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The Dartmouth Guide to Academic Success

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Acknowledgements	3
Preface: 10 Steps to Academic Success	4
Chapter 1: Developing your Academic and Personal Goals.....	5
Chapter 2: Active Learning.....	6
Chapter 3: Time Management	8
Making a Schedule.....	9
Chapter 4: Taking Effective Notes.....	10
Listening and Notetaking	10
Cornell Notetaking System	11
Chapter 5: Reading Skills	13
The SQ3R Reading Method	13
Chapter 6: Exam Preparation	14
Chapter 7: Managing Stress	15
Understanding Stress.....	15
Managing Exam Anxiety.....	16
Chapter 8: Writing College Papers and Essays	17
Why is Writing Important?	17
Writing Essay Exams	18
Plagiarism	18
Improve your Writing Skills through practice.....	18
Chapter 9: Sleep and Exercise	19
How to Get More Sleep	19
Self-test: Does your body need more rest?	20
Chapter 10: Getting Involved	21
Course Selection	21
Getting to Know Your Professor	22
Reaching Out.....	22
Resources	22
Get Involved in co-curricular activities	23
Further Resources	24



Introduction

This Guide is for any student who wants to do well academically. Its content and format are designed to present, in an easily accessible way, how you can do well academically at Dartmouth or any college or university.

The information in the Guide is based on my over thirty years working with students at Dartmouth College (NH), Olivet College (MI), and Cornell University (NY).

Acknowledgements

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Preface: 10 Steps to Academic Success

These 10 steps provide a useful overview of how to do well academically. They also correspond to the chapters in this guide.

1. Developing your academic and personal goals.
2. Learning actively.
3. Managing your time; achieve balance.
4. Improving your listening and note taking skills.
5. Enhancing your reading skills.
6. Preparing for and taking exams.
7. Managing your stress.
8. Learning college-level writing skills.
9. Staying healthy: sleep, exercise, and nutrition.
10. Engaging the college resources and co-curricular opportunities.



Chapter 1: Developing your Academic and Personal Goals.

“Great minds have purposes; others have wishes.”

-*Washington Irving*

Successful Dartmouth students share two important characteristics: they have clear goals and they manage their time. Similarly, successful adults in the world of work share the same characteristics: clear goals and time management.

- ☐ Start by asking and answering: “Why am I at Dartmouth college and what do I want to get out of my experience here?”
- ☐ Write your specific academic and personal goals on paper. For ex-ample, learn a skill or start a job search.
- ☐ Prioritize/rank-order them.
- ☐ Link long-term and career goals with short-term, weekly, and daily goals.
- ☐ Post your goals by your mirror or desk.
- ☐ Review them every day during the term.



Chapter 2: Active Learning

“People always told me that my natural ability and good eyesight were the reasons for my success as a hitter. They never talk about the practice, practice, practice!”

-Ted Williams

What is learning?

- Learning is an active process that results in the long-term meaningful understanding of information.
- The most effective learning involves time and active engagement.

Learning is a three-step process:

1. Exposure
 - Go to class. This is key.
 - Do the reading assignment before class. At the very least, skim it. See Ch. 5 for reading strategies.
2. Understanding
 - Actively review and reduce all your class notes to key points/ideas.
 - Review (don't re-read) your readings.
 - Make summary/review sheets of the key concepts and facts, including charts and graphs.
3. Retention
 - Review/practice/rehearse the key information each week.
 - Say it out loud.
 - Do additional practice problems, especially for math and science courses
 - Make flash cards and use them to test your-self, especially for facts and vocabulary.
 - Practice and discuss class material with classmates or a tutor.

What interferes with learning?

- Lack of specific academic and personal goals
- Forgetting (Read more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Ebbinghaus)

What enhances learning?

- Having specific academic and personal goals: have a reason to learn.
- Learning the key ideas and facts: don't try to learn it all.
- Weekly practice or rehearsal
- Collaboration: review/discuss/practice the material with other students.
- Exercise, sleep, and a balanced diet.

