



# Keys to Success

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Intelligence, ambition, and hard work can carry you far, but true success depends on other factors that aren't so measurable. Your life in general and your college experience, in particular, will be richer if you

- Maintain a positive attitude
- Develop high self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Set goals and make plans for attaining them
- Know how to contribute to and get the most out of teamwork
- Explore and celebrate the diversity around you

And, coincidentally, this chapter will cover all those topics!

## Attitude

What is credited with delaying aging and has (practically) its own section in the book store? That's right: A positive attitude. It's not measured on any report card, but it's one of the most important attributes a college student can possess. Your attitude towards your classes, living situation, peers, and yourself may be even more influential to your success and happiness than your skills, talents, and knowledge. And if you don't already tend to have a positive attitude there's good news: you can learn to develop a habit of positive thinking. In this section, we'll

- define a positive attitude
- share how to create and maintain a positive attitude

### What is a Positive Attitude?

It's difficult to pinpoint just what separates those with positive attitudes from those without, but there are some traits closely associated with positive attitudes:

**Optimism** - Positive people tend to have hope and to see the good in a situation.

**Persistence** - Positive people believe problems can be resolved and puzzles can be solved. Their hope leads them to persist, to not give up.

**Enthusiasm and energy** - Positive people exhibit enthusiasm in day-to-day life.

**Curiosity** - Positive people are curious about the world and are driven by the desire to learn.

**Creativity** - Positive people are able to shift perspectives and consider problems and ideas from new angles.

**Confidence** - Positive people have high self-esteem and are confident in their abilities.

**Resourcefulness** - Positive people work to find a solution when they encounter a problem.

**Vision** - Positive people envision possibilities and see the best in things—and people.

**Sense of Purpose** - Positive people believe they have a purpose in life and act on that assumption.

**Strong relationships** - Positive people cultivate good relationships with family, friends, and neighbors.

## **10 Steps to a Positive Attitude**

Learning to create and maintain a positive attitude will help you enjoy college and get more out of it.

### **1. Give yourself a dose of perspective.**

You got a bad grade on a test, you argued with your roommate, and your student loan check has been held up. It's difficult to be positive when things pile up like this. But putting things into perspective can keep you emotionally afloat. Try viewing your situation from another angle: What did you do right? What will you learn from the experience? How could it be worse? What will these problems look like when you reflect back on them a year from now? How about five years from now?

### **2. Be confident.**

Believe in yourself and your abilities. For example, if you got a bad grade on a test, have confidence that you will work hard to figure out how to do better.

### **3. Surround yourself with positive people.**

Seek out interesting, enthusiastic people. Reconsider relationships you have with people who thrive on negativity and bring you down.

### **4. Don't dwell.**

Yes, you want to reflect on your actions, accomplishments, and mistakes. But use that self-reflection to move forward. Too much attention on the past can result

in what one of our friends aptly calls “Analysis Paralysis.”

### **5. Get busy.**

It’s hard to dwell on the negative when you are involved in activities you enjoy, like sports, clubs, or volunteering.

### **6. Plan.**

Plan things you can look forward to and work toward.

### **7. Learn from mistakes.**

We’ll let Winston Churchill take this one: “All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn from their mistakes.” ‘Nuff said.

### **8. Be flexible.**

There’s only so much you can control, and some of the most interesting and inspiring moments will come when you haven’t planned on them.

### **9. Communicate positively.**

You’ve seen the signs: “See something? Say something!” OK, in one context it’s an anti-terrorism slogan. But in another context it can be an affirming reminder to celebrate the positive. See something cool? Say it’s cool. Compliment, thank, and congratulate people in your life.

### **10. Make a commitment and follow through.**

Few things are as gratifying as reaching a goal you have worked hard to achieve. Set short-term and long-term goals, commit to them, and celebrate your accomplishments.

## **Maintain Your Positive Attitude**

Positive thinking is a habit that needs to be cultivated and supported. Different people have different requirements for maintaining a positive outlook, but we can boil the specifics down to three general tips that might have echoes from Kindergarten:

**Be nice to yourself.** Everything is going to look pretty dim pretty fast if you are exhausted, starving, and stressed out. Treat yourself well: eat healthily, get enough sleep, and pace yourself.

**Be nice to others.** Show interest in others by listening, asking questions, and paying attention. Express gratitude and praise when it’s appropriate. Help out a friend who’s struggling.

