

Audit of College Success Traits

The following exercise focuses on 12 traits found to correlate with college success. The purpose of this exercise is not to provide an indelible “score” for each trait. Instead, it is designed to get you thinking about each trait in light of skills you need to succeed in college. Where you are today on the scale for each attribute is less important than where you will be when you head off to college.

Please read the full description of each trait and then indicate your level of satisfaction with how well you’ve incorporated this trait in your life. For example, consider Success Trait 1: Time Management. After reading the section, take a moment to think about yourself as a time manager. If you are a good time manager, you will select one of the options on the left side of the scale. If this is an area that you’d like to improve before or as you enter college, then choose one of the options on the right side of the scale. Note that each trait consists of several related components. Time management, for example, includes your ability to prioritize your time, plan ahead for assignments, and be a self-starter. You may consider yourself better in one area and weaker in another. Your task is to think of all of these components and assess how satisfied you are with your current time management traits.

There are no right or wrong responses here. Look on this as an opportunity for you to evaluate your current strengths and weaknesses and identify what traits you could work on as part of your preparation for success in college.

College Success Trait #1: Time Management

Your college experience is likely to be packed with courses, lectures, papers, maybe a part-time job on or off campus, as well as a full social life. With so much to do and so many opportunities to explore, time management is essential. In contrast to high school, where your teachers may have regularly checked in with students, in college you will not be guided in what study to do each week. Typically, there is no set of homework assignments. No one will remind you about the paper you should be researching or the course review you wanted to take. As a college student, you will be responsible for juggling all the different aspects of your life. With your education your top priority, it’s crucial to devise a schedule to set specific times where you are away from other distractions and able to concentrate on studying.

Students with good time management skills have assignments that are complete, accurate, and carefully written. They do the assigned readings for their classes, and their attention to detail in the work they submit is a clear indicator of the value they place on their educational activities. They are likely to stay engaged in their studies and focused on the possible career paths ahead.

How do you envision success in college? Does success in college mean passing classes? Does it mean doing well enough to get a good job or be accepted at a great graduate school? Does it mean being a top student? You are the only who can define what success in college means to you. Whatever goals you choose to set for yourself, your path to achieving them is through good time management.

As you assess your time management abilities, consider some of these hallmarks of good time management and how many you currently practice: prioritizing time; focusing on most important tasks first; preparing a weekly schedule that includes class time, studying, activities, email, work, meals, social media time, video games, time with friends, etc.; keeping a study timetable detailing goals to achieve and target dates for reaching them; maintaining a constant, consistent, and unwavering work effort; allotting the time necessary to complete assignments without prodding; being punctual and dependable; being a self-starter; targeting clear outcomes; and planning ahead for papers and exams.

Here's how I assess my time management:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #2: Study Skills

Every student who has graduated from high school student has learned a way to study. But some study methods are more effective than others.. Study skills here refer to academic abilities such as reading speed and comprehension, writing, note-taking, calculating, speaking, researching, and listening—all of which will be put to good use in your college classes. Knowing how to read efficiently, understand what you've read, take notes in class, use the library, and answer multiple-choice tests are all areas that will help you be more successful in the classroom. Students with solid study skills can also express ideas clearly, listen attentively, write clearly, and be thorough.

Good note-taking is an essential study skill because it enables you to identify and retain essential information from your college classes much more efficiently. Keep your notes in good order and review them to ensure they make sense and are easily accessible. They will be one of your greatest assets as you study for weekly quizzes and prepare for midterm and final examinations.

Here's how I assess my study skills:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #3: Motivation

Motivation or drive to succeed is the most important skill you bring to college. According to studies, academic success in college correlates not with your SAT scores or high school grades but with your level of motivation. Students who are driven to succeed do succeed. Some students go to college for the fun aspects, forgetting that college is primarily an academic experience. Motivated students are clear that they are in college to learn and grow intellectually.

