

**How to Get
Good Grades
In Ten Easy Steps**

by Linda O'Brien

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Dear Students,

When you get good grades, your parents, relatives, and teachers are proud of you, school is more fun, and most importantly, you feel good about yourself. Whether you are an “A” student, or a student who only dreams of getting A’s, this booklet can help you improve your grades.

Students who get A’s know that it’s important to be organized. They know how to study, how to take notes, and how to read a textbook. They know tricks that can help them memorize things and strategies that help them choose the right answers on tests.

This booklet will show you how to do all of these things and more. If you read and follow the suggestions in this book, you’ll be on your way to getting the best grades you’ve ever gotten. You may not be able to get the grades you want overnight, and it will require some work on your part, but if you want to improve your grades, this booklet can definitely help you to it.

Linda O’Brien

High school juniors John, Sarah, Maria, Jermaine, Greg, Brad, and Kathy met as a student panel to give us ideas and advise on how to get good grades. They had great ideas and we’ve placed quotes from them throughout this booklet. We thank these students for their input, and we hope that you find their ideas helpful.

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What Kind of a Student Are You?

To find out what kind of student you are, read the following 10 questions and put check marks in the spaces that best describe you. (This will take 2 minutes).

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. I complete homework assignments.	_____	_____	_____
2. I have all necessary materials when I go to class (book, pencil, etc.):	_____	_____	_____
3. I use the time teachers give us in class to get started on homework.	_____	_____	_____
4. I take good notes.	_____	_____	_____
5. I ask and answer questions in class.	_____	_____	_____
6. I use tricks to memorize information.	_____	_____	_____
7. After reading an assignment in a textbook, I know what I've read.	_____	_____	_____
8. I get along well with my teachers.	_____	_____	_____
9. I am good at taking tests.	_____	_____	_____
10. I am happy with my grades.	_____	_____	_____

Give yourself 2 points for each *Always* response, 1 for each *Sometimes* response, and 0 for each *Never* response. Add up your score.

What Your Score Means

20-15 points: You are a very good student. This booklet will mostly be a review for you. It could, however, help you raise your grades even higher.

14-10 points: You are a student who could be getting better grades. With this booklet, you will be able to improve your grades significantly.

9-5 points: You're probably not getting very good grades. This booklet can help you change that. It could even change how you feel about school.

4-0 points: Your grades must be a disaster. Memorize this booklet.

Regardless of your score, this booklet can help you improve your grades!

Step One

Believe in Yourself

“To succeed, we must first believe that we can.” Michael Korda

In order for you to succeed, you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. Here’s a little story to help illustrate this idea:

Two high school athletes are preparing to compete against each other. They are the same size, and they have about the same athletic abilities. Everyone assumes that it will be an exciting match.

The first athlete runs out. He looks confident, and as he waits, he continues to warm up and stretch. The people nearby can hear him muttering to himself, “I’m ready. I can do it.”

The second athlete appears. He slowly shuffles out with his head down, and as he waits, he stands and fidgets with his watch. Those nearby can hear him mutter, “I’m gonna get killed.”

Two athletes, same size, same abilities..... Even before the competition starts, everyone knows who’s going to win.

Whether you’re an athlete preparing for competition or a student tackling a difficult subject, it’s important that you believe in yourself. You must recognize the talents and abilities you possess, and you must know, and believe, that you can succeed.

Take a minute now, and write down the courses you’re taking in the grid below. Then in the “Grade” column, write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course this grading period.

Course	Grade

Think of these grades as your academic goals for this grading period. *Believe in yourself, and believe that you can achieve these goals.*

Step Two

Be Organized

If you're organized, you have what you need, when you need it. This section will give you several ideas on how to get organized. You, of course, must determine what's going to work best for you.

Use an assignment notebook. Get an assignment notebook, take it with you to every class, and use one page for each day's assignments. When you're given an assignment, write it on the page under the date it's due. For example, if today is January 11 and your history teacher assigns pages 50-65 for tomorrow, write this assignment on the January 12 page.

When you're given a large assignment, use your assignment notebook to break the assignment down into smaller parts. For example, if you have an English paper due at the end of the week, you could break this assignment down into smaller parts by giving yourself the following four separate assignments:

Jan. 10: get resources at library

Jan. 11: do outline

Jan. 12: write rough draft

Jan. 13: write final draft

Jan 11	Jan 12
Math - p.110	Math - p.111
Bin - Chap. 8 Questions 1-10	History 50-65 Bio Quiz
Do English paper outline	Write Eng. paper rough draft

"Using an assignment notebook helps me organize what I have to do. It also helps me get things done on time so that I'm not turning assignments in late or incomplete." John

"When I look at my assignment notebook at the end of the day. It reminds me of which books I need to take home." Maria

Use three-ring notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because you can easily insert handouts, and if you miss a class, you can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong. Buy a personal 3-hole punch and put it in your notebook. You'll then be able to punch your handouts right there in class and immediately put them in your notebook with your notes for the day.

Use folders for schoolwork. Have a different color pocket folder for each class. In these folders, keep current assignments along with all returned assignments, quizzes, and tests. Old tests and quizzes can help you study for future tests, and they may come in handy if there's ever a question about your grade. In each of your folders, keep a record of your test, quiz, and homework grades for that class.

