



GRAD ED:  
CHALLENGES  
& CONNECTIONS

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# Common mistakes made by students

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**W**e all make mistakes. It goes with the human condition. Someone has said, “He who never made a mistake never made anything.” However, it is wise and better to learn from other people’s mistakes and avoid them. In this article, we share seven common mistakes engineering students make and how to avoid them. We are talking about specific mistakes that create problems for students and prevent them from achieving the best possible results.

## Not attending classes

Most students attend classes, missing them from time to time as a result of academic, extracurricular, or personal conflicts. Some students develop the habit of not attending classes. This may be due to many reasons. It may be that the professor does not teach well, and the students feel that they can just read the textbook. It may be due to unavoidable circumstances a student faces. If it is

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not a correspondence course, it is highly recommended that the student attend class most of the time and be punctual. Even if the professor does not teach well, you can still gain something by attending class. Professors are well-educated people who know a lot; they are leaders in their fields. You are paying the professor, and skipping classes is not a wise thing to do.

### Not buying the recommended textbook

A professor usually requires and recommends a textbook for his or her class. Some students think they can do well in the class without buying the book. Their reason for this action may be that the textbook is too expensive. Some students look for an international edition of the textbook, which is usually in soft cover and less expensive. Some buy an old edition from their friends. Some don't buy the book at all. If you have money for other things, buying the textbook should not be your lowest priority. Instead of not buying the book, comparison shop online for textbooks, but make sure you buy the current edition of the book as recommended by your professor. For example, you can buy or rent books from Chegg.com and save money.

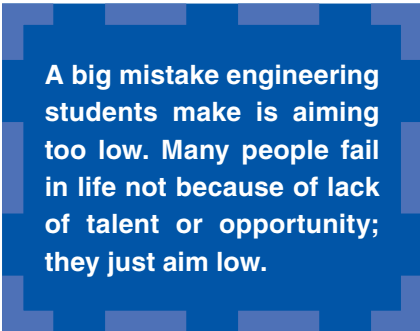
### Not doing the homework

Some students do not make any attempt to do their homework. Even when the professor requires that they turn in the homework for grading, some students just copy from their friends and avoid doing the homework themselves. This cheating on homework leads some professors to not ask students to turn in their homework for grading. The reason students don't do their homework may be because it is boring, too hard, they don't understand what to do, or they don't have the time (a matter of priority). They feel that they need time for social interaction such as spending time with their friends and attending parties. To have time for these activities means they have to skip homework. Doing the homework yourself is important to learning. Problem solving is an essential part of the learning process, and homework provides the opportunity to solve problems on your own. It is to your advantage to do the homework whether the professor grades it or not.

### Studying at the last minute

It is tempting to put off studying until the last minute. (This is also known as procrastination.) A lot of students do

some part- or full-time work. Many spend hours on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. They only study when they have a test or an exam. They pull "all nighters" right before the test. Time management and planning are crucial to college success. When you study at the last minute, you don't have the opportunity to ask your professors questions on what you don't understand. You remember



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enough to pass the test, but the problem is that you forget it right away. If you cram and barely pass chapters 1–5, when you get to chapter 10, which requires you to know chapters 1–5, you will have to do more work that is more difficult. Later, when the final exam comes, you won't be able to remember many things because everything builds on what has come previously.

### Aiming low

A big mistake engineering students make is aiming too low. Many people fail in life not because of lack of talent or opportunity; they just aim low. You probably have heard Alex Harris's maxim: "God set His standards this high so that we won't make the mistake of aiming low." It is easy to develop a lack of motivation to work hard and get a good grade when a course is difficult. Some student just desire to pass the course. They aim at getting a "C" and put in as little effort as possible. They end up making a "D" and failing the course. No matter how hard the course may be, always aim high. Aiming high means seeing yourself as ambitious and capable of performing well. It also means aspiring to something that may be beyond your capabilities. You are capable of accomplishing what you set your mind on. But if you want the best, you have to pay for it.

