How Much Time Should You Devote to Studying?

You are entering college and, in some ways, it is the opposite of high school. During high school you may have spent 8 hours a day in classes and done homework for an hour or two. College places more emphasis on you as an independent learner supported by a professor knowledgeable in the course material. As a result, you will spend 2-4 hours a day in class and be expected to spend as long as it takes outside of class to master the content of the course.

For the average student, they can expect 4-6 hours of time studying each afternoon or evening.   If the course is primarily an activity course (creation of art, theatre, music performance or student teaching) you may find most of your "study" time is actually doing the activity.   If it is a lecture or lab-based course you will more likely find yourself doing a combination of reading, writing, and lab/project work.

The slow reader should add in extra time for reading. Example: to read a page of text for simply understanding the basic concepts and memorizing (what you probably did in high school) you will spend 1-2 minutes per page.   To read a course textbook thoroughly and for the purpose of understanding its nuances and relation to other course material, the average reader will need to spend 4-6 minutes per page.   A slow reader may need to double that time.

So, if your course gives you 50 pages to read for the evening, you can expect 4 hours of reading if you are normal reader and, perhaps, 6-8 hours of reading if you are a struggling reader.   This means you will have to use your lunch break, time in the morning after breakfast and before class and other small pockets of time efficiently to complete your reading assignments.   Some readers who struggle opt for a digital version of a textbook and a software program to convert their text to Mp3. That way they can listen to their text as they work out or do errands.

There are many types of software that can help you convert your digital textbook to audio format, if you are interested in this check with our office for some links to websites that might help you.

For the average Cornell block course you should estimate 6-8 hours of study time per day. Then take a self-assessment every so often to see if that is enough time or whether you need to increase it to be adequately prepared for class.

Another trick is to look ahead. Buy your book and start reading it over block break. Look over the syllabus when you receive it and look for ways you can get ahead over the weekend. Always work ahead so that if you do get sick or have some other emergency come up you can still be on schedule in the class.

General Time Management Tips

You have approximately 16 waking hours a day to spend on this "job" of academia.   We can assume you might spend 2-4 hours in class, 2-3 hours socializing (a sports team, a club, activity, playing video games or just talking with friends), 2 hours eating, and 2 hours in hygiene/chores. That leaves 5-8 hours a day for studying.   You can imagine that 4-5 hours of that might be spent in reading. Then 1-3 hours might be spent in reviewing for future test or writing a portion of a paper.   You will need to break large papers, presentations or assignments into smaller pieces so that it can fit into this schedule and still get done on time. Weekends will give you extra time so you should use those extra hours to work ahead and get some additional reading or writing accomplished.