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By the end of first year everyone has a list of informative tidbits they wish they could share with their freshman-self. Like, “cramming for midterms isn't very successful” and “don't pull too many all-nighters” (they will catch up with you). Here are some of the top things I wish I'd known before starting first year:

New textbooks are overrated

Actually having to buy your own textbooks is an expensive change from high school. At first, this can seem like a special university experience; it's the first tangible step toward starting your university career. These will probably be the first textbooks you'll have (and own) that won't have doodles, phone numbers and "turn to page 63" scribbled throughout the pages. But the problem is that most university textbooks become outdated within three years of publication, meaning you're paying a premium for a book that won't be relevant, or valuable, by the time you've finished your undergrad.

The compromise? [Buy your textbooks used](#). Buying used doesn't mean settling for a tattered and grubby textbook that looks like it's been drooled on. Many websites, including [amazon.ca](#) and [abebooks.com](#), offer almost-new textbooks for half the price. The same goes for your university's used books program. The added bonus? You can then sell these textbooks back at the end of the term to help pay for the following term's textbooks. By second year you realize the fresh-out-of-the-plastic-wrap-smell is not worth the price tag.

No more homework

First-years often ask, "How much homework will I have?"

Short answer? None. The not-so-helpful answer? "It's up to you." The truth? In university, homework doesn't exist. Instead, you have Readings.

Yes, some courses will come with assignments or essays, but for most courses you just have readings. The professor will hand out (or post online) an outline of their course, their expectations, and what will be covered in your textbook during the semester. It's up to you to go to class, take notes, and read the textbook. But no one cares if you do.

Back in high school, there were checkpoints for students: homework checks, tests every few weeks, endless assignments and essays. This was all class work that ensured you keep up with the load of the course. University plays by different rules. You're given a list of the pages in your textbooks that the course will be covering, and then told when your midterm and final will happen. It's up to you to decide the what, when, and how much of the university homework you do. The problem? If you're still in high-school mode, suddenly it's two days before the midterm and you have five chapters of your "Sequential Statistical Analysis" textbook to read because you forgot to keep up with the readings. Do yourself a favour and during your first week create a reading schedule.

Prioritizing and organizing

For some first-year students, they fall into the trap of applying 100 per cent of their time and energy into everything, aiming to achieve stellar 4.0 GPAs (grade point averages) by acing every quiz and conquering every essay. The problem is that you'll only burn yourself out. Fast. Prioritize your time by figuring out what needs the most attention, and doing that first. I know, sounds obvious, right? Until you start thinking it might be a good idea to get the small work out of the way. You know, to help you feel like you're keeping up and getting stuff done, before attempting the daunting task of starting your bigger school tasks, like studying for a physics midterm. Instead, you'll end up spending way more time than is necessary on the trivial stuff when you have bigger tests to fry. Sure, you aced the quiz worth 0.5% of your final grade, but you've barely glanced at your notes for the upcoming final in two days. Be organized; don't invest too much time on something with a low ceiling on its possible grade return.

Use your resources

Once you start university, it can seem like you're alone. In high school you always have some teacher on your case, good or bad, about upcoming tests, quizzes and assignments. They want you to prepare and get your work done. In university, there's no weekly quiz forcing you to keep up, no teacher keeping tabs on whether you've read the textbook, or reminding you of Tuesday's big unit test.

In the classic first-year course, the prof will tell you the time and date of your midterm (worth 30% of your final grade) and final exam (worth 70%). From there on in, whether you've created a second home in the library or are partying all night, your professors don't really care what you do with your time. First-year can be an academic culture shock, just because you're not used to the teaching style.

But don't worry, it's not because university is so much harder than high school. You just need a little help switching school gears. There are tons of resources on campus that can help you bridge the gap between your old high-school habits and your new university ones. Or even if you just need a little help with something from a course. Professors will announce their office hours within the first few days of classes, during which time you can visit them and ask any questions you have on the course material. Some students feel shy or embarrassed about talking with their profs, but this might be one of the only ways to get face time, which can clear up questions, help you stay on the right track with your essay or simply become a name instead of a number to the prof, which can help if you need something like references from them in the future.

There are also loads of student-based clubs, societies and associations dedicated to helping students fit in at university, whether it's helping you pull up grades, establish better study habits, or just meet new people. The Counselling Department can help with all these issues. These easy-to-find (and join) organizations offer a supportive environment for students to help them academically and socially.

Stay healthy

University can be a shock after high school, both academically and socially. For many people, it can be the first time you're either away from home or responsible for yourself as an adult. Whether you're stressed about doing well or going overboard partying because you can, you may neglect your health. But the day you miss that crucial lab because you partied too late the night before, or you get pneumonia because you haven't been skipping meals and pulling all-nighters, is the day it hits you: you've got to take care of yourself. This means finding a way to eat something other than pizza and KD (whether it means picking the desiccated broccoli in your meal plan or actually cooking if you're off-campus), exercising at the athletic centre (which also helps to relieve stress) and, yes, getting a full night's sleep ... most of the time.