Achieving Your A Game

The book "The A Game: Nine Steps to Better Grades," offers nine rules that students can follow to make better grades. The rules below are taken directly from this outstanding book.

Rule 1: Go to class. There are two important things that happen when you attend class and take your own notes. First, every class meeting is a potential learning session. You do more than simply write down things that your teacher says – you have the opportunity to ask questions, to reinforce things that you already knew but might not write down in your notes, and to absorb a better understanding of class material. Second, you come into the classroom with your own background, your own prior knowledge, your own abilities, and your own organizational style. All of this influences the notes that you take, makes your notes specifically suited for you, and makes your notes better for you than anyone else's. University-wide at MSU, each absence in a class equates to a .2 letter grade reduction in final course grade. The easiest rule to adopt: Go to class.

Rule 2: Come to class prepared. Read assigned material before the class. Come to class rested and mentally awake. Be prepared to focus, to pay attention, to avoid distractions, and to engage in your learning experience.

Rule 3: Sit toward the front of the room. Learning is not a spectator sport, where you simply sit and watch. You must be engaged in your learning. Every row that you move toward the back of the classroom, the more potential distractions you've put between you and the teacher. Those distractions just don't happen in the front of the room. They happen toward the back.

Added to this rule, don't sit next to your friends if they're going to be a distraction. You don't need any more distractions. You need to focus.

Rule 4: Raise your hand. If you're ever lost in class, if you have any question about the material being covered, definitely raise your hand and ask a question! Don't worry, there are probably people in the class who have the same question. They will appreciate it that you asked. And your teacher will appreciate that you asked. Your teacher really does not want to be delivering material that students are not following, so if you don't understand, please ask.
Rule 5: Space out your study sessions. If you break your course material into smaller and smaller units, and devote shorter, focused study sessions to them, you will have much better recall of the material, and make better grades. Few people can focus and study for over two hours at a time. Rather than trying to cram in an 8-hour all-nighter the night before the exam, study an hour a night for 8 nights. Your grades will show the difference in your better learning and recall.

Rule 6: Develop learning objectives. For each study session, state exactly what you want to learn during that session. You might want to (1) identify a concept from your course material, (2) describe why that concept is important, and (3) describe how the concept fits into the overall structure of your class material. This sets you up to learn the material within an overall context of your course, and will make the material more meaningful.

Rule 7: Learn material at all levels. Learn the facts: dates, names, important points, etc. But don’t stop there, learn why the facts are important. Why are they important to learn? How do they fit into your overall course material? They’re not just raw facts to be memorized – they are pieces of information that fit into a bigger picture.

Rule 8: Use periodic learning checks. Separate what you know from what you don't know. If you use index cards to study, separate the cards into two piles – the things that you know quite well, and the things that you need to study more. Focus most of your time on the things that you need to study more. Frequently reassess your learning, and always focus more of your time and attention to the things that you need to learn, and less on the things that you already know.

Rule 9: Be exam savvy. When you actually start an exam, go through it and answer every question that you can answer quickly and with certainty, questions on which you are absolutely certain of the correct answer, skipping questions on which you are unsure. Next, go back through the exam, tackling the remaining questions. If these are multiple choice questions, cross out answers that you are certain are incorrect. Narrow in on the best answer.

People sometimes wonder if they should always go with their initial pick of an answer, or change to a different answer? The suggestion in this book: Go with your initial pick unless either (1) you absolutely know that a different answer is correct, or (2) you absolutely know that you initial pick is incorrect.

Adopt these nine rules in your student life, and you will be well on your way to making better grades!