10 Ways to Improve your Memory

1. Learn new learning skills/strategies
 - Don't rely on your high school study habits. Learn new strategies for understanding and retaining information.
2. Practice retrieving the information
 - Say it out loud. If you can't say it, you don't know it.
 - Do practice problems.
3. Link
 - Link new material with related facts/concepts from previous notes and readings; make concept maps.
 - Understand how the new material is part of a larger whole and/or on-going concept.
4. Schedule
 - Learn in scheduled "chunks" of time, spaced throughout the week.
5. Practice
 - Practice the material by saying or writing it.
 - Discuss the material with a classmate.
 - Do additional practice problems.
6. Study in the library or empty classroom, NOT in your room
7. Reduce distractions
 - Remove yourself from phones, friends, e-mail, and TV.
8. Learn from your mistakes
 - Why is it incorrect?
 - Do similar problems.
9. Become emotionally involved
 - Learn as if it really matters; look for the significance of what you're learning.
 - Involve your ego: how does it relate to you?
 - Be confident that you can remember the material.
 - Challenge your understanding with different perspectives.
10. Memory Aids
 - Mnemonics: use letters to create acronyms. Example: HOMES = names of Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior)



Chapter 3: Time Management

“One today is worth two tomorrows.”

-Benjamin Franklin

Successful Dartmouth students have clear goals and they manage their time.

Advantages of time management:

- Helps you to get more things done
- Enhances learning
- Promotes review
- Reduces procrastination
- Reduces cramming
- Manages stress

How to Maximize Your Time

- Designate specific times for specific tasks.
- Work on more difficult subjects first, when you have the most brainpower.
- Use your best time of the day to learn.
- Use waiting time (i.e. between classes, before appointments, etc) to go over notes, skim chapter headings, use flashcards, etc.
- Use the same study area place – this helps get you into the right mindset.
- Reduce or remove distractions (E-mail, TV, phone, music)
- Pay attention to attention — Are you being effective?
- Keep a time journal: Record how are you spending/wasting your time.
- Learn to say “no” when you need time for your responsibilities.

Making a Schedule

1. Make a four-year plan.
 - Courses (major requirements, distributive requirements, etc.)
 - Study Abroad
 - Internships
2. Make a term schedule.
 - Enter academic events such as exams, quizzes, and paper due dates on your calendar.
3. Plan your weekly/daily schedule.
 - Enter regularly occurring events, such as classes, labs, review time, and exercise time.
 - Schedule events in order of priority:
 - Classes, labs
 - Work, exercise
 - Extra-curricular activities
 - Wake-up, sleep, meals
 - Schedule specific and regular study times for each class.
 - Use day and early evening hours for studying.
 - Study in chunks of time: 60-90 minutes
 - Schedule review and practice times.
 - Schedule recreation and free time.
 - Schedule rewards.
 - Schedule 5-10 minutes each day for re-viewing your goals, schedules, and plans during mealtimes or before bedtime.



Chapter 4: Taking Effective Notes

“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”

-Ernest Hemingway

- Listening is important, but human beings are poor listeners.
- Listening is the weakest learning skill.
- Most students leave a lecture with only 50% immediate recall; 20-30% of that information is incorrect.

Listening and Note-taking

How to improve your listening skills:

- Be active, not passive.
- Sit up front.
- Take notes; record the information you are hearing.
- Listen as if it really mattered to you – don’t fake attention.
- Pay attention to your attention; avoid distractions. If you take notes on your computer, turn off the internet.
- Listen for speaker’s pattern of organization. How is it being presented?
- Listen objectively; reflect and analyze later.
- Use the differential between the slow speed of speech and the fast rate of thought by summarizing and developing questions.

Cornell Note-taking System

What you hear in class is often the most important information and what you will be tested on. College and university students around the world use the Cornell Note-taking System.

- Use a 3-ring binder.
- Allows you to easily combine your class notes with handouts and other print material.
- Use 8.5" X 11" paper.
- Draw a line 2.5" from the left side of the notebook paper.
- The space on the right side is where you will take your notes.
- The space on the left side is called the Recall Column.

During the lecture:

- Record
- Record in the main column as much information as you can.
- Write legibly.