(Keeping a record of your grades eliminates surprises at report card time.) If you're ever unsure as to how you're doing in a class, talk to your teacher.

*"I write down all of my grades. Then I always know where I stand in all my classes."
Brad*

Have phone numbers for classmates. Make sure that you have a phone number for at least one person in each class. If you're absent, you'll then have someone you can call to find out what you've missed. Phone numbers are also helpful when you have a question about an assignment or an upcoming test.

Keep your locker and backpack neat. Never put loose papers (homework assignments, handouts, etc.) in your locker, backpack, or folded up in a book. Always put them in the appropriate folder or notebook, and always keep your locker and backpack neat, clean, and organized.

Get organized before you go to bed. Put completed homework in the appropriate folders, and put everything you need for the next day in the same place each night. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, leave yourself a note so that you don't forget.

Step Two Review
Be Organized

- **Use an assignment notebook.**
- **Use three-ring notebooks for class notes.**
- **Use folders for schoolwork.**
- **Have phone numbers for classmates.**
- **Keep your locker and backpack neat.**
- **Get organized before you go to bed.**

Step Three

Manage Your Time Well

With good time management, you have time for the things you have to do, and you still have time for the things you want to do.

Use class time and study halls. Always use the time teachers give you in class to start on your homework, to ask questions, or to get help.

“If I really use my study hall and the time teachers give us in class, I don’t have nearly as much homework to do at night.” Jermaine

Create your own study plan. Some students study best at night; others study best earlier in the day. Many students also have activities, sports, and jobs that they have to work around.

Determine how much time you have available each day, take a look at the amount of homework you have, and then develop a study plan. To help keep you organized and “on track,” try to have a plan in mind by the time you get home from school each day. For example:

3:00 – 5:00 Band practice
5:00 – 6:00 Do math homework
7:00 – 8:00 Study for history quiz & do biology questions

Prepare for sabotage. Identify anything that could interrupt or ruin your study plan, and figure out how to eliminate or avoid it.

“I used to get interrupted by phone calls. Now my friends don’t call until 9:00, and I make sure that my homework’s done by then.” Kathy

“I can’t lie down on the couch and watch TV until I have all of my homework done. If I do, my homework probably won’t get done.” John

Step Three Review

Manage Your Time Well

- **Use class time and study halls.**
- **Create your own study plan.**
- **Prepare for sabotage.**

Step Four

Be Successful in the Classroom

If you follow the advice in this section, you'll enjoy school more and you'll get better grades.

Be in school, on time, every day. When you miss school, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work; you can never make up all of what you miss, even when you're out of school for only one day. You therefore need to decide that you will be in school *everyday*. Unless you have an extended illness or a chronic health problem, you should miss no more than five or six days of school a year.

Learn how to adapt to different teachers. In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and they make the rules. You may have one teacher who says you're tardy if you're not in your seat when the bell rings, and another teacher who considers you "on time" if you've got one foot inside the door. It doesn't matter whether or not you agree with the first teacher's rule; it only matters that you are in your seat when the bell rings. Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different personalities, teaching styles, and expectations.

"It's really important to know your teachers and to know what they want. Are they strict about rules? Do they collect and grade homework? Do they give points for participation?" Brad

Be prepared for each class. To be prepared, you need to have books, paper, etc. with you when you go to class. *You also need to have all of your homework done.* When you've done your homework, you can get more out of the class, the lecture makes more sense, and you can participate in class discussions. (If you haven't done your homework, you may not even understand the lecture and class discussion).

Being prepared also means that you're ready to learn. Try taking a couple of seconds as you walk into each class to think about what you're going to be doing that day. This will make it easier for you to shift your attention and to focus on the subject when the class starts.

Of course, to be physically and mentally alert, you need to eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep.

Sit in the front of the class if possible. It is easier to pay attention and to stay involved when you sit in front of the classroom. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, overheads, etc. If you've been assigned a seat in the back of the classroom, ask your teachers if it would be possible for you to move closer to the front.

Be aware of your body language and nonverbal behavior. This guidance counselor's story illustrates the importance of body language:

"One day a student named Jason complained to me that his English teacher always picked on him. Jason assured me that he never talked out in class, that he always did his homework, and that he did everything his teacher asked him to do.

The following week I was in Jason's English class to talk about scheduling. Jason, who was sitting in the back row, never spoke out of turn, he never talked to his neighbors, and he did everything he was supposed to do. Nevertheless, as my presentation went on, I became more and more infuriated with him. Why? Because of his body language and nonverbal behavior.

Throughout the period, Jason would look at his friends and roll his eyes, or he'd slump his shoulders, let his head drop back, and then he'd sigh. Jason's behavior was clearly saying to me, "This is stupid and boring, and I don't want to do this." I found Jason's behavior distracting and irritating. Of course, I also discovered why Jason and his English teacher weren't getting along very well.

The next day I called Jason into my office and explained to him what I had observed the previous day. Jason was genuinely surprised that I had even noticed him in the class."

