



# **HOW TO PROPERLY WITHDRAW FROM COLLEGE CLASSES**

## **OVERVIEW**

Sometimes a course or semester doesn't go the way that you planned, and it becomes necessary to withdraw from some or all of your classes. This guide will cover the effects of withdrawing from a course, how to know when it's time to withdraw from a course, and what you should do once you know you need to withdraw.

When you remove a course from your schedule, it only counts as a withdrawal if you remove the class after the end of your school's drop period, which usually comes a week or two after the start of the semester.

## **THERE ARE TWO GENERAL KINDS OF WITHDRAWAL:**

### **MEDICAL WITHDRAWAL/EMERGENCY LEAVE OF ABSENCE:**

This is a kind of withdrawal that you can do if you have a medical or mental health situation or other crisis that will make it impossible for you to continue with your classes. Often, schools will require students who request a medical withdrawal to provide documentation and also withdraw from all of their classes at once (as opposed to getting to drop some classes but not others). You don't have to do a medical withdrawal if the withdrawal deadline has not passed yet, even if you're withdrawing for medical or mental health reasons – you also have the option to do a regular course withdrawal (see below) and can pick and choose the classes you stay in or drop.

If you are close to the end of the semester and currently passing or close to passing a class, **you may want to ask your professors for grades of incomplete instead of taking a medical withdrawal.** An incomplete grade will allow you to make up and submit any missing work once the crisis has passed, and can be an important way to avoid losing credit for the classes you've worked so hard in. It's up to your professor whether they allow you to take an Incomplete grade, and some may be more understanding than others.

### **REGULAR COURSE WITHDRAWAL:**

This is any other type of withdrawal. Usually the main reason to withdraw from a course if there is not a medical or other emergency is because you know that you are going to be unable to pass the course. In this case, withdrawing from the class can help you avoid a failing grade and can sometimes keep you in good academic standing, but there can also be some consequences for withdrawing including [financial aid consequences](#) and [transcript consequences](#).

**4 KEY THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN CONSIDERING WITHDRAWING FROM CLASSES:****1. Always get advice before you withdraw.**

Talk to your professor, advisors, tutors, coaches, or any other knowledgeable people who can help you with your decision. If you have already done most of the work for the class but can't complete the semester due to a medical/personal issue, see if you can get a grade of Incomplete.

**2. Always try to withdraw in the week before the withdrawal deadline if you are going to lose your full-time student status after withdrawing.** This will reduce the potential financial aid penalties from withdrawing.**3. If you must withdraw, always withdraw officially**

It is preferable to withdraw by meeting with an advisor. It's important to make sure that your official withdrawal was processed. If you can't meet with an advisor, you can usually also officially withdraw from classes using your online student account. ***You never want to just stop attending classes.***

**4. After you withdraw, make a plan.**

If you are continuing college, consider taking a winter or summer course to try to make up for lost time. While officially withdrawing from a course will not harm your GPA, you still need to keep earning credits to maintain your financial aid eligibility and graduate on time.

**WHAT WITHDRAWAL MEANS FOR YOUR TRANSCRIPT**

**Withdrawing from a class is usually better than staying in a class that you know you are going to fail,** particularly if you make sure to withdraw officially and make a plan to avoid future course withdrawals.

**Every college has a deadline on their academic calendar for the latest date that you can withdraw from a course (usually around two-thirds of the way through the semester).**

Typically, if you withdraw before that date you will receive a **grade of "W"** for that class on your transcript.

**A grade of "W" is not a failing grade and does not impact your GPA,** it just means that you did not complete the course.

Too many "W" grades without a good explanation can potentially be an issue if you're applying to graduate school or applying for jobs that look closely at your college transcript (most employers don't), but in general, the "W" grade itself is not a concern.

If you withdraw after the deadline, you will need an extremely good reason (typically a medical or mental health issue resulting in a Medical Withdraw) to receive a "W" grade. If you withdraw after the deadline without doing a Medical Withdrawal, you will usually receive a failing grade in the class.



If you must withdraw, you should always withdraw officially by going to your advisor or dropping the class on your student account.

**You should not withdraw from a class by not going to the class anymore.** If you do not withdraw officially, you will receive a grade of **"UNOFFICIAL WITHDRAWAL"** or **"WITHDREW FAILING,"** which looks bad on your transcript and counts as a failing grade at some schools. Your professor might also just decide to give you an "F." An unofficial withdrawal might cause you to have to **return financial aid funds** ([see page 3](#)).

**NOTE:** In Fall 2021, CUNY shifted their policy so that unofficial withdrawal (WU) grades no longer count as F's (though WUs earned before Fall 2021 still count as F's). Some SUNY and private schools still count unofficial withdrawals as F's.

## FINANCIAL AID AND THE WITHDRAWAL WINDOW

### TWO KINDS OF POSSIBLE FINANCIAL AID CONSEQUENCES FOR WITHDRAWING FROM A CLASS:

1. RETURN OF FINANCIAL AID (TITLE IV) FUNDS
2. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) ISSUES

#### RETURN OF TITLE IV FUNDS

If withdrawing from a class would drop you below full-time student (i.e. 12 credits or remedial credit hours) or you are already below full-time: **the best time to withdraw from classes is during the week immediately before your college's withdrawal deadline.**

This is because of a federal rule that says: If a student completes **less than 60%** of the semester in a class, the student may be asked to return a portion of the Pell Grant funding that they received for that semester of classes IF withdrawing from the class drops them BELOW FULL-TIME.

*For example:*

If you dropped all of your classes 50% of the way through the semester, you would (most likely) have to return 50% of your Pell Grant funds. This means you would need to pay back around \$1,500 to your school!

