

Tips for Busy Students

1. Select your best season for education

When does your schedule best suit adding a course to your workload? Some may find winter (January – March) the best time, especially if they will sometimes be snow-bound. Others may live in blistering climates where they need to stay in air-conditioning during the summer. Some may prefer fall when their children go back to school and some semblance of tranquility returns to the household.

2. Pick your best time for learning

We post lectures on Mondays. Select some quiet time early in the week to read the lectures. Then either take the textbooks to read while waiting for some event, or over lunch, or in the quiet of your study.

3. Block out time for learning

Make yourself an appointment with “GCS” each week to sit down and learn. Yes, an occasional emergency may interrupt. If you find that you never keep this appointment when planned, consider the possibility that you either do not have this goal as a high enough priority, or you need to delegate some responsibilities to meet this need.

4. Start with a course of interest

It will be easier for some (if they are avid Bible readers) to take a biblical studies course than a theology course (vice versa for the theology buff). A self-reflective course like Ministerial Leadership may be an easy entry for those looking to re-enter formal education as an adult.

5. Take a course with assignments suited to your learning style

We post a short syllabus for each class at <http://gcs.edu/course>. It lists the reading requirements and assignments. Select a course that will ease you into this journey. For instance, the assignments in Ministerial Leadership are more self-reflective; assignments in TH501 are more “academic.”

6. Go for the credit – fall back on audit

Courses are most profitable for those actively engaged in the material. We try to make assignments accordingly. It can be time consuming. Sign up for credit. If the workload is overwhelming, you can fall back to an audit during the semester. You may find the work easier than you thought – or not....

7. Read for overview, not for every detail

Reading for academic courses is designed to give you a broad but deeper perspective of a given topic. Some topics are more familiar than others and lend toward skimming to get the point of the author. Focus on introductions to chapters, headings, introductory paragraphs and chapter summaries. Slow down and read more carefully sections that are less familiar.

Take notes as you go, especially in more difficult textbooks. Some students find it helpful to place topic and page numbers on blank pages at the front or back of the book (or use post-it notes) for something of interest they may want to cite in a book review or find later – perhaps ten years down the line.

8. You don't have to get straight A's to be a success

No one is good at every endeavor. People who are skilled at pastoring are not necessarily good at academics, and vice versa. If your time is limited, you don't have to be the best in the class. Just do what you can in the time you have. You'll end up understanding more than when you started, and that is a good measure of success!

9. Be a lifelong learner

Does age stop learning? I hope not. Remember – you are in this life for growth. So, don't sweat the small stuff, and don't fear the big stuff.

We are in ministry to serve others; we learn so we can teach and mentor others to do likewise. Jesus never said ministry would be fun – joyful, yes, but fun? Not always. Or perhaps learning is its own kind of enjoyment...

Russell Duke