

NorthBridge Student Guide

Preparing for a Successful Transition to College: A Guide for Students with Learning Differences

Introduction

The transition from high school to college is never easy, and it can be even more overwhelming for someone with a learning difference. As a young adult, you are now expected to be more proactive and independent when it comes to planning for classes and doing assignments.

This workbook provides suggestions on how to better understand your learning style and strengths, as well as direction on where to find support on college and university campuses.

Read on for tips on how to prepare for the transition to college and how to get the most out of your postsecondary educational experience.

NorthBridge conducted extensive research with Arizona high school graduates with learning differences, including questions about the following:

What were your plans after HS? How was this plan implemented? Successes? Challenges? What are you doing NOW?

What did you want from your post-secondary experience that you did not get?



Feedback was consistent among nearly every student surveyed. To be successful, students with learning differences need a comprehensive system of support that goes beyond academic tutoring.

College Support Needs Assessment



Step 1: How prepared for college are you? Take a college support needs assessment and find out. How would you answer the following questions?

Circle your answer.

1

Am I an effective critical thinker? (This entails analysis beyond simple memorization. Example - Can I analyze an article to determine viewpoint and/or bias? Can I identify and articulate an opposing argument?)

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

2

Am I an effective time manager? (This includes organization and disciplined scheduling of time. Example - Do I submit assignments in a timely manner? Do I allow for sufficient time to complete high quality assignments or am I guilty of procrastination?)

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

3

Am I organized? (This involves effective strategies for organizing physical materials as well as a day-to-day schedule. Example - Do I utilize an effective organizational system for my school materials? Do I have an organizational system for assignments and my schedule?)

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

4

Am I an effective communicator? (This includes the ability to clearly and appropriately convey and receive verbal and written messages. Example - Am I able to effectively communicate with others both verbally and in written form, including e-mail? Can I effectively interact with both peers and teachers?)

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

5

Am I an effective self-advocate? (This involves being able to understand individual learning differences, effectively communicate these differences to those who are best able to offer support in a timely manner. Example - If/when I struggle in school, do I know who to seek out for help and do I do it in a timely manner? Am I able to communicate my needs effectively and can I describe my own learning challenges?)

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

If you primarily responded with “most of the time,” you have good academic habits. Yet, you could still benefit from on-campus disability services as well as some additional academic support, either from the campus tutoring center or private tutoring.

If you primarily respond with “sometimes,” you need to further develop your academic habits and skills. You will likely benefit from on-campus disability services and additional academic support in the form of:

- Private or campus based one-on-one tutoring
- A mentor/coach/case manager who can help you develop solid communication, organization, time management and self-advocacy skills

If you primarily respond with “rarely,” you need to develop additional skills and new study habits to be successful. You will benefit from on-campus disability services and additional academic support in the form of:

- Private one-to-one tutoring
- A mentor/coach/case manager who can help you develop solid communication, organization, time management and self-advocacy skills
- A comprehensive program, like NorthBridge, that offers support navigating the college experience

Understanding Your Learning Style and Strengths

Knowing your strengths and weaknesses is crucial to the learning process. Before your first semester at a university, community college or vocational school begins, figure out how you learn best and make a plan to implement these practices.

- Knowing your learning style will help you choose classes that will allow you to have the best chance of success
- Knowing your learning strengths and interests will help you choose classes that you will enjoy and that will help you to meet academic and (eventually) career goals



Step 2: Take a Learning Assessment

<http://www.dvc.edu/enrollment/counseling/lss/survey.html>

Enter in your learning style here:



Visual/verbal learner: Learning is most valuable to you when ideas and concepts are associated with images or words. To put it simply, you need to see the information in order to understand.



Visual/nonverbal learner: It is easiest for you to learn by looking at a diagram or graph. You benefit most from diagrams, charts, pictures and films.



Kinesthetic learner: Your preferred method of learning is reliant on physical aspects such as touch, action and movement. You are most successful when you are totally engaged and can feel the materials in your hand.



Auditory learner: The best way for you to learn is to listen. You retain information by reinforcing it through sound.



Step 3: Assess your strengths and interests

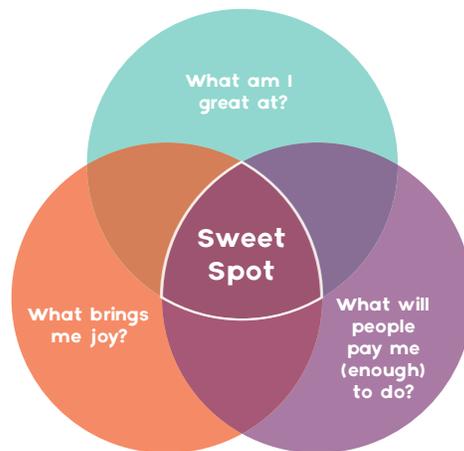
List your academic strengths - *what subjects and activities are you best at?*

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List your personal interests - *what subjects and activities do you most enjoy?*

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When you are done listing your own strengths and interests, **circle** any similarities between the two lists. You are most likely to do well in classes if you are passionate and interested in the subject matter. **Finding the intersections of your strengths and interests can help you choose the right courses, subject matter and eventually, career choices.**



Then do the same activity with a friend, parent, mentor or advisor. Add any input from your supporter.