What Jason didn't understand is that when teachers are up in front of a classroom, they see everything. They know who is paying attention, who's taking notes, and who is listening to the class discussion. They also know who's doing homework for another class, writing personal notes, daydreaming, and "napping" (even when students think they've positioned their hands and books to hide it). If you choose to do any of these things, don't kid yourself into thinking that your teacher's don't notice, even if they don't say anything. Teacher's notice, and they conclude that you don't care about what's going on in their class. It's not enough for you to say that you want to get good grades; your body language and nonverbal behavior have to communicate this also.

Always do your homework. Do not look at your homework as something you should do; think of your homework as something you must do. Since a significant portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Always have homework completed on time, and whenever possible, do extra credit work.

"If you don't do your homework, it kills your grade" Brad

"Always do extra credit. It improves your grade, and it shows your teachers that your grades are important to you." Greg

Participate in class. Many teachers give participation points. These are easy points to get, and participating in class helps keep you focused. Participating also makes the class more interesting.

*“If I tune out, the class goes on forever. If I participate, the time goes a lot faster.”
John*

“Teachers like it when you participate and try to answer their questions, even if you’re wrong.” Sarah

Be a good group member. The number one reason why people get fired from their jobs is because they can’t get along with the people they work with. It’s therefore not surprising that businesses are encouraging schools to teach students how to work together in small groups. When you have to do a group project, 1.) do your share of the work and do it well, 2.) accept that everyone is different and try to be open to all ideas, and 3.) support the other members of your group.

Treat others with courtesy and respect. Treat your teachers and classmates the same way that you want to be treated. Be polite, look at your teachers when they’re speaking, and listen when others are talking. Also, be very aware of the tone of your voice. The same words, in a different tone of voice, can communicate a very different message.

Remember that teachers are people too. They enjoy having students say hello to them in the halls, and they appreciate it when students show interest in them. For example, if a teacher’s been out ill, a simple comment like, “I hope you’re feeling better.” can brighten that teacher’s day. Teachers also appreciate wit when students make positive comments (e.g., “I like this book we’re reading.”). A thank you is, of course, always appreciated (e.g., “Thanks for the extra help.”).

“Teachers like it when you talk to them, and it lets them know that you care. Teachers are busy though, so if you have a question or a problem, see them before or after class and ask when it would be convenient for you to talk to them.” Maria

Involve your parents. Make your parents your allies. When a parent asks you what you did in school, tell them. For example, “Well, in biology we studied photosynthesis and we looked at slides under the microscope. Tomorrow we have a lab...” They’ll love the fact that you’re talking to them about school.

Whenever possible, let your parents help you with your homework and your studying. You can ask them to drill you on vocabulary words, help you study for a test. You’ll get better grades, your parents will appreciate you giving them the opportunity to help, and they’ll see for themselves that you’re really trying to do well in school.

If you are having a problem with a subject, teacher, class, or fellow student, let your parents know. They can help you deal with whatever the situation is, and if necessary, they can intervene on your behalf.

Step Four Review
Be Successful in the Classroom

- **Be in school, on time, every day.**
- **Learn how to adapt to different teachers.**
- **Be prepared for each class.**
- **Sit in the front of the class if possible.**
- **Be aware of your body language and nonverbal behavior.**
- **Always do your homework.**
- **Participate in class.**
- **Be a good group member.**
- **Treat others with courtesy and respect.**
- **Involve your parents.**

Step Five

Take Good Notes

Tests usually cover material that's been presented in class. It is therefore important to have good notes from which to study.

Be an active listener. In order to take good notes, you must be an active listener.

Kelly is listening to the radio while she's getting ready for school. The DJ plays several songs, and then he announces that he's going to play a new release by Kelly's favorite artist. As soon as she hears this, Kelly stops getting ready, she sits down, and she listens intently to the song on the radio. As she listens, Kelly tries to catch every word in order to understand the meaning of the lyrics.

In this scene, Kelly went from passive listening to active listening. When you're actively listening in class, you are not just hearing the words the teacher is saying, you're also thinking about, and trying to understand, the information that's being presented.

Take notes to help you pay attention. You can think faster than anyone can talk. This is one of the reasons that your mind sometimes wanders when you're listening to a lecture. When you take notes, however, your mind has something additional to do, and you don't have time to think about anything else. Taking notes therefore helps you stay focused. (Taking notes also shows your teacher that you're interested in the class and that you're paying attention).

Recognize important information. You can often hear a change in your teacher's voice when he/she is going to say something that's important for you to know. Teachers often speak louder, speak slower, or they give verbal cues like "the most significant outcome," "the main point," "the most important reason," "the three causes," etc.

Anything your teacher writes on the board or overhead should be considered very important. Double underline this or put a star beside this information (or any information that's very important) so that you'll know to give it special attention when you're studying later.

"I use a yellow marker to highlight things in my notes that are important." Jermaine

Take notes that are easy to read.

- **Put the name of the class, the date, and the page number at the top of each page of notes.** This is easy to do, and it will help you keep your notes organized.

