

LC-DC Podcast Episode 6: Starting Strong with Rashi

Transcript

00:00:12

Ryan

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the LCDC podcast, advice for students, from students, brought to you by the Douglas College Learning Center. I'm your host, Ryan, and I'm joined by my co-host, Rashi. Rashi is a third-year student at Douglas, and she's been tutoring with The LC for over a year now. And she tutors a range of subjects, everything from business to biology. So, Rashi, thanks for being here today.

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Rashi

Thank you for having me, Ryan.

Ryan

How do you find winter semester is different from fall, usually?

Rashi

I think they are kind of similar. It's just, I think weather can be one of the most deciding factors. Like it's winter is more, it's colder, it's like darker, and maybe it ends up like being that deciding force where students feel like a little like demotivated.

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But at the same time, it can be, on the other hand, like since there's a new year coming, the winter semester starts right after the new year. So a lot of students, like if they reflect upon the coming year, they want to develop some good study habits, they want to get on top of their courses, they want to achieve a better grade. So a lot of students can come really motivated and they can take the learnings back from their previous semester and they're like, okay, I'm going to lock in and I'm going to study really hard and develop really good habits over the winter semester.

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Ryan

Yeah, that's so true. And January is New Year's resolutions season, so it's an opportunity to reset and start things, start the year off right. And that's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to talk about how to start a semester off strong. So we'll get right into it. Before we do, I'd just like to acknowledge that our campuses here at Douglas are located on the unceded traditional and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the Katsee, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Musqueam, Kakite, Squamish, Tsawwassen, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

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Okay, so back to starting the semester off right. Rashi, why is it important to get a good start on the semester?

Rashi

I think just being so organized and being responsible from the very starting weeks where the course load is low really sets you up for that time of the semester where everything hits you at the same time. So starting off strong means you're going to have a successful semester. It's going to be less stressful, and you're going to actually enjoy learning.

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Ryan

That's important, right? Because the more you enjoy learning, the more you get out of it. And I think the better you do on tests and assignments and things like that. Is that right?

Rashi

Of course. Of course.

Ryan

Great. So talking about getting a good start on the semester, what are some things we should be doing during the first week of classes to set ourselves up for success?

Rashi

I think a strong start to the semester involves a lot of things. One of it is knowing what is ahead, right?

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And for that, your course outlines are your biggest, like biggest friends for that. What I do is during the first week of the classes, I print out the course guidelines for every course I'm taking that semester. I look through them, I see, okay, what are the important dates and deadlines? How is the course laid out? What are the meeting times for the course? What I do next is I have a physical calendar, which I like, but I've seen a lot of my classmates put important dates and deadlines, exam dates, and everything else into their calendar and organize it at the very start.

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How it helps is it helps you lay out how your semester is going to look like. And you're going to identify at what time you're going to be super busy. Like if you're taking four courses, there would be two to three weeks during that semester where you're going to have so much to do. Just knowing that time is coming and preparing for that time ahead really sets you apart. Apart from that, I just like to show up to class and just ask questions if I have anything, and that helps me be comfortable with the upcoming semester.

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Ryan

Yeah, that's great. Knowing those really stressful weeks that are coming, that'll help you mentally prepare, I guess, and also make sure that you're not booking, I don't know, doctor's appointments, driving tests, things, other things like that in that week, in those weeks that might get in the way of your studies.

Rashi

Yeah, it also helps me set a study schedule. So what really ends up happening every semester is different. Some of the semesters you're taking courses that require you to put in a lot of like effort and it requires very regular studying.

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So I paint like I paint a picture in my head like how much studying is this semester going to ask from me. Do I need to cut back from part-time work? Do I need to cut back from anything else that I'm doing to focus more on the deliverables of the semester? And it helps me set out that weekly schedule like, okay, I would need to study like one or two hours at least every week to stay on top of my courses. So it shouldn't take long. Just make sure you

print your course outline. Put everything into your calendar, just scroll through the deliverables and what is expected in the course and what topics are you going to study, just a general idea of it. And that should be good enough.

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Ryan

Okay. So when you mentioned deliverables, I'm guessing you're thinking about tests, assignments, presentations. Do you also put like reading homework in your calendar as well? Or is that something you just do on a regular basis?

Rashi

It really depends. I have seen a lot of my classmates, especially in theoretical courses, where there's a lot of reading material. They do put a deadline for themselves. Like, I'm going to read this by Saturday, or like, I want to complete it on Sunday.

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I personally do not do that because my schedule is like a little bit more complicated to fit things in like so rigidly. But I feel having that in, and if you are able to stick to that, it's great. It would really like ease things up for you. But if you cannot, what I think is just aiming for studying every day can be the way to go as well.

Ryan

Sounds good. And you mentioned asking questions and being prepared for your first classes. How do you prepare for your very first classes of the semester?

