

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



January 2022

Title I Program

Special School District

Talk with your teen about the value of editing after writing

Clarity is key in effective student writing. Careless errors are distracting and make it harder for teachers to understand the points students are making. Whether your teen is writing an essay, a paper or an exam answer, he will get better results if he takes time to edit and proofread his work before turning it in.



Share these editing strategies:

- **Consider paragraph order.** Do your teen's ideas flow logically from one to the next?
- **Proofread slowly.** Your teen should use his finger to track sentences word by word. This will help him catch missing words that his brain may fill in when he reads quickly.
- **Verify word usage.** Many English words sound alike. Teens sometimes confuse words like *there*, *they're* and *their*, and *access* and *excess*. Spell check programs may not catch these errors.
- **Proofread capitalization and punctuation.** Is the first word in each sentence capitalized? Do sentences end with a period or question mark? Are commas and apostrophes used correctly? There is a difference between *its* and *it's*, and *whose* and *who's*, for instance (the first word in each pair is possessive; the second words mean "it is" and "who is").
- **Add interest.** Does your teen's writing include interesting examples? He should also vary sentence structure so the piece doesn't sound repetitious.



Persuasive arguments take thought

In high school assignments, your teen will be asked to state positions and support them with evidence. Help her develop these skills by offering her critical thinking challenges. Ask your teen to:

- **Consider all sides** of an argument. Whether she's building a case for a paper or thinking about a real-life controversy, your teen needs to understand the different perspectives involved. Suggest that she find out about everyone's concerns and keep an open mind.
- **Stick to the facts.** Your teen should base her conclusions on verifiable facts, not opinions. This doesn't mean that feelings don't matter; it may be a fact that someone is upset.
- **Identify assumptions.** Is the quiet girl in her history class really snooty, or just shy?
- **Play Devil's Advocate.** When your teen is making an argument, have her write it down and read it aloud. Repeat her points, then have her argue the opposite side. This helps her build a better case.

Bolster your teen's resolve

Many students make ambitious New Year's resolutions only to get discouraged and abandon them after a few weeks. Remind your teen that big goals can't be achieved in a day. He may not be able to earn an A in science this week, but he can commit to specific actions that will bring him closer, one step at a time.



Encourage language study

Learning a foreign language can increase your teen's cognitive abilities and academic achievement, and prepare her for work in a global economy. To support her efforts:

- **Help her practice,** by asking her to teach you new words and phrases daily.
- **Expose her** to people, places and cultural events with ties to the language.
- **Go online** to find videos and apps that let your teen hear and use the language.

Source: "The Benefits of Learning Another Language," National Education Association.

There's always reading to do

Your teen may not have homework due in every class every day. But reading should always be on his daily to-do list. If he has no specific assignment, encourage him to spend 30 minutes:



- **Rereading a chapter** or reading ahead. He can clarify his understanding or learn what questions he needs to ask.
- **Reading over class notes.** This helps reinforce the material in his mind, and he can fill in anything he left out.
- **Reading anything!** All reading is worthwhile.

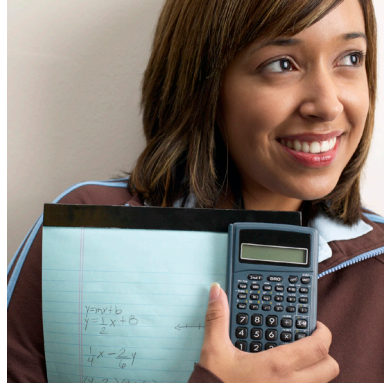
Source: "Predict reading growth: The power of literal comprehension," Renaissance.



Would a higher-level class be better for my student?

Q: My daughter is taking regular 10th grade math. It is too easy for her. She likes getting good grades without having to work hard, and says they'll boost her GPA for applying to college. But I think she should try something more challenging. What should we do?

A: First, get some more information. Schedule an appointment for the two of you to talk with your daughter's school counselor. Plan to discuss your teen's:



- **Goals.** Will her current class prepare her for a higher level course she might want to take next year? More long term, will she be able to enter college with necessary skills to pursue the studies she is interested in?
- **Grades.** It's true that colleges look for good grades. But they prefer to see good grades in rigorous courses. How are the rest of your teen's grades?
- **Course load.** Is your teen taking other challenging classes? If she has a heavy workload in those, her math class may provide needed balance. If she is coasting generally, she'll benefit from higher level classes.
- **Schedule.** Is it possible for your teen to switch to a higher-level math class and keep most of her schedule the same? Could she try it and move back to her current class if she is overwhelmed?

Figuring out how this math class fits into her overall high school and college plans will help you and your teen make appropriate choices.



Are you focusing on your teen's future?

Life after high school is approaching fast. Thinking, planning and preparing for it will put your teen on the path to a satisfying adulthood. Are you helping your student consider the future? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your teen learn more about careers he might be interested in and the education or training they require?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to explore the school's college and career resources?
- ___ **3. Do you brainstorm** with your teen about ways to gain skills and experience, such as by starting a small business?
- ___ **4. Do you suggest** your teen talk with family and friends who work in fields of interest?

- ___ **5. Have you helped** your teen create a résumé?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen move toward a bright future. For each no, try that idea.

"The future is always beginning now."

—Mark Strand

Empower your teen to fend off negative peer pressure

Just saying *no* won't always turn off peer pressure. So help your teen practice strategies she can use to avoid doing things that are wrong—or wrong for her. She can:

- **Talk about consequences.** "The last person who got caught was suspended. I can't risk that—I want to play varsity."
- **Blame a parent.** "If my mom finds out, she will freak. It's just not worth it!"
- **Suggest doing something else.**

Remind your teen that someone who repeatedly pressures her is not a real friend. Suggest that she avoid the person, at least for a while.

Sharpen word skills with a puzzle challenge

Doing the crossword or another word puzzle online or in the newspaper is a great way for your teen to build vocabulary. To encourage him, get two copies of the puzzle and race your teen to see who can complete it first.



Remind your teen not to skip a key test-taking step

One critical way for students to do their best on tests is also simple: Read the directions carefully. The directions might say, "Answer two of these four questions." Or they might say that some multiple choice questions have more than one correct answer, and your teen should choose them all, or only the best one.

Encourage your teen to reread directions after finishing the test. Then she can double check that her answers do what's being asked.

Source: S. Dunham and others, "The Psychology of Following Instructions and Its Implications," *The American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy.

Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-103x