Immediately after the lecture:

- Stay in your seat for one minute.
- Review the notes you just took.
- Circle/underline key terms or phrases.
- Note parts that you didn't understand.
- Ask the professor for clarification.

Later that day

- Review your notes once again.
- Put the key points and ideas in the Recall Column

Weekly

- Review all of your previous notes.
- Practice reciting the Recall Column information; if you can't say it, you don't know it.
- Note recurring themes or the development of key ideas.
- Make a summary/review sheet or information map of all your notes.
- Anticipate test questions.

Helpful Abbreviations for Note-taking

Using abbreviations instead of full words will allow you to increase the speed of your note-taking.

w/
with

w/o
without

wh/
which

ff
following

betw
between

bec
because

...
therefore

esp
especially

e.g.
for example

Develop your own abbreviations, but be consistent.



Chapter 5: Reading Skills

“To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting.”

-Edmund Burke

The SQ3R Reading Method

This method is an effective way to improve your reading comprehension and help you retain more information from your textbooks and journal articles.

1. Survey
 - Look over the entire text.
 - Note the titles, headings, and organization
 - Look over pictures, graphs and charts.
 - Read summary at end.
2. Question
 - Turn the titles, headings, and subheadings into questions. For example, “Basic Concepts of Reading” becomes “What are the Basic Concepts of Reading?”
3. Read
 - Look more closely at each section; skip the introduction.
 - Look for the answers to the questions.
 - Record the answers in the margin or on paper.
 - Reduce the text or journal article to one page of notes.
4. Review
 - Review (DON'T RE-READ) your texts weekly.
 - Combine several weeks of textbook notes into re-view sheet or concept maps.
5. Recite
 - Say out loud the answers to the key questions.
 - If you can't say it, you don't know it.



Chapter 6: Exam Preparation

“...examinations measure examinees.”

-Sir Walter Raleigh

Prepare Effectively for Tests, Quizzes, and Exams

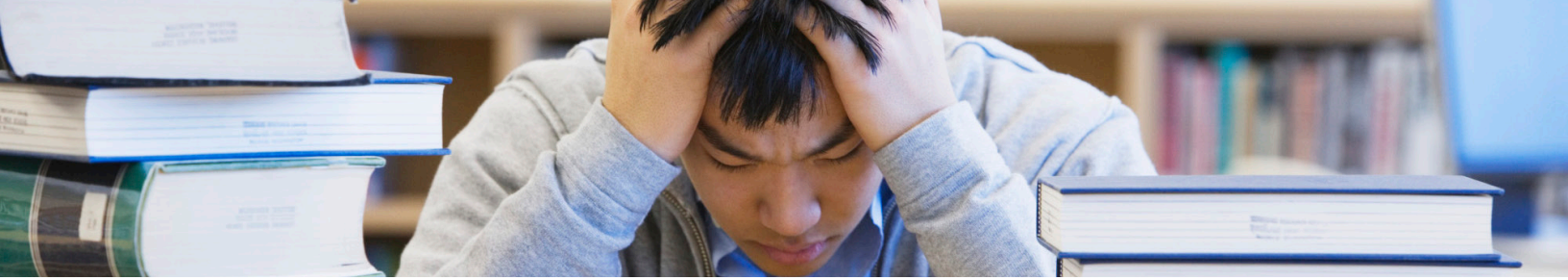
- The objective is to know concepts/ideas and facts/details/procedures.
- The best method is to LEARN the material as it's presented during the course.
- Start reviewing your notes and readings well before the test.
- Distill the information from notes and texts into summary sheets.
- Do additional practice problems for math, science, and economics.
- Anticipate essay questions and outline the answers.
- Practice the information with a study group. Use an empty classroom with a black/white board
- Attend any review sessions and use the professor's office hours
- Eat well, exercise, and get the sleep you need.

Exam Taking

- Be confident.
- Choose a good exam seat.
- Go over the entire test.
- Read and follow the directions carefully.
- Answer the easy questions first.
- Pace yourself; leave time to check your answers.

For Essay Exams

- Read all the questions first.
- Write the “easy” essays first
- Outline your answer.
- Answer the question in the first sentence or paragraph.
- Be specific — answer the question.