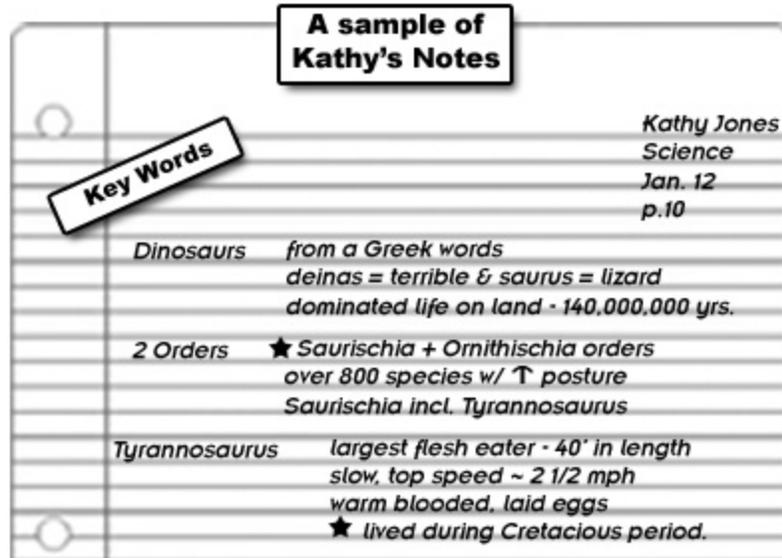
- **Write on every other line and only use one side of the paper.** Your notes will be neater and easier to read, and you'll have space if you want to add something later.
- **Use symbols and abbreviations whenever possible.** The following symbols will help you take notes faster.

=	same or equal	?	up or increasing	w	with
+	not equal	?	down or decreasing	w/o	without
>	greater than	?	resulting in	w/in	within
<	less than	*	most important	wh	which
~	approximately	eg	for example	v	very
...	therefore	b/c	because	esp	especially

- **Use pencil or erasable pen to keep your notes neat.**
- **Leave a wide margin on the left side of each page. As you're taking notes, identify key words, and then write these key words in the margins.** Key words (topics, people, places, events, etc.) help you organize your thoughts, and they make your notes more understandable. Key words are also helpful to use when you're reviewing for a test. Just cover up your notes, look at each key word, and then test yourself to see what you remember about that topic, person, place, or event. (See *Kathy's notes on page 13.*)

Go over your notes as soon as possible. While the information is still fresh in your mind, go over your notes and clarify anything that's confusing. Fill in the spaces, and make sure that you have all of the key words written in the margins. Of course, while you're going over your notes, you are also "fixing" this information in your memory.

If you are really serious about getting the best grade possible in a class, completely redo your notes. Eliminate unimportant information and rewrite the rest using your own words. Your notes will be clearer, and as you rewrite them, you'll also be learning the material. This is time consuming, but it pays off.



Get copies of class notes if you're absent. When you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you've missed, and to ask your teacher(s) for handouts and assignments. Do not assume that your teacher(s) will tell you if there's something you need to know or do. Get copies of any notes you've missed, and put them in your notebook as soon as possible.

"If I know I'm going to miss school, I try to get work ahead of time. If I'm out sick, I make sure to get the work and the notes I missed the very next day. I really try not to miss school though – it's such a pain to make things up." Greg

Step Five Review
Take Good Notes

- **Be an active listener.**
- **Take notes to help you pay attention**
- **Recognize important information.**
- **Take notes that are easy to read.**
- **Go over your notes as soon as possible.**
- **Get copies of class notes if you're absent.**

Step Six

Know How to Read a Textbook

When you know how to read a textbook, you comprehend and remember what you read.

Textbook authors have already done a lot of your work for you. They've inserted boldface subtitles that tell you exactly what you're going to be reading about. They've put all of the important words in **bold** or *italic* print, and they've added pictures, charts, graphs, lists of vocabulary words, summaries, and review questions. The textbook authors have done all of this to make it easier for you to learn and retain the information they're presenting.

In this section, you will discover how to use these "learning tools." You'll also learn how to **1) Scan, 2) Read, and 3) Review**. Once you know how to scan, read, and review, you will be able to comprehend and remember what you read the first time through.

Scan. Scanning gives you a quick overview of the material you're going to read. To scan, read the title, the subtitles, and everything in bold and italic print. Look at the pictures, graphs, and charts, go over the review questions, and read the summaries.

On the following page you'll find an article about the Beatles taken from a music history textbook. If you were to scan the page, you would read the title, **The Beatles**, and each of the section headings: **The Beatles dominate the music industry, The Beatles get their start in Liverpool, The Beatles change their image, the Beatles find success in the U.S., and The Beatles go their separate ways**. You would read everything in bold print: **Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison, John Lennon, Brian Epstein, and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**. You would also look at the "*Best Selling Beatles Albums*" chart, and you would read the review questions.

Scanning provides you with a great deal of information in a very short amount of time. (Look how much you learned about the Beatles just from reading the section headings). In addition to providing you with an excellent overview of the material, scanning also provides you with a kind of "information framework." Having this framework of topics and main ideas makes it much easier to read, understand, and remember the more detailed information.

The Beatles

The Beatles dominate the music industry

The Beatles were a British rock group that dominated the rock and roll industry during the 1960's. The Beatles had an enormous impact on music; they were, in fact, the single most important component in the creation of the modern day "pop" culture. The members of the group, **Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison** and **John Lennon** had a synergistic effect on each other musically. Their playful, yet irreverent public image captured the imagination of an entire generation.

