

Beliefs about Learning

Student beliefs about learning can affect the time they spend studying, how they study and the amount of energy and effort they are willing to invest. Here are some common **mistaken beliefs**:

1. **I can invest the same amount of time and effort on my studies as I did in high school and still be successful in college.** This is a mistaken belief held by many first-year college students. The amount of information and pace of learning is greater and quicker in college. Learning is not fast. It requires careful reading and review. Assignments often take longer than planned and it is necessary to complete reading far enough in advance to allow adequate time for review.
2. **Learning is memorizing facts, definitions or bits of information.** While memory is important, college learning goes beyond facts. In most cases one must go a level higher, understanding and applying concepts and solving problems.
3. **Being a good student is an in-born talent. If I don't "get it" I am either not smart or not good in that subject.** To be honest, this kind of thinking is completely bogus! There are very few people with in-born talent. In fact talent in general is greatly overrated. To be good at something requires the commitment of time, working hard and making sure that both are high quality, what is called *deliberate practice*. Your professors and others make things look easy because they have been studying, working and practicing many years. How many times does Lady Gaga practice a song? How many golf balls did Tiger Woods hit? How many drafts did Suzanne Collins write? What we see is the result but rarely do we see the process. **Learning is a process that takes time and work.**
4. **I am able to multi task when I study.** This is a huge myth in our culture today. We may think we can multi task yet in reality it is an illusion. Our brains don't function well when jumping from task to task and the result is a lower quality of work. This is one reason texting while driving is being discouraged. Overall multi tasking is distracting and interferes with both focus and concentration. The old adage "one thing at a time" remains a useful guiding principle.
5. Not so much a mistaken belief, but a huge problem with many students is **a poor ability to rate accurately their level of understanding of a topic.** Strong students have an accurate view of their level of understanding and know when to study more to make sure they get it. On the other hand, weaker students are poor at identifying their level of understanding. This over estimation leads to less study and review which usually leads to low achievement on exams and a surprised student who believed s/he understood the material. This diminishes learning because many of these students are not able to self diagnose their problem. They don't know what they don't know and are often perplexed when they get a bad grade on a test or paper. As David Brooks writes in *The Social Animal*, "The human mind is an overconfidence machine." As examples, he writes 90 percent of drivers believe they are above average. 94 percent of college professors believe they are above average teachers. 98 percent of students taking the SAT indicate they have above average leadership skills. Really?! This is a psychological immune system that Harvard's David Gilbert calls psychological blindness or an ego filter. Even if a person is confident in their abilities, it has little to do with their competence.