Chapter 7: Managing Stress

“Great minds have purposes, others have wishes.”

-Washington Irving

Understanding Stress

Stress is a combination of physiological, cognitive and emotional responses to a stressful event such as a test, performance, or competition. These responses can include increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, dry mouth, tight muscles, increased adrenaline production, slowed digestion, and negative thoughts and self-talk.

Some stress is normal and positive. It helps us prepare and get things done during the day. Increased stress helps us perform well during stressful events. However, too much stress can interfere and negatively affect performance.

3 Ways to Manage Stress

1. Attitude is important:
 - Be committed to doing your best.
 - Feel in control.
 - Meet the challenge.
2. The Relaxation Response: How to relax
 - In a quiet place, sit quietly in comfortable position.
 - Close your eyes.
 - Tighten and relax all muscle groups, beginning at feet and progressing to face.
 - Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth - concentrate on breathing.
 - As you breathe out, say “one” silently to yourself.
 - Breathe easily and naturally.
 - Continue for 10-20 minutes.
 - You may open your eyes to check time.
 - When finished, sit quietly for several minutes
 - 1-2 minutes with eyes closed
 - 1-2 minutes with eyes opened
 - Practice the technique daily.
3. Use Mental Aids to Prevent stress
 - Visualize success and positive events.
 - Daydream.
 - Praise yourself.
 - Say “stop” when you feel yourself getting anxious.
 - Practice relaxation at Dartmouth.edu/healthed/relax

Managing Exam Anxiety

Here are some specific guidelines that can help you learn more efficiently during exam time:

- Keep a regular schedule.
- Plan chunks of time to review.
- Eat healthy food at normal times every day.
- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day and get the amount of sleep you need.
- Schedule time to relax and exercise.
- Don't try to study 24/7.
- Efficient learning and the capacity to retain material rapidly decreases.
- Give yourself breaks during extended study times.
- Short and regular study periods are more productive than lengthy single sessions.
- Pay attention to your diet.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Drink lots of fluids.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine: this may produce confusion and even disorganization of thought processes.
- Don't use drugs or alcohol
- They will decrease your ability to think clearly.
- Use medication only under supervision of a physician.

If you have a significant problem (e.g. stress, illness) you believe will interfere with your exams, be sure to notify your advisor, dean, or a counselor/physician before you take your exam.



Chapter 8: Writing College Papers and Essays

“Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.”

-Joseph Pulitzer

Why is Writing Important?

Writing is an important communication skill that will help you succeed in your college education and throughout your life. You will need writing skills for papers, essay exams, job and grant applications, and in your career.

The Writing Process

Writing is learning. It involves time and an active, systematic approach.

- Start early
- Divide your writing assignment into small tasks to achieve the deadline.
- Make a schedule.
- Overestimate how much time each task will take.

The Topic

- Understand, tear apart, and discuss the topic with yourself and others.
- Narrow the topic to one point, idea, issue, or question.
- Avoid a laundry lists of facts.
- When you have your idea, gather information
- Search for supporting concepts and facts.

Outline

- Organize or structure your material in a clear, logical outline.
- Support each concept/idea with facts/examples.

Write a first draft

- Follow your outline or “free write.”
- Leave it for a day
 - It allows you to gain objectivity.

Second Draft

- Start your paper with a specific and significant point/theme.
- Present your discussion in a clear and logical way.

Final Draft

- Proofread for theme, organization, and grammar.
- Hand it in on time!

Writing Essay Exams

- Anticipate the questions.
- Make practice summary sheets.
- Look at past essays.
- Work with others to review.
- Read questions carefully. (Read all before beginning to write.)
- Write “easy” essays first.
- Outline the answer, and underline the main idea.
- Answer the question in your first sentence/paragraph.
- Be direct, specific, and concise: answer the question.

Plagiarism

DON'T DO IT!

- An “academic” crime
- Serious consequences: suspension from college?

What is it?

