Students committed to learning will find many possible paths to success. No path is error free, but the path best for you may not look like the same path as another student. For this reason, students should continuously assess their academic progress in courses and adjust their academic strategies accordingly.

While there is no magic formula, the following suggestions may improve your ability to succeed in philosophy and increase your retention of knowledge.

If you want to discover more, please see Professor Garth Kemerling’s webpage at: http://www.philosophypages.com/sy.htm which this information was adapted from.

Tips:

1. Do all assigned readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss your questions the concepts presented. This is invaluable to your gaining intellectual independence.
2. Consider the context in which the philosophical theories were written. Historical events, who wrote it, what audience it was written for all influence the interpretation of philosophy. You textbooks and internet sources should give you ample information concerning this.
3. Take your time! Reading philosophy is intense. Each person’s needs are different but never the less, do what you need to give yourself enough time and a quiet place to study and think about what you have read.
4. Spot crucial passages and identify central theses by reviewing the material and looking over other sources and what they have to say about it.
5. Locate supportive arguments. Philosophers do not merely state opinions but also undertake to establish their truth. The methods employed to support philosophical theses can differ widely, but most of them will be expressed one of the forms of logical argumentation (appeal to force, argument, ignorance, pity, emotion, or authority). That is, the philosopher will (explicitly or implicitly) offer premises that are clearly true and then claim that a sound inference from these premises leads inexorably to the desired conclusion.
6. Assess the arguments. Ask whether the premises are true and whether the inference from premises to conclusion is sound.
7. Look for connections between philosophers. See which way each philosopher incorporates, adopts, rejects, or responds to the work of those who have gone before.

8. When in class: be prepared with the daily readings completed and listen actively; do expect conflicts or disagreements but be respectful of others making every effort to see the other person’s perspective without taking offence and making personal attacks; participate full while letting others talk too and ask questions!

9. Realize that you can keep calm if it is confusing because the majority of philosophy is “gotten” through the discussion in class.