



FROM **VEGETATION**  
TO **PROCRASTINATION:**

# BREAKING BAD HABITS

BY **CLAIRE CARTER**

**I**t happens to the best of us: Starting an assignment at the last minute. Sitting on the couch instead of doing something productive. Searching endlessly through a sea of stuff on the bedroom floor. Whatever condition you suffer from—procrastination, vegetation, disorganization—before you head off to college, try to leave your bad habits at home!

Okay, some of this stuff might be heavily ingrained in your brain already. But the transition to college will be a whole lot easier if you make some adjustments to the way you study, sleep, and spend time in general.

Take heed of this cautionary yet all-too-relatable tale of bad study skills, unhealthy habits, and dorm-room dilemmas—plus a few tips on how to turn things around.

## **A day in the (stressed-out, disorganized) life**

*Your alarm goes off. After hitting snooze for the fifth time, you finally roll out of bed. You check your phone and scroll through Twitter, Instagram, Yik Yak . . .*

*Oops! You're supposed to be in class in 10 minutes. You throw on some sweats, grab your bag, and run across campus. When you finally arrive, the professor gives you a dirty look as you interrupt class and sink into your assigned seat.*

“College professors maintain consistent standards,” says Linda Moran, Director of the Hillyer College Study Center at the University of Hartford. These standards include being punctual with both start times and deadlines. “High school teachers often make exceptions for students,” she says, but in college, “unless a student has a documented learning disability or a medical note, there aren’t any exceptions.”

*The professor continues with his presentation. The first slide is titled “Test Review.” Test? What test? You misplaced your syllabus weeks ago and totally forgot about it.*

Paying attention to all of your course schedules can be a challenge, but it’s essential to managing

your time effectively. A syllabus “outlines deadlines and the percentage of the grades associated with each assignment,” Moran explains. “When students miss deadlines, they become discouraged.”

*That’s just your first class; you still need to write a five-paragraph essay for another class too.*

“Students often leave stressful assignments to the last minute, when it’s no longer possible to clarify a question with the teacher or consult a classmate,” says Robyn Scott, a private English tutor at TutorNerds. “College professors rarely give partial credit, and they can spot poorly completed assignments easily.”

Mapping out your semester with a monthly planner or e-calendar can help you organize important tasks and avoid penalties for absentmindedness. “Most university-level assignments are given with long-range due dates,” says Scott. “When students get an assignment, they should create a timeline where they must complete parts of the assignment each day.”

*You need to finish up another project tonight, so you’ll have to save the studying for later. Now tomorrow’s plans have changed from hanging out with your friends to cramming until you know chemistry vocab like the back of your hand.*

“Somehow this awful study habit became popular and even encouraged,” Scott says of the common college practice of “cramming.” It drains students both mentally and physically, she explains, and “students who squeeze eight hours of study into one day, the day prior to the exam, will almost always self-sabotage without knowing it.” After writing a test date in your planner, pencil in a few study days as well to avoid last-minute marathon sessions. “Once a work load is broken up into smaller parts, it becomes less overwhelming,” Scott says.

*The next day you return from class, sit at your desk, and lay out your study materials. You do this after you check Facebook, Vine, and Tumblr, of course. You turn on the TV for a little background noise. Oh no—a Friends marathon. And this is your favorite season! One episode won’t hurt, right?*

Procrastination is not a lost art, and it’s easy to focus on anything but school work when you have social media, smartphones, and other time-sucking entertainment at your fingertips. That’s why it’s helpful to set up shop in a peaceful environment conducive to studying, says Scott, like the library, a campus study center, or another quiet