The Beatles get their start in Liverpool

In the summer of 1957, John Lennon and Paul McCartney began playing together in Liverpool, England. Later that year, Paul invited guitar player George Harrison to join the group. The band was becoming popular around the area when they were booked to play a series of concerts in Hamburg, Germany. The group honed their musical skills in the Hamburg beerhalls, playing a repertoire of standard American rock and roll songs.

The Beatles change their image

On returning from Hamburg, the Beatles were discovered by **Brian Epstein**. He became their manager and he changed the image of the band, exchanging black leather jackets and tight jeans for collarless suits and slightly androgynous haircuts. In May of 1962, Epstein landed the Beatles their first recording contract. Shortly before entering the studio, drummer Ringo Starr was added to the groups. The early Beatles' recordings were instantly successful, and soon the band was headlining tours.

The Beatles find success in the U.S.

In 1964 the Beatles' music was released in the United States. The sales were tremen-

dous, breaking all previous records. The band came to New York in April where screaming fans met them at the airport, and 70 million people watched them on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Throughout the 1960's the Beatles' popularity grew. their 1967 album *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released to unprecedented critical acclaim. A series of artistically creative and commercially successful albums followed.

The Beatles go their separate ways

By the end of 1968 the members of the group had begun to go in different directions, Paul McCartney continued to write "pop" melodies while George Harrison immersed himself in eastern spirituality. John Lennon grew more distant from the band as he grew closer to his wife, Yoko Ono. In April of 1970, McCartney released his first solo album and announced the end of the Beatles.

Throughout the 1970's the Beatles' music continued to be popular, and they were constantly hounded to reunite. Lennon's murder in December of 1980 ended such speculation. The Beatles were inducted into the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame** in 1988.

Best Selling Beatles' Albums (in millions)

The White Album	16
Best of 67-70	14
Best of 62-66	13
Abbey Road	11
Sgt. Pepper	10

Review questions

- 1.) How many Beatles were there? Which two were the first to play together?
- 2.) What year did the Beatles start their recording career? When did they break up?
- 3.) After their break up, did the Beatles ever reunite? Why or why not?

Read. When your reading has a purpose, your comprehension improves and it's easier for you to stay focused. To give your reading purpose, try turning each boldfaced subtitle into a question. For example, you could turn the subtitle, **The Beatles change their image**, into the questions, "What did the Beatles do to change their image?" Keep your question in mind as you read, and when you finish the section, see if you can answer your question. Your question will give you something specific to look for, and it will help keep your mind from wandering. You will therefore remember more of what you read.

Before you start to read a section, look to see if there is any vocabulary words, names, places, or events in bold or italic print, and then ask yourself, "Why is this word, person, place, or event important?" You should, of course, have an answer to that question when you finish reading the section. For example, after reading "**The Beatles change their image.**" section, you should know who **Brian Epstein** is.

When you have completely finished your reading, you should also be able to answer all of the **Review Questions**.

Review. Okay, you've scanned and read the material. This is where most students will say, "I'm done." and close the book. Taking a few extra minutes for review, however, will make a huge difference in what you're able to remember later. When you review, you lock the information into your brain before it has a chance to evaporate.

To review, go back to the beginning and go through the same process you did when you scanned the material. This time, as you read the boldfaced subtitles, briefly restate the purpose or point of each section to yourself using your own words. As you look at the vocabulary words and the words in bold and italic print, think about what they mean and why they are significant. If you really want to lock the information into your brain, review everything again a day or two later. When you go to study for the test, you'll be amazed at how well you already know the material.

While it may take a little practice to get the **Scan, Read, and Review** process down, you'll soon realize that this process doesn't mean more work; it just means better comprehension, better retention, and better grades.

Step Six Review
Know How to Read a Textbook

- **Scan by reading subtitles, words in bold and italic print, summaries, charts, and review questions.**
- **Read with a purpose.**
- **Review by scanning the material to check your comprehension.**

Step Seven

Study Smart

Students who “study smart” find that they spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

Find a good place to study. Although it’s usually best to have one place where you study regularly, it doesn’t matter where you study as long as it has a surface for writing, it’s well lit, and it’s comfortable. In addition to paper, pens and pencils, your study area should be equipped with a calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, and one-volume encyclopedia.

Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others can work with music or TV on. If you like to listen to music when you study, try listening to classical music. Research has shown that classical music can actually improve your concentration. You, of course, must determine what works best for you.

“I like to listen to music while I’m doing busywork-type homework, but not when I’m studying.” Maria

“If I have a problem studying. I change locations. It’s kind of like taking a break.” Greg

Get started. Getting started on your studying is usually the hardest part. Don’t put it off until later, don’t make excuses, and don’t wait until you’re “in the mood.” Begin with something simple or a subject you like, and just get started.

Know your learning style. We all learn differently. Some students learn best by seeing the material (visual learners), some learn best from hearing the information (auditory learners), and some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners). Think about how you learn and adjust how you study accordingly.

Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, TV, reading, and demonstrations. If you’re a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts, diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and make use of color in your notes. Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, TV, films, and music. If you’re an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme. If you are a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Try moving around while you study, use tools and objects whenever possible, write or type notes, and role play ideas and concepts.

