

[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Objectives

- Define college success and examine strategies to achieve success in college

A Personal Definition for Success

How do you define college success? The definition really depends on you. You might think that “success” is earning an associate’s degree or attending classes in a four-year college. Maybe success is a bachelor’s or master’s degree or a Ph.D. Maybe success means receiving a certificate of completion or finishing skill-based training.

You might be thinking of other measures of college success, too—like grades. For instance, you might be unhappy with anything less than an A in a course, although maybe this depends on the difficulty of the subject. As long as you pass with a C, you might be perfectly content.

To help you start to define what success means to you, take this quick self-assessment about your college goals and beyond. How many of these items are important to you?

I want to be able to . . .	YES	NO
Change my major during my college years		
Have good relationships with my professors		
Be eligible for financial aid		
Be eligible for scholarships		
Get good grades and awards		
Get reductions on my car insurance		
Prove to my employer that I can work hard		
Keep my parents happy		
Make social or professional connections		
Get a better job after graduation		

Each of us has a different combination of answers to the questions above, but nearly every student in college answers yes to at least one of these questions. At the same time, we can’t be successful all the time at everything. We have to balance our energy and our focus, to get what

we really want.

Deciding to go to college has an **opportunity cost**. An opportunity cost is based on the economic principle that there are limited resources available and choices must be made. Examples of resources would be things like time and money. If you are spending time doing something, you must give up doing something else you want to do. That is the opportunity cost of your choice. Going to college will have an opportunity cost in your life. An important question to ask at the beginning of your college venture is: what are you willing to trade-off for going to college?

Opportunity costs are tied to the idea of return on investment. Once you make an investment of your time and money in college, what investment are you hoping to get in return? How you define success in relation to your college experience impacts how you see the concept of return on investment. Some ways to gauge the return on your college investment include the following: job opportunities after college, financial benefits, social network/connections made while attending college, development of communication and other “soft skills,” and personal enrichment and/or happiness.

What kinds of trade-offs do you think succeeding in college will require of you? How do you think you might explain these trade-offs to someone who isn't in college or never attended college?

Try It



[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

Strategies to Achieve Success

Most students want to be successful in their courses, yet not all college students are. We've talked already about common misconceptions about not being "smart enough" for college. Some students suffer from **impostor syndrome**, or a feeling that they are impostors and don't belong in college. Impostor syndrome is real and challenging.

Link to Learning

Watch [this clip about impostor syndrome](#) to learn more about how it can affect college students and what to do about it.

Instead of worrying about whether you are smart enough or belong in college, you might focus on some concrete strategies you can employ to increase your success in college. We suggest you embrace and master the following eight strategies:

1. Learn how to take effective notes in class.
2. Review the text and your reading notes prior to class.
3. Participate in class discussions.
4. Go to office hours and ask your instructor questions.
5. Give yourself enough time to research, write, and edit your essays in manageable stages.
6. Take advantage of online or on-campus academic support resources.
7. Spend sufficient time studying.
8. Join a study group or find a study buddy.

If you find yourself worrying about succeeding in college, ask yourself instead if you can implement or improve your use of some of these strategies.

Can you make more time for learning? One approach is to create a regular study schedule and make sure you allow yourself ample time. Only break away from your committed schedule if an extreme situation prevents you from sticking to it.

A Note about study Time

Most college success experts agree that students should study **two hours** outside of class for every hour in class.



Figure 1. Studying with a group is a great way to make friends, but also talk through concepts and solidify your understanding of course material.

Another strategy to consider implementing is group study. For example, rather than relying just on your own knowledge, notes, and skills, try studying with other students in your classes. Studying in a group or with a buddy gives you a chance to ask questions and talk about concepts.

You can also add a tutor to your personal study or to your study group. Tutoring is generally free in college, and the strategies and knowledge you gain will be invaluable. Usually, tutors have taken the class you are currently enrolled in, and they are trained to get the best out of you.

Overall, students struggle in college not because of natural intellect or smarts, but because of poor time management, disorganization, and lack of quality study time. The good news is that there are ways to combat this, specifically by doing things like creating a regular study schedule, studying in groups, and taking advantage of your school's academic resources, such as tutoring centers, instructor office hours, and online help.

Link to learning

[This Ted talk video by Alain de Botton](#) stresses the external factors that enable “success” or “failure” and encourages us to try to resist society’s definitions of success and strive to author our own ambitions. [Click here to download a transcript for this video.](#)

Glossary

impostor syndrome: impostor syndrome is the consistent fear that one does not belong or that one is not good enough; someone suffering from impostor syndrome may worry about being “exposed” as a fraud or fake

opportunity cost: the “cost” of choosing one alternative versus another; if I go running instead of hanging out with my friends, I incur the opportunity cost of not socializing

office hours: office hours are a specific time faculty set aside to meet individually with students who want extra help, have questions, or seek mentoring; some faculty ask students to make an appointment while others have drop-in office hours

Licenses and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Impostor syndrome. **Authored by:** J. Emilio Flores. **Located at:** <https://vimeo.com/208883682>. **License:** [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)
- Revision, Adaptation, and Original Content. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- College Success. **Authored by:** Linda Bruce. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **Located at:** <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/lumencollegesuccess>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Image of woman smiling. **Authored by:** Felip1. **Located at:** <https://flic.kr/p/riat9A>. **License:** [CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial](#)
- **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Image of four students. **Authored by:** UBC Library Communications. **Located at:** <https://flic.kr/p/57H7r4>. **License:** [CC BY-NC-ND: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives](#)
- **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)
- Foundations of College Success: Words of Wisdom. **Authored by:** Thomas C. Priester, editor. **Provided by:** Open SUNY Textbooks. **Located at:** <http://textbooks.opensuny.org/foundations-of-academic-success/>. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)

All rights reserved content

- Alain de Botton: A kinder, gentler philosophy of success. **Authored by:** TED. **Located at:** <https://youtu.be/MtSE4rglxbY>. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License

</div