Motivation includes many variables—personal drive to improve and achieve; commitment to goals; initiative; readiness to act on opportunities; and optimism and resilience. When you are motivated, you are

able to sustain your attention even in subjects that may seem unimportant or are unrelated to your major. Not every college course will directly relate to your future career but with motivation, you should be able to find relevance in the work you are doing.

To be successful in college, you must be motivated toward your success and have confidence in yourself; you need to believe that success is possible if you make the effort. Motivation must come from within you; it must be intrinsic or self-directed. It's true that external motivators will impact your college career, but you are much more likely to succeed when your motivation comes from within. If you are self-motivated, you attend class because it helps you learn and meet your goals, not because the instructor takes attendance. You are diligent in your studies because you are driven to take advantage of all your professors and courses have to offer. You have a plan to succeed.

Here's how I assess my motivation:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #4: Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is your ability to represent your views or interests and to recognize and speak up when you need help or support. In high school, you may have had counselors, teachers or even parents ready to step in, suggest resources, and help you resolve issues. Although you may have an advisor in college, in many situations, it's up to you to figure out how to advocate for what you need.

Being a good self-advocate means you can recognize when it's time to ask for assistance academically, socially, and personally. You are able to speak up for yourself and communicate your strengths, needs, and wishes. As a self-advocate, you take responsibility for yourself, you know your rights, and you know where to get help or who to go to with a question. You are able to communicate your needs and desires straightforwardly and without whining or anger.

The first step in self-advocacy is to determine and define your needs, strengths, and potential challenges. What stands in the way of your achieving the goals you have set for yourself? What tools and resources do you need to overcome these obstacles? The second step is to figure out how to get what you need. You know what it is you want to accomplish, and you have a sense of what you need to make it happen. Colleges have many resources—guidance offices, academic advisors, health services—that you can turn to but you must take the first step. If you are having a problem with a class, you need to feel comfortable going to see the professor. If you have roommate problems, you will have to find the proper housing official to help you resolve the matter. If you are struggling with depression, you must be willing to seek the counseling assistance you need to feel better.

The college years are a time for learning new information, new life skills, and a new way of relating with our world. Remember that seeking help when you need it is a sign of strength and integrity, not an admission of failure.

Here's how I assess my self-advocacy:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #5: Wellness Skills

Wellness skills are the actions you do to take care of your body, your emotions, and your mental health. Taking care of yourself may be even more crucial in college than in other phases of life. You're in a new environment with new challenges and a new social life. College students may sometimes feel they are invincible, but coping with unfamiliar challenges takes a toll on your physical and mental health. Stress is just as much physical as it is emotional.

Wellness means giving your body resources to manage stress and reduce the toll of emotions like anxiety or depression. Adequate sleep and a good diet can improve your mood, your athletic and classroom performance, and your ability to cope with stress. Exercise, relaxation, and good hygiene are other important aspects of self-care.

Wellness skills can include surrounding yourself with friends who support you and help you be your best self. Students with good wellness skills make smart choices, embrace low-risk options, and plan for the "what ifs" in life. They have impulse control, they play it safe, and they avoid risky behaviors.

Success in college means making the right decisions in and out of class. These decisions ultimately affect every aspect of your life—your discretionary time, study habits, predisposition to cheat, ability to take on part-time work, and success in dealing with setbacks and stress.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of wellness skills:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #6: Adaptability

Life is all about change. Some people go through transition periods with great ease while others find them more difficult. You may have already experienced some of these transitions as you moved from middle school to high school or relocated from one city to another. You may have had to deal with changes that are much harder to adapt to, such as parents divorcing or even the illness or death of a relative.

College almost always comes with big changes in everything from location, class size, and living situation to eating habits, sleep patterns, and circle of friends. Almost everyone experiences some fear and apprehension on leaving for college, but some people have more and others less skill at dealing with change. In other words, some of us are more adaptable than others.

