

Music Majors Survival Guide

College is different from high school

- setting priorities
- scheduling your time
- knowing your professors



Organize your life

Maximize your education

How to read a textbook

How to memorize

How to prepare for a test

Self-evaluation

Schedule templates

- weekly (day to day)
- semester (tests, projects, performances)



College is different from high school.

Saying “NO”

Your first semester – maybe your first year – will be a culture shock. It’s exciting to have so much freedom and so many new friends and opportunities, but it’s also easy to over-extend yourself. You should be clear about your priorities at the start of every semester.

PRIORITY #1: SCHOOL

According to *Academic Policies and Requirements* in the SIUE Undergraduate Catalog: “Undergraduate students are expected to spend at least two hours in preparation for every hour in class.” (2014-15, pg. 17)

In other words, a 3-credit class normally requires 9 hours per week. If you are taking 16 credits, you are committed for 48 hours per week of “school.” That’s more than a 9-to-5 job! Maybe you’ll need less time than your peers ... but you might also need *more* time.

Plan for school to take about 8 hours per day on weekdays and 2-4 hours per day on weekends: class, study, homework, and practice. Don’t forget special music major things like performing and attending concerts.

PRIORITY #2: EVERYDAY CHORES

Nobody is telling you to clean your room, but nobody is cooking or doing your laundry, either. You can turn meals and chores into social events with your friends or roommates, but they still take time. Don’t forget travel time if you commute!

Plan for 2 hours per day (every day) of everyday chores.

PRIORITY #3: SLEEP

Everyone needs a different amount of sleep. Studies show that your brain works best on at least 6 hours per night, but you might need more.

SLEEP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FREE TIME.

PRIORITY #4: HAVING A LIFE

Check out the hypothetical daily schedule below. As you can see, there’s not a lot of time left. Of course you are supposed to have fun at college, but school and life responsibilities come first. Keep this in mind before you say “yes” to extras.

Note: The gray boxes are uncommitted time when this student can say “yes” to extra things. There’s not a lot of it. When you build your own schedule, don’t skimp on study time or practice time – doing that is a waste of your tuition money and will hurt your chances of getting a job & having a rewarding, successful career.

A hypothetical freshman’s fall schedule:

	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN		
7-8	shower, breakfast, get to school					free time & life chores			
8-9	MUS 125a (music theory) lab								
9-10	MUS 125a (music theory) class								
10-11	ENG 101	MUS 121a	ENG 101	MUS 121a	ENG 101				
11-12	private lesson	lunch, practice, or help from profs							
12-1	lunch								
1-2	band	RA 101	band	RA 101	band	gym/exercise			
2-3									
3-4	homework, study prepare for the next day’s classes help from profs				Convo	laundry	practice		
4-5					free time				
5-6						practice			
6-7	dinner						dinner		
7-8	concerts & rehearsals study group homework reading work on long-term projects that aren’t due yet					free time			
8-9									
9-10									
10-11									study
11-12									sleep
12-7	sleep								

First, organize your life. (see templates at the end)

- Make a weekly schedule: class, homework, practice, commute, meals, chores, sleep, free time. Schedule 30-minute chunks and be honest about how you'll use your time.
- Schedule a study group that meets at least once per week. (3-5 people)
- At the end of the first week, after you get a syllabus for every class, make a calendar for projects, papers, and tests.
- Two days before every test, schedule at least one hour of private study. (**Two** days before because you might discover you have questions to ask the professor.)

Second, maximize your education.

