

Simple Tips for Improving Study Habits

Nervous About the First Tests?

Most students entering high school have not developed good study skills. These skills can easily be taught and can have a dramatic impact on grades. If you are looking to improve the time used to study, here are a few tips:

Conditions for a Good Study/Work Space

Limit distractions – when your son or daughter does schoolwork, are they in front of the TV, a computer, listening to music or using their cell phone? If the answer is yes, they are probably not focusing on their work. While we marvel at the fact that teenagers seem to be doing all these things at once, odds are they aren't doing any of them well. Research on multitasking shows that many people believe themselves to be great at multitasking, but almost nobody can truly do two different tasks at the same time effectively.

The lyrics from music and conversations on TV interfere with the “voice in our head” that helps us to clarify our thoughts. It's much like having two separate conversations with two different people at the same time. When both people are talking at once we can only focus on one of them, at least for more than a few seconds. When students are working or studying, make sure they have a quiet, well-lit place to do their work that is free of distractions.

Don't fall for the old “I'm texting my friend for help on my homework.” The great majority of assignments teachers give their students do not require a computer and you can bet that next to none of them require a cell phone. Clear the area of distractions and you'll find that homework gets done faster, more completely and with better learning.

Write it Down!

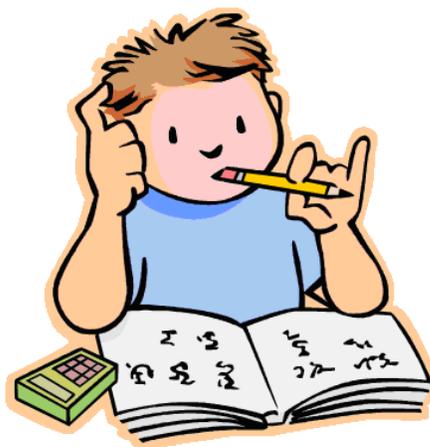
Ever read a book and find that your eyes are tracing over the lines but your mind is thinking about the conversation you had at lunch earlier today? You're in the same boat as the rest of us. The primary way that students study is by “rereading their notes” or “rereading the book.” However these are probably the least effective ways to study. Ask yourself this: Can you write a sentence about how to sharpen a pencil while

telling someone how to dial a telephone? I didn't think so. Writing things down on paper forces us to concentrate on what it is that we want to say. We have to recall, organize, and evaluate information in order to effectively write the notes.

Next time your teen tells you she studied for three hours for a test, ask her to show you what she made. If she has three pages of a study sheet, a flow chart, a web diagram, a journal, a pack of flashcards, or drawings she copied from the book, she probably is doing a good job of learning the information for the test. If she simply told you that she reread her notes, she probably has a lot more work to do.

Do A-Day Homework on A-Days and B-Day Homework on B-Days

Most homework assignments require students to recall the day's lessons while completing the work. If they do the homework the night it is assigned they will retain a much larger portion of the material from class and have a much better chance of getting it right. Also, if they do not understand the work, they have the whole next day to speak to their teachers for clarification.



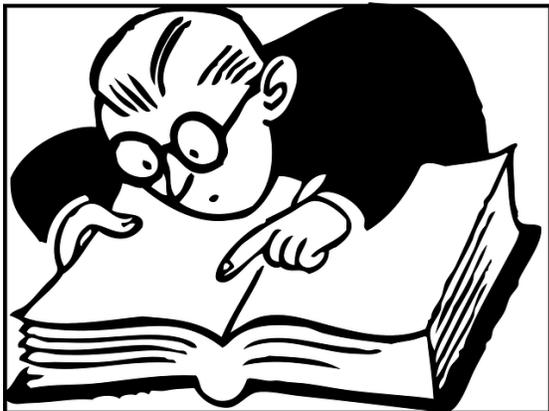
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Break it Up

Our brains can only handle so much information at a time. Teachers spend weeks on a topic before testing students, but often students only study the night before the exam. Why don't the teachers just give everything to the students the day before the exam? That's right. They know the students couldn't hope to learn so much in just one evening. So it should seem funny that so many students try to learn everything they need to know the night before a test.

We know from research that students learn better when they break up the information and learn it in smaller bits. Instead of spending a marathon session the night before the exam, students will learn a lot more by breaking down what they need to know into smaller, organized, manageable chunks and studying a little bit on a number of occasions. Studying can be broken up into 15 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes before practice and 10 minutes before bed. By doing this, students force themselves to recall information they have learned previously and help to solidify the knowledge in their heads.

This study technique also works well for students who are very busy with extracurricular activities and leaves them with more free time and less stress (just be sure they write out something to study from). Don't forget...study early and often. All that work you put off until the night before the test isn't effective. As a matter of fact, educators don't call that studying, they call it cramming, and they know it doesn't work!



Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

At Erie High School, all of our teachers have a special night of the week designated specifically to help students. We call it "Special Help Night." This is a student's best chance to get extra tips, information, and help from teachers and is also a great opportunity to get questions answered.

Don't Give Up!

Many of the classes students will take will be challenging. However, there is absolutely no research that shows that certain people are incapable of learning a particular subject. Many of us think that math is impossible or that science is outside of our ability to learn, but those ideas don't hold water.

Most of us tend to gravitate toward things we like early on. When we spend more time doing something, we get better at it. Most students that are great at math are great at math because they have spent a large amount of time doing math. They enjoy it, so they practice it and make sure they do it the right way. Most of us don't put a lot of effort into the things we don't enjoy. We also don't tend to enjoy things that are hard for us to do. See the dilemma?

There isn't a student that cannot get good grades in math, or science, or English, or art or whatever vexes them. The key is to spend the time studying, work hard, and get help when we need to. With the proper time commitment and focus, your child can "get it," no matter the subject. It won't be easy, and it won't come over night, but the payoff is invaluable. Once a child overcomes the idea that he cannot learn a particular subject and starts to succeed, he will gain confidence in his ability to learn. Your child may never quite master quantum physics, but he'll certainly be able to get a B in Trigonometry if he's willing to put the effort in.