

Discipline-independent techniques

1. Be active in class. Passivity is the enemy of learning. Take notes – not every word that the professor utters, but key points and strategies. If the professor provides notes or posts them online, make them your own. Annotate. Highlight important points. Comment on something that was new to you. Work out examples. Summarize. The more engaged you are during the class, the more you'll take away from it.
2. Learn to work well with a group. When surveyed, employers at the GCC Career Fair uniformly mentioned two attributes they look for, independent of discipline: out-of-the-classroom independent experience (like research or internships), and the ability to work well in groups of diverse backgrounds. This is borne out by research: “[Ochs, Jacoby, and Gonzalez] studied the activities of a physics laboratory research group whose members included a senior physicist, a postdoctoral researcher, technical staff, and predoctoral students. They found that workers’ contributions to the laboratory depended significantly on their participatory skills in a collaborative setting – being able to formulate and understand questions and problems, develop arguments, and contribute to the construction of shared meanings and conclusions.” - *Knowing What Students Know*, p. 88. So, ...
 - Find a study group and participate.
 - Be an active member of any collaborative learning team, such as a lab group or project group. Take ownership of what your group turns in.
 - If you're a stronger member of a group, be sure you're explaining material to increase the understanding of your peers. You'll find your own understanding strengthening as you seek to put in words what makes intuitive sense to you. If you're a weaker member, ask questions and repeat others' ideas in your own words to make sure you understand. The goal should be increased understanding of all members, not merely “completion” (in the sense of writing of answers) of an assignment.
3. Take advantage of office hours. The huge number of office hours is a big perk of GCC. If you regularly stop by to clarify a point or two from that week's classes, you won't be trying to figure it all out right before the exam. But if you're coming for help with homework, be sure you've started the assignment and have at least written down thoughts about the problem that is stumping you. (e.g., pictures, what goal is, what you know, ...)
4. If a professor requires or even suggests a specific protocol, follow it!!! These protocols are based on lots of experience with lots of students, and they generally have been developed to serve a particular purpose with the goal of increased student development. If you don't see the point, ask the professor in office hours to explain his or her reasoning, rather than just assuming it's useless.
5. Read the syllabus. Every professor has different requirements, and these should be outlined in the syllabus. Don't assume that what works in one class works in another.
6. Take pride in your work. Don't turn in a paper without using spell-check and re-reading for grammar mistakes. Make sure problem sets are easy to follow. This makes it easier to use your returned work as review also.
7. Read assigned material before the class period in which it is discussed. This means more than having your eyes skim over every page. Read with pencil in hand – take notes, work out missing steps, mark sections that don't make sense after multiple readings, and prepare to ask professor about that material.

8. Use good time management on exams. Avoid getting bogged down on a single question. Make sure you know your professor's partial credit policy. If partial credit is given, make sure you at least address each question, since partial credit can't be given for empty blanks.