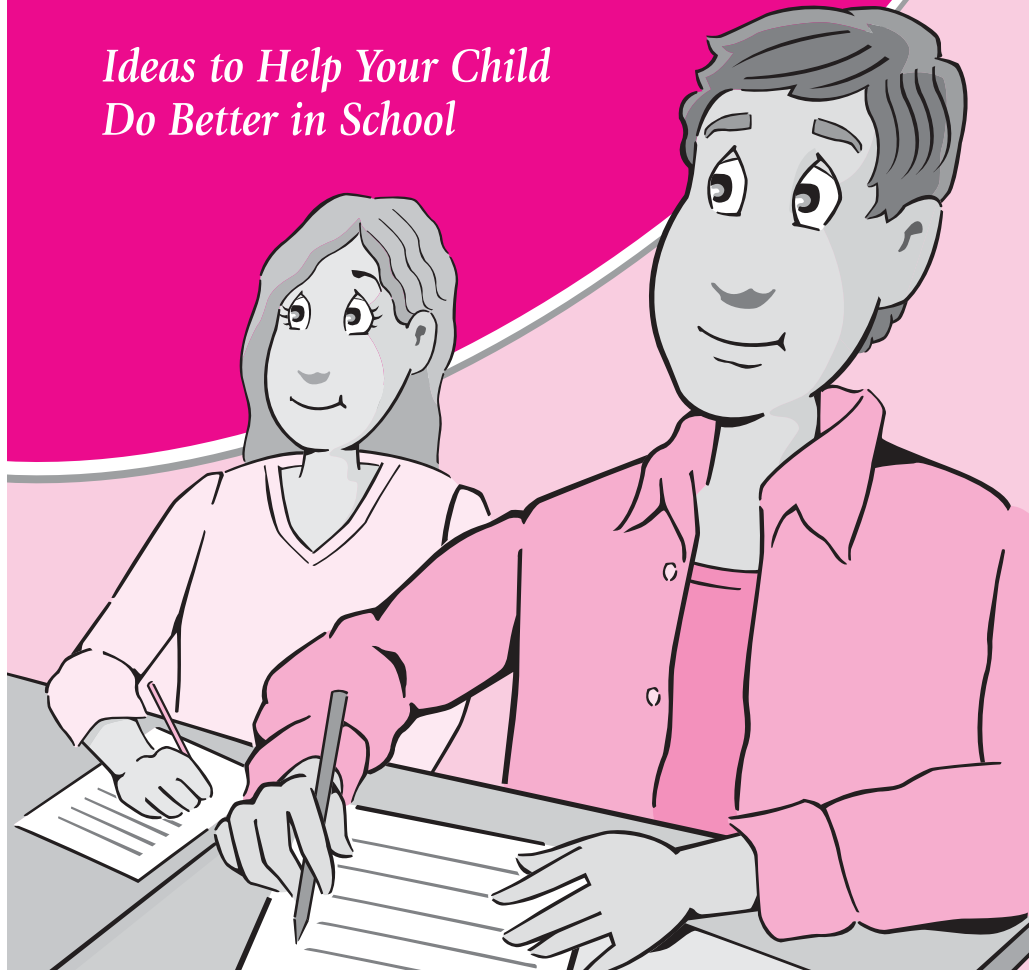


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# Top Five Study Skills Every Student Needs

*Ideas to Help Your Child  
Do Better in School*



Homework & Study Skills Series

THE  
**PARENT**  
INSTITUTE®



**A**cademic success depends on a student's ability to study effectively and efficiently. This goes beyond just completing daily homework 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 good 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 she\* needs in order to be academically successful.

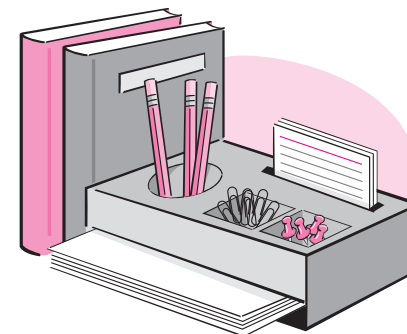
\* Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate the use of "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.