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Rashi

Oh, wow. Yeah. I think this experience is shared by everybody. It's like going to that first class, being so curious, at least, to see who the professor is and meeting your peers. I think one of the most important part of preparing for that first day is to be curious and to be present and to be happy. That, okay, I'm entering a new course and I'm here to learn something new. And just looking forward to it, just that mindset itself is really, really helpful.

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Apart from that, it does not need to be super heavy. I just look over the course outline. I look over the meeting time, and I just show up to class and ask questions and say hello to my professors, say hello to my peers. It's just that. It's not that complicated. Just show up, be present, and be organized.

Ryan

Sounds pretty easy when you put it that way. Just show up, be present. Talk to your professor, talk to your peers. I like how you said be curious, because I learned today that you can't be curious and anxious at the same time. So shout out to Sarah from counseling for teaching me that.

00:08:45

Okay, so sounds good. Sounds like it's not too difficult to get started on the right foot. You mentioned looking at your course outlines and putting all your important deliverables into your calendar. What other important information should we be looking for and where can we find it?

Rashi

Yeah, of course, like reiterating. Assignment deadlines, exam dates are important. They are present in your course outline.

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Apart from it, you would have a grading breakdown of your course, which is really important to give you an idea whether the course would be paper-based, like research paper-based, or it would be project-based, or it would be like more of an exam-based grading criteria. So having an idea is really important. Apart from that, there are some course policies regarding attendance, late work, exam, passing grade. All that is in your course outline.

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I've seen so many instructors for all the classes I've attended emphasize that a student should go thoroughly through the course outline so that nothing comes as a surprise for them. There are some required materials for the course. Each course, like required textbooks or some required subscriptions that a student needs to buy.

About that, all that information, again, should be at the course outline given to you. So all this information is really helpful when the time comes and you know where to find it. And I would highly suggest everybody to just look through their course outline.

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And if they cannot find some specific information in their course outline, ask your instructor.

Ryan

Yeah, don't be afraid.

Rashi

Don't be afraid. Yeah, definitely. Don't be afraid. I think I would mention that point during the first week of classes. I would encourage everybody to walk up to the instructor, introduce themselves, and tell their instructor that they are looking forward to their class. And meeting them in office hours.

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I've seen a lot of students coming in and they are scared of their instructors, which is like sort of weird to me because I feel most of the instructors are so helpful and they're looking to meet students and talk to them. It's just in our heads that we get scared because they are at a position of authority. But I would highly, highly encourage that the first few weeks of classes are a great time to make a good bond with your instructor so that in future, if you need any assistance or any guidance, they are able to readily help you because they already know you. Yeah.

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Ryan

That's great advice. And I do wonder why so many students are so afraid of talking to their professors. And maybe it's just because we've all had that one really strict, mean teacher at some points in our lives. And that has a lasting impact, maybe. Okay. So thinking in terms of it being a new year, new semester, chance to start off right, what are some positive habits or routines that we should start developing at the first week of the semester?

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Rashi

Oh, yeah. I have like 2 big things. One is studying regularly. As a student myself, as a peer tutor, I think in today's time, what everybody is struggling with is studying regularly on an everyday basis. And I think it's so crucial for academic success. I know a lot of things are coming up. Students are working part-time. They have other, they are volunteering. They have other things to, they have social life, right?

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But at the same time, developing that habit where you know you're going to come back and devote at least one to two hours to your academics, especially what I suggest to my students who come in for a tutoring session is I tell them that whatever you are studying in class that day, I highly encourage you that after, right after the class, after you have had food or had a break, please go over that material again. Just skim over that material for 10, 15 minutes But I can assure you that would stick so much better than viewing that information after, let's say, one week or two week.

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And second is organizing your notes. Ryan, I have been guilty of this. I start my semester with a different notebook. I lose that notebook, I lose those notes, and midway I have to buy a new notebook and then all my notes are in some other notebook. it ends up hurting me. Since a lot of students are using electronic devices, what I've seen my peers do is that they create specific folders for each course, and then whatever notes they take or whatever PowerPoint slides they have for that course. All the material goes into that specific folders and they organize it really well. That's another way to do it.

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But at the end of the day, I want you to organize things so that when the midterm is coming and you need your notes to revise, you're not all over the place looking for them, right? You have them right there at your disposal to help you out. So yeah, I think these two habits, if a student masters it, he's good he or she's really set up for the semester.

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Ryan

I'm still guilty of losing notes sometimes and being disorganized, but yeah, that's definitely great advice, and I like the idea of keeping a notebook for every class and also a digital folder for every class, because even if you feel like you're doubling up on the physical notes and the digital notes, it's still having that kind of backup, I think.

Rashi

That's correct, yeah.