Look for good. Attend each lecture or activity with an eye toward the positive. Look for at least one good thing about each class period or event.

## **Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy**

In this section we’ll talk about two factors critical to success and happiness: self-esteem and self-efficacy. Don’t worry! We won’t suggest you paste up sticky-notes with happy messages to yourself all over your apartment. If you want to do that, great, but our mission here is simply to define self-esteem and self-efficacy,

discuss their importance in one's life in college and beyond, and provide tips for developing them.

## Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the pride and respect one has for oneself. If you hold someone in high esteem, you value and respect them. If you hold *yourself* in high esteem, you value and respect yourself. High self-esteem is not cockiness; in fact, most people with high self-esteem do not brag or flaunt their stuff because they don't rely on extrinsic validation. People with high self-esteem tend to value and respect others.

Self-esteem is reflected in the way you

- talk to yourself
- think about yourself and others
- meet a challenge
- respond to criticism
- face adversity

The inner monologue reveals how a person sees him or herself. A person who dwells on his or her weaknesses and failures—and, by contrast, everyone else's strengths and successes—will tell him or herself disrespectful “truths”:

Low Self-Esteem Statements	High Self-Esteem Statements
<i>Everyone else is better at this than I am.</i>	<i>I can do this!</i>
<i>I'm worthless.</i>	<i>I accept and like myself.</i>
<i>I messed up again! That's just like me.</i>	<i>I made a mistake.</i>

By making yourself aware of your own inner monologue, you can adjust it to be kinder, more forgiving, and more celebratory.

Self-esteem also affects how you respond to criticism and setbacks. Someone with low self-esteem will perceive criticism as a direct attack or proof that his low opinion of himself is well-founded. If he experiences a setback, he will give up. By contrast, a person with high self-esteem will be much more persistent and less likely to see criticism as a personal affront.

Your self-esteem will affect your academic life, so it's a good idea to reflect on your perceptions of yourself and to make sure they will have a positive influence.

The National Association for Self-Esteem has a tool on its website that allows visitors to answer a series of questions and rate their self-esteem.

<http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/rate.php>

*It is of practical value  
to learn to like yourself.  
Since you must spend so  
much time with yourself  
you might as well get some  
satisfaction out of the  
relationship.*

**Norman Vincent Peale,  
American author**

## The Self-Esteem Workout

Here are some exercises you can do on a regular basis to bolster your self-esteem:

**Don't compare.** Value yourself, value others, and don't waste time measuring the differences.

**Don't dwell.** Move on from past mistakes and embarrassments. If you find yourself dwelling on something, get busy or get help.

**Be accountable.** Taking responsibility for your own actions will help you respect yourself more.

**Develop diverse interests.** Imagine a three-year-old at a playground. There's no "I won't go on the slide, I'm not really good at slides, I'll just stick to sitting in these wood chips"! Now imagine yourself 30 years from now: What activity or interest will you be proud of yourself for trying? Will you care if you weren't perfect at it?

**Compliment others.** Recognizing others for their successes is great practice for recognizing your own.

**Take risks.** When you take a risk and succeed you've just amped up your willingness to take another, bigger risk. When you take a risk and you fail you can congratulate yourself for being the type of person who takes risks.

**Give yourself credit—and rewards.** Remind yourself of your successes, talents, and good qualities.

**Be grateful.** Divert negative thoughts away by reflecting on the things for which you are grateful.

**Take care of yourself.** If you value yourself, you value your health. When you feel healthy, you're more likely to feel good about your overall well-being.

### Self-Efficacy

Remember the Little Engine That Could? "I think I can, I think I can," he chugged all the way up the mountain. That's perceived self-efficacy, but for some reason the title "The Little Engine with Perceived Self-Efficacy" never caught on.

First, let's clear up how self-efficacy differs from our previous topic, self-esteem. Let's consider our Little Engine again. If he were to tell himself "I'm a good engine! I respect myself! I have value!" he would be expressing positive self-esteem. When he believes that he can accomplish a task ("I think I can!") he is expressing a positive perception of his capability.

Albert Bandura, the influential Stanford psychologist, defines **perceived self-efficacy** as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave.” A person with high perceived self-efficacy believes she or he is very capable of performing well and can influence her or his own life.

What is your perceived self-efficacy? Do you believe you are capable? Do you believe you have influence over your life?