**However:** if you waited another week or two to drop your classes, until you completed 60% semester, **you would not owe the school any money.** It is important to note that you would need to keep attending class while you wait to withdraw - otherwise you might get an unofficial withdrawal.

At most colleges, the 60% mark in the semester comes at the beginning of the week before the withdrawal deadline. It's a good idea to consult with your school's financial aid office if you are ever unsure about the financial aid consequences of withdrawing.

**TIP!** *If you would still be a full-time student (i.e. 12 credits or remedial credit hours) after withdrawing from a class, you will not have to return financial aid funds and can withdraw at any time.*

**If you are in the Dorm Project,** you should always talk to the Dorm Project team before withdrawing from classes, because dropping below full-time can jeopardize your standing in the program.

#### SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) ISSUES

In order to keep receiving financial aid, you need to demonstrate **SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP).**

**SAP means: keeping your GPA above a 2.0, and also earning a certain number of credits each semester - usually about 10 credits per semester.**

While withdrawing from a course officially will not bring your GPA down, it could stop you from earning the credits you need to keep up with the SAP requirements for financial aid. You may end up needing to take summer or winter courses, or take additional classes in upcoming semesters, in order to get yourself back on track.

A chart of the SAP requirements at CUNY for both TAP and Pell grants can be found [here](#). In addition to the SAP requirements, TAP requires students to earn a certain passing or failing grades (not W's) in a certain number of credits each term in order to receive their award for the next semester. This number is 6 credits per semester of the student's first year of TAP payments, 9 credits per semester in the second year, and 12 credits per semester beyond that point.

## BEFORE YOU WITHDRAW

### STEPS YOU SHOULD TAKE BEFORE YOU DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM A CLASS OR CLASSES:

#### STEP 1: CHECK YOUR GRADES AND TAKE STOCK

Sometimes students will withdraw from classes that they actually have a good chance of passing - this is something to avoid! Take a look at your recent test scores, your syllabus, and any grades you have posted on your online class account. If you are passing the class, or you are close to passing, it's almost always a good idea to stay in the class.

It's also good to think about whether there's anything you can do right now to improve your performance in the class. If your job is conflicting with school, is it possible to cut back your hours at work to spend more time studying? Join a study group? Go to more office hours or submit make-up work?

#### STEP 2: TALK TO YOUR PROFESSOR

Talking to your professor in person (either after class or at office hours) is usually best, but you can also send an email if you need to. Ask your professor if you have a chance of passing/getting a C or above in their class, and if so, what you would have to accomplish in order to make that happen. **Most professors want their students to pass their classes**, and some will offer accommodations or extra credit to students who show motivation and initiative. Sometimes, your professor will tell you that there is no way for you to pass their class. In this case, at least you know for certain what the next steps should be. If you have to withdraw for medical/personal reasons and are currently passing the class, you might want to ask your professor for a grade of Incomplete.

#### STEP 3: TALK TO YOUR ADVISOR AND OTHER PEOPLE YOU TRUST

It's really important to talk to people who know and support you and/or have knowledge about how the withdrawal process works at your school. Have a conversation about your options, get advice on whether to withdraw, and figure out what kind of withdrawal you want to do.

**If you are receiving ETV, in a scholarship program, an Opportunity Program or in the FCSI/Dorm Project, you definitely need to let your point of contact there know before you withdraw from classes.**

#### STEP 4: GATHER DOCUMENTATION (IF NEEDED)

If you are trying for a late withdrawal or a medical withdrawal, you'll want to gather documentation for why you are withdrawing from your class or classes. Doctor's notes, letters from your agency, and other formal documents that explain your situation will be very important in making your case.

#### STEP 5: MAKE SURE TO WITHDRAW OFFICIALLY

Some schools and programs require you to meet with an advisor in order to withdraw. Others will allow you to do it online. Whatever the policy is at your school, you want to make sure that you are withdrawing officially from your classes. If you just stop attending your classes, you may receive failing grades in those classes.

#### STEP 6: IF YOU ARE WITHDRAWING FROM ALL OF YOUR CLASSES

- ☐ **Talk to the housing office/bursar (if needed) and settle your accounts:**  
If you are leaving school with a balance, you want to make sure you at least have a payment plan in place. When you withdraw, any balance you owe to the school does not just go away, and if you don't pay it for long enough, it could get sent to collections, which would impact your credit score.
- ☐ **If you have any library books or school property, make sure to return them.**  
This ensures won't have a hold on your student records, which might make it hard to start school again.
- ☐ **Get a copy of your official transcript from your school.**

## **AFTER YOU WITHDRAW**

### **AFTER YOU WITHDRAW, YOU SHOULD:**

#### **Submit any necessary appeals.**

There are a couple situations where you might have to submit an appeal after you withdraw. If you did a medical withdrawal early in the semester and had to return financial aid funds, you might want to submit a tuition appeal for that semester so that you don't owe the college money. If you withdrew after the deadline, or your withdrawal was counted as an unofficial withdrawal or other failing grade, you might need to submit a grade appeal to change the failing grade to a "W". **If you do get an unofficial withdrawal grade, you should always try to appeal the grade to a "W".**

#### **Log back into your student account a month after you withdraw.**

Make sure you don't have a balance or hold on your account, and that you're not signed up for any classes for the next semester that you don't want to be in.

#### **Complete any makeup work for classes where you got an incomplete.**

If you got an incomplete in one or more classes, you still have the opportunity to earn a passing grade by turning in the work you were not able to complete during the semester. Reach out to your professor and find out when and how you can submit your missing assignments or tests. It's important to not leave incomplete work to the last minute.

#### **Reflect and make a plan.**

Talk to the people you trust. If you're staying in college, you'll want to think about what you need to do in order to avoid having to withdraw from classes in the future - whether it's getting additional support, building different habits, or something else. If you're leaving college for the time being, what do you want to do next?