

# The Successful Student

---

Economics is a powerful analytical tool that can be used to understand almost every aspect of human behavior. Unfortunately, many students deny themselves this powerful way of thinking because they find their economics courses to be unnecessarily difficult. It has been my experience that this is not due to the nature of the subject, but rather to the fact that many of you enter the class without being taught how to *acquire knowledge*.

It is my belief that economics is really a simple science that is based on a relatively small number of fundamental principles which are easily learned once a student develops some simple, effective habits. Of course I can't guarantee you an A if you follow the suggestions below. However, I honestly believe that they can help you to become a more effective student of economics and make your experience in the class more enjoyable. If you learn to study more *efficiently* and you like the course you're taking, then better grades will come naturally.

## ***Attend every class lecture and discussion session.***

This is probably obvious advice, but I want to give you a couple of reasons *why* attendance is so important. First, economics teaches us that resources are scarce. This is especially true of time. By attending class, you'll find out what I spend scarce class time covering, and therefore what I feel is the most important material. This material will definitely show up on exams! Thus, you can study more efficiently by spending time on the most important course material.

Second, and most important, the classroom and discussion sections are the places to ask questions. Many students seem to come to class and discussion section with the idea that they are to sit there and passively write down lecture material. If this is your attitude, GET OVER IT!!! Come to class prepared to ask (and answer) questions about the material. Getting answers to questions right away will save a lot of time and frustration later on when you are trying to prepare for an exam.

## ***Take a good set of notes.***

A good set of notes is one of the most important assets you can acquire for this course. As I pointed out above, what I cover in the lecture will certainly show up on the exams. Not only that, the material will be covered differently in class than in the book (I assume you can read the book). I think it's important to give students novel applications and different perspectives in lectures, so you have a greater opportunity to learn the material.

Further, economics is very "cumulative" in nature. This means that concepts covered in class during one lecture will be used throughout the semester. Any "gaps" in your notes may make it difficult to learn new concepts as the class progresses. Find someone in the class that you can get notes from in the event you have to miss a class.

## ***Read the book.***

Again, I hope this is obvious advice. The trick to reading a book is not to read it over and over, but to read it *effectively*. There have literally been books written on how to read a book, so I'm just going to give you a few ideas that I find useful:

*Read the relevant chapters in the book before we cover the material in class.* If you have any questions about the reading, make notes in the margin of the book, then review these questions prior to the lecture. By doing this, you will be able to look for answers to these questions during the lecture.

*"Skim" the chapter before reading it for comprehension.* This will allow you to get the "big picture" of the material in the chapter.

*Turn the chapter headings into questions.* As you read the sections, find the answers to the questions you made from the chapter headings and write them in the margin of your book.

*Underline the key point of a paragraph.* By underlining only the key point, you avoid excessive underlining (or highlighting), which will save you time when you review the text.

*Use the Key Terms and Review Questions at the end of each chapter.* Again, this will help to reinforce the most important ideas in the chapter.

Remember that the book is *yours*. Write in it. Underline in it. Own it!

## ***Deal with the graphs.***

Graphs seem to be the hardest thing for new students of economics to come to grips with. Remember that graphs are designed to make the material easier, not harder! The best way to deal with the graphs is to draw (or redraw) all of the graphs from the lectures and the text. When redrawing the graphs, pay particular attention to the following:

*What is on each axis of the graph?* Be sure you know what variables are being related on the graph. Never draw a graph without labeling the axes! If you do, you are missing the entire point of graphing a relationship.

*Which way does the curve slope?* The direction of the slope of the curve shows us whether the variables on the axis are *positively* or *negatively* related.

*Why is the curve shaped the way it is?* Is the relationship being shown linear, or does the graph "curve"? If it's curved, be sure you can explain the economic significance of the shape.

*Do any lines of the graph cross?* If they do, be sure that you know the economic significance of those points of intersection.

### ***Use the textbook Web site.***

The textbook Web site is an excellent source for "practice" test questions. It can be found at <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/econ/hat6/welcome.htm>. Work through the interactive quizzes as we cover the material in class.

### ***Review often.***

The best way to retain information is to be exposed to it consistently. "Cramming" is actually counter-productive in that you won't retain the material and you will have to learn it again as the semester progresses. This is particularly important if you only have the class once a week, when some students have the habit of only seeing the material on the night of the class!

### ***Ask questions.***

Ideally, the classroom and discussion sections are the places where all questions should be asked and answered. That way, all students can benefit from each others' questions (and answers).

### ***Accept the responsibility to try to learn.***

As the professor, I can only commit to being as clear and as fair as possible. The ultimate responsibility for learning the material is yours. Take it. When you complete the course with the grade you want, the success is *yours*, not mine.