TIPS FROM THE DEAN*
SURVIVING MIDTERMS

*With thanks to Joel Silverman, the former Dean of Morse

1) TIME MANAGEMENT

Are you managing your schedule, or is your schedule managing you? FOMO is a huge issue here at Yale, because there are so many wonderful and amazing things to do. But keeping track of how you spend your time and making sure you don’t lose track of important deadlines and obligations is key.

Use an organizer/planner/gcal etc. to map out all your major assignments and exams in one place. This is the first step in helping you to feel in control of your schedule.

2) TAKING LECTURE NOTES

Wow, Professor X is such a great lecturer! When she speaks, her argument is so well-crafted, and her points so well-organized, that you felt like you did not even need to take notes because everything she said made so much sense. Here’s the problem: weeks from now, when you're reviewing your class notes in advance of the final, you’re going to have a tough time reconstructing that lecture. Why? You seldom write down things you think you understand well, and great lecturers will often inadvertently lead you to believe that you understand everything they say.

What to do? If you aren’t taking notes in your classes now is the time to start! You don’t have to use your computer and write down every word; students who take notes by hand have been shown to absorb material better, because they are forced to distill the lecture content into its key points.

Even better—after every lecture (and every reading assignment, for that matter), reserve fifteen minutes to write—in your own words and using your notes—a summary of the main points. This practice will help you to pay closer attention to lectures and reading assignments, and the two or three paragraphs you write will serve as a useful reading guide when reviewing your notes for exams.

3) MASTERING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

It will pay off to work hard in your language courses this term, especially for those of you beginning a new language. Each term of a language builds on past work, and the stronger your foundation, the easier—and more enjoyable—your future classes will be.

Yale's foreign language requirement is not a hoop to be jumped through. Consider your language classes as an entryway to different cultures and experiences and, perhaps, the first steps in your access to study or work abroad. If you need help, don’t wait: get a tutor now.

https://cls.yale.edu/programs/foreign-language-tutoring
4) TAKING A “GUT” (READ: RESISTING SELF-DELUSION)

Though some courses, though edifying and worthwhile, are less demanding than others, these are not “guts”—at least, if you define “gut” as an opportunity to earn an A without effort. If you fail to honor your day-to-day obligations to these less-demanding courses, you run the risk of doing poorly in a course you cavalierly called a “gut” back in September.

5) HANDLING PROBLEM SETS

Some problem sets are a snap; others can be quite challenging. Try solving both types alone (or, if appropriate, with a tutor). Sure, it’s tempting to collaborate, but realize that your midterm exam may consist entirely of the difficult problem sets, and your friends and classmates cannot work with you on that exam. If you find yourself relying too much on your classmates, do your problem sets alone. Treat them as an honest self-audit of your mastery of the material. Let the results inform your approach to the course: use the TF, the residential college math and science tutors (http://ctl.yale.edu/tutoring) or—if you really start to struggle—a one-on-one tutor you request using a form available in my office or here: https://ctl.yale.edu/sites/default/files/basic-page-supplementary-materials-files/applyfortutoringonlineform-01202017-a.pdf.

6) ALLOCATING TIME FOR LAB

Even if you keep reminding yourself that your lab is worth “only” .5 course credits, the amount of work required for that lab is always far greater than the footprint the lab occupies in the map of the week. Plan accordingly and use your time as efficiently as possible. Wasted minutes accumulate quickly and sap your energy for other tasks. If you feel like you’re becoming a lab rat in a giant sociological experiment, or you just need assistance with managing your time, turn off your Bunsen burner and see me.

7) IMPROVING YOUR WRITING

Writing courses don’t magically make you a great writer. Bear in mind that writing is a process, not just a product. Get in the habit of starting your assignments right away; don’t wait until the last minute. Even if you manage to earn a good grade with an all-nighter, you won’t develop the critical skills you’ll need to draw on later for your upper-level courses, fellowship and grad school applications, and your Senior Thesis. Write multiple drafts for every assignment and get feedback from your instructor, from our fabulous Writing Tutor, from the Writing Center (http://ctl.yale.edu/tutoring/writing-tutoring) and from your peers.

8) CONVERTING FROM A LETTER GRADE TO CR/D/F

Friday, October 25, 5 pm sharp is the last day to convert a fall full-term course from a letter grade to a Cr/D/F. Once this conversion is made, you cannot choose to convert back to a letter grade. Please keep in mind that you may not apply any Credit/D/Fail course toward
fulfillment of the distributional requirements. To find out if a course can be taken Cr/D/F and still count for your major, please contact your DUS.

Unsure whether to convert to Cr/D/F? Come see me any time before the October 25th deadline and we’ll discuss the pros and cons.

9) ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

This section may be the most important part of my email. There may come a time, when you are exhausted and stressed and facing down a deadline, that you may be tempted to cut corners—to borrow from a paper or source you saw online, to “collaborate” on a problem set in a class where the professor has expressly told you collaboration is not allowed, to recycle some of your own past work—in short, to fail to live up to the standards of academic integrity expected of each student here at Yale. **DON’T DO IT. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe.**

If you have -any doubts- what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, ask your professors. If you have any questions over whether you can work together in groups on problem sets for a particular class, ask your professor. If you are unsure if you need to cite something in a paper—go ahead and cite it. You’ll never be penalized for being overly cautious and citing too many sources. If you are staring down a deadline and panicking, it’s better to hand in whatever you have—notes, an outline, a rough draft, half of a problem set—than to not hand in any work or to cheat. Be aware that your professors are very smart people who have been grading student work for many years; they will know if your work is not your own.

If you are in a situation where you are panicking and tempted to cheat, stop, take a deep breath, talk to your professor or come talk to me.

10) ASKING FOR HELP

**Never hesitate to ask for help.** There are so many resources here at Yale, and so many people willing to help you! Go to your professor’s office hours, TA’s office hours, or request a tutor if needed. Seek out the JE writing tutor or Science/QR tutor. Form or join a study group. Reach out to your faculty adviser, DUS, FroCo, or PL. If you are having specific challenges that you want to discuss, I am always happy to help.

I hope these tips are helpful as you face the next half of the semester. As always, my door is open if you want to discuss your schedule, your progress, your challenges—I am willing to discuss anything and everything that might help.