“I must be a visual learner because I have to see what I’m trying to learn.” John

As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the wider variety of methods you use while studying, the more you remember. William Glasser, a well-known author and expert in the field of educations, says that,

“Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else.”

Organize your study time.

- Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you’re going to do it. Make sure that your plan is realistic.
- Prioritize your work in order to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- Always allow more time than you think you’ll need.
- Study your least favorite subject first to get it out of the way.
- Alternate types of assignments (e.g., read English, do math, read history).
- Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. Try studying for 20 minutes and then taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, etc.).

“When I study, I take short breaks between subjects.” Brad

Know how to study for tests.

- Know what the test is going to cover so that you’ll know what to study. For essay tests, it’s important to understand the big picture and to know main points and key facts. For fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tests, you need to know more detailed information.
- Pay particularly close attention in class the day before a test. This is when teachers often go over information that you’ll need to know.
- Have all of your reading done ahead of time.

“I try and get all of the reading done a couple of days before the test. Then I just need to skim and review.” Greg

- If your textbook has review questions, be sure you know the answers to all of them. Also, go through your textbook and make sure that you know the meaning of all the words in bold and italic print.
- If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use the review sheet to come up with questions that you think might be on the test.

“If I’m given a review sheet, I always study it first.” Maria

- You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of a mirror.
- Review often and review out loud. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. *Review is the key to learning anything.*
- Write down any names, dates, formulas, etc. that you need to remember on an index card. Take this card with you the day of the test and go over it as often as you can before you take the test.

Use tricks to help you memorize information.

- Use flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.

“If you have a lot to memorize, spread it over a period of time, and just keep going over and over it.” Brad

- Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Do this until you know it.
- If you are an auditory learner, use rhyming or rhythm to help you memorize things. Make up a rap or memorize to a beat.
- Right before you go to sleep, go over any information that you want to remember. Your brain will commit it to memory while you sleep.
- Use acronyms to help you memorize. For example, the acronym HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- Use the first letter of the words you want to remember to make up a stupid, silly sentence. For example, let’s say you need to remember the planets for an upcoming test. Just make up a stupid sentence like, “My very elegant mother just scooped up none piglets.” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto). As soon as you get your test, say this sentence to yourself and at the top of your test write MVEMJSUNP – the first

letter of each of the planets. when you need to write in the names of the planets on the test, you'll already have your memory cue written out. This technique can be used in many ways. For example, if you need to remember the 5 main causes of the Depression, take 5 key words and use the first letters to make up a ridiculous sentence.

- Look for an easy or logical connection. For example, to remember that Homer wrote the Odyssey, just think, "Homer is an *odd* name."
- Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help trigger your memory. for example, a ridiculous image could help you remember that Hawthorne wrote The Scarlet Letter. Just visualize a large red letter A with a big thorn sticking in it saying "Ha!" Sometimes associations need to be a little more complicated. For example, to remember that Dostoevsky wrote Crime and Punishment, visualize a guy named Dos playing with a toy while he's snow skiing (Dos-Toy-Ski). Someone yells at him, "You can't play with a toy on a ski hill!" That's a crime you'll be punished!" Get the idea? It can actually be fun coming up with your own silly images, and, they work.

Know how to write a paper. the key to writing a good paper is to spread it out over as much time as possible. Writing a paper should be a process, not a one-time event. Start off by brainstorming and taking notes; then make an outline. From your outline, write a rough draft. Rewrite the paper until you have it just the way you want it, and then write the final draft. It's important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take it out and read it again, you'll see and hear things that you didn't notice before.

To get a good grade on a paper, you must 1) follow the directions exactly, 2) have someone else read your paper to give you suggestions, 3) make sure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors, 4) make sure your paper looks neat, and 5) always turn your paper in on time.

Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.

- Use props whenever possible. Props, such as posters, books, or sporting equipment, give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. (You can also put notes on the back of them).
- When you give a presentation or speech, pretend that you are telling your best friend something really important.
- Effective speakers make eye contact with those in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.

Learn word processing. If you don't know how to type or how to use a computer for word processing, see your counselor and sign up for a keyboarding or computer class as soon as possible.

Step Seven Review
Study Smart

- Find a good place to study
- Get started.
- Know your learning style.
- Organize your study time.
- Know how to study for tests.
- Use tricks to help you memorize information.
- Know how to write a paper.
- Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.
- Learn word processing.

Step Eight

Use Test-Taking Strategies

In order to do well on any test, you must study hard and be prepared. Having done that, you can further improve your test performance by using these test-taking strategies.

Get off to a good start. Have everything you need for the test (pencil, erasable pen, calculator, etc.) If you have a couple of minutes before the test starts, try to relax. Think about something else or talk to your classmates. As soon as you get your test, write anything that you want to remember (facts, dates, equations, formulas, memory aids, etc.) in light pencil at the top of your test. Put your name on your test, and read the directions carefully.

Develop a plan. Before you begin answering questions, quickly look over the entire test and develop a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, you could plan 10 minutes for the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes for each essay question, and 10 minutes to check over your answers.

Mark the questions the you want to return to. As you go through the test, put a dot or light check mark by any answer you're not sure of. After you've gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones you've marked and try them again.

Don't panic if you don't know the answers to the first few questions. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for your brain to get in gear. Chances are you'll know the answers when you come back to them.