- “Stealing” words, ideas from another source
- Copying or paraphrasing one or more words/ideas without crediting source

How to avoid it:

- Write papers on time.
- Know the rules about quoting/citing your sources.
- Talk to professor, Composition Center

Successful writers learn the discourse of their discipline (i.e., terminology, syntax, structure & organization) and argumentation. Every academic discipline has its own style of writing. Learning that style will take time and practice. Seek out models—a good place to look might be academic journals in that area. Discuss your papers with your professors, the Composition Center, or majors in the department.

Improve your Writing Skills through practice

- Choose courses that will help you develop your writing skills.
- Write for the D, the Alumni Magazine, or student publications.
- Discuss your papers:
 - Professors
 - Composition Center
 - Classmates
 - Friends/roommates



Chapter 9: Sleep and Exercise

“The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.”

-Dr. Johnson

How does sleep affect my academics?

- Many college students are sleep deprived, regularly getting less rest than they need, resulting in:
 - Reduced learning and memory
 - Impaired motor skills
 - Reduced immunity to illness

Causes of Sleep Problems:

- Poor sleep habits
- Irregular bedtime
- Frequent naps
- Late-night activities
- Weekend sleeping-in
- Emotional stress
- Emotional stress causes 50% of chronic sleep problems.
- Early morning wake-up caused by bedtime anxiety or depression.
- Major stress can start insomnia and/or cause excessive fatigue.
- Sleep difficulties due to a single incident can linger
- Physical Illness
- Pain
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Diet and exercise
- Alcohol and caffeine
- Large meals
- Strenuous exercise near bedtime

How to Get More Sleep

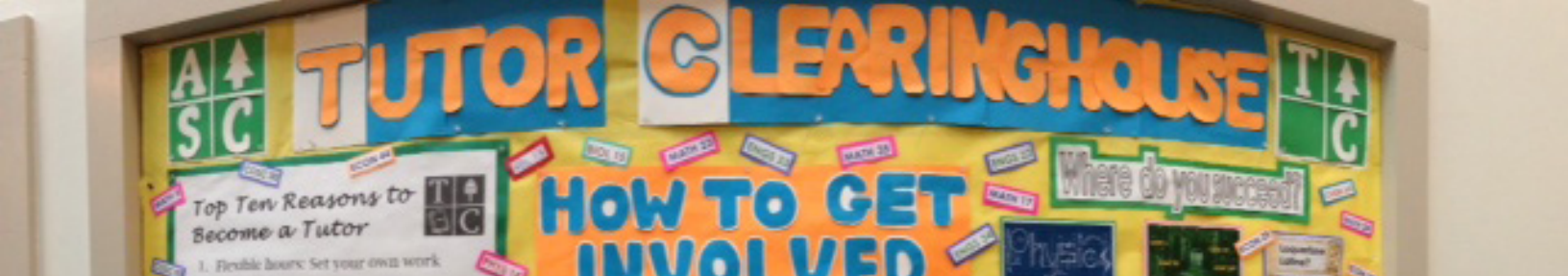
- Know and get the sleep you need.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Fine-tune your sleeping environment.
- Comfortable bed
- Reduce ambient light.
- Reduce noise.
- Adjust temperature.
- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Get up at the same time each day.

- Make your last hour before bed a daily routine.
- Deal with your worries: plan the next day/week.

Self-test: Does your body need more rest?

If one or more of the statements below are true for you, you may want to start improving your sleep habits.

- ☐ It takes you at least an hour to fall asleep.
- ☐ You can't get out of bed when the alarm sounds.
- ☐ You can't get back to bed after waking up .
- ☐ You worry about getting enough sleep.
- ☐ You use sleeping pills or alcohol to help you sleep.
- ☐ You feel exhausted from lack of sleep.
- ☐ You sleep in or take daytime naps to make up for lack of sleep.
- ☐ You get drowsy during the day or need caffeine to stay alert.



Chapter 10: Getting Involved

"Nothing is interesting if you're not interested."

-Helen MacInness

Course Selection

- Wise course selection can be a big factor in how well you do academically.
- Choose your courses carefully, especially during your first year. Course selection strategies:
 - Choose courses that interest you.
 - Vary and balance the types of courses you take.
 - Mix science, social science, and humanities courses.
 - Mix large lecture courses with smaller, class discussion courses.
 - Choose courses based on professors' reputations.
 - Pay attention to course sequence if you are interested in science, engineering, and other more structured majors. Speak to a faculty advisor in those departments.