### Being overconfident

Being confident in one's self is good and proper; but to be overconfident can be foolish. Self-confidence can be bene-

ficial to individual self-esteem as well as giving the individual the will to succeed in his/her desired goals. Overconfidence is an overestimation of one's performance, ability, level of control, or rate of work. Overconfidence is manifested in two ways. First, some students take as many courses as their college allows (six, even seven courses per semester). Second, they feel they can do it all without their professor. They shy away from seeing their professor. As a result of either taking so many courses or not seeking help from their professor, they end up not doing well. A few minutes with their professor could clear up some confusion. Make the habit of seeing your professor during his/her office hours.

### Selling your engineering books

There are several reasons students sell their books after using them. Most students sell their books to make money, assuming that they would not need the book again. Others sell them because they are running out of space to keep them. Higher prices provide incentive and increase the probability of selling books. Students sell their books to a bookstore, a book seller using the Web, or some other students. For engineering students, one may condone selling books on science, mathematics, history, English, art, or philosophy. But engineering students will need their engineering books later in their profession and cannot afford to sell them. Keeping the acquired engineering books will greatly help in their lifelong learning.

### Conclusion

There are countless mistakes students make. This list of mistakes is not exhaustive. The mistakes we have covered in this article are typical but paramount. Engineering students will do a lot better and have less regrets if they avoid making these mistakes.

### Read more about it

- A. Freeman and R. DeWolf, *The 10 Dumbest Mistakes Smart People Make and How to Avoid Them*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- J. S. Hyman and L. F. Jacobs. (2010, Sept. 1). The 5 biggest mistakes college students make. *U.S. News & World Report* [Online]. Available: <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2010/09/01/the-5-biggest-mistakes-college-students-make>

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Overall, being a TA can help showcase your abilities and improve your skills. It is a good idea to ask students to provide feedback on how well they felt you were prepared for the course. This will help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of your work. By improving your weaknesses, you will improve your skills gradually. The positive feedback you receive from students helps encourage your push toward success.

Although a TA works in an academic environment, many students who have experienced teaching assistantship often perform well in industrial environments. On the other hand, your previous TA experience does not guarantee your success; it depends on how you apply your skills and use those experiences while working in an industry-related position.

### Skills that pay the bills

Using your knowledge and experiences can help you to improve your work. For postgraduate students moving into industry, a record of successful teaching experiences has a positive impact on their work environment. Creativity, problem solving, teamwork, time management, decision making abilities, and good communication skills are the qualities that you will need to perform well at your job. You may need to improve additional skills for a specific position. For example, an administrative position in an industrial environment requires working with a

group of engineers, technicians, and other staff. As mentioned above, you may have developed your communication skills as a TA previously, so

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now you should not have a problem communicating with personnel. As a group leader, you must be able to guide your staff in the right direction and help them improve their careers and solve their problems—much like what you have previously accomplished with students as a TA.

One of the most important skills while working in an industrial environment is resource management. You must be able to manage your time, staff, and budget. Time management is something that you learn as a TA. Most of these skills can be obtained during a period as a successful TA. When you start your job for the first time, these experiences will serve you well in any professional position.

The final benefit of being a TA is that it satisfies a strong desire to help others. Quite simply, it makes a good impression and it just feels good. If you try it, I'm sure you will see its positive effects on both your education and future career.

### Read more about it

- D. D. Butler, J. F. Laumer, Jr., and M. Moore, "A content analysis of pedagogical and policy information used in training graduate teaching assistants," *J. Higher Educ. Manage.*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 27–38, Summer/Fall 1993.
- P. L. Gray and N. Buerkel-Rothfuss, "Teaching assistant training: A view from the trenches," in *Preparing the Professoriate of Tomorrow to Teach*, J. D. Nyquist, R. D. Abbott, D. H. Wulff, and J. Sprague, Eds. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, pp. 40–51, 1991.

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