"If your not sure of an answer, always go with your first instinct." Greg

Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.

- As you're reading a multiple-choice questions, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the answer choices.
- If you're not sure of an answer, eliminate the choice you know are incorrect by crossing them out. Then make an educated guess.
- If two of the choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.
- Read all of the answer choices. At least a couple of the answers will probably sound like they could be correct; don't be tempted to mark the first one that sounds good.

“Use the test to help you take the test. Sometimes questions give you information that can help you answer other questions.” John

Look for key words in True/False questions. Statements with *always, never, every, all* and *none* in them are usually false. Statements with *usually, often, sometimes, most* and *many* in them are usually true. Read True/False questions very carefully; one word will often determine whether a statement is True or False.

Know how to approach essay questions.

- Read each question and then start with the easiest one. (This will give you confidence, and you'll have time to think about how to answer the harder questions.) Note how many points each essay is worth, and adjust the time you allot to each question accordingly.
- Before you do any writing, brainstorm. Jot down the key words, ideas, and points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize these ideas and points into a simple outline; if not, just number them in the order you want to present them.
- Begin writing. Write legibly, and use clear, concise, complete sentences. (Studies have shown that when two identical essays are graded, the one that's easier to read gets the higher grade). In your opening paragraph, restate the question, and tell the reader what he/she can expect to learn from your essay. In your middle paragraphs, present examples, details, evidence, and facts to support the points you're making. In your final paragraph, restate the most important points, draw conclusions, and write a brief summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.
- If you don't know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write down what you do know about that subject. You may hit on something and get partial credit. If you don't have time to complete an essay, write your teacher a note explaining that you ran out of time, and then briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.

Improve your math test scores. 1) Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be. 2) If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or a diagram. 3) Don't spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, go on, and come back to it later. 4) Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, if you were on the right track, you may get partial credit.

Be prepared for open book tests. During an open book test, you must be able to locate information quickly. To help you do this, 1) highlight your notes, 2) put self-stick notes or bookmarks in your textbook to help you locate important information, and 3) rewrite all of the information you know you'll need on a separate sheet of paper.

Check your answers. If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. (You may have made a careless mistake). *Always use all of the time that you're given to take a test.*

Go over all returned tests. Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. You may see one or more of these questions again. Also check to make sure that your test was graded correctly (teachers sometimes make mistakes). Keep a record of your test scores, and keep returned tests in your folders.

Step Eight Review
Use Test-Taking Strategies

- **Get off to a good start.**
- **Develop a plan.**
- **Mark the questions that you want to return to.**
- **Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.**
- **Look for key words in True/False questions.**
- **Know how to approach essay questions.**
- **Improve your math scores.**
- **Be prepared for open book tests.**
- **Check your answers.**
- **Go over all returned tests.**

Step Nine

Reduce Test Anxiety

A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Excessive worry, or test anxiety, will lower your tests scores.

It's possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can't think clearly. The brain is like a computer in that it contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you're not able to "access" it when you need it. Having test anxiety is like not having the password for your computer. The information is there, but you can't get to it.

To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. Then try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you:

- Start studying early. The night before a test, review the material and get a good nights sleep. Cramming increases test anxiety.
- Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself calmly and confidently walking into the test. See yourself answering the questions correctly, and then see yourself receiving the grade you want. Go through this mental imagery exercise several times before the day of the test.
- Walk into the test with your head up and with your shoulders back. How you act can definitely affect how you feel. If you act confident, you may just find that you feel more confident.
- Here are five common relaxation techniques for you to try:
 1. Take a deep breath, hold it, and then slowly release the breath and the tension. Do this until you feel your body relax.
 2. Start at the top of your head, flexing and the relaxing each part of your body.
 3. Close your eyes and let your arms hang down at your sides. As you relax, visualize the tension from your head, neck, and shoulders flowing down your arms and out through your fingertips.
 4. Close your eyes and visualize warm sunshine washing over you, melting away the tension and relaxing all of your muscles.
 5. Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

Positive thinking and relaxation techniques are like anything else. The more you practice them, the better you get. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your counselor.

Step Ten

Get Help When You Need It

When you have a problem, do something to resolve it.

At some point, you're going to have a question or a problem concerning a class, school rule, teacher, or fellow student. Most questions can be answered and most problems resolved if you explain the situation to the appropriate person (e.g., secretary, principal, teacher, counselor).

If you need academic help, or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. If the problem continues, or if you feel that you can't talk to your teacher, see your counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or harassed by another student, tell a teacher, counselor, or principal immediately. If you ever have a problem and you're not sure where to go for help, talk to your counselor.

Every student has his/her share of normal teenage problems. Some students, however, have problems that are so overwhelming that they cannot pay attention in class or concentrate on their schoolwork. Even though they may put up a good front, these students need to get help.

If you are dealing with any of the following, please talk to a parent or counselor immediately: alcohol, drugs, pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, a health concern, problems at home, depression. Thousands of students across the country are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.

"If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astonish ourselves." – Thomas Edison

Tips for Parents

Your children need you to be interested and involved in their academic progress. Your children must, however, be responsible for their own grades, attendance, and behavior.

