College, on your terms

A practical field guide for neurodivergent students

You do not have to become someone else to succeed in college. Build systems that work for you, ask for access when you need it, and keep room for experiments, mistakes, and recovery.

10 PRACTICAL MOVES

1 Define your version of success

A degree, transfer, friendships, job skills, or greater independence can all be legitimate goals. Write down what you want this term.

2 Meet the access office early

Ask disability/access services how adjustments work, what documentation is needed, and when requests take effect. You can ask questions before deciding what to disclose.

3 Turn assignments into a map

For each task, capture the deliverable, grading criteria, due date, and first action. Ask for examples when directions leave too much to guess.

4 Schedule the start, not just the end

Break major work into smaller stages. Put a first-work session on your calendar rather than relying on the final due date to trigger action.

5 Use a few reliable tools

A calendar, a to-do list, and one place for class materials may be enough. Build habits around tools you will actually check.

6 Ask questions that can be answered

Try: “I completed steps 1–3, but I am stuck on the graph. Can you show me what the final result should include?”

7 Prepare communication options

Office hours, email, a written question, and a short meeting are different routes to help. Choose the route that fits the issue.

8 Decide what to share

A request for written instructions is not necessarily a request for an accommodation. Formal adjustments may follow a different process.

9 Practice the recovery move

After a missed class or deadline, contact the relevant person, check the policy, and identify one next task. Do not let embarrassment make the decision for you.

10 Track what helped

After each week, note one successful strategy and one change to test. Improvement is information, not a judgment of your worth.

Read the full guide: ttwnest.org/for/students/

Questions, suggestions, or corrections? info@ttwnest.org

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PUT IT INTO WORDS

When an assignment stops making sense

LESS HELPFUL

“I am bad at this, so I guess I will turn in nothing.”

TRY THIS INSTEAD

“I understand the research question but not the required format. Could you point me to an example or tell me the three sections you expect?”

A precise request makes it easier for a professor or tutor to respond. It also keeps you in charge of the next step.

FIVE-MINUTE ACTION CHECKLIST

- [ ] Find and save the disability/access office contact.
- [ ] Choose one place for course deadlines and reminders.
- [ ] Write a short, reusable email requesting clarification.
- [ ] Identify a professor, tutor, adviser, or peer you can ask for help.
- [ ] Plan what to do after a setback before one happens.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Official U.S. Department of Education guidance explains the shift from K–12 services to college accommodations. Karp and Bork describe how unwritten college expectations complicate navigation. Pashler and colleagues find no strong evidence for matching teaching to fixed “visual/auditory/kinesthetic learner” types.

BOUNDARIES AND CAVEATS

Use preferences and access needs as clues, not fixed learning-style labels. College procedures and eligibility vary; this sheet is not individual legal advice.

SOURCE STARTERS: U.S. Department of Education (2011) · Karp (2014) · Pashler (2008)

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