

Top Five **Study Skills** *Every Student Needs*



Ideas to Help Your Child Do Better in School





Academic success depends on a student's ability to study effectively and efficiently. This goes beyond just completing daily assignments. It means making studying meaningful and seeing it as an opportunity to really learn.

Not every student studies the same way; however, there are five important skills that every student needs to learn. Successful students know how to take useful notes and understand what they read. They know how to recall information and tackle large assignments. And they know how to make the most of study time by learning actively and purposefully.

This booklet offers ways you can help your child learn strategies for achieving goals beyond simply getting good grades. With a little practice, your child will develop the study habits necessary to be academically successful.

1. Study With a Purpose

Successful students study with a purpose—they study to learn! So talk with your child about how to approach each study session with learning as the goal. Encourage your child to:

- **Be prepared**, making sure pens, pencils, paper, index cards, reference materials and all other necessary supplies are at hand in a regular study spot. Suggest using a large calendar to keep track of assignments.
- **Set study goals each day**. Your child should write them down in a daily planner and be specific. “Read. Math. Essay.” won’t always get the job done. Instead, include the details. “Finish reading Chapter 3. Do math problems 9–17. Create outline for writing assignment.”
- **Read actively**. Your child shouldn’t simply skim through the material. Share the tips for reading with understanding on pages 8 and 9 of this booklet.
- **Focus on what’s important**. Your child needs to understand the difference between central ideas and details. For example, look at the following sentence together: “Mary shed crocodile tears on her blue dress as she ran up to her room.” Ask your child what’s important in the sentence? Is it the fact that Mary wore a blue dress—or the fact that she was crying?
- **Talk to family and peers** about the material. Discussing concepts helps make them “stick” and gives your child an opportunity to think about them more deeply.

Recognize what you don't know

Learning is not a passive process. Purposeful studying requires active involvement. This also means being aware of what you *don't* know—and knowing what to do about it.

When studying new material, your child should:

- **Link the material to previous knowledge** or experiences. Finding a connection can help your child better understand new concepts.
- **Avoid skimming over material** that is difficult to understand. Learning is cumulative. It's important that your child develop a solid foundation and then to build on it with information in future lessons.
- **Practice a particular concept or lesson** until it's mastered. Then, before the next quiz, your child will just need to do a quick review.
- **Think about questions** the teacher might ask, and try to answer them.

Sometimes students study material but still don't understand it. If that's the case, encourage your child to:

- **Get help from books** or online resources that use a different approach to teach the same information.
- **Talk to teachers** about where to find additional information. Accessing information today can be as simple as a mouse click. But finding what's relevant can be a challenge. Teachers can help. (Your child will also learn to develop important research skills.)
- **Ask teachers or the school counselor** about tutoring options. Many are free and available at school.

2. Take Useful Notes

Every student needs strong note-taking skills to succeed in school. It's nearly impossible to remember everything learned from a reading passage or a lecture. Notes help students focus on what's most important.

To develop effective note-taking skills, your child should:

- **Be an active listener.** Teachers often give verbal cues about points worth remembering, such as: "This is really important," "I can't emphasize this enough," "Four factors contributed to this situation," "Let's look at this again," "You'll find good examples on page 23," "The point is ...," etc.
- **Watch for nonverbal cues.** The teacher might write something on the board, point to a chart or diagram or use gestures to emphasize important points.
- **Jot down notes using your own words**—unless teachers want students to write down exact definitions. This will make the notes more meaningful when it's time to review before a test.
- **Make sure notes are organized and legible.** Have your child number and date the pages so they stay in order. Suggest keeping them in a loose-leaf notebook so it's easy to add new information. Your child can use dividers or separate notebooks for each subject.
- **Keep track of notes** from online material. Bookmarking these websites will allow your child to go back and cite sources correctly.
- **Review notes regularly.** Suggest building a few minutes for review into daily study time. When reviewing notes, your child can clarify and fill in missing information.