Be interested. Make sure that your child knows that his/her academic progress is important to you. Attend all open houses and parent conferences. Know when each grading period ends, and make sure that you see all progress reports and report cards as soon as they come out. If you do not see a progress report or report card, immediately call the school and request a copy. *Do not just assume that someone will call you if there's a problem.*

Discuss classes and set goals. Sit down with your son or daughter at the beginning of each grading period and help him/her set realistic academic goals for that term. Your child will better understand what your expectations are, and having goals will give your child something to work towards. For example, at the beginning of the grading period, Kathy and her parents decided that she should be able to earn A's in math, social studies, English, PE, and art. Since Kathy finds Spanish and biology a little more difficult, they decided that in these two subjects, they'd be very pleased with B's.

Throughout the term, recognize effort and improvement. Acknowledge each academic success, even if it's only a good grade on a quiz or homework assignment. At the end of the term, you can offer "rewards" if goals are met and/or "consequences" if they're not. Rewards are particularly good when you want to encourage a change in attendance, effort, or behavior. (Eventually, doing well will be its own reward.) Consequences should be logical whenever possible. For example, a logical consequence for routinely being late to school is an earlier bedtime. Never take away a positive activity (sports, school plays, music lessons, scouting, etc.) as a consequence.

Be available to help. Be available to help with homework, but don't give more help than is wanted. Your son or daughter may not ask again. Keep in mind that it is your child's responsibility to be organized, to get homework done, and to prepare for tests.

Listen. Talk to your child about what's happening in school and be a good listener.

Encourage involvement. Student who are involved in school-related activities enjoy school more, and they generally have greater academic success. Encourage your child to be involved in one or more activities at school.

Monitor activities and jobs. Make sure that your child is not spending too much time watching TV, playing computer games, or talking on the phone. Also, make sure that your child is not working too many hours or working too late at a job.

Important “don’ts.”

- Don’t nag about school or grades. Your child will tune you out.
- Don’t allow your child to miss school unless he/she is really ill. You will send a message that school isn’t important.
- Don’t criticize a teacher in front of your child. Your child will only lose respect for that teacher.
- Don’t make your child’s failures (or successes) your own. Your child may see getting poor grades as a way to rebel.
- Don’t have expectations that are unrealistic. Knowing he/she will never be able to meet them, your child may decide to not even try.

Work with the school. Know that teachers, counselors, and principals are there to help your child get the best education possible. A health problem, death in the family, or a divorce can affect your child’s attitude and/or performance in school. If such a circumstance should arise, call the school and tell them what’s going on. If you have a question or concern that related to a specific teacher or class, call the teacher. For other questions and concerns, call your child’s counselor.

If Your Child is Not Doing Well in School...

Most students who don't do well in school feel like failures. They are frustrated, discouraged, and sometimes angry. The "I don't care" attitude they display is usually a defense mechanism. It's important for these students to know that their parents have not given up on them. They also need to know that their parents are interested, supportive, and willing to take the time to help them figure out how to be more successful in school.

Students who are not doing well in school usually have problems in one or more of the following areas:

Attendance: It is extremely important for students to be in school, on time, every day. Unless a child is truly ill, he/she needs to be in school.

Appropriateness of Courses: We cannot expect students to get good grades if they are in the wrong classes. If any of your child's courses are too difficult, too easy, or not right for him/her, call the school counselor. You may also want to look into career-oriented (vocational) programs. Many students are happier and more successful in career and technology program where there is a more "hands-on" approach to learning.

Accountability: It's human nature to be tempted to "slack off" when we're not held accountable. How seriously would most workers take their jobs if they knew that their bosses would never know how hard they were working or how many days they had missed?

Your child needs to know that someone cares and that someone is checking on how he/she is doing. Your child also needs to know that successes will be recognized and that poor performances will be noticed. See every progress report and report card, and if your child has a low grade in a class, contact the teacher. Your son or daughter also needs to know that you will be consistent in your interest.

Alcohol/Drug Abuse: Students who abuse alcohol and/or drugs are often distracted to the point where their school performance is affected. If you know or suspect that your child is drinking or using drugs, talk to him/her. If you need information or advice, talk to your doctor or to the school counselor. They can help you.

If you believe that there are other reasons for your child not doing well in school, make an appointment to see your son or daughter's counselor. Recognizing that there's a problem is the first, and most important, step in finding a solution.

Final Thoughts

- ⇒ We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. *Aristotle*
- ⇒ The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. *Benjamin Mays*
- ⇒ The man who believes he can do something is probably right, and so is the man who believes he can't. *Anonymous*
- ⇒ The whole world steps aside for the person who knows where he is going. *Anonymous*
- ⇒ He who never fell never climbed. *Anonymous*
- ⇒ Successful people have learned to make themselves do the thing that has to be done when it has to be done, whether they like it or not. *Aldous Huxley*
- ⇒ Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently. *Henry Ford*
- ⇒ Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them. *Ann Landers*
- ⇒ The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving. *Oliver Wendell Holmes*
- ⇒ Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up. *Thomas Edison*
- ⇒ All things are difficult before they are easy. *Thomas Fuller*
- ⇒ You are never a loser until you quit trying. *Mike Ditka*
- ⇒ Success is a state of mind. If you want success, start thinking of yourself as a success. *Anonymous*