It depends, right? Most of us, if challenged to grow three feet taller or to become invisible or to be the next NBA superstar by Wednesday, would have low self-efficacy. We would doubt our capabilities to accomplish those goals because they are impossible or next to impossible. We would feel frustrated or apathetic, think “I can’t. No way!” We would be completely unmotivated and behave accordingly.

If, on the other hand, we were challenged to learn to snowboard, or paint with watercolors, or make a birdhouse, most of us would have significantly higher perceived self-efficacy. Some students enter college with a strong sense of their capabilities, and others need to develop theirs. In order to understand your own perception of self-efficacy, consider the influences on it:

**Success and failure.** If you try something and succeed, you’ll be more likely to think you can do it again or do the next step in the process. Bandura terms these “mastery experiences.” Think about your first time at bat in a baseball game or the first time you completed a set of fractions: how did those mastery experiences influence your next attempt? Failure can influence a person as well. When you have a strong sense of efficacy, though, you tend to see failure as temporary and it challenges you to redouble your efforts. The author J.K. Rowling, for example, received multiple rejections before a publishing house took a chance on her book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Her persistence paid off, to say the least.

**Social models.** When we see people around us accomplish something it shows us that it’s possible and that we can do it, too. On the other hand, if there are no models we might think something is out of reach or impossible.

**Social persuasion.** Other people around us give us messages about our abilities, for better and for worse. If you believe these other people they can be very influential. Think about the teacher who believed in you when you didn’t. (Or the teacher who didn’t believe in you.) Parents, teachers, and peers have a big impact on us—that can last well beyond our time with them.

*So why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me.*

JK Rowling, British author,  
Harvard Commencement Address, June 2008

**Emotional states.** Think about how difficult some tasks seem when you're overtired, or how little energy you may feel when you're sad. Our state of being influences how we interpret our performance and our perception of our own efficacy.

The above information was adapted from Albert Bandura's work. See Sources section for more information.

## Developing Self-Efficacy

Once you understand the influences on your perception of self-efficacy, possibilities open up for how to develop it. Here are some:

**Set yourself up for success.** Give yourself tasks where you can be successful. Break up big projects into little chunks and note your ability to tackle them.

**Consider failures opportunities.** A failure isn't a Stop sign; it's a Detour.

**Choose your social models.** Hang out with friends who inspire you and believe in you and do the same for them. Connect with instructors you admire and respect.

**Recognize your emotional state.** If you do poorly on a test, recognize the physiological and emotional factors that influenced your performance. Were you exhausted? Overly anxious? Depressed? Don't see your poor test score as indicative of you in general but of your performance on a given day in certain circumstances.

## Goal Setting

Contestants on *The Biggest Loser* know all about goal setting, and they have expert support as well as an audience of 25 million people to motivate them toward those goals. Your goals are probably a little less defined—there's no magic number to reach—and certainly not as public. However, you do have incredible expert support available to you. A successful college student sets goals and makes specific plans for achieving them. This section will show you how to do just that, by discussing

- how to set goals
- how to establish meaningful goals
- how to stay motivated

## Five Steps to Setting Goals

Here's a process for setting goals that ensures you attain them:

### 1. Establish a goal

First, ask yourself what you want to accomplish. Be specific. For example, if you want to improve your grades, clarify what grade you'd like to earn in each class.

### 2. Create an action plan

There is never just one way to accomplish a goal, but there is some way. If you want to be successful, be as specific as possible when you create your plan. If your goal is to run a marathon eight months from now, for example, your action plan should include how many miles per week you need to run, what kind of adjustments you will need to make to your diet, and what time of day will be best for your training.

### 3. Divide your goal into smaller achievements

Learn Mandarin Chinese! Save \$10,000! Get a 4.0! Goals can be daunting sometimes. Make it less intimidating—and more achievable—by breaking it into smaller, more accessible goals. For example, if your goal is to learn a new language, you might break it into the following steps: register for an introductory class, join an evening conversation group, spend a term in a country where that language is spoken, etc.

### 4. Set a target date

You've seen the inspirational posters: A goal is a dream with a deadline. It's true. A person decides she'll get out of credit card debt. But when? Next month? In 40 years? What if she pays off the plastic in April and runs it up again in June? How will she know if she's achieved the goal satisfactorily? Be specific with your timeline so you can stay motivated.

### 5. Identify your motivators

Speaking of motivation—what's yours? The rest of these tips focus on the How, but this one is about the Why. Why do you want to get in shape? To look good? To improve your health? To perform better in your favorite sport? When you identify why you want to do something you will be better able to stay on track.

