Survival tips from Current Academy Cadets

Just remember – Cadets are like snowflakes. There are no two alike. The following personal tips may or may not work for you. USAFA has not endorsed any of these tips.

Part 1: Before you go….

➢ Get in shape! Recommendations include running – work up to a 3 mile run, flutter kicks with ankle weights or AF boots on, running, push ups – work up to 50 at one time, running, pull ups, running, crossfit.com cardio work, running, more running. Push yourself now helps keep the cadre from ‘noticing’ you too much during basic.

➢ Hair: gentlemen, you’ll get a buzz cut regardless. Ladies: long is fine but 1.) takes a long time to wash correctly, 2.) may get mildewed during basic and 3.) hair falling down during basic draws attention (read – yelling) from the cadre. Optimum hair length from several sources = hair long enough for a small bun or ponytail.

➢ Practice makes perfect:
  ○ The standing long jump
  ○ Taking a shower in 90 seconds.
  ○ Ladies: putting your hair in a military grade bun in 60 seconds. (If you can’t do this, be prepared to have your hair cut short during in-processing).
  ○ A marching Jodie.
  ○ Your salute.
  ○ Memorize your social security number.
  ○ The “7 basic responses” –
    ▪ Yes Sir/Ma’am
    ▪ No Sir/Ma’am
    ▪ No excuse, Sir/Ma’am
    ▪ Sir/Ma’am, may I ask a question?
    ▪ Sir/Ma’am, may I make a statement?
    ▪ Sir/Ma’am, I do not understand.
    ▪ Sir/Ma’am, I do not know.
  ○ Reporting in: Sir/Ma’am, Basic cadet (your name) reports as ordered.
  ○ Train your bowels so you get the routine urge to go at night. You will get 60 seconds to poop during the day at basic so start the internal dialog now – “craps after taps”.
  ○ Wean yourself off protein bars/ shakes, caffeine and energy drinks. Withdrawal during basic is miserable.

➢ Boots
  ○ One opinion – get boots now, walk around and run at least 2 miles to find the spots that will cause blisters on your foot. Duct tape inside the boot where it rubs.
  ○ Second opinion – breaking in boots now is not helpful. Bring only soft insoles with you since you must wear the boots issued at basic and you’ll have to break those in anyway. Carrying or wearing your boots at in-processing is no fun.

➢ Money
  ○ One opinion – establish your Armed Forces Bank charge card before basic because you won’t have time to do so during and you’ll need money for the Cadet store.
Second opinion – bring cash, no need for credit, ~ $100 with you at in-processing to pay for cleaning supplies ($20-30), an additional $45 charge from the Cadet store for issued cleaning supplies and toiletries and some extra to buy as much food as you can eat at the Rodeo (a break during Jacks Valley).

Letters from home are a lifeline during basic. Have family mail a letter a couple of days before in-processing so it’s there at your first trip to the mailroom. Cadets recommend the letters arrive in plain white envelopes. Some suggest typed inspirational sayings, jokes, etc. on the back of the envelope. One cadet received an envelope covered in penguin stickers. Once the cadre noticed it, the stickers turned into ‘push up penguins’.

Packing tips:

- Avoid rolling luggage at all costs. Stick with a backpack or a gym bag.
- Pack light – no computers, iPods, iron, ironing board, extra civilian clothing, etc. You can’t use them during basic. Think about this: everything you bring has to be carried in your left hand while you in-process. You can’t wear your back pack.
- Compression shorts can be a life saver! Make sure they are white and have your ID on them. Men’s have a 6 inch inseam and women’s come with a 4 inch inseam. Most helpful when 1.) you first get your ABU’s (they are very stiff and thigh-chafing), 2.) when sweat + the low crawling course at Jack’s Valley conspire together to pull your pants down to your knees, and 3.) ladies, when you realize your PT shorts are significantly shorter than what the gentlemen wear.
- Travel size toiletries - enough to get you through the first 3 weeks only. You’ll get to go shopping for more before the second ½ of basic.
- Best bets: sun screen (esp. for the face), Gold Bond foot powder, moleskin, glide stick (prevents chafing).
- Phones and chargers are fine but will be taken away and secured until Doolie Day In or Acceptance Day.
- +/- opinions on a calculator for the assessment tests you will take within a few days of arrival.
- A copy of your AP scores and validation information to present during the assessment period.
- A written list of addresses to friends/family you want contact, plenty of stamps and some stationary. You are issued only a small amount of stationary at USAFA.
- Write what motivates you, everything that makes you happy, your reasons for going to the Academy or words of wisdom like “success comes in cans, not can’ts” on a piece of paper you can tuck in a pocket. You can reference it every time you’re losing the will to continue or asking yourself “why am I doing this?”
- Gentlemen: electric razors – saves time and hassle, found to be very handy if your hair is out of regulations before a pop inspection.
- Ladies: bring more feminine products and hair clips that you think you need. Stress can either shorten or lengthen your cycle. If you don’t need them, someone else will and you’ll be her hero. Hair clips (barrette type), bobby pins and twisted hair pins which are as close to your hair color as possible keep the falling locks and cadre in check. If your cycle is particularly painful, get a prescription from your doctor for what works best for you (even if it’s an over the counter medicine) and show it to the in-processing personnel. Otherwise you may not get much help with your pain during basic.

Please join us at the Class of 2017 Doolie Picnic for more answers to:

Part 2: In-processing Day (I-day)
Part 3: First Basic (First BCT, First Beast) Cadet Area (The Hill)
Part 4: Second Basic (Second BCT, Second Beast, Jacks Valley)
Part 5: Acceptance (A-Day)

Or go to http://www.usafa.edu/Commandant/BCT/FAQ/?catname=BCT%20FAQ