Do they see your strengths differently?

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Which topics and subjects are both strengths and areas of interest?

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Which classes correspond to your strengths and areas of interest?

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Work may be your dominant thought, and joy an afterthought. But joy is your true purpose, and work the afterthought.

— Alan Cohen



Step 4: Become a Self Advocate

Self Advocacy: Definition

1. Know yourself: Understanding your academic strengths and weaknesses is the best way to prepare yourself for college. Being a self-advocate will help you communicate your needs to others around you. The more you know, the better you will understand, and the easier it will be to clearly explain your skill levels to your professors, tutors and peers.

2. Who to ask for help: Your professors in college want to see you succeed. Do not be afraid to ask questions when you do not understand, and reach out if you think you could benefit from some one-on-one time. Additionally, the disability services office on campus can provide support such as test preparation and homework assistance. Visiting colleges campuses will give you a good idea about how that college will best fit your needs and expectations.

3. When to ask for help: Remember that your professors want you to succeed. If you do not understand an assignment, chances are you will not be successful on the exam. Before the semester begins, it is a good idea to let your teachers know that you have a learning disability. In college, you will need to be more upfront and self-sufficient than you were in high school. Stand up for yourself and clearly communicate your needs to get support.

4. How to ask for help: You will only get the help you need in college if you request it. Contact the disability services office to see what accommodations they can offer you. It is a good idea to find out what documents are required before seeking help on a college campus. Make a list of questions that you have before the meeting.



You have likely had some experience self advocating already. List examples where you have advocated to:

Your parents/guardians:

Teachers/Counselors:

Friends or Classmates:

Supervisors or Co-workers:

Others:

Working with Disability Services

Being an effective Self Advocate is essential in college and it often begins at the Disabilities Resource Service Office.

It is important for you to know that disability support services are available on campuses to provide alternative accommodations for students with learning differences. Students are encouraged to reach out to the office if they need help in the following areas:

Common accommodations/supports

Note takers: Note taking accommodations can be offered in various forms. One of the most common techniques is peer note taking. Students with learning differences will be provided with a set of notes from another student already enrolled in the course.

Recorded lectures: Students with a diagnosed learning difference may be recommended to record class lectures. This may include the use of a Smart Pen, digital recorder or computer software.

Testing: Alternative testing accommodations are available to students who are registered with disability services on campus. Students are responsible for communicating with professors before an exam and specify which testing format is needed. Some of the alternative test forms are enlarged test, assistive technology, isolated room, a step in reader or writer.

Extended time: Additional time on tests generally follows the “time and a half” rule based on the duration of standard exams. Instructors provide this accommodation by allowing a student extended time directly before or immediately after a scheduled exam, during office hours or at any other mutually agreed upon time.

Alternative location: Students can be set up at a separate testing site to making completing exams and quizzes easier. The purpose of this are is to eliminate any testing distractions that could hinder a student with learning differences.

Assistive technology: Assistive technology can support both compensatory and remedial approaches for students in college. Whether it be a digital recording or a tech-savvy tool, both approaches can be valuable to a student with learning differences. Computers and handheld devices are an ideal form of assistive technology because they they cut out distractions, decrease the stress of stimuli and leave more of a student’s brain for thinking.

Preferential seating: Some students with learning differences may prefer to sit in the front, back or side of a classroom. Depending on a person’s needs they may require a specific chair or table to increase their work productivity. The professor must be made aware of these requests to set up accommodations based on their classroom.



Based on your learning style,

- ✓ check the types of services you think you need the most, and
- ☆ star the services that have helped you in the past.

Make a list of the things you plan to say when you ask for disability support services:

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Getting Ready to Advocate for Yourself

Do you feel you are an effective self advocate? Why or why not?

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How you become a better self-advocate?

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Set Yourself up For Success

1. Make the choice to attend community college or university carefully
2. Choose classes carefully (advisement)
3. Research your professors
4. Set up a support system
5. Make a great first impression
6. Ask for help
7. Show up and participate
8. Use technology to your advantage
9. Get to know your professors
10. Work hard

Critical College Skills



Study Skills



Time Management



Communication



Self-Advocacy Skills



Stress Management



Organizational Skills



Self-Determination



Critical Thinking Skills

NorthBridge is dedicated to helping college age young adults with learning differences excel in a postsecondary education. Students are provided with a multi-layered support system that focuses on both academic success and personal development.

Our program offers the necessary support to help you succeed in a postsecondary environment and accomplish your goals. Our academic specialists understand the importance of helping each student reach their goals. Through individualized mentorship, our center reinforces effective planning strategies, developing and refining study skills, building reading comprehension, editing and proofreading essays and creating organized and efficient study plans.

Pursuing your postsecondary goals without support is like walking a tight rope without a safety net. Be smart and find or develop the support system that works for you. Good luck!