## Meaningful Goals

Setting impossible goals is a sure way to frustrate yourself; setting trivial ones won't do much for you either. The key is to develop realistic, meaningful goals. Here's how:

**Think short-term and long-term.** Some goals are accomplished in one week; others take years. Establish both kinds for yourself so you get the satisfaction of achievement along the way to your bigger goals.

**Make sure they're your goals.** Your mom might want you to pursue a career in medicine, your classmates might expect you to go into law, but if your heart tells you to become a physical therapist—well, others' plans for you don't matter. Similarly, if everyone else is set on getting a high-paying job right after college and you don't hear that particular siren's call, decide what *you* want to do.

**Prioritize.** Sometimes goals compete for time and attention. You may want to earn a 3.6 this semester, learn to play banjo, and meet new friends. Which is most important? Which one needs to be addressed right away and which one can wait? The answers will depend on you.

**Challenge yourself.** Sure, you want realistic, achievable goals, but they should also stretch you. If your goals are too easy to achieve, you might become bored or not enjoy the satisfaction of accomplishing them.

**Be flexible.** Things change and you may need to adjust a goal or replace it with another one, or you might need to alter the action plan and find a new way to achieve the goal.

## Staying Motivated

Your motivation level is probably the most important factor in determining your success. Here are strategies to get and stay motivated:

**Build reminders into your life.** It's surprisingly easy to lose sight of something that seemed ultra-important just hours or days before. Write down your goals and post them in a place you'll see regularly (screen savers and refrigerators were made for this type of thing!).

**Focus on results.** Keep your desired end result in mind. Let's say your goal is to earn an A in Organic Chemistry. There will be moments throughout the term when you may want to skip a lecture or hang out with friends rather than study. If you begin to waver, pause to think about how it will feel to get that A, and how you will be able to use the knowledge you gain from this term to move on to the next level of science.

**Share.** *The Biggest Loser* contestants have 25 million witnesses to their goals. You should share yours with at least a couple people. Knowing that others are aware of your goals and are rooting you on will help keep you enthusiastic.

**Reward yourself.** Recognize and celebrate your achievements.

## Teamwork

So far this chapter has focused on the individual—personal attitudes, perceptions, and goals—but much of your college experience will be about the other people you encounter. And at least some of the college experience will involve working very closely with others in teams.

*Can we choose our groups? Can we pick our teams?* These refrains echo down from elementary school. Chances are you've had quite a bit of experience working in groups. You've experienced the joys (or horrors) of middle school kickball team line ups. You know, the ones where a bunch of kids stand against a fence and wait for the captains to choose teams. You've seen the meltdown of a dysfunctional group, when the bickering escalates and next thing you know someone's throwing non-toxic paste and glitter all over someone else. You recognize the group slacker and the group leader/Control Czar.

Whatever your feelings about working with teams, you will probably have many opportunities to work through them in college. And in the working world, where group work is also known as just another day at the office.

In this section we'll

- explain what makes a good team member
- describe the qualities of a successful team
- recommend strategies for getting the most out of the team experience

## What is a Team Player?

In the kickball line up the qualities that stand out are height, brawn, agility, and fearlessness. In most college classes, extracurricular clubs, and offices a team player is defined a bit differently:

**Skillful.** Every member of the team needs to bring some talent and skills to the group.

**Cooperative.** While leadership gets a lot of press, cooperation is even more important. A good team player pulls his or her weight, minimizes conflict, stays positive, and encourages others to do the same.

**A good communicator.** Failure to communicate well is one of the biggest sources of conflict in teams. Effective communication is very valuable.

**Committed.** A good team player lets her or his teammates know she or he is committed to the common cause and can be counted on.

**Honest.** Honesty is necessary to establishing trust between team members.

**Responsible.** Good team players share the credit, not the blame.

### Successful Teams

You have a team made up of great members. Great! What's the next step? To be successful, teams must possess:

**Purpose.** The members must understand their mission.

**Empowerment.** A strong team feels empowered to work and create solutions, and well-supported by their leaders and resources.

**Good communication.** Members should listen, speak, and discuss frankly and respectfully.

**Flexibility.** A good team can adapt and adjust to changing circumstances and expectations.

**Productivity.** A team gets the job done efficiently and effectively.

**Morale.** A good team keeps morale high even in high-pressure situations.

### Strategies for Getting the Most Out of Working With a Team

The following are ways you can ensure success for the team:

**Create clear goals.** Team members must understand their goals, believe those goals are worthwhile, know what they are expected to accomplish, and understand how they will work together to achieve those goals.