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## 1. Study With a Purpose

**S**uccessful 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. Offer these guidelines:

- **Be prepared.** Make sure pens, pencils, paper, index cards, reference materials and all other necessary supplies are at hand in a regular study spot. Use a large calendar to keep track of assignments.
- **Set study goals each day.** Write them down in a daily planner. Be *specific*. "Read. Math. Essay." won't always get the job done. Instead, write "Finish reading Chapter 3. Do math problems 9–17. Create outline for writing assignment."
- **Read actively.** Don't simply skim through the material. Follow the tips for reading with understanding on pages 8 and 9 of this booklet.
- **Focus on what's important.** Understand the difference between central ideas and details. For example, look at the following sentence: "Mary shed crocodile tears on her blue dress as she ran up to her room." What's important in this sentence? Is it the fact that Mary wore a blue dress—or the fact that she was crying?
- **Ask yourself questions** about what you're studying—until you feel confident that you understand the material.
- **Talk to your family and peers** about what you're learning. Discussing concepts helps make them "stick" and gives you an opportunity to think about them critically.



## Recognize what you don't know

Learning is not a passive process. Purposeful studying requires active involvement. This also means that your child should be aware of what he *doesn't* know—and what to do about it.

If your child is studying new material, offer the following advice:

- **Link what you're learning to what you already know.** Previous knowledge or experiences can help you understand new concepts.
- **Don't skip or gloss over what you don't understand.** Learning is cumulative. It's important to develop a solid foundation and then to build on it with information in future lessons.
- **Practice a particular concept or lesson** until you know you've got it. Then before the next quiz, you'll just need to do a quick review.
- **Make up your own tests.** Think about what the teacher might ask. If you can't "ace" your own tests, go over the information again.

If your child has studied the material, but still doesn't understand it, encourage him to:

- **Get help from books** or online resources that use a different approach to teach the same information.
- **Talk to his 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. His teachers can help. (He'll also learn to develop important research skills.)
- **Ask his teachers or guidance counselor** about tutoring options. Many are free and available at school.



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## 2. Take Effective Notes

**E**very student needs good note-taking skills to succeed in school. It's nearly impossible to remember everything learned from a textbook or a lecture. Notes help students focus on what's most important.

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

- **Be a good listener.** It's not possible to write down everything the teacher says, so he should focus on the main ideas. Listen for cues the teacher gives 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 his own words**—unless teachers want students to write down exact definitions. This will make the notes more meaningful when it comes time for him to review before a test.
- **Make sure his notes are organized and legible.** He should number and date the pages so they stay in order. If possible, keep them in a loose-leaf notebook so he can add new information. Use dividers or separate notebooks for each subject.
- **Be sure to keep track of notes** he's taken from online material. He should bookmark these web pages, too, so he can go back and cite his sources correctly.
- **Review his notes regularly.** Build a few minutes for review into daily study time. This is very important. If he doesn't use his notes, then writing them was a waste of time. This is also a good time to clarify and fill in missing information.



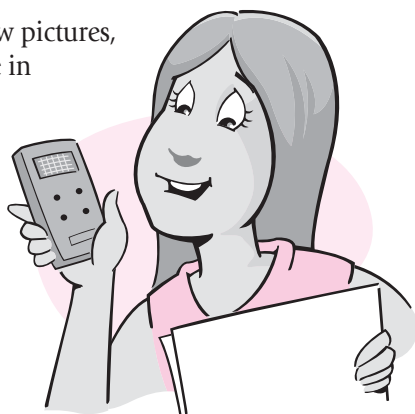
## Try these shorthand tips

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

- **Use abbreviations.** 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 up some of her own:

↑ increase	↓ decrease
→ leads to	≈ approximately
* important	— same as
w/ with	w/o without
< less than	> greater than
∴ therefore	

