Learning Café Quick Study Tips

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR INTRODUCTORY COMPUTER COURSE

Many students find their first computer course intimidating. They are given a textbook or handbook, some basic introductory instruction in class and then sent off to complete assignments. If you are one of these students, there are many ways to overcome your initial fear of using computers.

© Microsoft®

How Do I Start?

Your Instructor

Your instructor is your primary resource for information regarding the content of your course. You should not hesitate to ask for help if you don't understand a concept or an application. If you do not speak up, your instructor will assume that you understand what was covered in class. Speak to your instructor either in class or make an appointment to meet after class.

Perhaps you feel that you are the only one who doesn't understand the topics covered in class. Don't be fooled by the silence of your classmates. Perhaps they too are afraid to speak out. Your questions can prompt your instructor to cover material in more detail or give useful examples to illustrate a technique.

> *If you understood everything that was covered in class,
> you wouldn't need to take the course!*

Occasionally instructors cover material too quickly or too superficially for some students. This may happen because the instructor has had years of experience working with computers and is not aware that you have had no experience at all. Students come to college with many different levels of experience. It is up to you to discuss your needs with your instructor.

Your Textbook

Most computer classes require you to purchase a textbook or handbook for the type of programs you will be using. Your textbook can be an invaluable tool to help you understand what happens when you press the buttons on the keyboard. Many students do not read their texts carefully enough. You wouldn't begin to prepare an unfamiliar recipe without first looking at the ingredients list and instructions, would you? In the same way you should apply appropriate reading strategies to reading your textbook. You should use standard textbook reading techniques to preview your computer textbook. Use "read to learn" techniques, such as
- previewing
- questioning titles, subheadings
- reading to find answers
- looking through the table of contents
- reading the introduction
- locating the index and the helpful hints found in most texts. Computer texts often have shortcut instructions for using the keyboard and mouse commands. Be sure you understand how the text indicates these shortcuts.

Most computer course handbooks take you step by step through the variety of standard processes you will use on the computer. Read each chapter title and turn it into a question.

For example: If the title of the chapter is "Saving Files",
your questions may be "What are files? How do I save them?"

After you create the question, read the chapter to find the answers. As you read, you will find yourself asking other questions. Write these down and try to find the answers in your text. Read carefully and slowly, if necessary just a phrase at a time. Be sure you understand one step before proceeding to the next. If there are any suggested activities, complete them to ensure that you are applying what you have read. If you continue to have difficulty understanding the text or finding answers to your questions, ask your instructor.

Your Computer

Your goal is to become proficient at using the computer for many tasks. The key to computer success is to use the computer! Here are a few examples of ways to practice using your computer:

- retype your notes on the word processor
- send and receive e-mail frequently
- use the calculator or create a spreadsheet
- keep track of your budget at home, plan a trip, organize your grocery list

The key here is to learn by doing. If you limit your use of the computer to the assignments in your class, you will also limit your ability to understand the variety of applications the computer has for everyday life. Trial and error is part of learning about computers.

At Lethbridge College there are several computer labs for your use. If necessary, you can often use an extra computer in a lab while a class is being taught. Just be sure you have permission from the instructor and then arrive on time.

Remember:
You can't hurt the computer!
You must ask your instructor if you need help!
You must read the textbook!
You must use the computer!

For more information on any of the suggestions given here, please visit the Learning Café, located in the library (CE1340) / 403-382-6952 / learningcafe@lethbridgecollege.ca
Or sign up for a Student Success Workshop!