

Learning How to Study: Developing skills for a lifetime

Eileen Vasenko
Health, Safety, and Parenting Chair
scmsptso.healthsafety@gmail.com

Studying: It's the bane of every student's existence, but the most vital component of their academic success. The need to study never seems to end, and the information students are required to master becomes more voluminous and complex with each school year.

The keys to developing good study habits are organization and time management. School is not the only thing a student has to worry about these days. Sports, Scouts, Church, jobs, chores, family events, and other community activities are all vying for a place on each student's schedule. With all those balls in the air, it is hard for a student to keep them from crashing down.

One of the best tools you can use as a student is one that is already in your backpack: your planner. Your planner, however, is only as good as the information you put into it. Bring it to every class, and write down every assignment. If you have a test scheduled, don't just write down the date of the test; write down "study for test" in the block for that subject on the days leading up to the test. Cramming at the last minute might help you with that test in the short term, but it won't help you maintain the information for future exams, or future classes.

Here are some tips from Howtostudy.com:

- Record your school assignments with their due dates and your scheduled tests.
- Record your planned school activities.
- Record your known out-of-school activities.
- Each Sunday before a school week, update your schedule for the week.
- Review your class notes from the previous week to see if you need to add any school activities.
- Add any out-of-school activities in which you will be involved during the week.
- **Schedule your study time!** Be sure to include times for completing assignments, working on projects, and studying for tests. These times may be during the school day, right after school, evenings, and weekends. Successful students have good study habits. They apply these habits to all of their classes.

Ten Study Habits of Successful Students (from Howtostudy.com):

1. **Try not to do too much studying at one time.**

If you try to do too much studying at one time, you will tire and your studying will not be very effective. Space the work you have to do over shorter periods of time. Taking short breaks will restore your mental energy.

2. Plan specific times for studying.

Study time is any time you are doing something related to schoolwork. It can be completing assigned reading, working on a paper or project, or studying for a test. Schedule specific times throughout the week for your study time.

3. Try to study at the same times each day.

Studying at the same times each day establishes a routine that becomes a regular part of your life, just like sleeping and eating. When a scheduled study time comes up during the day, you will be mentally prepared to begin studying.

4. Set specific goals for study times.

Goals will help you stay focused and monitor your progress. Simply sitting down to study has little value. You must be very clear about what you want to accomplish during your study times.

5. Start studying when planned.

You may delay starting your studying because you don't like an assignment or think it is too hard. A delay in studying is called "procrastination." If you procrastinate for any reason, you will find it difficult to get everything done when you need to. You may rush to make up the time you wasted getting started, resulting in careless work and errors.

6. Work on the assignment you find most difficult first.

Your most difficult assignment will require the most effort. Start with your most difficult assignment since this is when you have the most mental energy.

7. Review your notes before beginning an assignment.

Reviewing your notes can help you make sure you are doing an assignment correctly. Also, your notes may include information that will help you complete an assignment.

8. Tell your friends not to call you during your study times.

Two study problems can occur if your friends call you during your study times. First, your work is interrupted. It is not that easy to get back to what you were doing. Second, your friends may talk about things that will distract you from what you need to do. Here's a simple idea - turn off your cell phone during your study times.

9. Call another student when you have difficulty with an assignment.

This is a case where "two heads may be better than one."

10. Review your schoolwork over the weekend.

Yes, weekends should be fun time. But there is also time to do some review. This will help you be ready to go on Monday morning when another school week begins.

Consider joining a study group to master difficult concepts or to study for a test. Just make sure it stays a study group, and doesn't turn into a social group!

Taking the test (from Testtakingtips.com):

- Preparation for your first test should begin on the first day of class; this includes paying attention during class, taking good notes, studying, completing homework assignments and reviewing study materials on a regular basis.
- Budget your time, make sure you have sufficient time to study so that you are well prepared for the test.

