

# Short Readings

## Learning can be hard work

Learning is complex, takes work, and frankly, is hard to do! Have you ever seen a baby learn to walk? They try and cry, and then repeat many times until they can do it. Even then, babies are wobbly and need practice. Still, they continue- no baby ever says “I’m not perfect at this, forget it, I’m not going to walk”. College learning is hard work too. At a quick glance, it looks like the work you did in elementary and high school. But when you start to dig in deeper, it’s different.

College-level learning requires that you:

Use complex comprehension skills (develop a deep understanding of what an idea or theory is and how it connects to other ideas and theories)

Apply practical (skills and knowledge used to accomplish tasks) and theoretical (understanding of a subject beyond the practical, including why and how things happen and how they interact and change other things in complex ways)

Yes, in some classes you will be expected to memorize (I’m looking at you anatomy and physiology and math), but that is because it is the first step in learning the content within those disciplines. You need to have things memorized in order to use them—but you will need to be able to move past memorization to demonstrate that you understand, apply, analyze, and use your knowledge.

To make the jump from childhood educational learning to the deep and enduring learning you need in college and beyond, you’ll need to understand how your brain works, strategies that help you learn, and ways of monitoring your progress.

There is much more to learning, so let’s dive in! After all, you are here to learn—and you will need to continue to learn throughout your life if you want to thrive!

## Success may surprise you

Success may not be what you expect or planned

This is a tough one to believe, I know. Of course, you know what success is. It’s a good job. Right? Wait, maybe not. We all come to college for different reasons and with different goals. Universally though, having a good job or career (they are different things by the way!) is one of the primary reasons why students come to college. But if you only define success by the amount of money you make, you are missing out on what college can do for you and you risk a lifetime of unhappiness. After all, there is always more money out there that you have not yet made.

So what is success anyway? Success is a deeply personal idea. It is grounded in your values and beliefs. It is part of your roadmap to your life- moving towards success is a never-ending journey guided by what you believe is right, and right for you at that time. You’ll find yourself chasing success and it moving away each time you get close because you likely reevaluate and then revise what you think success is.

What you think of as success, as you enter college, is likely to be very different from what you think it is at graduation. And that is totally okay! In fact, it’s a sign of growth that you see success differently and more vibrantly over time

Most college students find themselves changing their major, or at least how they want to use their major field of study. Many find themselves wanting something different for themselves and their families. Students typically reevaluate their lifestyles and relationships as they learn more about themselves and the world around them. One of the best things about college is how it broadens how you think of the world around you- and with that comes new ideas of what success can look and feel like. Changing your views on success, whether it’s clarifying it or outright changing or deepening connection, is a sign you

are thriving in college and getting ready to take your place in the world as a leader. Setting goals. Monitoring progress, and revising them are key to becoming a leader.

## College is not about your opinion

Ok, this one might be a bit confusing. What do I mean by college is not about your opinion? Shouldn't your opinion matter? Of course, it does! But college itself is not about opinions. It is about ideas and evidence. It is about building an argument based on a careful process, step by step. College learning expects you to make evidence-based decisions- meaning you do not work from your opinions. You can form ideas that are based on what you read, but you need to be ready to justify your ideas with valid and reliable sources.

So what is the difference between opinion and ideas?

An opinion is your view or judgment that you've formed. It may be based on emotion or experience but was not formed with a careful, step-by-step process using reliable and valid evidence. An idea based on evidence is different from an opinion. It may match your opinion- but when you create an idea based on evidence you are aware of your thought process, the readings and information you've used, and have spent time working through your idea to ensure that you can explain how you came to it and why you believe it to be correct. When I talk about ideas here, they could also be arguments, decisions, or actions- all based on careful processes and good-quality information.

It also is helpful to understand how knowledge is created. Knowledge isn't just something that is written down- it is something created. And like all things created, it can be created poorly or well AND it can be supported or proven wrong as new knowledge is created.

The process of creating knowledge

Data → Information → Knowledge → Wisdom

In college, you'll work with knowledge created by others who are experts in the field. You'll also work to create knowledge, by transforming data to information and from information to knowledge. Wisdom, however, is the enduring knowledge in a field that has been continually supported by evidence and research. You'll study wisdom, though it may be called many other things. You'll study many things and transform data and information into knowledge. But remember, college is not about your opinion, it is about a careful methodological process based on careful analysis of reliable evidence.

And we all know that we need good leaders to tackle the very big problems that our world faces.

## Slow down

It is tempting to move fast, to get to the next thing as quickly as you can. In doing so, you miss the "now" and what you can learn and experience. Fast movement feels good and productive in the moment but won't give you enduring ideas, learning or experiences that stay with you for life.

Slowing down has benefits in all areas of your life. By slowing down movement, you can better appreciate what is happening around you AND be aware of any possible issues heading your way. By slowing down emotional reactions (not your emotions, but the actions you take as a result of your emotions), you have time to think about what is happening and how to best approach the situation. This helps you to preserve your relationships, gather information, and make the best choices. By slowing down thinking you have time to take in details that you would usually ignore. This leads to deeper understanding and connections with people, ideas, and the world around you.

Slowing down sets you up for critical thinking. Critical thinking is a way of thinking where you take in the information carefully and slowly, thinking about what it means, how it was formed or gathered, and how it connects to other ideas. When you are thinking critically, you are aware of the quality of the information and where it should- and should not- be used. Critical thinking requires you to read, listen, or observe carefully (hint: slowly!) until you have a full understanding of the topic, and then analyze, evaluate, and infer as you make decisions and take action.

In our society, slow does not seem like the right choice. In part that is because things are moving so fast that we don't realize where slow fits in. Your college years will go by quickly and the constant demands on your time and energy will make you want to get things done fast. By intentionally slowing down, you'll be able to learn in a way that allows you to use it throughout your life, building a knowledge base, skills, and relationships that will be part of who you are and become.

There will be times when fast is the right choice. To truly thrive in college though, you need to know when slowing down will enable you to dive in and become the person you want to be.

## Being honest and authentic matters

You might wonder who you are, or if people know the real you, or you may feel like you know everything there is to know about yourself. Well, the answer to all of these is no. You are constantly changing and evolving.

College especially is a time of change as you push your limits, try new things, explore new ideas and ways of thinking, and get to know yourself in a whole new world. But if you are not really sure who you are or will be, how can you be authentic and honest?

Being honest is not just limited to sharing facts (because one of the things you learn in college is that facts are sometimes not as clear as we'd like them to be) or telling someone everything. Being honest means acting with integrity- in a way that you and the people around you are proud of. Being authentic means sharing what is real, what you know (and don't know), and acting within your values.

Simply put, being honest and authentic means being who you are - and bringing all of yourself to the work you do. It also means respecting that others are who they are and giving them the space to bring all of themselves.

Being honest and authentic also means doing your share of the work, in a real way. Not at the surface level, not by cheating or stealing, and not by allowing others to take on your responsibility. Integrity is an important part of your work in college and your career.

Being yourself and accepting others as they are will help you adapt to new environments and build new connections. Shortcuts may feel good in the moment, but have long term costs and affect who you can and will be in the future.