

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Secrets of the Most Successful College Students

Source: Annie Murphy Paul/March 13, 2013/Time.com

College admission letters go out this month, and most recipients (and their parents) will place great importance on which universities said yes and which said no. A growing body of evidence, however, suggests that the most significant thing about college is not *where* you go, but *what* you do once you get there. Historian and educator Ken Bain has written a book on this subject, *What The Best College Students Do*, that draws a roadmap for how students can get the most out of college, no matter where they go.

As Bain details, there are three types of learners — surface, who do as little as possible to get by; strategic, who aim for top grades rather than true understanding, and finally, deep learners, who leave college with a real, rich education. Bain then introduces us to a host of real-life deep learners: young and old, scientific and artistic, famous or still getting there. Although they each have their own insights, Bain identifies common patterns in their stories:

Pursue passion, not A's.

When he was in college, says the eminent astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, he was “moved by curiosity, interest, and fascination, not by making the highest scores on a test.” As an adult, he points out, “no one ever asks you what your grades were. Grades become irrelevant.” In his experience as a student and a professor, says Tyson, “ambition and innovation trump grades every time.”

Get comfortable with failure.

When he was still a college student, comedian Stephen Colbert began working with an improvisational theater in Chicago. “That really opened me up in ways I hadn’t expected,” he told Bain. “You must be OK with bombing. You have to love it.” Colbert adds, “Improvisation is a great educator when it comes to failing. There’s no way you are going to get it right every time.”

Make a personal connection to your studies.

In her sophomore year in college, Eliza Noh, now a professor of Asian American studies at California State University-Fullerton, took a class on power in society: who has it, how it’s used. “It really opened my eyes. For the first time in my life, I realized that learning could be about me and my interests, about who I was,” Noh told Bain. “I didn’t just listen to lectures, but began to use my own experiences

as a jumping off point for asking questions and wanting to pursue certain concepts.”

Read and think actively.

Dean Baker, one of the few economists to predict the economic collapse of 2008, became fascinated in college by the way economic forces shape people’s lives. His studies led him to reflect on “what he believed and why, integrating and questioning,” Bain notes. Baker himself says: “I was always looking for arguments in something I read, and then pinpointing the evidence to see how it was used.”

Ask big questions.

Jeff Hawkins, an engineer who created the first mobile computing device, organized his college studies around four profound questions he wanted to explore: Why does anything exist? Given that a universe does exist, why do we have the particular laws of physics that we do? Why do we have life, and what is its nature? And given that life exists, what’s the nature of intelligence? For many of the subjects he pursued, Bain notes, “there was no place to ‘look it up,’ no simple answer.”

Cultivate empathy for others.

Reyna Grande, author of the novels *Across A Hundred Mountains* and *Dancing with Butterflies*, started writing seriously in her junior year in college. “Writing fiction taught Reyna to empathize with the people who populated her stories, an ability that she transferred to her life,” Bain notes: “As a writer, I have to understand what motivates a character, and I see other people as characters in the story of life,” Grande says. “When someone makes mistakes, I always look at what made them act the way they do.”

Set goals and make them real.

Tia Fuller, who later became an accomplished saxophone player, began planning her future in college, envisioning the successful completion of her projects. “I would keep focused on the light at the end of the tunnel, and what that accomplishment would mean,” she said to Bain. “That would help me develop a crystalized vision.”

Find a way to contribute.

Joel Feinman, now a lawyer who provides legal services to the poor, was set on his career path by a book he read in college: *The Massacre at El Mazote*, an account of a 1981 slaughter of villagers in El Salvador. After writing and staging a campus play about the massacre, and traveling to El Savador himself, Feinman “decided that I wanted to do something to help people and bring a little justice to the world.”

Possible Responses:

- What type of learner are you?
- How can you apply these “secrets” to your life during and after high school?