

TOP REAL TALK TIPS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

1. Check your email! (Emails are, by the way, short letters not long text messages.)

Let me just get my biggest pet peeve out here right off the bat! ALWAYS use a subject, greeting, and closing (including your name) in an email. I don't care if you email from your phone, you can still write "Hi Cat," and then drop down a line before you start the body of your email.

You also need to *check* your school email! Seriously, from the moment it's given to you, check it regularly - even before school starts. A class you register for may get cancelled. . .you may need to turn in an additional Financial Aid form. . .or your school might need to contact you. Communication takes place through campus email and it is your responsibility to check it. Nothing is worse than showing up on the first day of classes to find a classroom has been changed or, worse, the class has been cancelled and you have no idea because you haven't checked your email since orientation 3 months ago. (Program your school email into your phone. If you can't figure it out I bet you \$10 your school's technology help desk has the instructions on their website. If not, call or visit the technology help desk and I'm sure someone can assist you.)

2. Advocate for yourself and don't always accept "no" as an answer.

So often, I see students failing to ask for what they need or giving up the first time someone tells them "no". It's ok to stick up for yourself!! You can always ask for clarification or more information. Never nod your head and say "yes" if you actually don't understand! (I have a Master's degree and still ask about 6 follow up questions every time I ask about financial aid.) It's also fine to respectfully ask someone for another chance or another try. If you don't look out for yourself, who will?

3. Deadlines are not optional & they're no one's responsibility but your own.

Figure out how you will remember deadlines and due dates because it's an essential skill. (Phone reminders, Google calendar, paper planner or calendar – you need to create a system.) If you miss a deadline it could literally mean you don't get scholarship money and cannot go to school for a semester. Or, it could mean you can't take an intro class that is required for your major and have to stay in school an extra semester at the end of your 4 (now 4.5) years.

4. It's up to you to seek out resources & build connections.

Building relationships with professors, staff, and other students is important. It just makes life easier when you have people to talk to and folks you can ask for help when you need it. Plus, there are so many things happening on campus that can benefit you that you may never know about. Being connected to others means being in the know. And, when I say "things that can benefit you", I'm not just talking about some free pizza. I am talking about leadership positions, paid internships, scholarship opportunities, conference travel and the fancier kind of catering ;) Also, don't graduate from college without knowing a few people who can write you recommendation letters!

5. Lose your “whatever, it will all work out” - mentality!

I have seen this laissez faire, “whatever, it will all work out” – mentality from too many students. I am here to tell you that it might not work out and things could have disastrous consequences if you don't prioritize getting paperwork turned in on time, show up to class, or ask for help when you need it. You don't want to let the stress of college get you down but a personal sense of accountability is crucial.

6. Keep your personal information accurate & up-to-date in your student account.

Sometimes people at school try to contact you for reasons you wouldn't want your parents to know about. If I am calling you because you're failing Geology and wound up in my “Academic Early Alert” list, you might not be so pleased if the number on file is your parent's home number and I ring them when you're not even living there. Although you may have listed your home number on your application, please update it to your personal cell phone once you get to school. Of course, in those cases we're always as vague as possible when speaking to parents but that's an awkward situation that neither of us want to be in. Update your info. And, if someone calls or emails you to see if they can provide you with some support – TAKE IT!! So many schools don't offer that kind of outreach!

7. Transcripts are forever.

I didn't know this fact until I finished my master's degree...transcripts stay with you FOREVER. FORRRREVVVVEERRRRRRR!!!!!! This includes college credit you complete or attempt while you are in high school. It doesn't matter if you are in a different state. It doesn't matter if it was 20 years ago. They stick with you.

There's an online clearinghouse that Admission Counselors look at to see all of the places you were ever registered as a student. And, when you apply to school, you usually have to provide transcripts from all of those institutions. Don't even bother lying because you will be found out. And, then you'll be looking foolish, too. Some schools offer an academic amnesty program where you can apply or appeal to have your old records removed but that's usually a long process and not always not always possible.

8. Self-confidence, resourcefulness, & having a strong vision for your future are VASTLY more important than book smarts.