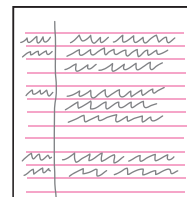
- **Leave out vowels.** Many words are still readable without all of their vowels, *sch as th wrds n ths prt of th sntnc.*
- **Include a key.** Your child should write down what new symbols or abbreviations mean so she doesn't forget when it's time to study later.
- **Be creative.** Your child might draw pictures, shapes around key words or write in different colors.
- **Consider electronic tools** or recording devices when practical—and if permitted.



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## 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 also for taking notes 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:

- **Write notes on the most important points** you hear in the space on the right. 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 you've written in the space on the right.
- **Read the notes soon after taking them** to complete any thoughts.

To take notes while reading:

- **Write the main headings** in the left column.
- **Summarize the text of those headings** by writing a brief note in your own words in the right column. Don't simply repeat what's written in the textbook.
- **Do this for key words and phrases as well.**

To review:

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

Other effective methods for taking notes include:

- **An outline.** Begin with the most general information. Continue indenting each more specific fact underneath.
- **A time line.** This is an effective method for learning a series of events associated with specific dates.
- **Mapping.** Draw a circle or box in the middle of a page. Write in the main idea. Write supporting ideas and details on lines attached to the box or circle.



### 3. Plan Ahead for Large Assignments

**F**or many students, there's nothing more intimidating than facing a large assignment or long-term project. But these assignments simply involve using different skills than those for studying for tomorrow's spelling test. Good planning, organization and self-discipline can make the task much easier.

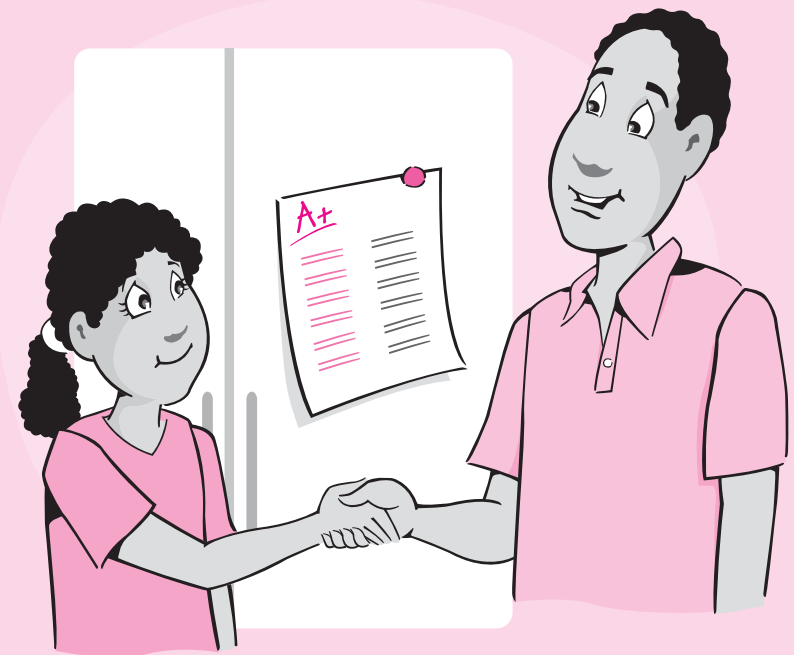
Whether it's an important term paper or a major science project, the key is to break down the assignment into logical parts that can be tackled one by one.

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 he has any questions, he should ask the teacher as soon as possible.
- **Get a large calendar.** Have your child write the due date on the calendar. It's a good idea to set a completion date a few days *before* the actual due date to allow for last-minute glitches.