Ryan

Can be very helpful.

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Okay, so when you mentioned one or two hours, is that one or two hours per day, per week, per couple days? What are you thinking? How would you break that down? I guess it's different every week, right?

Rashi

It could be different every week, especially at the start of the semester. You don't have your deliverables hitting you until like 3rd or 4th week of the semester, right? So the first two weeks are very light, I would say.

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And during those weeks, I would still encourage students to devote at least like half an hour reviewing what you have studied that day, if they can. Because what ends up happening is the first two weeks are very light, and I've seen that too many times with me as well, that I don't study at all. And then on that third or fourth week mark, when the midterms and the quizzes start coming in, I panic. I'm like, oh my god, now I have work. I have these commitments and now I have so much to learn.

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I wish I could have just learned during those early weeks or started on those assignments early on so I wouldn't have so much piled on by week three or week four. So I encourage, I know this is like life gets in the way and you're like, nobody wants to study when there's no homework, right? I know that, but the most successful people, especially getting high

grades, I've seen, are the ones who do it early. They know that they cannot, they don't want to pile up stuff right near to the deadline. So they break that, I would say, work into those weeks, those are lighter. So if you would do that, it's really beneficial for you.

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I do understand that it could not be possible some days to study every day, but aim for, especially on lighter weeks, aim for still studying two to three hours on a lighter week. And I'm telling this to like first year students, not third year or fourth year students. They have a lot going on and I will encourage them to just start studying one or two hours right away because I'm in third year right now and I can feel it. Like the courses are so much harder than I had like a year ago or two years ago when I started at Douglas. So it really depends. That's why I recommend looking at the course outline and seeing what you have coming up to give you that idea on how much studying you would have to put in.

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There's no hard and fast rule, but I want to make sure that you choose the best for yourself and you are able to stick to the plan.

Ryan

Yeah, that's so true. It's all about developing that regular habit, right? And that starts in the first couple weeks of the semester. I know I've done both things. I've spent the first couple weeks of semester just thinking, oh, I've only still a few weeks away until my next test or assignment. I can chill. No big deal. But then, yeah, you get into that third or fourth week, as you say, and then it just gets stressful because you're coming.

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Rashi

Right. And you have multiple things going on in every course. And now you have a midterm for one course, and then you have a project due for another course. And you're like, I wish I should have started earlier. I would so wish. And I've seen a lot of students coming in saying, I just wish I would have started it. Yeah.

Ryan

Totally.

Yeah. You don't want to be cursing past Rashi. We don't want to be cursing past Rashi or past Ryan or past whoever, right? Yeah. All right. So are there any under the radar things that people don't consider when starting college? Things that they didn't think about beforehand or they're like, oh, I didn't know I had to do that or things like that.

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Rashi

I think it could be things, little things that makes or breaks your day. Like, for example, and it's quite funny, actually, sometimes I want to stay back and study for, a quiz, for example. And in the middle of the day, I'm super hungry. And like, I want to have food, but maybe I don't want to have food that's offered in the cafeteria. And had I packed myself some lunch earlier in the day, I would not have had that uncomfortable feeling where I'm feeling so hungry, but I wanted to stay back at the library to study for this quiz.

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And now I am debating whether I should just head home and cook, eat food that I have prepared at home or cook food, or just stay back and eat, something that I don't like to prepare for my quiz. I think little things like that, packing snacks, lunch for you, packing your essentials, packing your electronics, everything you might need if you're staying back at college or studying at the library. You should carry it with you when you leave the house.

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More often than not, we come to college unprepared. We don't have our electronics with us. We don't have our notebooks where we take the actual notes with us. And we don't have that material. And then we're thinking, oh, maybe I should just head home and I'll do it at home. And then you go home and you do nothing. So like planning these little things out to make your day easier at college is really important. And it's a skill again. I would highly encourage everybody, especially during those first weeks, to figure out their class timings, to figure out how their day looks like, and to come up with a plan on how they're going to win their day at college.

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Ryan

I love how you said win the day at college because that's so true. The days that we feel like we won feel a lot better than those L days. Nobody likes those, right? Yeah, and food's so

important too, right? You're not, we're not machines, we're gonna get hungry. And as much as we love Tim Horton's, Tim Horton's every day is going to get tiring after a while and not super healthy.

Rashi

Yes, I highly encourage everybody to pack good, nutritious food with them so that they are not feeling drowsy in the middle of the day and they just want to sleep because of just so much sugar they had during the day.

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I mean, you can have a snack, that's fine, but have a good nutritious meal packed with you that can energize you throughout the day to do all that studying and commitments you have made to yourself, right?

Ryan

Yeah, totally. All right, well, one thing I like to think about my days at college is it was such a great opportunity to meet people, make connections. You don't have as many opportunities, I feel, in the, once you leave college. So what are some ways students can build those connections at the beginning of the semester?

