but your other roles as well.

That's why we began by looking at a typical day for you. Your high school organizes the first part. You organize the second part. Or do you? Are you the kind of student who takes control of your time? Or do you just let things "happen"? Do you scramble to get in assignments? Do you meet most (but not all) of your deadlines? Do you use time well to prepare for the next test? Or do you cram the day before?

As you filled out your **Weekly Activity Map**, carefully recording everything you do in an entire week, from morning to night, what did you find out about yourself overall? How about yourself as a student? Are you giving that role the time and effort it requires? How close are you to meeting the study-time goals listed above in the **Why time is important** section?

The BIG QUESTION we are trying to answer is this: *Do you control your week, or does it control you?* When you were filling out your Activity Map and realized that you would have to include homework/study time, did you start thinking about the need to add more time to your after-school student role? Or were those hours already assigned because you are the captain of your educational boat — or at least the first mate?

Do you see how we're getting closer and closer to understanding how well you know yourself as a student?

Sleep or die! (Well, almost!)

Don't forget the importance of the hours of your day that are NOT included on your schedule sheet: from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. During these hours, you should be sleeping. Eating healthy is important, exercising is important, but *sleeping is essential*.

If you don't eat right or keep your body in shape, you'll feel the consequences, but not right away. If you don't sleep enough, you'll feel it tomorrow or the day after. Lack of sleep is deadly to a student. Sleep deprivation, as doctors call it, makes your mind wander and even shut down at times. It makes understanding or remembering new information difficult, if not impossible.

Isn't your main job as a student to use your mind? Absolutely. So don't do anything that makes your mind weak. Sleeplessness will do just that. Using your mind in all your various courses is hard enough, even when you're rested.

And some people need more sleep than others. Figure it out for yourself. It's easy to do. Try this: Get a normal 8 hours each night for two to three nights in a row (and that's absolutely the minimum) and ask yourself, "*Am I tired during the first two classes of my day?*" If so, go to bed earlier for the next two to three nights. How do you feel after getting more sleep for a few nights? Adjust your schedule to get the amount of sleep your body needs.

A late night here and there won't kill you. But too many will. One more thing: Don't deceive yourself about playing "catch-up" with sleep by staying up late during the week and sleeping all weekend. It doesn't work.

If you get into bad sleeping habits in high school, you'll mostly likely carry them to college. Dorm life invites staying up late talking, listening to music, socializing, or playing computer games. These late nights mean that students often sleep on and off during the day to make up their lost sleep, sometimes sleeping through their classes — in or out of the classroom. The next night, the cycle repeats itself.

Start working on good sleeping habits now: GET ENOUGH SLEEP!

Controlling time is a BIG DEAL.

For some of you, filling out your **Weekly Activity Map** was probably difficult, maybe even frustrating. However, filling out a chart like the Activity Map is the best way to see just how busy you are.

Knowing what you do each hour of each day is the first step to learning about yourself as a person — and *as a student*. This understanding lies at the heart of your ability to succeed academically. Despite all the things you do and all the roles you play, you should always remind yourself, "*I am a student, and I give time and energy to those things that lead to my academic success.*"

Question: *Is being a student important to you?* If you plan on being a student for several more years, becoming a skilled learner is VERY IMPORTANT, whether or not you know it now. So if you are going to college, the answer is "*Yes, being a student is important to me.*"

Whatever kind of student you are right now, you should know this: **Learning takes time, and therefore, to be a learner, you have to make time for learning.** That's how education becomes important in your life. To make time for learning, you have to control your personal time each day and each week. Remember that learning and going to school are your full-time job, requiring effort and responsibility every day.

So as you looked at your **Weekly Activity Map**, what did you discover about yourself *as a student*? Did you find that you don't have all that much time to study? **Are your days so packed that activities squeeze out study time?**

Remember the **BIG QUESTION**: Are you controlling your days and weeks, or are they controlling you? One of the major reasons that students don't succeed in college is that they cannot control their days and make time for study. Those are your two most important goals: making time for study and then using that time to study.

Before you can put in the time, you have to *find* the time. Your **Weekly Activity Map** may have shown you that you should simplify or organize your life. If your days are too packed, you'll have to clear away some "things" to open up time for study. That's taking control. And you're the only one who CAN control your days. And what will surprise you is that when you control your days, you'll feel better about yourself — now and in your college years. (We'll talk more about this in Strategy 8.) Keep in mind that your job as a student will become more, rather than less, demanding year after year.

Learning to control time now is the way you navigate your educational boat toward college. It's a skill you'll need because the daily responsibilities that lie ahead of you are really big. Start now. Keep looking inside yourself and at your days. Pay close attention to your student role and keep developing as a student. Your job is to make sure that you make enough time in your days for one of the most important parts of your life: your education.

What's a perfect student?

There are good students and bad ones — and many kinds of students in between. But is there a "perfect" student? You already know students who really have it "together." (Maybe it's you!) How would you describe this student? Look at the words below.

Ambitious	Creative	Inquisitive	Private
Argumentative	Determined	Lazy	Respectful
Calm	Disagreeable	Motivated	Serious
Careless	Energetic	Moody	Shy
Casual	Friendly	Nervous	Sociable
Conceited	Generous	Organized	Stubborn
Confident	Honest	Patient	Talkative
Cooperative	Immature	Practical	Unfocused

Now write in the spaces of the two columns the words that best describe the “perfect” and “worst” student.