Try these shorthand tips

Whether your child is taking notes in class or while reading, creating a system of shorthand will make note-taking easier and more effective. Here are some ideas:

- **Use abbreviations and shorten** words to save time while writing. An easy way to do this is to use the beginnings of words. For example, *esp* for *especially* or *rep* for *representative*.
- **Use symbols.** This helps eliminate words entirely. Encourage your child to try these symbols and make some up:

↑ increase

↓ decrease

→ leads to

≈ approximately

* important

— same as

w/ with

w/o without

< less than

> greater than

∴ therefore

- **Leave out vowels.** Many words are still readable without all of their vowels, *sch as th wrds n ths prt of th sntnc*.
- **Include a key.** Your child should write down what new symbols or abbreviations mean and refer to the list when it's time to study later.
- **Be creative.** Your child can draw pictures, put shapes around key words or write in different colors.
- **Consider digital tools** or recording devices when practical—and if permitted.

Effective note-taking methods

There are several methods for taking notes. The Cornell method is a tried-and-true technique for taking notes in class and while reading. Tell your child to draw a vertical line on a sheet of paper, creating a 2-1/2" space on the left and a 6" area on the right.

To take notes in class, your child should:

- **Write notes on the most important points** in the space on the right. Have your child skip a few lines between main points to fill in any missing information later.
- **Use the left-hand space to write key words** to label the ideas and details of the notes in the space on the right.
- **Read the notes soon after taking them** to complete any thoughts.

To take notes while reading, suggest your child:

- **Write the main headings** in the left column.
- **Summarize the text of those headings** by writing brief notes in the right column. Your child shouldn't simply repeat what's written in the material.
- **Do this for key words** and phrases as well.

To review, have your child:

- **Cover the notes in the right column.**
- **Say the key words in the left column out loud.** Then, your child can try to recall the information in the notes on the right.
- **Uncover the notes.** If what your child said matches the notes chances are your child knows it!

Other useful methods for taking notes include:

- **An outline.** Your child should begin with the most general information and indent each more specific fact underneath.
- **A time line.** This is an effective method for learning a series of events associated with specific dates.
- **Mapping.** Your child can draw a circle or box in the middle of a page and write the main idea in it. Supporting ideas and details can go on lines attached to the box or circle.

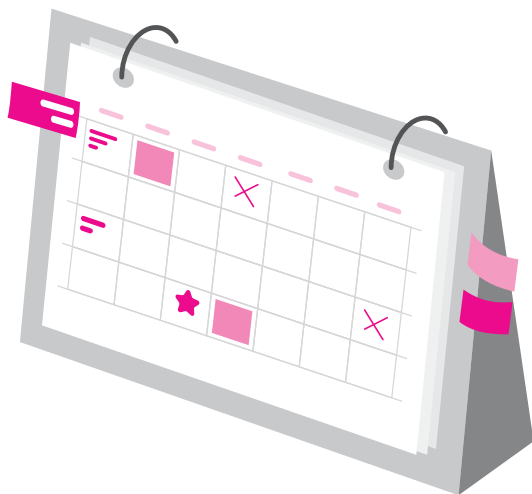
3. Plan Ahead for Large Assignments

For many students, large assignments and long-term projects can seem intimidating. But these assignments simply involve using different skills than those needed to study for a test. Effective planning, organization and self-discipline can make the task much easier.

Whether it's an important research paper or a major science project, the key is to break down the assignment into logical parts that can be tackled one by one.

Here are some tips for managing a large project:

- **On the day the assignment is given**, have your child write down clear notes about the project, including the due date and specific requirements. If your child has any questions, it's important to ask the teacher as soon as possible.
- **Get a large calendar.** Have your child write the due date on the calendar. Tell your child to set a completion date a few days *before* the actual due date to allow for any last-minute glitches.



