

Dr. Wenning's Advice for PTE Majors

Autumn 2019

These suggestions are based on the 42 years of university and college teaching experience of your course instructor. Following this advice can lead to success in both this course and in life; failure to heed this advice will lead to just that.

Achievement and Goals:

- ***Set high personal and academic standards for yourself and live up to them.*** Listen to that little voice inside you that says, "I can do this." Believe in yourself. Realize that school is work; it's not playtime. Settle for nothing less than your very best. Willingness to accept anything less than the very best too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Strive for an "A" in all your courses. If you fall short of an "A", you might earn a "B". If you fall short of a "C", you will earn a "D" or "F".
- ***Understand that a good education requires hard work on the part of the student.*** Many students come to the university under the mistaken impression that "now the fun begins." While university life can and should be fun, don't miss the point that your learning requires more than just sitting in on classes. Good teaching does not equate to good learning. In order to learn, you must settle down and work hard. Think of your university education as your first "real" job. Job performance is officially measured by grades. Who will want to hire someone with lack-luster job performance?
- ***Remember that grades count.*** The best jobs with the best pay most often go to those with the best grades. High grades imply intelligence, personal excellence, and dedication to seeing a job well done. High grades can make all the difference in landing the ideal job or getting into graduate school at the institution of your choice.
- ***Turn in only your best work.*** Avoid doing an incomplete, careless, or sloppy job; show pride in all your work. Your work ethic - and perhaps even your academic ability - is reflected in your work. Strive to impress those from whom you might later ask for a letter of recommendation.
- ***Never fail to turn in an assignment.*** Missed assignments score zero. Keep in mind that a zero figured into your course average can have devastating consequences. Consider the following four submissions: 100%, 100%, 100%, 0%. The average is 75%, a letter grade of C by the usual grading scale. Is a C acceptable when your typical performance has been A-grade?
- ***Don't sacrifice major long-term goals for minor short-term gratification.*** Major gains are most often associated with long-term efforts. It is best to put off immediate gratification so as to achieve major long-term gains.
- ***Speak with your instructor if you are having difficulty keeping up with work.*** Sometimes an unexpected turn of events can cause you to fall behind in your coursework, and all you need is a bit of time to catch up. Don't forget that instructors have been students before; they are likely to understand. If you can make a good case for your self, you might be given additional time to get your assignments completed after the deadline and even submitted without a late penalty.
- ***Don't make important decisions without consulting a qualified authority.*** If you are uncertain about something, check it out before you decide. Your departmental advisor will probably be the best person to consult about academic matters. Jumping to rash conclusions based on incorrect information can cause you significant personal and professional problems. Talk with those who you trust before making important decisions but make certain that those people are well qualified to give proper advice.

- **Take the initiative.** If you see something wrong, do something to correct it immediately. Don't wait until the situation gets worse before acting. Recall the old sayings "Nip a problem in the bud" and "A stitch in time saves nine". These aphorisms are intended to keep problems from getting worse.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Don't give in to boredom or resignation if coursework is more challenging than you expected. Continue to work hard. Even if you are struggling, keep in mind that you are way ahead of those who aren't even trying. When you are having difficulties, speak with your instructor or advisor.
- **Don't let bias or fear paralyze you.** Some people say that physics is "hard" or only for "geeks" or "brainiacs." Not so! If you think this really is the case, then you might find yourself with a self-fulfilling prophesy. Form your own opinion about physics. Yes, physics is a bit more challenging than other subjects because there are word problems with precise answers, but don't let that paralyze you. You can learn and hone the necessary skills. You can use knowledge and reason to obtain correct answers. By taking physics you can learn critical thinking and essential problem-solving skills. These are worth the added effort. They will pay lifetime dividends.

Studying, Learning, and Time Management:

- **Commit yourself to learning.** Two of the greatest failings of university students are: (1) failure to complete assigned readings, and (2) failure to attend class regularly. Students with poor grades often exhibit these characteristics. Complete reading assignments before the corresponding lectures and be certain to attend all course lectures. Reading and lectures are intended by course instructors to work together to help students learn.
- **Know what it takes to succeed.** Success is a function of innate ability, learned ability, motivation, effort, and environment. How well you succeed will depend upon how well you take advantage of the relationship between the independent variables. Speak with your PTE coordinator to learn more about these important factors.
- **Strive first to understand.** Don't merely memorize; increase your depth of understanding. You need to attempt to fully comprehend what you need to know and be able to do as a result of your education. You will remember what you understand and forget what you merely memorized.
- **Read your textbook prior to class.** One of the most significant factors associated with student success is the completion of required readings in a timely fashion. Read for understanding. If a reading doesn't make sense to you, reread it and do any associated mathematics for yourself. Don't skip over example problems. Be certain to examine all pictures and read their captions. Come to class having learned as much as possible about the topic for the day. Bring with you any questions from your reading. Don't wait for an exam to begin reading.
- **Stay ahead of your instructor; never fall behind.** Always come to class fully prepared by having both read and studied the chapter under consideration. You will get much more out of your reading by striving to understand the content of a chapter before the teacher addresses it in class. Again, don't confuse the work of the teacher with that of the student. The teacher is responsible for preparing situations under which a student can learn. It's up to the student to do the actual learning. Teaching does not necessarily result in learning. Learning is the work of the student.
- **Avoid procrastination.** Don't delay until tomorrow what you can do today. Work should come before pleasure. Manage your time effectively; set up a time line for getting work completed in each of your courses. Set aside adequate time for homework, study, sleep, relationships, and work. You need not always finish every task all at once. Remember the fable of the tortoise and the hare; slow and steady is often better than jackrabbit sprints.

