

# WHAT I WISH I KNEW before starting OT school

## SEEK OUT A MENTOR

Look for someone in a higher class than you or someone already in the field that you can ask for help/advice when you need it.

### TIPS

- Join TNOTA's Occupational Therapy Mentorship Program.
- Your program or university might already have a program set up. Be sure and talk to your professors and peruse the school's website for information.

## GRADES AREN'T EVERYTHING

Learning the information well and getting comfortable with it is more important than grades - no one is going to ask you about or care what your GPA in graduate school was when you get into the workforce.

### TIPS

- The point of graduate school is to learn skills and information that can help you in the future - if you learn the information and can apply it, the grade you get does not hold as much weight.
- Do your best, always, but also have some grace for yourself when things do not turn out like you were expecting.
- Don't stress yourself out over those 5 lost points on a test - figure out where you went wrong and learn from it. No one is going to look back and ask you why you made a B, or even a C, on that test from the first semester of OT school.

## **PRIORITIZE SELF CARE**

Find time for self-care, even if you must schedule it into your day.

### **Exercise**

Exercising regularly can greatly reduce your stress level, while having the added benefit of feeling better/healthier. Find a group fitness class, search some YouTube videos, research the local gyms, etc... Make it something you will want to do even if you've had a long day.

### **Nourish Yourself**

Eat food that makes you feel good – make sure you leave time to prepare and eat food that will give you fuel to keep going each day.

### **Keep up with Personal Hygiene**

It's far easier than you think to let these fall by the wayside when stress catches up to you.

### **Allow time for things you enjoy**

Take time to do things you enjoy, too – whether this is something you do every day or a couple of times a week, allow yourself time to do the things you enjoy (hobbies, meeting up with friends/family, etc...).

### **Get Enough Sleep**

I know this is going to sound like a broken record, but getting enough sleep is essential to performing at your best each day. Not getting enough of it will lead to difficulty concentrating and an increase in the already high level of stress that comes with graduate school.

### **Find Someone to Talk To**

Make sure to find someone you trust to talk to about your stress or any difficulties you may be having. This could be a family member or friend, but it can also be helpful to set up an appointment with your school's counseling center. They are unbiased to the things that you have been dealing with, so they can often better make recommendations for how to proceed.

## OTHER TIPS & TRICKS

### **Time Blocking**

Make an appointment with yourself in your calendar for the different tasks you need/want to do each day – exercise, sleep, meal times, family time, job hours, homework, etc... This can help keep you on track during the day, but it also allows you to get an overview of how much time you have to get everything done.

### **Assignment Calendar**

Set up a calendar (whether digital or physical) with all your due dates, tests, etc... at the beginning of the semester. Then go through and set personal deadlines for your assignments that fall before the true deadline. This will help you make sure to get everything done early, thereby reducing your stress levels. The best part is, you still have a little bit of wiggle room in case that week turns out to be busier than expected.

### **Share Study Guides**

Set up shared study guides with your cohort: This can allow you all to learn from one another, while having the added benefit of making it less strenuous on each person before the exam.

### **Connect with Professors**

Don't be afraid to set up a meeting with a professor: At this level, they truly do want all of you to succeed! They are happy to answer any questions you may have; just be sure to ask them in a timely manner – not late on the night before a big exam.

### **Take Breaks**

Don't burn yourself out. Take breaks during your study period. One of my favorite methods is the Pomodoro Technique – this is where I study for 50 minutes, then take a 10-minute break. You can use whatever time intervals that work best for you.

I would not recommend using the timer that is on your phone – this opens you up to further distraction.

## OTHER TIPS & TRICKS

### **Teach Others**

Teach the information you are learning to someone: Whether this is a roommate, friend, or classmate, teaching back/return demonstration (an OT technique ☺) is one of the best ways to make sure you truly know the material.

### **Work Smarter Not Harder**

You don't necessarily have to read every single word of a reading assignment: It is not feasible to think that you will have the time to fully read every single assignment given to you, especially if you work or have other life responsibilities. Don't stress yourself out over trying to read and take notes over everything. Unless you find that your professor discusses the reading assignments each day, I would recommend skimming the assignment in the days leading up to class and then determining (while in class) whether you think it would be helpful to go back and read the information. Many times, your professor will provide you with more than enough information and context while in the lecture.

If you find you need more clarity, you can go back through and seek out the specific information you are confused about.

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