Becoming a successful Dartmouth student also includes making valuable connections. Your professors are more than lecturers—they have real world experience and are generally interested in getting to know students. You may at first think they seem unapproachable, but don't underestimate their willingness to help.

Office Hours

A great way to get to know your professor is at office hours. These are specific times when you can meet with your professors and teaching assistants to discuss class material or other subject-related interests you may have. Although going to office hours is not required, professors at Dartmouth will enjoy engaging with you and responding to your questions.

Making the Most of Office Hours

- Make an appointment—Your professor will most likely post availabilities on a syllabus or blackboard, but it can be not only polite, but helpful to make an appointment for a specific time in case of last minute schedule changes.
- COME PREPARED—don't enter office hours expecting the professor to do the heavy lifting for you. Just showing up is not enough. Review your notes and make a list of questions in advance. This can be especially helpful if you're nervous about speaking with your professor.
- Ask quality questions—your questions should be thoughtful, and preferably not those which you could find the answer to on your own. Bring attention to areas of confusion by being specific. "I am having trouble understanding the concept of [x]" is far better than just, "I need help."

- Build a relationship—You don't have to wait for a problem to arise to get in touch with your professor. Throughout the course, take the time and effort to visit with questions and conversation; show him or her that you are eager to make a valuable connection.

Getting to Know Your Professor

Part of becoming academically successful as a Dartmouth student means knowing not only your strengths, but weaknesses as well. At Dartmouth, staff and faculty is ready to help you.

- Tutor Clearinghouse
- Works within the Academic Skills Center
- Provides access to individual peer tutoring or study groups
- First-Year Advisor
- Each student is assigned a first-year advisor at the beginning of their freshman year. Don't let their services go unutilized.
- The advisor helps first-year students make the transition to the D-Plan understandable.
- Help students plan their schedules
- Undergraduate Dean
- Acts as an advisor, and can help you with issues from selecting your classes to navigating academic policies and procedure.
- Works with you from arrival on campus until graduation.
- Discuss not only academics, but personal issues as well.
- Provides you with information about college re-sources and makes referrals as needed.

Reaching Out

Resources

Undergraduate Deans

- Good starting point for anything.
- Personal issues, trouble with a professor, trouble with other campus authorities. Your dean's got your back.

Academic Skills Center

- Learning skills
- Anything related to better studying, learning, and succeeding academically
- Possibly tutoring

Career Services

- How to find a job or internship
- Interview, resume, cover letter help
- What careers would suit you

Writing Center

- How to get started on papers
- Research tips
- Paper feedback



Faculty/major/pre-graduate Advisors

- What classes you need to or should take
- Career and research advice
- Pre-med/vet/dental/law advising

Community Service Office

- How to get involved
- Volunteer activities that fit your interests

Get Involved in co-curricular activities

Dartmouth offers the following, and more. Try picking a couple ways to get involved on campus, but don't overload yourself. You can add more activities to your schedule later, but you don't want to over-commit yourself initially.

- Varsity Athletics
- Club Athletics
- Intramural Athletics
- School Government
- Global Health groups
- Community Service groups
- Mentoring programs
- Tutoring programs
- Political groups
- Dance teams
- Singing groups
- Instrumental groups
- Theater groups
- Greek houses

Etc...

Further Resources

Cornell University Learning Strategies Center: <http://lsc.sas.cornell.edu/>

Dartmouth College Academic Skills Center Resources Page: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/index.html>

Duke Academic Resource Center: http://web.duke.edu/arc/academic_skills/index.php

Middlebury College Learning Resources Page: <http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/ctrl/olr>

Stanford University Academic Skills Resources Page: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/cgi-bin/drupal_ual/ARS_help_academic_AcademicCoaching.html#StudyTips

University of Pennsylvania Office of Learning Resources Page: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/lr/?PHPSESSID=267a45d61111b34cd65b40342f08aee6>