

Academic Success at SJCP

Navigating academic and social life in a college prep high school can be challenging, whether you are a freshmen, senior or transfer student. On top of adjusting to a new schedule, new people, and different responsibilities, you have to adjust to more rigorous courses and likely a heavier workload. It can be a lot. Fortunately, you are not alone, and there are many resources available at SJCP to help you achieve academic success. There isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution, nor is the following intended to be an exhaustive list, but as a starting point we have put together five key tips with practical steps and resources to help you thrive in high school.

1. Establish a time management system.

Any student's academic success is built on a foundation of time management. It's nearly impossible to do well in classes without a routine, a way to balance priorities, and a system for planning ahead. Here are a few key tips to get your time management under control:

Use a weekly schedule, planner, or calendar to plan your time each week and each day. It's common for students to want to have lots of unstructured free time, but students often tell us that unstructured time leads to procrastination—meaning they end up neither doing what they should be doing (studying) nor what they want to be doing (fun stuff). By using a planner, you can find room for both academic and social time. Factor in everything you do in a day, including things like sports practices, social events, clubs and organizations, class, work, studying, and even free time. Use this to plan strategic study times for each class. You can use any type of planner (digital or hard copy).

Chunk your time. Research has shown that it's much more effective to space out your studies over a longer period of time (distributed practice) instead of doing all your work at once or cramming last-minute (massed practice). Additionally, studying for smaller periods of time (no more than an hour) and then taking a break improves learning. Try using the [Pomodoro technique](#) to help you study in chunks.

Plan ahead and think big picture. Use a monthly or semester at a glance calendar to figure out when your busy weeks are—before they catch you off guard! This big picture tool can help you plan ahead so you don't end up cramming last minute or getting overwhelmed during the busy weeks.

Use academic coaching. Academic coaching can help you better understand your habits and your goals, and it can also give you new ideas for what might work best for you. Importantly, academic coaching includes a focus on accountability, which is integral to forming new time management habits. Stop by our Prep Center after school for help in getting started.

2. Use effective study strategies.

Let's be honest: if you're not studying effectively, you're wasting your time. Many students start high school using the same strategies they used in middle school because those techniques worked well there; however, as you may have already figured out, high school is different. Classes are structured differently and require more independent study; these differences may require new study habits that you didn't need to develop in middle school. Below, we give brief descriptions of a few effective study strategies and connect you to resources to continue exploring.

Test yourself. Rather than simply re-reading your textbook and notes, create flashcards or create a study guide from memory to test yourself on the information. If you're using flashcards, don't look at the answers or flip the flashcard until you have tried to answer the question yourself. If you're creating a study guide, write down as much as you can from memory, leaving gaps when you know you need to fill in information or details later. These practices will tell you exactly what you do and do not know and will actively engage your brain in retrieval—an essential part of good learning.

Become a teacher. Instead of rereading information, close your book and notes and explain the information in your own words out loud to a friend—or even to yourself. In doing so, you'll quickly get a better feel for what you know and don't know well.

Use active reading strategies. Using effective active reading strategies can transform your reading time from frustrating, time-consuming, and confusing to meaningful, purpose-driven, and successful.

Use metacognition to your advantage. Research has shown that students who engage in metacognition (reflective thinking about what they know and don't know and about how they learn) are much more effective learners.

Study with friends. Ask someone in your class to be a study partner or start a group.

3. Understand your teacher's expectations for each course.

Read your syllabi. Get to know your syllabus for each course and refer to it often. It's your roadmap for the class and provides important dates, links to resources, and timelines of topics.

Take advantage of after school tutoring hours. Don't be afraid to talk to your teacher about anything you may be confused about or any questions you have about your course or assignments.

Get to know Google Classroom and Blackbaud Visit these online resources often for updates from your teacher, returned grades, and important dates.

4. Create your team at SJCP.

SJCP offers resources and support in many different areas. Consider your needs and check out these great resources to become more connected at school:

Prep Center: Offers a quiet space to do homework, plus a resource teacher to help organize and structure assignments.

Writing Lab: Provides review and editing of written assignments with our English faculty.

Student Support Center: School counselors offer support for schedules, courses, conflict resolution and more.

5. Practice self-care.

Since college prep coursework can be challenging and time-consuming, it's important to take care of yourself along the way. Many students find themselves neglecting sleep, healthy eating, and enjoyment for the sake of academic success. However, part of being academically successful is living a healthy, balanced life and taking care of yourself. You can't perform at your best if you aren't taking care of yourself mentally and physically. Many of the resources we've shared in this handout can help you establish a good routine that will allow you to do well and eliminate some of the stress that high school brings. These self-care strategies seem simple, but they are as easy to neglect as they are important to remember.

Sleep matters. Sleep promotes cognition and memory, facilitates learning, recharges your mental and physical batteries, and generally helps you make the most out of your days. With enough sleep, you improve your mental and physical health, withstand stress, and maintain the consistency that is critical to healthy daily functioning.

Make healthy choices. What you put into your body affects the way you feel, perform, and learn. Things like drinking enough water, eating healthy foods, and getting exercise improves your brain, body, and your chance at academic success.

Set goals and develop solid habits. Create some short-term and long-term goals, then take steps towards pursuing them. Our counseling office is a wonderful resource for goal-setting resources to keep yourself focused, driven, and purposeful in high school. Use this resource to create healthy habits that will set you up for success not just in high school but in college and beyond.

Find things you enjoy. It can be tempting to study or work all the time, but it's important to strike a healthy balance and make sure you do things you enjoy sometimes. Incorporate relaxing activities

into your day, like yoga or a walk. Give yourself study breaks. Plan to spend time with friends. Take up a hobby or get involved in a student organization. Make sure to plan ahead and schedule your time so that you are able to get your work done, but don't feel bad about scheduling in some fun time as well. And don't forget that quality "down time" isn't just for fun—mental breaks also help you study more effectively.

Works Consulted:

Dembo, M. H. and Seli, H. (2013). *Motivation and learning strategies for college success: A focus on self-regulated learning*. (4th ed.) New York: Taylor & Francis.

Holschuh, J. and Nist, S. (2000). *Active learning: Strategies for college success*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.

McGuire, S. Y. (2018). *Teach yourself how to learn: Strategies you can use to ace any course at any level*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

"Tips & Tools." Learning Center, learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/.