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in regards to Linear Algebra, Fall 2008

During my freshman year of college, I treated my classes no differently than I had throughout high school: I would listen to the teacher present the material, complete the assigned homework problems and perhaps consult the textbook if I found any topic particularly confusing. As long as my homework assignment was complete, I felt prepared for class. This attitude got me through two college-level math courses that I had previously taken in high school, but sophomore year brought Linear Algebra, my first math course to present primarily new material. The professor used the first class period to explain to us the way mathematics in college needed to be learned – emphasizing that we were responsible for our own learning and that the professor was one available resource for aiding in our learning.

The first weeks passed in the same fashion as the previous semesters; I only consulted the textbook as a last resort and relied heavily on my professor to teach me the material. However, in the third week, I attended my Linear Algebra lecture, listened carefully for the full fifty-minute entirety, and left feeling quite confused. I dedicated an hour that night to learning what had been discussed that morning from the textbook, using my memories and notes from the lecture as a guide. For the rest of the week, I attended lectures, leaving each one with the same feeling of bewilderment. My frustration grew. That weekend, instead of focusing only on what had already been covered, I ventured to read ahead and look at material not yet presented. The next week's classes passed far more smoothly, because I had already developed familiarity with the material discussed in lecture. From then on, I began truly coming prepared to class, having read the textbook prior to lecture. I eventually reached the conclusion that it wasn't the professor's responsibility to make sure I learned the material; rather, it was my own.

This epiphany has changed the way I prepare and study for all of my classes, allowing me to gain the most out of each lecture I attend.