

# Survive Your First Year at College by Asking Yourself These 10 Best Questions

## Highlight

Avoid the worst college freshmen pitfalls, money mistakes, and time wasters by asking yourself the right questions.

## The 10 Best Questions®

This is the shorthand version. The experts' best answers are below.

1. How do I become a Time Management Jedi?
2. Will I avoid serious financial and credit card mistakes while I'm in school?
3. Can I learn to say "no" more often?
4. Am I overloading myself?
5. Realistically, how can I avoid soul-searing stress?
6. Will I focus on good exercise and eating well?
7. How can I find and feed my passion?
8. Do I really know which classes are the right ones to take?
9. Am I willing to get to know my professor? To find a mentor?
10. How's my sleep?

## The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

Will I remember my old friends and family and treat them well?

## The 10 Best Answers

### 1. How do I become a Time Management Jedi?

There are two magic words in the best answer: calendar and routine. Pick the best type of calendar for you – digital, paper, or phone – and make it a habit not to forget noting homework assignments and other important responsibilities.

Magic word # 2: routine. The most successful students are masters of established routines. Experts at *Peterson's College Guides* say, "The biggest shifts in college compared to high school are the lack of daily structure and fewer hours in class. Plan around an eight-hour day comprised of class time, study, preps, and meetings."

Then you can skip the all-nighters and have fun in the evenings instead.

[Related: Timely Time Management Tips for College Students: The 10 Best Questions](#)

## **2. Will I avoid serious financial and credit card mistakes while I'm in school?**

Your college experience is also a financial journey. You can either learn good money management skills now or walk away with a crushing debt that haunts you into retirement.

Trent Hamm, founder of the personal finance website *TheSimpleDollar.com* advises, "Avoid credit card sign-ups like the plague. Credit card hawkers are often on college campuses, offering freebies like T-shirts to entice you to sign up for a credit card."

He's right. According to the College Parents of America, 50 percent of students have four or more credit cards and 60 percent are shocked at how high their balances have gotten.

[Related: Smart Credit Card Choices for College Students: The 10 Best Questions](#)

## **3. Can I learn to say "no" more often?**

Besides saying no to credit cards, other assertiveness challenges await you. Saying "yes" to all the new freedoms explains why many new students get overwhelmed or in trouble.

Most people become more assertive later in life, but why wait? Assertiveness is a life-long skill that's also a great stress antidote. Of course, you can't tell your professor or boss no, but the little word "no" is the ticket to avoiding awful parties or other time-sucks and budget-busting shopping sprees.

Nationally-syndicated advice columnist Carolyn Hax advises, "It may be tough to get the hang of it at first, but saying it once, and subsequently watching the Earth remain solidly on its axis, is usually all it takes."

[Related: Assertiveness for Former Doormat Types: Ask These 10 Best Questions](#)

## **4. Am I overloading myself?**

Be kind to yourself, especially during your first term or first year. It's a tough academic, social and emotional transition so learn the ropes and still have fun. You got accepted into this school, right? Stop trying to prove you're good enough.

“For the first semester, take on a challenging but reasonable workload,” Micha Sabovik, an Assistant Dean at Boston University’s College of Communication told HerCampus.com. “You’ll be making a lot of adjustments all at once, not just academically.”

[Related: How to Choose the Best College Classes: The 10 Best Questions Checklist](#)

## **5. Realistically, how can I avoid soul-searing stress?**

Psychologists’ secret weapon for stress and tough decisions is a time-honored tool called “Force Field Analysis.”

Try it. It’s based on the principle that you should only focus on those stressors in your life over which you have some control to change. For example, you can talk to your obnoxious roommate about her messy habits and jointly agree on ground rules.

More at: Wikipedia, “Force-Field Analysis,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field\\_analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field_analysis)

[Related: Stress Relief by Asking These 10 Best Questions](#)

## **6. Will I focus on good exercise and eating well?**

Every late-night ramen dinner ultimately costs brain cells and physical endurance. College *is* a race, a competition. This race is about earning A’s and getting a good life/career later on.

Get a routine here, too. Move on over to your campus’s recreational center for yoga, swimming, or weight-lifting. Pick one healthy veggie per week (or month) and concentrate on learning to love it, no matter what. Hold your nose and send broccoli down the hatch. At least order your Chinese takeout food steamed, not fried.

[Related: Snack Attack or Snack Sanity? Shop Smart with This 10 Best Questions Checklist](#)

## **7. How can I find and feed my passion?**

Will college be my time of discovery or just a biggest missed opportunity in my life? Think outside the classroom and even off-campus to figure out what you love to do and what makes time zoom by. Get the full benefit of your expensive tuition.

For example, if you’re a STEM student (science, technology, engineering, or math), build an early professional network. Then try a totally different interest like photography or music classes. Another route is to investigate the pros and cons of declaring an academic minor. Or just go clubbing.

[Related: Clubbing Tonight? Ask Yourself These 10 Best Questions and Be Really Ready](#)

## **8. Do I really know which classes are the right ones to take?**

So many options, so little time. Experts say you should pick classes for reasons beyond convenience and requirements. Here are alternative ideas from Northwestern University Professor Andrew Roberts in his book, *The Thinking Student's Guide to College*.

Sample 5 to 10 classes during the first week of a semester to see what you like.

Aim for course variety in different disciplines instead of rushing to complete your general-ed requirements. Include a class that challenges your beliefs.

