SEMESTER KIT

First Week Starter Kit

> A free mini-guide: the first-week university checklist, 5 study methods that work, and a prof email template.

INSIDE

01 Your First-Week Checklist

02 5 Study Methods That Work

03 The Prof Email Template

16	5	1
first-week to-dos	study methods that work	prof email template

For university and college students across Canada · Free edition, 2026

CHAPTER 1

Your First-Week Checklist

Ten minutes tonight saves you a stressful September

The setup checklist

- ☐ Log into your student portal and your school email. Turn on email forwarding to your phone, or install the app. Profs and the registrar will only ever use your school address.
- ☐ Find your learning management system (D2L/Brightspace, Moodle, Canvas or Blackboard). Log in and confirm every course you're registered in shows up.
- ☐ Check your timetable for room locations. Walk the route to your buildings once before Day One.
- ☐ Get your student ID card. You'll need it for exams, the library, the gym and often your transit pass.
- ☐ Check your fee deadline and what happens if you pay late. Some schools drop your registration for unpaid fees.
- ☐ Confirm your transit pass (U-Pass or similar) is active, if your school has one.
- ☐ If you have a disability, ADHD, anxiety, a chronic illness or a learning difference, register with accessibility services now. Accommodations take weeks to set up, and they are not retroactive.
- ☐ Save the important dates: first day, add/drop deadline, last day to withdraw, reading week, exam period.
- ☐ Set up a calendar app you will actually open (Google Calendar, Apple Calendar or Outlook).
- ☐ Find your academic advisor's name and how to book them.

> **HEADS UP** **Don't buy textbooks yet**
>
> Wait until the first class. Profs often say "the textbook is optional" or "the older edition is fine", or put a copy on library reserve. Check for used copies, the campus bookstore's rental option and the library before you pay full price.

Week 1: Get the map

1. Go to every class, even the ones that "only go over the syllabus". Profs often mention exam formats, what they care about and which readings actually matter.
2. Download every course outline (syllabus) and save them in one folder.
3. Put every due date from every syllabus into one calendar this week, with a reminder 1–2 weeks before anything worth 10% or more.
4. Find two study spots: one quiet (library floor, empty classroom) and one where you can talk (study room, cafeteria).

5. Say hi to one person in each class. Swap numbers. Future you will need lecture notes from someone.
6. Learn what each course's office hours are, and where.

CHAPTER 2

5 Study Methods That Work

Backed by research, not vibes

Here's the uncomfortable truth: the study methods most students use are the least effective. Rereading notes and highlighting feel productive because the material starts to look familiar. But recognizing something is not the same as being able to recall it on an exam. A well-known review of learning research (Dunlosky and colleagues, 2013) rated practice testing and spreading study out over time as the most useful techniques, and rated highlighting and rereading as low-utility.

1. Active recall: test yourself instead of rereading

Close the notes and try to pull the information out of your head. The effort of retrieving it is what makes it stick.

- Turn headings into questions and answer them out loud or on paper
- Do practice problems before looking at the worked solution
- Make flashcards (Anki or Quizlet) with a question on one side, answer on the other
- Write everything you remember about a topic on a blank page, then check what you missed
- Explain it to a friend, a roommate or an empty room

2. Spaced repetition: review just before you forget

Cramming works for tomorrow and fails for the final. Reviewing the same material across several days, with growing gaps, builds memory that lasts the whole term.

Review	When	Time it takes
1st	Same day as the lecture	10 minutes
2nd	1 day later	10 minutes
3rd	3 days later	10 minutes
4th	1 week later	15 minutes
5th	2 to 3 weeks later	15 minutes
6th	Before the exam	As needed

Flashcard apps like Anki do this scheduling for you automatically.

3. The Pomodoro technique: beat procrastination

1. Pick one task. Not "study", but "do questions 1 to 6".
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes. Phone in another room or face-down on Do Not Disturb.
3. Work until the timer rings. If you think of something else, write it down and keep going.
4. Take a 5-minute break. Stand up, get water, don't open TikTok.
5. After 4 rounds, take a longer 20 to 30 minute break.

> **TIP** **Can't start at all?**
>
> Tell yourself you'll do just one 25-minute round. Starting is the hardest part. Most of the time, once the first round is done, you'll keep going.

4. Interleaving: mix it up

When practising problems, mix different types instead of doing 20 of the same kind in a row. It feels harder, but it trains you to recognize which method to use, which is exactly what an exam asks.

5. The Feynman technique: find your gaps

1. Pick a concept and write its name at the top of a page.
2. Explain it in plain language, as if teaching a Grade 8 student.
3. Wherever you get stuck or reach for jargon, that's your gap. Go back to the notes.
4. Simplify again, and use an example or analogy.

CHAPTER 3

The Prof Email Template

Copy it word for word

The template: a question about course material

Subject: COURSE 1234: Question about Week 4 practice problems

Hi Professor [Last name],

I'm in your [day/time] section of COURSE 1234. I'm working on question 6 from the Week 4 practice set and I'm stuck on [specific step]. I tried [what you tried], but I get [your result] instead of [expected answer].

Could you point me in the right direction, or should I bring this to office hours on [day]?

Thank you,

[Full name], [Student ID]

- Use your school email and put the course code in the subject line
- Check the syllabus first
- Give it 2 business days before following up

WANT THE WHOLE THING?

This was the starter

The First-Year Field Guide is the full version: 15 chapters on syllabus-to-calendar, the 14-day exam plan, group projects, three prof email templates, grades and GPA rules, a student budget, mental health resources in Canada and 25 common first-year mistakes.

The Semester Planner Pack is the printable companion: semester overview, term map, weekly planner, assignment tracker, exam countdown, budget sheet and habit tracker, ready to print or use in GoodNotes.

Find both at the Semester Kit shop: **semesterkit.sites.tab.bot**

This guide shares general information to help students study and plan. It isn't academic, financial, medical or legal advice. Your school's official policies and your course outlines always come first. © 2026 Semester Kit. Free to download and share with a friend; please don't sell it.