- Go to review sessions, pay attention to hints that the instructor may give about the test. Take notes and ask questions about items you may be confused about.
- Ask the instructor to specify the areas that will be emphasized on the test.
- Make sure you go to the class right before the test; it's another prime time for the instructor to give out more hints or the format of the test.
- Go over any material from practice tests, HW's, sample problems, review material, the textbook, class notes, etc.
- Eat before a test. Having food in your stomach will give you energy and help you focus but avoid heavy foods which can make you groggy.
- Don't try to pull an all nighter. Get at least 6 hours of sleep before the test (normally 8 hours of sleep a night is recommended but if you are short on time, get at least 6 hours so that you'll be well rested enough to focus during the test).
- Put the main ideas/information/formulas onto a sheet that can be quickly reviewed many times, this makes it easier to retain the key concepts that will be on the test.
- Try to show up at least 5 minutes before the test will start.
- Set your alarm and have a backup alarm set as well.
- Go to the bathroom before walking into the exam room. You don't want to waste anytime worrying about your bodily needs during the test.
- During the test, allow time to go through all the questions once, answer the questions you know, and then go back to the ones you are unsure of. Sometimes questions that come later in the test will help answer earlier questions.
- After you have answered all the questions, go back and review your answers and make sure you still feel comfortable with them.

Once you feel you have a handle on the material you will be tested on, have a parent, study partner, or older sibling quiz you. This will show you what you have mastered, and what material you still need to work on to develop a better understanding.

Test taking tips for parents (from Testtakingtips.com):

- Make sure that your child does all their homework and reading assignments, this will help make sure your child is prepared for the test.
- Encourage your child to space out their studying and homework assignments so that they won't be forced to cram on the night before the test.
- If you are anxious about your child's test, it's ok but try to keep cool around your child, you don't want them to get anxious about their tests too.
- Encourage your child to do well but don't pressure him/her. You may stress him/her out. It is important for your child to stay relaxed for the test.
- Keep a positive attitude about tests.
- Provide a quiet, well lighted area with little distractions to help your child study efficiently.
- Mark down test days on your calendar so you and your child are both aware of testing dates.
- Make sure that your child gets enough sleep on the night before the test.
- Ensure that your child eats a healthy breakfast and avoid heavy foods that may make him/her groggy and avoid high sugar foods that may make him/her hyper.
- Make sure that your child gets up early enough so that he/she will be on time to school.
- Let your child relax for a few hours before bedtime, it can be stressful for a child to study all night.

- Talking about the test with your child can relieve stress about test taking.
- If your child is struggling on their tests, talk to them about it and meet with their teacher to find out the best way to help your child.
- Praise/reward your child when they do well on a test or for their hard work preparing for a test.
- Encourage them to do better if they don't do well.
- Review the test with your child after they have taken it and go over any mistakes they have made and make sure that they understand what they did wrong and how they can improve for the next test.

Advice from other parents:

“Don't [let them] do homework in their rooms or their beds. Keep their room a place of rest so that the brain doesn't think it's a place to work. Have them study and do homework in an office or at the kitchen table.”

“[Have a] snack and then do your homework as soon as you get home from school. When you finish you're free to move on to the fun and relaxing things you like to do. [For times when they have] no homework...if they want to play any electronics...they first have to spend 30 minutes playing an educational game...tons of educational games on the computer.”

“Where to start -- learning how to plan ahead, figuring out what the month ahead looks like (weekend commitments, activities, etc.) so they can "nibble" at big assignments and have less procrastination. Finding an organizational system that works for them whether a binder with slots or separate folders. Learning to study for tests -- saving quizzes, study guides, etc. to review.”

“Make your child responsible for his or her own work, schedule, etc. Better to make a mistake and learn from it in elementary school or high school than to learn the hard way in college. Teach them how to develop a schedule but make them responsible to check it. Many parents do too much for their kids.”

“Always know their testing schedule. My boys are procrastinators and won't move until pushed. If you know a few days ahead of any tests, you can help them review the material a little at a time. We also have them go through their notebooks once a week so there aren't 4000 disparate loose papers. That actually gives them another opportunity to look at their notes.”

“[Have them make a] to-do list of their school work for that day and have them check it off . . . Also, give a time limit to every subject of study so they can better divide their time. . . The kids have timers so they can keep track of how much they are investing in the subject. We like to have interesting books, stories or articles that can enhance the learning while making it more interesting. This helped them keep the motivation and also made them research the subject more deeply. I also made them take a little nap after they have a snack and then start doing home work. They still do now that they are in high school!”

Developing good study habits in middle school will set the stage for future success as the amount of material and level of difficulty increase with each school year. Students and parents should work together to master the art of studying. Learn for life!

Resources:

<http://www.how-to-study.com/>

http://www.ehow.com/list_6502653_organizational-study-skills.html

<http://www.testtakingtips.com/>