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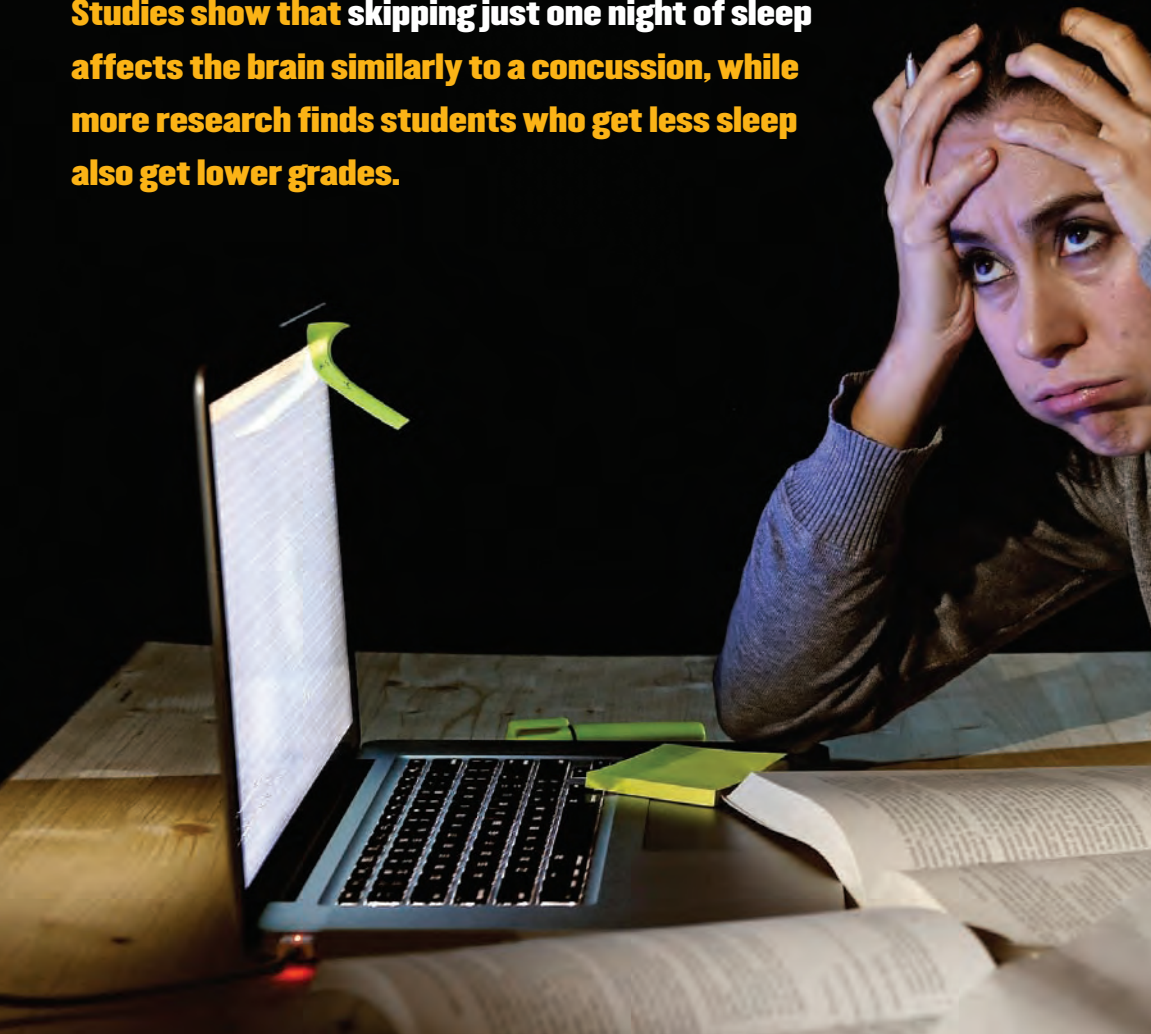


area. She also suggests turning off your phone entirely and temporarily blocking distracting websites with a free productivity app like Self Control. Designated breaks, study buddies, and personal rewards can also help motivate you to finish tedious tasks, i.e., enjoy your favorite show after an hour of studying instead of binge-watching five episodes before you start.

*You finally crack open your textbook, but just as you finish skimming chapter one, your roommate walks in. She's getting ready to go out and proceeds to crank her party playlist, try on every outfit in her closet, and toss the rejects on the floor—including some clothes she borrowed from you. She says she'll be back later and leaves the room a disaster area.*

"Many students today have grown up having their own room and are not used to sharing a space with others," says Jana Valentine, Director of Residence Life at Providence College. "Most of the time, the other

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roommate doesn't even know that their habits are bothering their roommate," adds Amy Pollock Drake, Assistant Director of Housing at SUNY Binghamton's Office of Residential Life.

Your version of a clean room, proper bedtime, and other appropriate roommate behavior may differ, but communication and compromise can help keep your relationship harmonious. "It can be intimidating to talk to your roommate directly about what is bothering you, but in most cases the other student is open to making adjustments so that both people feel comfortable in the space," says Drake.

"Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal signals from your roommate, and communicate regularly and clearly, not via text or Post-it note," advises Kelly Beers, Assistant Director of Residence Life at the University of Maine. If you have trouble getting the conversation started, your resident assistant is always there to help.

*Hours later, you finally give up and look at the clock. It's 4:00 a.m.—and you're not even done yet.*

"So many students sabotage sleep at the expense of staying up late to study," says Karen Jashinsky,

founder of youth fitness company O2 MAX Fitness. She recommends getting at least six hours of shut-eye each night. Studies show that skipping just one night of sleep affects the brain similarly to a concussion, while more research finds students who get less sleep also get lower grades.

These bad habits can spoil other aspects of your life as well. "Late-night studying and too little sleep often lead to overeating or craving things that are not so good for you," she says. In addition, "students tend to compromise workouts at the expense of studying."

*You've been meaning to hit the gym this week, but your bed sounds so much more appealing than a treadmill.*

"Even though we hear that exercise is good for stress, it often falls by the wayside when stress and lack of sleep are combined," Jashinsky says. "Rather than thinking of working out as this huge activity, break it up into five- to 10-minute increments if you are pressed for time and sleep." Sit-ups, squats, and yoga stretches are quick and easy exercises that can be done in a dorm. "Little things add up, and something is better than nothing."

Long story short: don't let this be you! Even if you already put the "pro" in procrastinate, all is not lost. Just keep calm, learn from stressful situations, and don't underestimate the magical properties of the power nap. **CX**

Claire Carter is the Editorial Assistant at Carnegie Communications.



An advertisement for Baldwin Wallace University. The top left features the university's logo: "BW" in large gold letters, with "BALDWIN WALLACE UNIVERSITY" in smaller gold letters below it. The background is a night city skyline with illuminated buildings and a bridge over water. The text "BW + CLE" is prominently displayed in white. Below this, the text reads: "Where you go to school matters. Big city opportunities and small town charm of a safe suburban campus. bw.edu/admission".

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