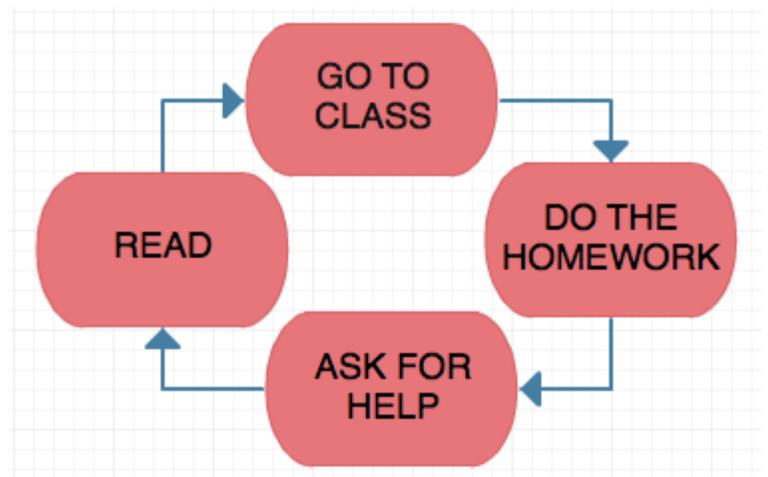
Preparation

Professors assume you read and did the homework *before you come to class*. If you didn't, you might get away with it but you won't learn as much and you might miss something. When a test comes around, you'll regret that!

Help

If you don't understand or need extra help outside of class, just ask! Classes meet every other day so you have plenty of time to see your professor before a reading or an assignment is due.

- Professors keep office hours (see your syllabus) when you can always come in for help without making an appointment.
- If you can't come to office hours, you are supposed to make an appointment for a better time. Use e-mail. Don't be shy!
- You can "drop in" without an appointment but the professor might not be available to help even though he/she is in the office. It's not personal. Everyone has work to do.
- The worst time to talk to a professor is right before or right after class. That might have been the only time you saw your high school teachers, but for professors it's their time to set up the day's materials or move quickly to the next class.



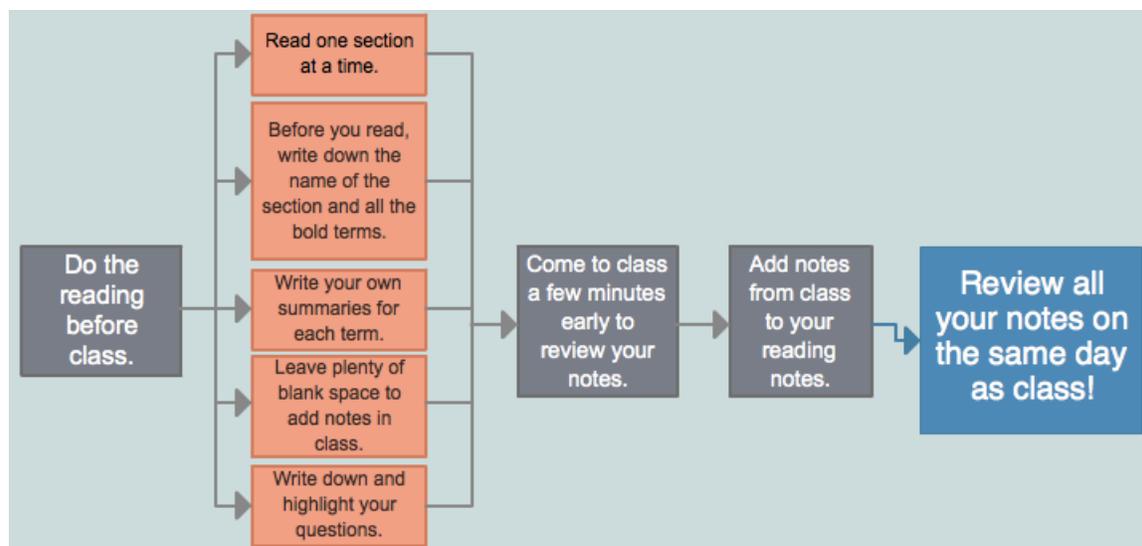
Third, remember that a textbook is not like a novel.

When you read for pleasure, you start on the first page and go straight through to the end. A novel is a narrative or a story. It's linear.

Reading a textbook requires a different process. It's stop-and-start all the time. You're supposed to go in small chunks, take notes even before you start, and back up to re-read.