- **Investigate learning and test taking skills.** Educational researchers have studied what it takes to get ahead academically. Take advantage of what they can tell us.
- **Make and use lists.** Start off each day making lists of things you need to complete, and rank order them. Start each list with headings including all work areas as well as personal. Use a program for managing your lists. This will help insure that you get all necessary work completed in a timely fashion. Remember that those who fail to plan, plan to fail.
- **Break your large tasks down into manageable sub tasks.** Large jobs rarely can be completed at one setting. Tackle small parts of a large task each day; avoid cramming. Remember, you can write a 365-page book every year if you only write one page per day.
- **Use the Snowball method.** If you are having problems getting your work done, start small. Complete your smaller, less complex tasks first. This approach works because it furnishes rewards, builds confidence, and provides the experience and confidence needed to complete larger, more complex tasks.
- **Sustain your efforts.** Work hard from the beginning and keep up a sustained effort. Learning is similar to flying an airplane. You are most efficient when flying at altitude. Lots of energy is wasted in landing and taking off repeatedly.
- **Persist until the very end.** It's amazing how many A's turn into B's and B's into C's in a course, and this frequently occurs right at the end. A foot race is won only when a runner persists until crossing the finish line. Many races are lost because the runner didn't have that "kick" at the end. So it is with grades and course work.
- **Don't over-commit yourself.** Mature students always take responsibility for their actions – all of them. Some students will commit themselves to more work than they are capable of completing. Don't let this happen to you; you owe it to others to be honest to your word.
- **Get a job.** Studies show that students who work from about 8-10 hours per week tend to organize and spend their "free" time more wisely. Overworking or not working at all sometimes can be detrimental to personal and academic success.
- **Don't ignore or deny your personal and academic problems.** Problems will often get worse if they are not directly addressed in a timely fashion. Procrastination in any of its many forms can lead to a small problem getting much worse. Confront your problems head-on and get help when you need it. Speak to your course instructors, your advisor, or your parents.

Personal and Professional Integrity:

- **Integrity counts.** It is easier to retain your integrity than trying to reclaim it. Failing to complete reading assignments, turning in poor quality work, missing important deadlines, cheating, and failing to contribute meaningfully to class activities are all examples of failed integrity. It might cost you something to do a job right the first time, but it will cost you a lot more to do the same job after you have failed to do the right initially.
- **Honesty is the best policy.** Avoid cheating in all its forms – collusion, plagiarism, copying, etc. Students who cheat seriously fail to learn what is oftentimes important, and this doesn't help them in the long run. Sometimes the only things they do learn – after getting caught – is that cheating doesn't pay.
- **Take responsibility for your actions.** If you screw up on a test or quiz, it's always easier to blame someone or something else – the fault is with the teacher or with the text book or with your roommate or with who knows what else. When you find yourself regularly blaming others for

your failings, you know that you have a problem. People who blame others see themselves as victims. As victims, you feel you can do nothing to change the situation. When you see yourself as responsible, you can take the initiative to change.

- **Learn from the success and failures of others.** It is important to learn from both the successes and failures of others. Read biographies of those who you admire and emulate their successful practices and avoid the practices that have resulted in failure. It is better to learn from the experiences of others than from your own experiences. Failures, in particular, are one way to learn but they can be very expensive in a variety of ways. It is best to educate yourself – learn from the failures of others – than to experience mistakes from which you might never recover.

Personal Development:

- **Seek out special opportunities.** College is a time to expand your mind and your experiences. Select your general education courses wisely. Consider student research, field trip opportunities, or a new language. Choose courses that will expand your world; avoid taking courses merely because they are “an easy A” or a “blow-off course.”
- **Make yourself a well-rounded person.** Consider all four dimensions of life as you strive to educate yourself – physical, spiritual, intellectual, and social. Spend time each day developing each of these four dimensions. Cultural literacy can be enhanced by picking up a foreign language and by reading widely. It would behoove most teacher candidates to read one of the several cultural literacy books authored or coauthored by E. D. Hirsch.
- **Take responsibility for yourself.** When some students begin college life their sense of personal responsibility seems to disappear. Parents or guardians are no longer “cracking the whip” making certain that everything is getting done correctly or on time. That work is now the responsibility of the student. Failure to recognize this fact has resulted in even some of the best high school students failing as university students.
- **Get to know a wide range of people – faculty, staff, and students.** Networking is important. It is often true that who you know is just as important as what you know. Use your acquaintances to advantage, but don’t take advantage of them.
 - Meet with your departmental advisor early on and frequently; he or she can provide valuable and timely advice.
 - Get to know your teachers; just because they might have a Ph.D. is no reason to believe that they are not interested in you as a student.
 - Get to know the majors in your field and form a study group.
- **Choose your friends carefully.** Friends can support you in your efforts to maximize the benefits of a college education. Friends too set on having a good time at the expense of a good education can be seriously detrimental. Get to know people who express high social, academic, and personal values.
- **Express your appreciation.** When others do something nice for you (e.g., fix a problem, provide you will important information, give you timely and helpful advice, go the extra mile), be certain to thank them sincerely. How many faculty and staff members have become less helpful due to the apparent lack of appreciation of students will never be known. Rest assured, however, that even a small word of “thanks” can make a difference in their day.