

Study Skills Made Simple



In middle school, studying is a regular part of life. So why not make it as easy and enjoyable as possible? Use the advice in this guide to help your tween get ready to study, spend her study time wisely, and do well on tests.

Note taking

When your child reaches middle school, it becomes even more important for her to have good note-taking skills. Have her try these tips:

- While reading a chapter or listening to her teacher, she should write down the main ideas. She can jot down key words and fill in the details later. *Tip:* Encourage your tween to leave room between her notes so she can add more information as she studies or rereads the material.
- She could use “shorthand” to save time during note taking. *Examples:* “w/” for “with,” “o” for “over,” “bc” for “because,” “b4” for “before.”
- Suggest that she write a question mark next to anything she doesn’t understand. She might look up the answers at home using a dictionary, her textbook, or the Internet. Or she could ask her teacher to explain.

Organization

Before your child can begin studying, he needs to be organized. Here are suggestions:

- Designate a place for studying. One middle grader may prefer working at the kitchen table, while another likes to sprawl on the floor in his room. The important thing is to have a place that has “Study here” written all over it. That means a clutter-free surface, good lighting, and minimum distractions. Switch off the television, turn music down, and keep siblings from playing nearby.

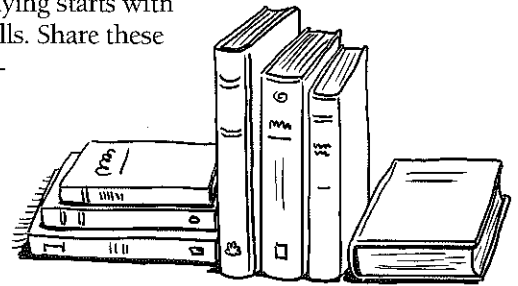


- Suggest that your child put a stocked supply box in his study area. In addition to sharpened pencils, pens, and notebook paper, supplies might include highlighters, a ruler, scissors, glue, a calculator, a dictionary, and graph paper.
- Encourage your middle grader to write quiz, test, and project due dates on a calendar. Help him divide the work into small, manageable blocks and set goals for each day. *Example:* Study vocabulary words on Monday. Review history notes on Tuesday for Wednesday’s quiz.

Reading comprehension

Successful studying starts with strong reading skills. Share these strategies for helping your middle schooler absorb what she reads:

- Have her close her textbook after each section and summarize the content in her own words.
- If she’s struggling to understand a novel, she might write down the names of the characters and something to remember them by (Thomas, the brave soldier); the setting (the beach at Normandy); and a sentence or two summarizing what happened (The soldiers landed before dawn. When the assault began, Thomas’s best friend was hit, and Thomas carried him to safety).
- Help your tween relate what she reads to something familiar. *Example:* “The setting makes me imagine crashing waves and sand. Sand is hard to walk in, and the soldier was carrying a lot of weight, so it must have been very difficult.”



Middle Years

continued



Concentration

When your middle grader learns how to concentrate, he has won half the battle. Use these ideas to improve his focus:

- Many children have trouble concentrating if they have an empty stomach. Before your youngster begins studying, he should eat a healthy, energy-boosting snack that includes both protein and carbohydrates. Try fruit smoothies or English muffin pizzas, for example.
- Is your tween more focused when he gets home from school, or after dinner? To find out, he can vary his study times for a week, keep track of how long it takes to finish his assignments, and choose a study time that works best.
- Doing the hardest work first can give your child a sense of accomplishment that will help get him through the rest. If a creative-writing assignment is giving him trouble, suggest that he finish it before doing something he finds easier, like studying geography terms.

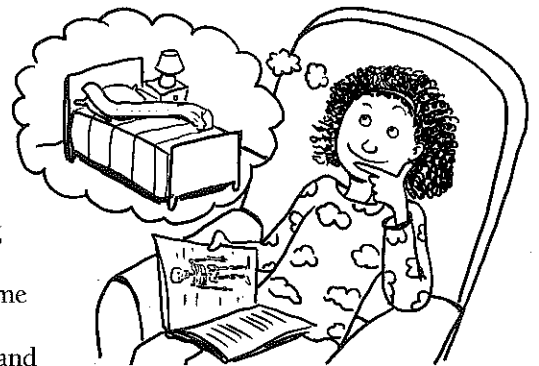
Memorization

For some materials, memorization is the key to studying. Your middle schooler can try these strategies:

- To help memorize math procedures, suggest that she use acronyms. For instance, PEMDAS (parentheses, exponents, multiply, divide, add, subtract) can help her work math problems in the right order. Or she could use FOIL (first, outside, inside, last) to solve binomial equations.
- Your middle grader can make connections between the ideas she has to remember by creating a simple story. Suppose she needs to know the steps of a science experiment. She can make up a story with them: “Joe had a *question*, so he created a *hypothesis* to answer his question. He designed a *procedure* for figuring out the answer. When he had his *results*, he came to his *conclusion*.”

- Tell your child to visualize a familiar place and put each thing she needs to memorize in that place.

Example: To remember the human body’s skeletal system, she could imagine placing each bone in a part of your home (cranium in the attic, vertebrae and ribs in the upstairs hallway, clavicle in her bedroom).



Tip: Encourage your child to make a list of her memory strategies. Writing them down will help her remember them—and she’ll have a study sheet to use.

Tips for tests

Share these ideas to help your middle grader study for his next test:

- Offer to quiz him, mixing up the order of the questions each time.
- Suggest that your child ask the teacher for extra copies of math worksheets and do them again for practice.



- Have him make flash cards for foreign language vocabulary. He might put the French word on one side of an index card and the English word on the other side.
 - If he’s learning about a series of historical events, he could create a picture time line.
 - Encourage him to make up his own quiz and then take it.
- Help your tween organize a study group with two or three classmates.

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