I'm here to tell you that your academic skills are not as important as your ability to believe in yourself and bounce back when bad things happen. There are a million ways you can beef up your academic knowledge and skills – tutoring (often offered for free on campuses), YouTube videos, reading your textbook, studying & discussing with classmates, finding practice tests and activities online . . .just to name a few. But, what can't be so easily taught is resilience, determination, and belief in yourself & your dreams! If you can cultivate those qualities, the rest is totally doable!

Look at yourself in the mirror every day and remind yourself how powerful, capable, and amazing you are! Spend some time figuring out your vision – who you want to be & what you want to achieve. Hold that picture of the future you in your mind as a daily reminder of why you are working so hard. (P.S. I believe in this so much I wrote a workbook about it. [Check it out here if you're interested!](#))

MORE IMPORTANT THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW:

1. On emails, BCC means “blind carbon copy”.

When you put a recipient's email address in this tab, you send them a copy of the email secretly (or, blindly). So, the other people on the email won't know they were included. I do this almost exclusively in situations where I need to include a supervisor by bcc-ing her if I'm sending an email where things are getting a little dicey, sassy, or heated.

2. T/R means Tuesday & Thursday

Do not be that kid who doesn't show up on Thursday. I have seen this happen more than once.

3. When you pronounce FAFSA, don't add in an extra “F” and say FAFSFA.

Related to FAFSA, always remember to go to the .gov site! There are scammers out there!

4. You're be amazed the answers you will find by simply searching terms on your school's website.

AMAZED!

5. Labs are often just one credit!

Or, are less credits than a full class. Don't fool yourself into thinking you're a full time student just because you're in 4 classes. . .if one is a lab – you're probably not!

6. Do not underestimate the power of drinking water and getting a good night's sleep. Also, coconut oil. Are y'all younger people on that bandwagon yet?

7. If you schedule a meeting with someone, show up.

Or, call in advance if you can't make it. And, apologize promptly if you miss it.

8. If you send someone an email and they don't respond within a few days, you can totally send a follow-up email.

By a follow-up email I mean something like “replying all” so they get the original email again and adding a new message by writing something like “Hi So & So, I wanted to follow-up on this email I sent last week. I would really like to meet with you before the end of the week to go over blah – blah – blah. . .closing & your name. I DO NOT MEAN SIMPLY RE-SENDING THE SAME EMAIL AGAIN (with no additional message). I find that to be incredibly rude and extra lazy.

9. If you transfer to a different college your GPA probably won't transfer with you.

This is different for each college but, usually, you need a certain GPA to get in but once you're in you start fresh. Meaning – don't bomb the first semester and think it will just get averaged in to your previous work. It won't!

10. Sometimes you can get book store vouchers to buy textbooks if your financial aid money is coming in but hasn't arrived yet.

It never hurts to ask! This is usually more of a possibility if you take care of your financial aid early and submit all follow up forms and info right away.

11. School libraries often have textbooks on reserve. You can sometimes look at text books there if you are still waiting for yours to come in. (Or, through inter library loan.) Also, some libraries have heavy duty scanners with scan to pdf functions so you can scan a chapter of your friend's textbook and email it to yourself.

QUICK & DIRTY CLASSROOM ETIQUITE

Here's some real talk for you should you ever wind up in my college classroom. . .

1. The syllabus should be your first place to find information. Please look there before you ask me questions.
2. You don't have to raise your hand to ask to go to the bathroom while you're in class. If you have to go, just walk out and come back. (Leave your stuff at your seat so we know you're coming back.)
3. If I tell you to call me "Cat", please don't continue to call me "Ms. Cat". I don't care if we're in the south ;)!
4. Don't you dare pack up your stuff before I am done talking and officially close out class.
5. I can tell when you're using your phone. Put it away.
6. Even if your headphones aren't on, it's super rude to have them in your ears while I am teaching or we are meeting.
7. Better to ask (in advance) for an extension on something than just not turn it in or hand in crap.
8. In terms of grades, some points are better than no points – it's almost always better to turn in something than nothing. Related, it's always better to attempt test questions than leave them blank. (Unless you're taking the SAT!)
9. Class discussions and participation help build a positive relationship. If you don't talk in class or talk to me outside of class time, it's hard for me to get to know you or like you!
10. I want everyone to get an A! But, if you don't earn an A I am not doing my job if I simply give it to you.