

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative

Educational Service Unit 10

Share this five-day study plan to improve your teen's test success

Chapter tests, standardized tests, final exams. High school students take a lot of tests, and they need to know how to study for them. To beef up your teen's study skills, have her try this five-day study plan:

- **Four days before the test:** Gather the material that will be covered. This should include class notes, outlines, quizzes and handouts. Arrange them by date. If anything is missing, this is the time to find it.
- **Three days before:** Read everything over. Make a list of questions that could be on the test. If the teacher spent four classes on the defeat of the Spanish Armada, chances are that will be on the test. If there are lists of facts to memorize, make flash cards.
- **Two days before:** Review the textbook. What are the chapter titles and headings? What are the most important topics? Make up more questions that might be on the test. Make notes of how to answer those questions.
- **One day before:** Take a self-quiz. Write down facts from memory, and see if they are correct. If it's math, apply formulas to sample problems. Review the most important information. Get a good night's sleep.
- **On the day of the test:** Allow a few extra minutes in the morning to avoid rushing. Take another self-quiz. If books or notes are allowed in the testing room, double-check that all the necessary materials are packed and ready to go.



Healthy risks benefit teens

Risk-taking isn't always a negative thing. When you encourage your teen to take on healthy challenges, you reduce the likelihood she'll take more dangerous risks.

Urge your teen to try such positive risks as signing up for a difficult course, introducing herself to new people or organizing a volunteer effort. Chances are, they'll pay off in school success!

Explain two ways to learn

In high school, your teen is expected to learn broadly and in depth. Discuss these two types of knowledge and how to achieve them:



- **Breadth of knowledge.** This is an overview. Your teen should study key points and look for ways information fits together. In U.S. history, for example, it might mean being able to name three causes of the Civil War.
- **In-depth knowledge.** This involves learning all the details of a particular subject. Your teen should consult many sources, study different points of view and draw his own conclusions.



Writing isn't finished until it's edited

Your teen will need to write in most of his classes. Whether he's writing an essay, a report or an exam answer, your teen will get better results if he edits his writing before handing it in. Teach your teen these editing strategies:

- **Point to each word.** Have your teen proofread slowly, moving his finger under each word to check for mistakes.
- **Correct sound-alike words.** Many English words have the same sound but different spellings. Sort *their* from *there* and *past* from *passed*, for example.
- **Proofread punctuation.** Do sentences all end with a period or question mark? Are the commas used correctly? Check for proper use of apostrophes (pay attention to the difference between *its* and *it's*. The first is possessive, the second means "it is.")
- **Add support.** Does the writing include interesting examples? Do they support the main idea?

Source: K. Donohue and N.N. Reddy, *180 Days to Successful Writers*, Corwin Press.

Visualize time management

Heavy course loads and busy schedules make managing time tricky for teens. To help your student see how much study time she really has:



- **Have her list** everything she has due between now and the end of the year.
- **Give her a calendar.** Have her write her commitments on it, such as classes, practices and jobs.
- **Have her plan** a realistic study schedule. If there's not enough time for schoolwork, she'll have to cut back on something else.

Source: D. Goldberg, *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond*, Fireside.



My teen is silent on the subject of school. What now?

Q: My son was never a real talker. But this year, he says almost nothing about school. When I ask about his day, I get shrugs and grunts. How can I find out what's going on if he won't talk?

A: By the time students get to high school, it can be a challenge to find out from them what is going on in the classroom. But you are right to try. You are showing your son that his education matters and that you want to support his success. That can spark his own motivation to succeed.



To open the lines of communication:

- **Raise the issue with your teen.** Tell him you care about him and his education. Explain that you don't want to bug him with too many questions, but you do want to know what is going on at school.
- **Give him time to unwind.** You don't have to pepper your teen with questions the moment he walks in the door. Let him relax a little. Later he may be more forthcoming.
- **Wait for a time when you aren't face to face.** Teens often open up more if they don't have to look at their parents. Find ways to let conversation emerge naturally—like when you're in the car or fixing dinner.

Remember, too, that not all information about school has to come from your teen. Check the school website. Email your teen's teachers. Ask them to suggest questions you can ask him about what he's learning.



Do you promote respectful language?

Using appropriate language—at home and at school—shows respect for others and improves the learning environment. Are you encouraging your teen to speak respectfully? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you set an example** by using the language you want your teen to use?
2. **Do you explain** that when your teen uses profanity, it reflects poorly on her education and family?
3. **Do you tell** your teen that polite language will earn her respect at home, at school and in the community?
4. **Do you remind** her that it is never acceptable to insult or demean another person?
5. **Do you role-play** ways your teen can express her emotions without using vulgar language?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are setting high standards for your teen's language. For each *no*, try that idea.

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”
—Maria Robinson

Offer healthy food choices

Along with sleep and exercise, good nutrition is a foundation that supports your teen as he learns, works and plays. To build it:

- **Encourage breakfast.** Keep whole grains, proteins and fruits on hand.
- **Provide nutritious lunch options.** Despite what some teens think, chips and soda is not a lunch. Help your teen plan to bring salads or other healthy choices.

Give your teen time away from the screen

In a recent survey, 24 percent of teens reported being online “almost constantly.” More than half said they were online several times a day. Much of that time was spent on social media and games. To keep recreational time online under control, have your teen:



- **Estimate it.** How much time does she think she spends online?
- **Track it.** Have her keep a log for a week.
- **Cut back** until she has plenty of time for reading, studying, exercise and family time.

Source: A. Lenhart, “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015,” Pew Research Center, niscw.com/tech.

Let your teen have a say in discipline matters

If the words “discipline” and “teenager” sometimes seem like direct opposites, ask for your teen's input. Together, come up with rules and consequences that are:

- **Clear,** with no room for argument.
- **Reasonable.** If he fails a test, having him study for an extra half hour a day makes more sense than making him quit soccer.
- **Immediate.** If he breaks his curfew, canceling your teen's plans for this weekend is a more effective consequence than canceling his plans for a trip in July.

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