

If you want to be successful in English 110, 111, or 112 . . .

Created for the Writers Lab by Sherri Wahrer, summer 2001

- . . . don't be afraid to ask questions, however petty they may seem to you. Your instructor will cover all assignments and your responsibilities for them in class, but please don't feel as if you should automatically and completely understand them just because they've been described. Question your instructor until you get the information you need in order to be comfortable with the task before you!
- . . . budget your time well. Don't assume you can complete a presentable draft in a very brief amount of time (say the 1-2 hours preceding class . . . !). "Rush jobs" will always leave you with much more work to do than if you had originally allotted more time for a particular task. Put the bulk of your efforts into your rough drafts--treat them as if they were final drafts, if that helps--and you'll find that you'll have less to do when it comes time to draft the *actual* final.
- . . . be willing to work to improve your skills. Wouldn't you rather give this class your "all" the first time around (especially if you're not a fan of writing to begin with), than to have to take it again because you didn't work as hard as you could have?
- . . . keep tabs on your progress and on your essay's evaluations. Do not fall into the habit of thinking, "So I didn't pass this essay . . . I've still got other ones to write, and I'll work harder on those/understand the requirements better." While this may be true initially, don't get me wrong, it can also be an academically fatal state of mind. Should you continue to receive unsatisfactory evaluations on your essays, never wait until the last minute (i.e., the end of the semester) to try and rectify things. If, for example, you don't totally understand the concept of effective, written argumentation (or you thought you did but your evaluations speak otherwise), schedule a conference with your instructor early on to discuss your concerns. It's better to get the "bugs" worked out ASAP so you can move forward in a confident manner!
- . . . take advantage of the resources around you, including your peers, your instructor, and the Writers Lab. Many students feel that it's entirely up to them—by themselves—to produce good, solid writing. And it is, in a way. But they also tend to forget that there is quite a bit of assistance available to them whenever/however often they need it. If you're struggling with an opening paragraph, ways to develop your ideas, etc. then always feel free to ask a peer (or a roommate, or a parent), your instructor, and/or Writers Lab consultants for suggestions; that's what we're here for. You're not in this alone!
- . . . break larger tasks into smaller tasks. Essay writing is much less daunting (and exhausting!) when you take the "today I'll go to the library and get sources; tomorrow I'll read through the sources; the day after that I'll begin organizing my ideas . . ." approach. Do be aware, though, that this approach takes *days / weeks*—not *hours*—so you'll need to be a good time manager in order to pull it off successfully. However, the results are well worth it, and you're not left feeling like you have to do everything at once.
- . . . don't procrastinate (ahh . . . the cliché of college advice!). First of all, you never know when an emergency will rear its time-consuming head. Secondly, if you have the time to complete an assignment ahead of its due date, why not get it over with so you can focus on more important tasks, or a well-deserved evening of relaxation? Finally, procrastination often leads to more procrastination (which induces stress as assignments in your classes build up . . . and who needs more stress, especially the kind that can be avoided with a little good planning on your part?!?).
- . . . anticipate problems ahead of time. This means being responsible and not waiting until you're ready to walk out the door to print your assignment. It's truly amazing how many "defective" computers, printers, and disks seem to exist on this campus (read between the lines here, folks . . .!). Trust me when I say that going up to your instructor on the day a big paper is due and telling him/her that you had computer/printer/disk problems very easily and frequently translates into "I didn't finish the assignment because I didn't plan well enough." You may get away with that excuse once. If one printer doesn't work, use another, and always create back-up disks of your work. In short, print your assignments out well before the time comes for you to leave for class!