

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Educational Service Unit 10

An editing checklist can help students improve writing

Middle schoolers are by nature very sensitive to criticism. That can make it tricky for their parents to help them improve their writing assignments.

Before students can improve their writing, they need to feel secure about writing in the first place. So when your child asks you to read something she's written, focus at first on what you like: The title. The introduction. A clear description.

Then, turn the task of improving the writing over to your child. Have her complete this editing checklist:

- **I've read through the entire piece** to see if it all makes sense.
- **I've focused my writing** on one important topic or idea.
- **My title is appropriate** and interesting.
- **My writing flows logically** from one concept to another.
- **I have replaced vague words** with specific ones.
- **I have deleted unnecessary words.**
- **I have deleted or replaced overused words.**
- **I have shortened sentences** that were too long and complicated.
- **I have checked spelling,** punctuation and capitalization.

Source: J. Novelli, "Joan Novelli's Writing Workshop," Scholastic, niscw.com/edit-checklist.



Positivity beats defeat

A student who has had several failures in a row is at risk for *learned helplessness*, or avoiding a task because she believes it will be impossible for her to complete.

If this sounds like your child, encourage her to think positively. If she gives her best effort, she's more likely to succeed. To build her confidence, suggest that she try starting homework sessions with easier tasks.

Try on career possibilities

One of the ultimate goals of education is to prepare students to do productive work as adults. Exploring possible careers in middle school can enable your child to make the most of his educational opportunities. To help:



- **Get to know your child's teachers** and counselor. Ask about resources for career exploration and enrichment.
- **Encourage your child to develop** his interests by getting involved in extra-curricular activities and volunteering.
- **Help your child learn** the educational requirements, skills and salaries of jobs that interest him.



Be a parent, not a peer, to your child

Your child is growing up physically and intellectually. He can understand concepts he couldn't last year. But he still needs to respect you, his teachers and other adults. To maintain your authority:

- **Insist that your child speak** politely to you and other adults. Don't allow him to speak rudely to you. Walk away and do not listen to him until he speaks respectfully.
- **Require your child to follow** your rules. He shouldn't need a huge list of rules, but enforce a few important ones with consequences for breaking them.
- **Don't try to be** the "cool" parent in the neighborhood. Be kind to your child and his friends, but don't act like a kid.
- **Don't base decisions** on what would please your child and his friends. Trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.

Source: C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*, Broadway Books.

Prevent a year-end slump

By reinforcing what your child is learning and encouraging her to stay on task, you can help her stay motivated to learn until the final bell rings. To do it:



- **Make connections.** Spell out why her studies are important. Does she like to play computer games? Solid math skills could be her ticket into that field.
- **Praise her efforts.** When she earns a good grade on a test or a paper, let her know you are proud of the work she did.
- **Encourage her to challenge herself.** Choosing rigorous courses for next year may inspire her to learn all summer.



How can I help my child put more effort into homework?

Q: My seventh grader does well on tests, but he's really lazy about doing his homework. How can I get him to take his assignments seriously?

A: You are right that your child needs to learn to take his assignments seriously. Although quizzes and tests may have more drama surrounding them, it's homework that reinforces his knowledge on a daily basis. To help your child devote his best efforts to homework:



- **Tell him how you feel.** "I've noticed that you've been blowing off your homework quite a bit. That's not OK, so let's figure out how to change the situation."
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Agree on a time that works for him and stick to it. "Your homework session starts at five o'clock. No arguments." If he doesn't have any assignments, he can use the time to review his notes or read.
- **Tie homework to privileges.** "If your homework isn't done, there will be no TV or basketball after dinner." Check his work when he says it is complete.
- **Follow up at school.** If your strategies at home don't work, get his teachers involved. Let your child know that you'll be checking with them each week to see whether he's turning in completed assignments. If he isn't, be sure to enforce appropriate consequences immediately.



Are you encouraging responsibility?

One of the most critical things successful students do is take responsibility for their own learning. Are you fostering a sense of personal responsibility in your middle schooler? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you expect** your child to take care of her bedroom and belongings?
- ___ **2. Do you suggest** that your child use planners and calendars to track her assignments and schedule?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to get started on long-term assignments right away?
- ___ **4. Have you taught** your child how to be responsible with money?
- ___ **5. Do you require** your child to help the family by doing

a few weekly chores? Middle schoolers are capable of cooking and doing laundry.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are doing a lot to raise a responsible child. For each no, try that idea.

"Loving your child also means respecting him as a person. Treat him with the same courtesy as you would a friend."

—Claudia Jones

Encourage healthy habits

Just as good study habits help students succeed in school, so do healthy lifestyle habits. The key to developing a healthier lifestyle is to make small changes, one at a time. Help your middle schooler:

- **Get enough sleep.** Between nine and 10 hours a night is recommended.
- **Learn about nutrition.** He should eat a healthy breakfast, make nutritious choices for lunch and drink lots of water.
- **Wash his hands regularly.** Fewer illnesses lead to fewer school absences.
- **Make exercise a habit.** Adolescents need 60 minutes of physical activity every day—biking, playing a sport, walking, etc.

Drug use is non-negotiable

Now that your child is getting older, some topics—curfew, free time, chores—are more open for negotiation. Others, however, are not, including alcohol and drug use.

Explain to your child that underage drinking is against the law and unacceptable. So is illegal drug use. Both are very harmful to your child's health, so be absolutely clear that you will never allow them.

Support your child with a parent-student-school team

At one time or another, most students, even those who do well in school, need a little help. A joint effort by you, the school and your child can get her back on track. To make it work:



- **Stay neutral.** Focus on solving problems, not on blaming your child or the teacher.
- **Encourage your child** to ask her teachers for help.
- **Help her strengthen** classroom skills, such as listening and taking notes.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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