Characteristics of the “perfect” student

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Characteristics of the “worst” student

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How about you?

The first question to ask yourself is this: Do the words you’ve listed for your perfect student include qualities that you already have? Or are these qualities that you’d *like* to have? Give this some thought.

Then consider this. How does each of the five qualities you’ve chosen for the perfect student help the student achieve and succeed? What about the words from the worst-student list? How do these qualities prevent student success? Answer these two questions, and you’ll begin to see that how you live your life as a *person* affects your life as a *student*.

You may have noticed that some of the descriptive words in the list are not clear. For example —

- Being casual is not bad in itself, but being so casual that you become disorganized will mean you can’t manage all the material you’re supposed to learn in all your courses.
- Being stubborn can be bad if you don’t listen to others who are trying to help you, but being stubborn can be good if it means you don’t give up on subjects that are hard for you.
- Being quiet is not bad, unless it keeps you from talking with teachers and counselors.
- Being energetic is great, unless that energy leads to nervousness or distracts you in class.
- Being talkative is good if it gives you the confidence to take part in class discussions, but if you’re talking to your friends instead of listening to the teacher, being talkative moves into the “worst” student column.

These sometimes-good, sometimes-bad words just describe personalities. As the examples show, how you use these characteristics in particular situations determines whether they are good or bad.

If you were to ask your teachers which qualities they would like to see — not only in you but in all their students — what would they say? Well, think about when the class bell rings. Teachers want everyone seated and prepared for class, with notebooks open and pens in hand, and interested. Right? These actions represent qualities: *determined*, *organized*, *motivated*, *serious*, and *courteous*. These words are clear, and they don’t depend on circumstances.

The characteristics of a perfect student, like the ones we just mentioned, are really the same characteristics an employer looks for in an employee. They fall into three general categories: (1) skills and talents, (2) personal traits, (3) qualities of character. What do these mean? Well, just think about it. Pretend that you are hiring someone. First you look at applications. But they can tell you very little, so you conduct interviews. You want to meet people face to face, so you can ask them questions.

What do you want to discover in an interview? You've got it: Their skills and talents, their personal traits, and their qualities of character. Why? Just think about it for minute.

- **You naturally want someone who can do the job**, so you want to know about their skills and talents, their educational background as it relates to the job, and their success in previous jobs.
- **You want a person who will get along with you and other employees**, so you want to size up their personal traits, like friendliness, cheerfulness, and kindness.
- **And you want a person with high moral standards** — qualities of character like honesty and responsibility.

If teachers could interview students for their courses, teachers would do just the same. They would want students who have a good educational background with high grades in other courses; students who get along with other students, so the classroom work is pleasant; and, of course, students who are honest, hard working, and dependable.

Want to take describing the perfect student to the next step? You might want to ask each of your teachers and your guidance counselor which five characteristics they would use to describe you. Or if you don't want the question to be so personal, ask these people if they would give you the five basic qualities they would like to see in all students. If the words they give you aren't already on the list you've made, add them to your list. It takes a lot more than five characteristics to make up a perfect student. Now you have a list that identifies the qualities you want to practice and develop.

Be college smart. The point of all this is to get you thinking very precisely about the kind of student you are. But here's a warning. If you were asked to choose five words to describe yourself as a student *right now*, and some words were good and some were not so good, the last thing you should do is sit back and say, "*Well, that's just the way I am!*" Remember, qualities like being organized, thorough, or careful are *learned*. They take effort, the same kind of practice as shooting free throws. Saying, "*That's the way I am*" allows you to give up. It's just an excuse for not trying to develop the qualities you need to succeed as a student. Have confidence that you can develop the qualities of a perfect student — a college smart student — because, with practice, you can!



Your qualities affect your future.

College applications will ask you to write essays about yourself and explain why you're the kind of student that will significantly contribute to College X or University Z. They will, you know.

It's hard to be truthful if you are generally uncommunicative, disorganized, and unmotivated as a student. Or imagine yourself in a job interview after college. You'll want to describe yourself to the interviewer as the right person to hire. You say you are determined, organized, and energetic. Will an interviewer ask, "*How do you explain some of these low grades or withdrawals from courses? Why did you attend four colleges before completing your bachelor's degree? Why did it take you six and a half years?*"

Right now, college, career, and adulthood seem so far away, but they're just around the corner. You have to start getting ready for it all now.

What you've just learned about yourself

These activities have just helped you answer several questions about yourself and the kind of student you are.

- Think about how you answered the questions in this chapter. Your answers will tell you how much you value school and how seriously you take your education.
- Look at your **Weekly Activity Map**. It tells you how many roles you are juggling and how much room you are now making for education in your life.
- Examine your word list. It gives you the opportunity to compare yourself to the perfect student and gives you direction to set some personal goals.

All of your answers directly or indirectly describe your attitude toward learning in one way or another. As you go over these activities, ask yourself, "*Is this the student I want to be?*" Are there areas you want to improve?

If you still say, "*So what's the big deal?*" stay tuned. You'll find out — IT'S A VERY BIG DEAL. Defining yourself as a student is a very important step toward defining yourself as a one-of-a-kind, independent person.



PSST! This chapter is all about you. Now that you've read through this chapter from start to finish, go over the highlights. This is very important information. Are there changes that you want to make? How "in charge of yourself" are you?