

What To Expect: Going Back To School As An Adult

March 20, 2013



So you are considering going back to school as an adult after a lengthy break from your youthful days of college experience, or, perhaps, you never attended college and are finally deciding to do so now, in either case the thought of sitting behind a school desk again can be terrifying and overwhelming. Well, fear not my mature student, the experience is a lot less painful than you have imagined it to be. Personally, I went to college after high school like I was supposed to, however, after receiving my first associate's degree I quit after I have convinced myself into thinking that I do not need a strong college degree to make money and experience will be enough. Also, I burned myself out trying to complete a two year program as soon as possible, often taking 6-7

classes per semester and working full time. So after I got my first diploma at 19, you couldn't pay me enough to continue with school – I wanted freedom. Needless to say, after seven years of said freedom, independence and a number of dead end jobs, it finally dawned on me – I have to go back to college. So there I was, on the verge of a life-changing decision at the age of 27 trying to figure out how to get myself back on track. The following suggestions are based on my experiences and those of others in the same boat as I was and possibly as you are right now.

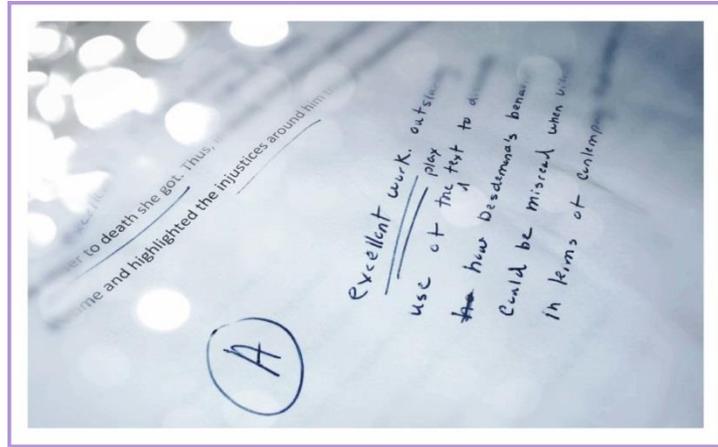
Age Fear

Am I going to stand out due to my age and be made fun of? This was probably my main fear about going back to college as an adult and is a concern I heard other people of age express. Amazingly, this fear was completely unfounded and actually turned out to be 100% false. Due to my job, I had to take all night classes and, as it turned out, those mostly consist of working adults. Of course there were kids straight out of high school in some of my classes, but most of the people in my evening classes were on the same page as me and often much older than me. The oldest student I have seen was an 83 year old lady getting her fifth degree. Also, having some life experience helps you relate better to the material you are being taught and gives you an advantage over the younger students. Moreover, professors are more understanding towards the elder students and often give slack for late assignment and missed deadlines, because you simply cannot miss a conference, a meeting or a due date for a project that could cost you your job. So if age is a road block you are facing when thinking about going back to college, don't let it stop you since it is really not an issue.

Brain Capacity

I was definitely worried about my brain handling the overload of information I would be facing in college. I have noticed a decline in my memory around the age of 25, when I couldn't memorize telephone numbers at a first glance anymore and had to make lists to remember all the tasks of my work day, something I was able to do easily in my teens and early 20's.

Thus, I knew that studying for a test will be 10 times harder than during my earlier school years, but I still had to try and do my best. The first semester back I took 4 courses and at the end had 3 A's and 1 B, which was so much better than any of my previous grades in school. I attribute the difference to three things – at 27 I firmly knew what method of studying works for me, I cared a lot more about my grades at this point and I was paying out of pocket so failure was not an option. I won't lie, to memorize a simple definition I had to write and re-write it a hundred times just to get the terminology right, but I had the determination and did what I had to. Also, your brain is a muscle so you can train it to work better and after 4 years mine works pretty well, much better than it did at 27 for sure. So not only will you be able to keep up with the younger kids, you might end up surpassing them in the long run.



Time Management

During my "freedom" years, I got used to not having much to worry about once my work day was over – I did what I wanted when I wanted, slept too much or not nearly enough, I was able to do the things I enjoyed a lot more than the things I *had* to do. So I knew that college will be a huge re-adjustment from my care-free life to a new very scheduled life with no time for anything but work, class and homework. I heard an adviser once

say that for every hour of class time plan to spend 3 hours on homework which is roughly true. If you are worried about juggling a full time job, college, homework, family, kids, pets – well you should be, it is demanding, exhausting and overwhelming, but it *is* possible! For example, last semester I met a woman who got straight A's, while maintaining a job, a husband and 5 kids, 5! I honestly don't know how she does it, but if she can manage it so can I and so can you, just plan your day and week wisely, schedule "me" time and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it, keep your eyes on the goal, do your best and before you know it you will have your diploma.

Tuition Costs

College *is* expensive and tuition cost is a huge deterrent for a lot of people and it was for me as well. In order to afford my new financial burden, I had to make a change, so I gave up my independence and moved in with my dad, who agreed to charge me a low rent for the duration of my college years. Also, I enrolled into a community college first, so I could get a lot of the prerequisites out of the way for a much smaller price and once I maxed out the number of my transferable credits I moved on to a 4-

year college. If you are concerned about tuition costs, I would first suggest figuring out which route you want to go – if your major guarantees you a well-paying job in the first 6 months after graduation then consider taking a loan and enroll for full time (in this case, the faster you graduate, the faster you can earn the money that you were striving towards); if your degree doesn't guarantee you a job immediately upon graduation (like my English Literature one) then try your best to pay for it as you go, slowly and steadily, at least in this case you will graduate debt free, which is a huge benefit in today's economy. Make sure to meet with a financial adviser at your school to discuss all your options, there are may be some you never heard of and could take full advantage of.



Overall, attending college as an adult is not a big deal at all and you will see what I mean once you try it. If you are still not sure if you can hack it at your local campus, then start slowly by taking 1 class of your choosing and see if you enjoy it. Furthermore, if a college degree stands in the way of your dreams then stop making excuses and just go for it, because there is a solution to every problem and you just have to find the right one.

What are some other concerns you have or had about attending college as an adult? What advice would you give to someone in this situation? Feel free to share your experiences below, perhaps what you say can make all the difference to someone who is still on the fence and can't decide.

Thanks a bunch!