Take classes that require lots of writing and papers. Roberts says, "Employers want graduates who can write even if you're majoring in a technical or scientific field."

### **9. Am I willing to get to know my professor? To find a mentor?**

Do you know what Bill Gates and Luke Skywalker have in common? A great mentor.

Let your professors help you pass the class by asking them questions. If you hit it off with him or her, you might have a potential mentor. Professors schedule office hours with the main purpose of meeting with students, Take the initiative and take the time.

[Related: The 10 Worst Questions to Ask Your Professor](#)

### **10. How's my sleep?**

Sure, it's a boring question, but it's too easy for this first taste of college to sweep you away. You can't stay awake for the next several months or years, so figure out what hours and times work best for you.

Routine, routine, routine. Boring answer, too.

### **The Golden Question**

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

### **Will I remember my old friends and family and treat them well?**

As you plan visits home, ask yourself: Have I been good about staying in touch? It's too easy to let new distractions take over.

The University of California student paper *Daily Californian* suggests sending your friends a simple text, "Hey! What's up?" to get restarted. Then meet up for an easygoing conversation over a coffee or lunch.

Be considerate of your family. They haven't changed even though you have.

[Related: Avoid Awkward Small Talk with Old Friends: Ask These 10 Best Questions](#)

## QDoc's Q-Tipster

No matter what happens this semester, remember that *you* are amazing. Be great, do great things and have fun! And keep asking great questions!

### References

1. Bradbury-Haehl, Nora and Bill McGarvey, *The Freshman Survival Guide: Soulful Advice for Studying, Socializing, and Everything In Between*, New York: Center Street, 2011.
2. CollegeParentsofAmerica.com, "College Students and Credit Cards: Some Statistics," <http://www.collegeparents.org/members/resources/articles/college-students-and-credit-cards-%E2%80%93-some-statistics>
3. CreditCards.com, "Credit Card Debt Statistics," by Tamara E. Holmes and Yasmin Ghahremani, <http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-debt-statistics-1276.php>
4. *Daily Californian* (University of California, Berkeley), "How to Reconnect with Friends at Home," by Sophia Zepeda, May 26, 2015, <http://www.dailycal.org/2015/05/26/how-to-reconnect-with-friends-at-home/>
5. *Daily Californian* (University of California, Berkeley), "Stay Motivated: A UC Berkeley Survival Guide," by Hopi Hernandez, November 1, 2014, <http://www.dailycal.org/2014/11/01/berkeley-survival-guide-101/>
6. DeVillers, Julia, *The College Dorm Survival Guide: How to Survive and Thrive in Your New Home Away from Home*, New York: Crown Publishing, 2010.
7. *Fast Company*, "5 Career Questions To Ask Yourself Instead Of, 'What's My Passion?'" by Allison Jones, September 11, 2014, <http://www.fastcompany.com/3050942/5-career-questions-to-ask-yourself-instead-of-whats-my-passion>
8. Fitzgerald, Susan, and J. Lee Peters PhD, *The Everything College Survival Book: All You Need to Get the Most Out of College Life*, NY: Adams Media, 2011.
9. HerCampus.com "Choosing College Classes: Important Tips For Incoming Freshmen," by Kelsey Mulvey, <http://www.hercampus.com/life/academics/pre-collegiettes-guide-choosing-classes-freshman-year-college>
10. MindTools.com, "Force Field Analysis: Analyzing the Pressures For and Against Change," [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_06.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm)
11. *Peterson's Guides*, "Ask the Experts: Colleges and Universities - Survival Tips," by Peterson's Staff, January 23, 2013, <https://www.petersons.com/college-search/ask-experts-college-survival.aspx>

12. *Psychology Today*, “Seven Major Ways to Choose a College Minor,” by Mitchell M. Handelsman Ph.D., <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-ethical-professor/201404/seven-major-ways-choose-college-minor>
13. Roberts, Andrew, *The Thinking Student's Guide to College: 75 Tips for Getting a Better Education*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010.
14. University of Hartford, “25 Tips to Help You Survive Your Freshman Year,” [https://www.hartford.edu/career\\_services/files/pdf/25\\_tips.pdf](https://www.hartford.edu/career_services/files/pdf/25_tips.pdf)
15. University of West Florida, “Course Description: College Survival Skills,” <http://uwf.edu/offices/first-year-advising/college-survival-skills/college-survival-skills/>
16. USNews.com, “7 Big Money Savers for Your First Year at College,” by Trent Hamm, August 12, 2014.
17. USNews.com, “7 Tips for Selecting College Classes,” by Lynn O'Shaughnessy, February 8, 2011, <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/the-college-solution/2011/02/08/7-tips-for-selecting-college-classes>
18. *The Washington Post*, “Tell Me About It,” by Carolyn Hax, December 31, 2012, page C3.
19. Wikipedia, “Force-Field Analysis,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field\\_analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Force-field_analysis)
20. YouVisit.com, “7 Tips You Need to Know to Survive College,” September 13, 2013, <https://www.youvisit.com/virtual-tours/blog/7-tips-you-need-to-know-survive-college/>

©2015 - 10 Best Questions, LLC. All rights reserved.  
[www.10bestquestions.com](http://www.10bestquestions.com)

by Dr. Dede Bonner, The Question Doctor  
10 BQ Document # COL054

This article is for information only and is not intended to be a substitute for personal, professional, legal, or medical advice.