Here's how to make academic reading efficient and successful:

- 1) Turn off your phone and music. Even if you can only stand silence for 15 minutes, you'll have better focus and retention.
- 2) Don't read the entire chapter at once. Look for "breaks" in the text, usually indicated by bold or underlined headings. Focus on one chunk at a time.
- 3) First, skim for important terms (in bold, etc.) and write them down. Then you know what to look for as you read.
 - Highlighting with a marker seems fast & easy, but your brain will retain more information if you actually write out the important words and definitions.
 - Use paper and pencil, not a computer! The physical hand motion is part of learning.
- 4) As you read and come across those important words from #3, jot down notes and definitions. Make sure you can use your own words: paraphrasing instead of copying.
- 5) Once you've finished the first chunk, review your notes. If you're not sure you understand, try the process again. If the second time doesn't help, then write down your questions and highlight them so you remember what to ask in class. Then go on to the next chunk.



Fourth, master the art of memorizing.

Most of what you do in 100-level courses is memorize. This lays the foundation for more complex activities in 200-400 level courses.

Start immediately. Your life is going to be much busier at midterm and final exam time. The longer you wait to memorize, the more stress you'll feel. Also, *you can't cram memorizing at high quality for long-term retention.* What's the point of passing tomorrow's test if you crammed, and then you have to do it all again for the next test?

Spend a little time every day on memorization. Music theory is cumulative. If you don't memorize how to spell scales & keys, then intervals become hard. If you don't memorize intervals, then triads become hard. Suddenly, the whole class is hard!

Memorization is the first step to speed. If you have to count intervals on your fingers instead of memorizing them, the homework will take you a lot longer than someone who memorized intervals right away.

Example: How to memorize key signatures using flash cards.

Step 1: Buy a pack of index cards or cut a piece of paper into 8 equal pieces.

Step 2: On the front side of each card, write a question.

- Card #1: What major key has 1 flat? Card #2: What major key has 1 sharp?
(and so on, until you've covered all the major keys)
- Card #14: What minor key has 1 flat? Card #15: What minor key has 1 sharp?
(and so on, until you've covered all the minor keys)
- Card #27: What is the order of flats? Card #28: What is the order of sharps?

Step 3: On the back of each card, write the answer to each question.

Step 4: Shuffle & flip the cards so they're in random order, and sometimes you're looking at the question while other times you're looking at the answer. Then, for each card in the deck, read the information out loud and say aloud the information you can't see on the other side. (Yes, do this out loud. You're a musician. You probably learn by hearing things as well as by seeing them.)

Step 5: Shuffle the deck and repeat as many times as you need to.

Wouldn't it be easier to use a website or app for memorizing?

Sure. You can do that. Making your own flash cards has extra benefits, though:

- You had to review your notes in order to write down all the questions & answers.
- Writing out the cards is the same as recopying your notes: it's repetition.
- Physically writing on the cards makes a brain-body connection. Your body helps your brain remember. Do you know what a note "feels like" before you play it?
- Saying the questions & answers out loud engages your ears. You're a musician.

What topics in music theory can be memorized with flash cards?

- treble, bass, alto, and tenor clef note names
 - order of sharps and flats
 - key signatures in major and minor
- spelling major, natural minor, harmonic minor, and melodic minor scales
 - spelling intervals above and below a given note
 - inverting intervals
- changing simple intervals to compound and the reverse
 - spelling triads and chords
 - inverting triads and chords
- doubling rules for triads and chords
 - voice leading rules

Preparing for Tests

Have you ever gotten a test back and said, “What happened? I really studied for that!” Most poor test scores happen because you lack study strategies, have test anxiety, and/or need a better whole-test process.

Study Strategies

Most studying happens several weeks before the test, when you were keeping up with readings, doing homework (and correcting returned assignments), participating in class, and memorizing.

Starting 3 days before the test:

For each topic, make three piles: readings, your notes, and all old assignments related to that topic. (Keeping a notebook/binder is handy!)

