

# AGILE

## Maximize Your Academic Success at USM

When it comes to learning, it's what you *DO* that matters. The team at USM's Learning Commons wants to help you maximize your academic potential. Every learner can become AGILE, which stands for *Academic Gains through Improved Learning Effectiveness*. Plan ahead for success and stay on track by using this checklist.

**1) Go to class.** Class attendance does matter. Being a successful student starts with being present. Get to class early, be visible, and pay full attention. Attention is one of the most critical components of learning. Take steps to reduce distractions by [managing your learning environment](#) and avoiding the urge to multitask. Silence your phone and keep it in your bag.

**2) Review each course syllabus thoroughly.** The [syllabus](#) is an essential guide to understanding the professor's expectations, when assignments are due, how your work will be evaluated, and how your course grade will be calculated. Try to think of your syllabus as a map that gives you directions to arrive at the end of the semester successfully. Refer back to each syllabus weekly to keep yourself on track throughout the semester.

**3) Create a semester plan.** After reviewing each course syllabus, map out due dates for the entire semester. Whether that be through a physical day planner, a [semester-at-a-glance](#) worksheet, or Google Calendar, note all semester dates and deadlines at the beginning of the semester, not just as they approach. It's important to know the big picture!

**4) Create a weekly plan.** Scheduling enough time for your academics is essential. Once you know your "big picture," create a weekly plan by finding several times throughout the week for your academic "time-on-task." Consider creating a calendar with an online platform such as Google Calendar, that you'll be able to access from anywhere via your phone, laptop, or other smart device. If there are recurring events, you can schedule it once and have it repeat automatically with a quick click. You also can use other Google Calendar features to your advantage in your time management efforts, such as reminders before events. Refer to your calendar daily to get a sense of the day (and week) ahead, and to make your daily and weekly to-do lists. If enrolled in an online course, set times each week for you to work on the course; treat it like a live class and build "meeting times" into your weekly schedule.

**5) Meet with your professors.** Studies have shown that students who make an effort to get to know their professors are more likely to succeed in college. Introduce yourself to your professor early in the semester, not just when a problem arises. Visiting office hours early on in the semester can help you proactively address any areas of concern, clarify course concepts, and demonstrate your investment in the course. Your professor is here to help; don't miss the opportunities that office hours provide!

**6) Take effective notes.** If you find yourself thinking, "I don't need to take notes; I'll remember," challenge that belief. When we don't do anything with information in the moment, we are telling the brain it is not important, and we begin to forget almost immediately. Effective note taking is an active, purposeful process in and of itself. Figure out which note-taking approach will work best for each class or subject. Since it is normal to start to forget once you leave class, take steps to interrupt the forgetting process by reviewing your notes soon after class, preferably within 24 hours.

**7) Use spaced practice.** All effective learning requires practice. "Spaced" refers to the frequency of the practice, the "when." It means practicing more than once during the week, and allowing space in between the practice sessions. Once a week is not enough to build a skill, and trying to cram in lots of practice in one day results in fatigue, not productivity. Spaced practice takes finding several shorter times throughout your week, such as 60 minutes on Sunday, 45 minutes on Tuesday, and 30 minutes on Friday. This approach builds memory, understanding, and skill far more quickly, and creates "durable learning," learning that will last over time.

**8) Form a study group.** Studying in a group means meeting regularly with others from the class to teach each other concepts, ask challenging questions, predict exam questions, and debrief an exam. Sharing and discussing different ideas and perceptions will deepen your critical thinking and understanding of the material. If you can teach the information effectively and accurately, then you know it!

**9) Practice single tasking.** A common learning trap is the notion of multitasking, trying to complete two cognitive tasks simultaneously. When we multitask while trying to learn, some of the information never "gets into" our brain since we are not paying full attention. Single tasking entails removing distractions (people, phones, social media, etc.) and committing to pay full attention to the one academic task at hand. In order to be most effective and efficient with your time, have out only the materials you need for the particular study/work session.

**10) Work with a trained peer.** All USM students are encouraged to seek opportunities for active learning by working with Learning Assistants, Subject-Based Tutors, Writing Assistants, Technology Assistants, Peer Academic Coaches, or Learning Commons Navigators. Learning with a peer fosters self-testing for understanding, connecting concepts, and improving memory.

**11) Use AGILE strategies.** We want to help you, as a USM student, avoid common learning challenges, and instead increase your memory, understanding, and academic performance. These strategies involve self-testing, active practice, making connections between ideas, all of which will maximize your academic time both inside and outside of the classroom. The mantra we want you to remember is: "Be an AGILE learner" (Academic Gains through Improved Learning Effectiveness).

**12) Be proactive.** One of the greatest things about college is that you get to steer your own ship. You don't need permission to pursue the things that will make you successful, but you do need to be the one to take the initiative. Seek out ways to go beyond the minimum required and access help resources early in the semester. The momentum to succeed starts within you!