Some time during your college years, you will be disappointed, discouraged, or maybe even derailed from your career path. How will you handle small and large setbacks such as not getting into a class you wanted to take, dealing with a troublesome roommate, or determining how to pay next year's of college tuition? Will you fall into a funk or hide from the problem using unhealthy coping strategies such as bingeing on food, alcohol, or social media?

Adaptable people can successfully navigate from the controlled environment of high school to the wide-open world of college. Have you met people who never seem to get sidetracked by difficulties that would bring most folks to a screeching halt? No matter what chaos the world throws at them in their career or personal life, they adapt accordingly and build a solution with the pieces they have left.

Adaptability can be found in both attitude and action. Adaptable people learn from their mistakes rather than lament them. They ask questions, seek out mentors, and respond to obstacles by coming up with diverse and creative ways to overcome them. Adaptable people plan. They know that everyone experiences setbacks in life so they're accustomed to coming up with ideas or alternatives to try.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of adaptability:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #7: Even-Temperedness

Even-tempered people are calm, steady, and in control of their emotions. They tend to be skilled at managing relationships, resolving conflicts, and finding ways to collaborate with others. They keep things in perspective, roll with the punches, and accept change as a part of life.

Students who are even-tempered are typically adept at handling stress, boredom, anxiety, or disappointment. They tend to have better relationships with teachers and peers, which has a positive effect on their academic performance and their college experience. If a specific goal or ideal becomes unattainable due an adverse situation or unforeseen event, even-tempered students accept circumstances that cannot be changed and focus on actions that they can take. They usually maintain a hopeful outlook, and their optimism empowers them to expect that good things will happen to them.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of even-temperedness:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #8: Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness is the ability to make do with what you have, see possibilities that others might not see, and anticipate the challenges you encounter in college. In a time saturated with quick fixes and easy solutions, resourceful folks stand out for their willingness to look beyond the facile or expected option. People with resourceful friends are often in awe of their problem-solving skills, not realizing that with practice they could strengthen their own resourcefulness.

Being resourceful means knowing how to solve problems. It includes the ability to take in the big picture or many sides of a problem, the tenacity to not give up when issues get complicated, and the maturity to learn from mistakes made along the way. There are three key parts to successful problem-solving:

- Understand or define the problem.
- Devise a plan to resolve the problem.
- Carry out the plan to resolve the problem.

Resourceful students are information gatherers. They seek answers to a problem or people who have information they can use to find a solution. Confronted by a research paper that needs writing, resourceful students track down appropriate books, websites, and other resources. They use search engines like Google quickly and successfully. A college campus offers countless resources such as academic advising; counseling/ personal guidance; financial aid and scholarship info; tutoring; library services; health center; career and employment services; accessibility/disability resources; multicultural centers; clubs, activities, and sports offices; services for specific student groups; information technology services; and, of course, faculty office hours. Resourceful students take the time to learn about these supports and utilize them. They prove the adage “Success is not about your resources. It’s about how resourceful you are with what you have.”

Here’s how I assess myself on the trait of resourcefulness:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #9: Social Fluency

College is a social experience, both inside and outside the lecture hall. Interacting with others on campus is essential to getting the most out of your college experience. Socially fluent students are good at meeting people and establishing friendships. They are sensitive and caring and find it easy to develop rapport with faculty members and other students. Socially fluent students get out of their college dorm rooms! They join organizations, do volunteer work, participate in sports, and try out for plays.

On a college campus, students are often called upon to work in groups where teamwork and collaboration are required. Residence halls, clubs, and other groups are essentially communities of individuals who come and go. Socially fluent students are able to successfully navigate these sometimes turbulent social waters. Although they can work productively in a group, they are also able to confront someone when necessary. They are often skilled listeners, negotiators, mediators, and motivators.

Socially fluent people find mentors in college—a professor, coach, dean, upper-class student, or even an off-campus employer. In high school, your teachers are expected to look out for you and lend a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on when you need it. While you don’t need this support any less in college, you should assume that the burden of finding the support lies with you. It’s up to you to take the initiative and find individuals who can give you support and advice, as well as a kick in the pants when you need it!