- a. Skim over the reading to refresh your memory. Once you’ve done that, jot down all the important terms again *from memory*. Compare this to your notes to make sure you got everything.
- b. Reprint the homework, since you have access to everything on Blackboard. Try out a few examples of every type of question, then check your answers against your old corrected assignments.
- c. If you discover anything you still don’t understand or can’t do correctly, e-mail the professor for an appointment. This is why you need to start studying early!

Test Anxiety

Do you know that feeling of looking at a question and suddenly forgetting how to read English? One of the best ways to avoid “test anxiety” is to feel secure about how you do things. The way you solve problems every time is called “process.” You develop this by doing your homework!

Question: “Spell a D-flat major scale.”

Problem: That’s a lot of flats. OMG, I just drew a blank!

Process:

- Write in the noteheads for the scale. Each letter name can only be used once, so that’s an easy thing you can do. This will help you calm down.
- Recall the order of flats: BEADGCF (memorized).
- Recall that for a “flat” key, the next-to-last flat is the key name.
- Add B, E, A, D (key name), and G flats to the noteheads.

Whole-Test Process

Another good way to void “test anxiety” is to know how you’ll go about taking a test.

Remember, like academic reading, you’re not just going to start at the top and go to the end. Below is a whole-test process that might help you:

- 1) Put your name on the paper. (It’s easy and you’ll get it right every time!)
- 2) Read all the instructions on the test. If a question has multiple parts, underline them:
 - “Identify the triads below by root name and inversion.”
- 3) Do the easiest questions first. This will build your confidence.
- 4) When you get to the harder questions, trust that you studied and go with your first instinct. Anxiety makes people over-think. If you are prepared, your first instinct is usually the right one.
- 5) Keep track of how much time you have. Use the last few minutes to review your answers. Finishing the test might feel better, but it’s actually better for your grade if you answer fewer questions correctly.

Studying doesn’t end with the grade!

Most students get their assignment or test back, look at the grade, and then forget about it.

It’s a better idea to really look at what you missed and also why you missed it. The worksheet on the next page is a “test debrief” exercise that will help you find out what you do well when you study and what you could do better. It only works if you’re honest with yourself.

**CORRECT EVERY PAPER YOU GET BACK AND
TAKE IT TO THE PROFESSOR TO VERIFY THE ANSWERS.**

It doesn’t matter if you get more credit for doing this or not. It will impress the professor, help you learn, and give you a set of correct answers to review.

Copy the checklist below and fill it out every time you get a test back.

Exam Self-Assessment Class: _____ Test date: _____ Topic: _____

STUDY HABITS

- 1) I felt I was well-prepared for this test. True False
- 2) I was surprised by how I did on this test. True False
- 3) I did all the assigned reading for this test. True False
- 4) I did all the assigned homework for this test. True False
- 5) I reviewed my notes before the test. True False
- 6) I reviewed the readings before the test. True False
- 7) I reviewed my old assignments before the test. True False
- 8) I spent about _____ hours reviewing readings, notes, and assignments.
- 9) I reviewed using a website or software in addition to course materials. True False
- 10) I let myself be distracted by music, electronics, or people while studying. True False

CLASS HABITS

- 1) I missed _____ classes that were related to this test or came unprepared to _____ classes.
- 2) I didn't do or didn't turn in _____ assignments that were related to this test.
- 3) I was distracted during class or not paying attention. True False
- 4) When I got assignments back, I didn't correct them. True False
- 5) I didn't take sufficiently detailed notes on the reading. True False
- 6) I didn't take correct or detailed notes in class. True False
- 7) When I had questions, I contacted the professor or went to office hours. True False
- 8) I worked on memorizing at least 15 minutes every day, *without distractions*. True False

Note any other observations below:

	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
6:00-6:30 AM							
6:30-7:00							
7:00-7:30							
7:30-8:00							
8:00-8:30							
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5:00-5:30							
5:30-6:00							

	Quiz/Test	Project/Paper	Performance
Week 1			
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			
Week 5			
Week 6			
Week 7			
Week 8			
Week 9			
Week 10			
Week 11			
Week 12			
Week 13			
Week 14			
Week 15			
Exam Week			