- **Working backwards 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 check 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



**M**any students are fluent readers, 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

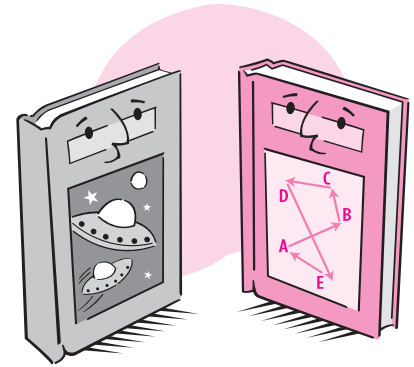
To read novels or short stories with understanding, help your child:

- **Make connections.** Your child should have some "me too" moments. Parts of the story might remind him of an experience he or someone he knows has had. Thinking and talking about those similarities can help him understand it.
- **Visualize as he reads.** Making mental pictures is a wonderful way to improve understanding. Ask him 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 what he's reading.** Ask him: "Can you tell me about the main character?" "What kind of personality does he have?" "Does he remind you of anyone?" "Can you see his character developing?" "What people and events are influencing him?" "How do you think the book will end?"
- **Make predictions.** Ask him: "Now that you've finished reading five chapters, what do you think is going to happen in the sixth?" Or "Did the book end the way you thought it would?"
- **Practice critical thinking.** Ask your child to give you his 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?"

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### Understanding textbooks

Reading and studying from textbooks requires some different techniques than those used for reading fiction. Here are some tips that will make it easier for your child to understand what she reads in textbooks.



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 when she reads.
- **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.** Start by locating key words in each sentence. Next, find the main idea of whole paragraphs. Practice with short passages. Then move to those of greater length.
- **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, she should read that part of the text again. The answers are usually there.
- **Review by turning section headings into questions.** Afterwards, she can quiz herself.

With practice, your child won't just read information. She'll *understand* it!

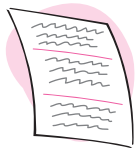
## 5. Remember What You Learn

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 the periodic table in chemistry 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 for him to recall information in school and throughout life. Share the following tips with your child.

To memorize a list of facts:

- **Be sure you understand what you're learning.** It's tough to memorize something if you don't know what it means in the first place.



- **Divide a long list into short, meaningful chunks.** For example, don't try to memorize all the dates of the American Civil War at once. Instead, memorize them in categories—dates of secession, dates of battles, etc.

- **Start with a different section each time.** Otherwise, you'll get really good at remembering just the beginning of a list.
- **Set it to music.** Use a familiar tune or make up a rap to learn each category on your list.

To learn vocabulary words:

- **Use flash cards** (vocabulary word on the front, definition on the back) to practice quizzing. 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 your vocabulary words.



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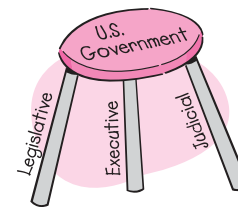
## Use mnemonics

A mnemonic (neh-MON-ick) is a device that helps a person 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 you have to remember. For example, "My Very Earnest 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—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, picture sailors (Sail-em) using oars (Oar-egon). Drawing images, such as the parts of a seed, can also help. Then 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, 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.** 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. Have her make a test and ask you questions. Not only will the "pupil" learn something, the "teacher" will understand it better, too!

## More Study Tips

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

Here are more tips to share with your child:

- **Set a regular place and time for studying.** This is very important for developing good homework and study skills. It will help your child focus. When she settles in at her study spot, her mind will say, "Okay, it's time to pay attention." She might even make a "Do Not Disturb" sign to let everyone know that homework and study time is serious business.
- **Know how to approach each task.** Learning spelling words for Friday's test does not require the same skills as working on a research project.
- **Plan and prioritize.** 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.
- **Know your learning style.** Do you remember material better when you:
  - **Hear it?** Record your spelling words; then play them back.
  - **See it?** Make a chart or an outline for your research project. Use colored pens.
  - **Touch it, feel it and experience it?** Take a field trip to get information for a project.
- **Schedule regular study breaks.** Get up, walk around, have a snack and let your brain recharge.
- **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 you.



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

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