Introducing yourself to faculty members and getting to know them is always a good idea. You never know when you’ll have questions about assignments, tests, or course material. When you are more than just a name on the roster, professors are better able to provide you with guidance about your major or future career or write recommendation letters for a job or graduate school.

An essential part of social fluency is networking. Students who network well are open to making new friends and building relationships and can communicate effectively with other students, faculty, and administrators. Research shows that when students connect to peers or mentors, they tend to stick to their commitments and follow through. Often the students who fail to graduate or are unsuccessful in college are those who have not taken the time to engage with others outside of class or were reluctant to explore activities involving new people. When these students get stuck or encounter obstacles, they lack a support system made up of friends, teachers, coaches, and counselors. There is no one to hold them accountable or urge them to keep going.

Here’s how I assess myself on the trait of social fluency:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #10: Intercultural/Interracial/Global Curiosity

In today’s higher education, diversity is more than just a buzzword. Universities worldwide are pushing for more diverse student bodies and faculties and are creating programs to encourage more people from underrepresented groups to enter higher learning. A diverse student body and faculty can open the door to broader and more rigorous discussions, and ultimately, lead to better and more robust ideas.

Most large universities are already diverse spaces. Students are of different ages, different races and religions, different sexual orientation, and different educational backgrounds. They come from different socioeconomic groups and geographic areas—cities, rural areas—and even from different nations. With all this diversity, colleges and universities offer you a unique opportunity to learn from and about other people.

In order to learn from these differences, however, you need to be curious and open to listening to the opinions and beliefs of others, even when these opinions and beliefs differ from yours. The more curious you are, the more you will want to examine assumptions, correct misunderstandings, acknowledge history and context, display inclusivity, navigate cultural norms tactfully, and even confront prejudice and discrimination.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of intercultural/interracial/global curiosity:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #11: Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings, opinions, beliefs, and needs directly, openly, and honestly while not violating the personal rights of others. When properly conducted, assertive communication can lead to respectful dialogue. Assertiveness skills are helpful in roommate communication, study groups, teams, and conflict resolution. Successful college students are assertive. They speak up for themselves and for other people; they speak out when someone tries to take advantage of them or others.

An assertive person does not need to be domineering, aggressive, or overbearing. Assertiveness does not call for yelling, demanding, name-calling, or putting down others. Any of those scenarios are likely to end with the other person feeling disrespected, attacked, and defensive. On the other hand, not sharing your feelings may be interpreted as “passive” or non-assertive. The other person may feel excluded from both the opportunity to understand your feelings and respond to your concerns. Assertive communication by all involved parties is the preferred approach for successful communication.

In any situation calling for assertiveness on your part, you want to be transparent, honest, and open about your feelings, opinions, and needs. Do not let your friends, classmates, or others impose or force their behaviors, values, and ideas on you. Let them know where you stand, what you think, how you feel, and what you want. You are always allowed to say no to unreasonable requests. Use the word “no” and explain why only if you choose.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of assertiveness

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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College Success Trait #12: Resiliency

College life includes peaks and valleys, occasions of great joy as well as setbacks and disappointments. Individuals with resiliency have a mental reservoir of strength that can carry them through troubled times.

Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress, family and relationship problems, health issues, or other stressors. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from difficult experiences, it can also lead to major personal growth. While adverse events can be painful and difficult, they don't have to determine the outcome of

your college career. In most aspects of your college life, you can control, modify, and grow with defeat. Being more resilient not only helps you get through challenging circumstances but also empowers you to grow and even improve your life.

Resilient people also tend to communicate well, hold favorable views of themselves and their abilities, possess the capacity to make realistic plans and stick to them, and see themselves as fighters rather than victims.

Here's how I assess myself on the trait of resiliency:

completely satisfied	very satisfied	moderately satisfied	slightly satisfied	not satisfied	I have no preference
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