

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

HIGH SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School  
Santa Cruz Valley Union High School



December 2022

## Discuss strategies for answering questions on any test

Preparing for a test makes it more likely that your teen will do well. But there are a few things besides the subject matter that your teen should study for the best results. Review some general test-taking strategies together that help students get every point they deserve.

Remind your teen to:

- **Pay close attention** to the instructions. Your teen should reread them to get a clear understanding of exactly what to do.
- **Look over the whole test**, if possible, before beginning to answer questions. Then your teen can think about how much time it makes sense to spend on each question.
- **Scan for key words in questions** that explain what process to use. These include: *compare, list, describe, define* and *summarize*.
- **Answer easy questions first**, if the test allows. Your teen can circle and skip the more challenging questions and come back to them after getting every point possible for questions on familiar material.
- **Think about the answer** to a multiple-choice question before looking at any choices provided.
- **Leave time to double-check answers**. Did your teen answer every question? Do the answers address exactly what is being asked?



## Remember three key ways to praise

When praise is genuine and used as positive reinforcement, it's an effective way to boost teens' motivation. But offering too much insincere praise can have the opposite effect.

Keep these three effective ways to praise in mind:

1. **Do it one-on-one.** A private word while you and your teen are in the car will mean more to your student than a public "Isn't my kid great?" Don't worry—your teen will find a way to let others know what you've said!
2. **State clearly** what your teen did right. "You rewrote that essay

in the ways your teacher suggested. It reads so much better now—and I am really proud that you kept at it."

3. **Help your teen recognize** how good it feels to do a good job. "How did it feel to turn in a paper you knew you had improved so much?"

Source: R. Lavoie, *The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning On the Tuned-Out Child*, Touchstone Books.

## Plug in to study power

Help your teen learn the difference between doing schoolwork and studying. Doing schoolwork means completing assignments. Studying means making an effort to learn, master and recall the material. Make sure your teen allows enough time to do both each day.



## Learning and play can mix

Studies show that today's teens may be even more stressed than their parents. Adding an element of play to study time can help your teen manage stress and boost brain function at the same time. Your teen could:

- **Act out a scene** from a book the class is reading.
- **Create a rap** about a science concept.
- **Design a logo** for each side in a historic conflict.

Source: K. Douma, "Playing to Learn in Middle and High School," Edutopia.

## Sharpen note-taking skills

Students who take clear, relevant class notes create a valuable learning tool for themselves. Share these tips with your teen:

- **Divide the page** into two columns. Take notes in one column, and write summarizing headings in the other.
- **Write by hand.** Studies show it helps students process information better.
- **Make a list** of abbreviations. Abbreviating common words will help your teen keep up.
- **Review notes after class.** Your teen can jot down questions or clarify points while the memory of the class is fresh.



Source: J. Gonzales, "Note-taking: A Research Roundup," Cult of Pedagogy.



## How can I get my teen to accept more responsibility?

**Q:** I don't know how my junior will ever be responsible enough to leave home after high school. My teen doesn't do assignments on time, or forgets to turn them in. I get regular calls for a ride because "I ran out of gas again." How can I instill a sense of responsibility at this age?



**A:** Your student is in for a rude awakening in college or the workplace. Presumably you won't be driving for hours if your teen runs out of gas at college halfway across the state. And employers are not likely to look kindly on a worker who doesn't do the work.

To ease your teen into taking responsibility:

- **Don't be too quick jump to the rescue.** If your teen doesn't turn in an assignment, a zero in the grade book may be a more effective lesson than a reminder from you. Having to call a friend or missing activities may teach your teen to check the gas tank before heading out.
- **Review ways to stay organized.** Encourage your teen to use a planner to schedule study time and keep track of assignments. Suggest creating daily checklists to remember tasks. Then help your teen establish routines that will turn responsibilities into habits.

Your teen *can* learn to be responsible for work and behavior. With some practice, it will become second nature.



## Do you stand your ground with your teen?

Sometimes it seems as though pushing back against parent authority is what teens do best. Do you respond with firm, fair consistency, or are you a parent pushover? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you understand** that your teen needs you to be a parent more than a friend?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your teen about the reasons for your rules?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you stand** firm on your rules, even if your teen is upset with you?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you impose** consequences when you say you will?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you adjust** rules when your teen shows maturity and responsibility?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your teen understand and live within boundaries. For each no, try that idea.*

"Caring for children is a dance between setting appropriate limits as caretakers and avoiding unnecessary power struggles..."

—Charlotte Sophia Kasl

## Proofreading pays off

Researching and writing are important steps in producing a paper for school. But students shouldn't stop there. Proofreading is essential for quality work. Remind your teen to:

- **Proofread** slowly. Your student will catch more errors.
- **Look** for frequently-made mistakes. Does your teen often misspell a certain word or forget to close quotes?
- **Read** in different ways. Your teen can read the paper aloud, or read from back to front. Both can help errors stand out.



## Give resilience a boost

Things in school and in life won't always go the way your teen planned. To help your student bounce back from disappointment:

- **Ask how your teen** is feeling.
- **Be sympathetic.** "I'm sorry. I know you are disappointed." But don't try to fix things for your teen.
- **Model resilience.** Show your teen how you cope with your disappointments. "I didn't get that promotion, but I'm going to keep trying."

## Include time for learning over winter break

Sticking to a schedule helps students keep learning over winter break. In addition to time for relaxation, have your teen plan time each day for:

- **Schoolwork.** If there is no assigned work, your teen can review or read ahead.
- **Writing.** Ask your teen to spend a few minutes writing in a journal.
- **Reading.** Encourage pleasure reading for at least 30 minutes a day.

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