- **Working backward from the final due date**, have your child mark the calendar with mini deadlines—a due date for each step. Remember to build in some “wiggle room.” Post the calendar in a prominent location and be sure your child checks it every day.
- **Ask your child to make a list of materials** needed for the project—poster board, graph paper, a report cover, etc.
- **Set up a space where your child can keep everything** related to the project.
- **Have your child make to-do lists** and check off items as they are completed. Celebrate each goal reached. This will build confidence, motivation and a sense of accomplishment. Soon the whole project will be finished!
- **Turn the completed assignment in on time.**

Evaluate how things went. Offer congratulations on a job well done! Ask if there is anything your child would do differently next time. What would your child repeat?



4. Read With Understanding

Many students can read all the words in a book, but they have trouble with comprehension. Comprehension is much more than recognizing words on a page. It's *understanding the meaning* of the information those words deliver. Students also need to be able to vary their approach, depending on the type of material they're reading. Reading with understanding is one of the most important study skills a student can develop.

Understanding fiction

To read novels or short stories with understanding, help your child:



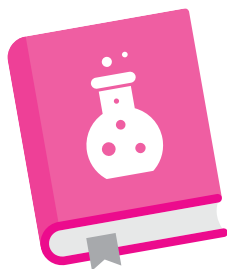
- **Make connections.** Parts of the story might remind your child of a personal experience. Thinking and talking about those similarities can help your child understand it.
- **Visualize while reading.** Making mental pictures is a wonderful way to improve understanding. Ask your child questions such as, "What if you got to make the movie of this book? Who would you cast as the main character? Where would you film it?"
- **Answer questions about reading material.** Ask your child: "What can you tell me about the main character?" "What kind of personality traits do you notice?" "Does the character remind you of anyone?" "How has the character changed throughout the book?" "What people and events are influencing the character?" "How do you think the book will end?"
- **Make predictions.** Ask: "Now that you've finished reading five chapters, what do you think is going to happen in the sixth?" "Did the book end the way you thought it would?"
- **Practice deeper thinking.** Ask your child to share thoughts about the material. "Why did the author present the characters that way?" "What do you think of the choices the characters made?" "Were the conflicts resolved effectively?"

Understanding nonfiction

Reading and studying nonfiction texts require some different techniques than those used for reading fiction. Here are some tips that will make it easier for your child to understand nonfiction.

Tell your child to:

- **Flip through the chapter first** before reading it. Look at headings, photos, charts and words in **bold** or *italics* to get a general idea of what the chapter is about.
- **Skim through the questions** at the end of the chapter to get an idea of important concepts to look for while reading.
- **Next, read the chapter carefully**, paying close attention to the information as it relates to section headings, photos, charts and words in **bold** or *italics*.
- **Break down the text.** Your child should begin by locating key words in each sentence. Next, your child can find the main idea of whole paragraphs. Suggest practicing with short passages before moving on to longer ones.
- **Reread sections, if necessary**, to understand some of the more difficult concepts.
- **Take notes**, using ideas on pages 3–5 in this booklet.
- **Try to answer the questions at the end of the chapter.** If your child can't answer a question immediately, recommend reading that part of the text again. The answers are usually there.
- **Review by turning section headings into questions** and answering them.



With practice, your child will read *and* understand information!

5. Remember What You Learn

Today, researchers understand more about how students learn. It turns out that memorizing basic facts is critical! When students already know a set of basic facts—such as parts of a cell in biology or important dates in history—they can free their brains to focus on deeper concepts and higher-thinking skills.

The memory skills your child learns now will make it easier to recall information in school and throughout life. Share the following tips with your child.

To memorize a list of facts, your child should:

- **Understand the material.** It's tough to memorize something without knowing what it means in the first place.
- **Divide a long list into short, meaningful chunks.** For example, your child shouldn't try to memorize all the dates of the American Civil War at once. Instead, suggest memorizing them in categories—dates of secession, dates of battles, etc.
- **Start with a different section during study sessions.** Otherwise, your child will get really good at remembering just the beginning of a list.
- **Set it to music.** Your child can use a familiar tune or make up a rap to learn each category on the list.



To learn vocabulary words, have your child:

- **Use flash cards** (vocabulary word on the front, definition on the back). Making up a memory game works, too!
- **List other words** that mean the same thing.
- **Write other forms of the word** if possible. For example, write *legible*, *legibly*, *illegible*.
- **Build sentences** to practice using the vocabulary words.
- **Make up a story** using the vocabulary words.