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Rashi

There are multiple ways, actually. One thing, I ended up making the most friends during group projects. I think the classes where there were group projects, and we were kind of required to meet every day. It really helped me out connect to people on a regular basis. I think they're a great way, if you really hit it off with your group mates, they can be your lifelong friends as well. And it feels like a long shot, but that's true. There are some friends I met, those were my group mates I met at the first semester at Douglas, like two years ago. I still like talk to them. So I think don't be afraid of group work. And if your course requires group work, talk to your group mates and maybe you'll end up making friends with them.

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Apart from that, I feel there is a lot of volunteer opportunities with, especially at Douglas, with Student Life, with DSU. I think going through those events is really important. And just, even if you feel shy and you're like, oh, I don't even know what I'm going to do there, just going and talking to people is really helpful. And if you're sitting in class, and for example,

let's just say your class doesn't have group work, but sitting in class, just talking to people right next to you, like, hey, which program are you in? What year are you in? Really helps.

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And I would highly recommend, have the number of at least one peer in every course, just in case you end up missing that day, you can always ask them about it.

Ryan

Yeah, great advice. I know a lot of students hate group work, but it is a good opportunity to make friends, isn't it?

Rashi

Is, it is. And yeah, you sometimes you end up meeting people who are way more intelligent and smarter than you, and you end up learning a lot, which could not have been possible if you just worked alone. So be open, be curious, try talking to people.

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As I mentioned, try talking to peers, even if your class does not have a group project or something. Just saying hi to them, asking them, is it okay if we connect on social media or if I have your number? Can I message you if I just missed class because I'm sick? It really helps out.

Ryan

Great advice. Okay, so you've given us so much great advice about getting off to a great start, but sometimes, you know, something gets in the way. a life issue or illness or something like that prevents us from getting off to a good start. So if that happens, what can students do if they fall behind and get off to a slow start?

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Rashi

Well, it's very common than you think, right?

Ryan

Oh, I know. Trust me, I know.

Rashi

I mean, starting strong is a goal, right? This is something that we want to achieve. And that's okay if we fall behind. Sometimes life can happen as well. For example, I had to urgently travel to India last year, which is why I arrived like a week after my classes started and I was already behind. So sometimes things like that happen. And sometimes you are just maybe too lazy and you're like, I'll just put it off.

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And then it hits you. Maybe I've made a mistake, but that's completely all right. The sooner you realize your mistakes, the better. Just get to work. And I break it down, like getting to work would be recognizing what's the most important and urgent things coming up in the next week or two weeks and tending to them. That's the most important thing. So for example, if you have a midterm or a quiz coming up, you just want to make sure to get that done first because we don't want you to lose your grade or something like that.

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The second thing I recommend is when you fall behind, you need help. So reach out. I have seen like we have a lot of students coming up at the learning center reaching out and I really appreciate them. That reaching out for tutoring, going to your professor's office hours and just talking to them like, hey, professor, like I ended up missing classes or I ended up not working as I should have worked. But now I'm at this crossroad where I need to make better choices. Can you guide me through it? Because they have seen numerous students go through the same process, and they will give you good advice on how to get a good grade at their course, right?

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Ryan

Yeah, that's so true. It's never too late to get back on track if you're really committed, right?

Rashi

I know. Sometimes, and it's a funny thing to motivate the students who come in, I tell them, it's not over until you come out of that final exam. It's not over. You still have hope until that final exam is over. So whenever you realize, like at whatever time of the semester, that it's important to make things right, just try to get as much help as you can and try to be disciplined moving forward.

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Ryan

Yeah.

Rashi

I would just like emphasize how important starting strong is, even if you're developing those habits, just try your best, right, in whatever way you can. Yeah. That would be better. Yeah.

Ryan

Well, if I were starting the semester instead of just starting another semester of work, actually, even starting a semester of work, it's like starting a semester as a student in a way. So, you know, you've given some great advice. I feel like I'm ready to start off the new year strong. I don't know about you. How do you feel?

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Rashi

I feel motivated.

Ryan

All right, 2026, here we come. Winter semester. It's going to be our semester. Yeah, for sure. All right, so we're going to get a great start on the semester. And if not, hey, we'll get things back on track. Definitely. That's it for today's show. Thanks for listening, everyone. Remember, the Douglas College Learning Center provides free one-on-one peer tutoring to Douglas students. You can book an appointment with Rashi or any of our other peer tutors. Or find out more information at our website, library.douglascollege.ca/learningcentre, where you can also register for our Semester Startup Workshops, including Strong Start Tutor Tips. If you like this episode, please give us a five-star rating, review, or share it with others who could use the advice. For those about to learn, we salute you.