**Aim for small victories.** Focus on small, short-term successes to build the confidence necessary to achieve the overall goal.

**Build mutual trust.** Trust takes a long time to build and an instant to shatter. To build trust, team members must be approachable, respectful, objective, dependable, and willing to listen.

**Ensure mutual accountability and a sense of common purpose.** All members must feel accountable.

**Secure the resources you need.** If your team is dependent on resources from outside sources, make sure they're in place before you proceed.

**Develop your skills.** This is the time to strengthen areas of weakness. Problem solving, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and writing skills are all areas where most students can improve.

## Diversity

Many people think of diversity only as it relates to ethnicity. Advertisements intended to portray a business or its clientele as diverse will include images of people with a range of skin colors. But diversity encompasses much more than that and does not just pertain to visible characteristics. In fact, there are many aspects to diversity. Here are just some:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Cultural heritage
- Mental/physical abilities
- Mental/physical characteristics
- Sexual orientation
- Language
- Religion
- Socio-economic status

Colleges and universities around the country make it a significant part of their mission to promote, support, and celebrate diversity. They have good reason to do so. In order to thrive in the increasingly interconnected 21<sup>st</sup> century, students need to understand their own background and experience and learn about others'. The world is complex and varied; a successful student will learn how to approach complexities with an open mind.

Consider these statistics:

- There are more than 450 languages spoken in the United States (Source: [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org))
- About 10% of the U.S. population is foreign-born (Source: U.S. Census [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov))
- 40% of American college students are “nontraditional”: 25 years old or older. (Source: [studentaid.ed.gov](http://studentaid.ed.gov))

While these statistics give just a glimpse of the diversity in the United States, they provide a starting point for envisioning the college classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where students who are foreign-born and “native” (born in the United States), 18-year-olds and thirty-six-year-olds, Catholics and Buddhists, students with no financial concerns and students who are struggling to pay for each term learn and work together.

The first step to becoming **culturally competent** (having knowledge of others’ cultures, beliefs, perspectives, etc.) is recognizing how one’s own culture and background influences one’s perspective. Be aware of any stereotypes or prejudices you hold. A **stereotype** is a conventional or oversimplified image or idea. Regional stereotypes in the United States are common: “Midwesterners are . . .” and “People from the East Coast are . . .” There are positive and negative stereotypes of different groups of people, and these stereotypes accomplish the same thing: They impose a “type” or identity on an individual. **Prejudice** is judging somebody because of a preconceived notion or opinion. (“He is an older student; therefore, he must . . .”)

You’ll find that if you treat people with respect and as individuals, you’ll make meaningful connections and enjoy the similarities as well as differences. College is a gathering of people of different backgrounds, experiences, characteristics, and values. You have an incredible opportunity to connect with and learn from this diverse group of individuals—and to share your own experiences and perspective. **You will probably have opportunities within classes to explore points of view, experiences, and ideas that are unfamiliar to you.** Take advantage of these opportunities as often as possible. Also, **look for ways to get involved and explore diversity on your campus.**

A big part of your education will come from the things you do and learn outside of your academic requirements. You can attend classes, take notes, do the assigned work, and even get high marks, but if you aren’t learning from the students and instructors around you, you’ll be missing one of the most important aspects of a college education.

It’s easy to surround yourself with people who are similar to you, but doing so is limiting. Challenge yourself to recognize and question your assumptions about other people, and you will be amazed at what you find. Students not only learn more about other people when they are in a diverse community; they also learn about themselves.

## Keys to Success Exercises

1. Describe a time when you demonstrated high self-efficacy: What was the task before you? What conditions do you think led you to feel you were very capable? What was the result?
2. Describe a time when you demonstrated low self-efficacy: What was the task before you? What conditions do you think led you to feel you were very capable? What was the result?
3. In general, do you believe you have a positive perception of self-efficacy? Explain. What steps can you take to maintain or improve your perception of self-efficacy?
4. Follow the tips included in this chapter's goal-setting section to set some personal and academic goals. Explain why each goal is meaningful to you, write out an action plan for each goal, and describe how you plan to stay motivated.
5. Visit your college's multicultural center to learn more about clubs, activities, and resources available on campus and in your community. Choose one event or activity to participate in or learn about that is different and new to you. Either write a two-page reflection on your experience or share your experience with a small group of students in class.