Use mnemonics

A mnemonic (neh-MON-ick) is a device that helps students remember things. Mnemonics can take many forms, including:

- **Rhymes**, such as the calendar rhyme to remember the number of days in each month: “Thirty days hath September, April, June and November”
- **Acronyms**, which are words created from the first letters of other words. For example, HOMES helps to recall the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- **Sentences**, in which the first letter of each word is the first letter of one of the things your child has to remember. For example, use “My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Noodles” to remember the order of the planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune).

Make associations

- **Associate with familiar things.** To learn that the U.S. government has three branches—the legislative, the executive and the judicial—have your child think of a three-legged stool. If one leg is broken, it can’t function—just like the U.S. government.
- **Use images.** Even silly mental images can work. To remember the capital of Oregon is Salem, have your child picture sailors (Sail-em) using oars (Oar-egon). Drawing images, such as the parts of a seed, can also help. Then, your child can recall the picture when it’s time for a test.

Other ways to remember what you learn

- **Learn actively.** Instead of sitting quietly while memorizing the elements for chemistry, your child should walk around, talk about them, write them on a big piece of paper or record and play them back.
- **Write facts on self-stick notes**, and place the notes everywhere—in the refrigerator, inside the cookie jar, in the lunch box, etc.
- **Be the teacher.** Let your child explain facts to you, then make a test and ask you questions. Not only will the “student” learn something, the “teacher” will understand it better, too!

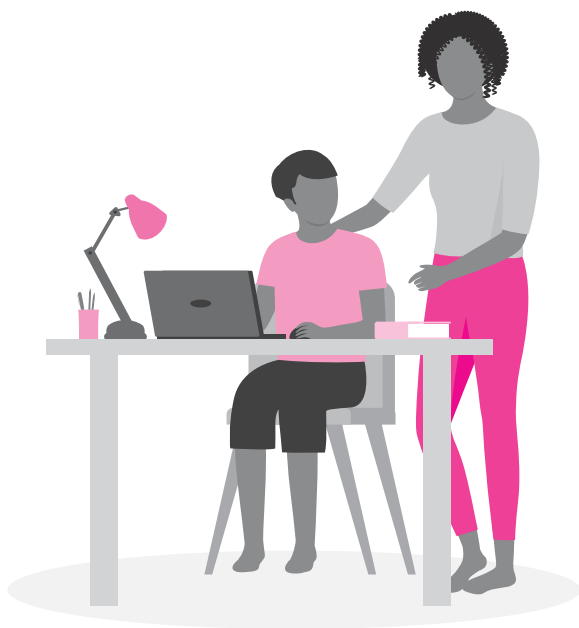
More Study Tips

Committing to practical study habits is the key to your child's academic success. Continue to offer your support and guidance to help your child experience that success.

Encourage your child to:

- **Set a regular place and time for studying.** It will help your child focus. After settling in at the study spot, your child's mind will say, "OK, it's time to pay attention." Your child could even make a "Do Not Disturb" sign to let everyone know that study time is serious business.
- **Know how to approach each task.** Learning vocabulary words for Friday's test does not require the same skills as working on a research project.
- **Plan and prioritize.** Encourage your child to use a daily planner to create a plan for each study session.
- **Read directions.** Too many students skip this step, assuming they know what to do for each assignment.
- **Try a variety of learning strategies.** It can help to:
 - **Listen as well as read.** Record your child reciting vocabulary words and definitions, then play back the recording.
 - **Use visuals.** Have your child make a chart or an outline for a project.
 - **Go beyond the book.** Suggest your child take a field trip or interview an expert to get information for a project.
- **Schedule regular study breaks.** Your child can get up, walk around or have a snack. Breaks recharge your child's brain.
- **Work alone or with a partner.** Some students learn better if they can work with a partner or a small study group. Others need to study by themselves. Find out what works best for your child.

Remind your child that
the ultimate goal of each
study session is to learn.



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