

Recipe for Success in My Courses

Folks, after talking to students who have received A's in my courses, over the years, I have found, not surprisingly, that a common strategy pursued by *all of them* is to build for themselves a “behavioral *structure*” designed to put them on a grade path toward an A. This structure comprises a *package* of key elements, listed below in no particular order. (You may also notice that one or two elements of this structure are specifically meant to positively influence me psychologically, by indicating to me their seriousness and *professionalism* in approaching my courses.)

Credit hours: Carrying no more than 15 credit hours total (most especially when one also has a part-time job).

Syllabus Packet: Carefully going through each and every one of the documents in the *entire* syllabus *packet* and becoming familiar with all essential information (including even something as mundane as the course description).

Attendance: Coming to class on time and rarely, if ever, missing a class. (If a class is missed because of a legitimate reason, then always making sure that the *missed attendance form* is completed and handed in as soon as possible.)

Class home page: Becoming thoroughly familiar with the *entire* class home page on the web by making sure that *every* link on that page is explored (regardless of whether it appears relevant or not).

Announcements: Always visiting the announcements section of the class home page on a regular basis.

Class notes: Devoting full attention to all class proceedings AND noting down *everything* that happens (but while the notes are comprehensive they do not have to be detailed) as per syllabus instructions.

E-mails: Avoiding the use of e-mails as much as possible, and instead making an effort to talk to me in person—after class and/or during office hours. (And if an e-mail is absolutely necessary making sure that the correct e-mail format—beginning with “Dear . . .” and ending with “Sincerely . . .”, as indicated in the syllabus, is followed.)

Cell phones: Switching off the cell phone and putting it away in their book bag so that there is absolutely no temptation to look at it or use it.

Classroom sitting: Always making sure of choosing a classroom seat that provides a clear view of the blackboard.

Classroom behavior: Behaving *professionally* by:

- being fully attentive when class is about to begin during that moment of silence just before the class greetings take place;
- *not* talking to fellow students when class is in session;
- *not* putting up their feet as if sitting in some lounge somewhere;
- maintaining eye-contact when I looked at them;
- *not* leaving the room in the middle of the class session;
- if on that rare occasion they came late to class, closing the room door gently and tip-toeing to the nearest available seat;
- *not* attempting to be the class-clown or making idiotic comments; and so on. (As one of them reminded me, to respect others is to respect yourself *and* those who raised you.)

Readings AND other assignments: Always staying on top of the readings/assignments by keeping up with the readings/assignments schedule (even if the class falls behind with the readings schedule). Priority in the studying the readings being given to anything written by me.

Studying: Following the best practices approach (as suggested by the latest neuroscientific findings on learning) to studying—outlined by me in class lectures—such as: (a) studying alone; (b) always studying in the same place where it is quiet with no distractions; (c) *not* engaging in self-distractions by listening to music, reading e-mails, updating social network sites, talking on the phone; and so on; (d) studying from hard copy printouts of assigned materials rather than their electronic versions; and (e) studying assigned materials at least more than once.

Course glossary: Becoming thoroughly familiar with the contents of the course glossary (that is, knowing exactly what terms/concepts are covered by the glossary should a need arise to look up these terms/concepts).

News websites: Visiting the recommended news websites on a *regular* basis.

Class participation: Never, never answering a *conceptual* question (a question designed to make you think, in contrast to a *factual* question) with the answer “I don’t know,” but instead making an effort to come up with, at the very least, an intelligent answer—even if it is incorrect.

So, now you know the secret to success in my courses. If you do not have the time and/or the discipline to attend to *all* of these elements of this *structural package* then you should be willing to pay the price: a grade much lower than an A, including the possibility of an F!