

How To Get Good Grades

In Ten Easy Steps

What Kind of a Student Are You?

To find out what kind of a student you are, read the following 10 questions and put check marks in the spaces that best describe you.

	Always	Never	Sometimes
I complete homework assignments.			
I have all necessary materials when I go to class (book, pencil, etc.).			
I use the time teachers give us in class to get started on homework.			
I take good notes.			
I ask and answer questions in class.			
I use tricks to memorize information.			
After reading assignments in a textbook, I know what I've read.			
I get along well with my teachers.			
I am good at taking tests.			
I am happy with my grades.			

Give yourself 2 points for each *Always* response, 1 point for each *Sometimes* response, and 0 for each *Never* response. Add up your score.

What Your Score Means

- 20-15 points:** You are a very good student. This booklet will be mostly a review for you. It could, however, help you raise your grades even higher.
- 14-10 points:** You are a student who could be getting better grades. With this booklet, you will be able to improve your grades significantly.
- 9-5 points:** You're probably not getting very good grades. This booklet can help you change that. It could even change how you feel about school.
- 4-0 points:** You might consider memorizing this booklet...

The Ten Steps to Getting Good Grades

STEP 1

Believe in Yourself

"To succeed, we must first believe that we can." Michael Korda

In order for you to succeed, you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. Here's a little story to help illustrate this idea:

Two high school athletes are preparing to compete against each other. They are the same size, and they have about the same athletic abilities. Everyone assumes that it will be an exciting match.

The first athlete runs out. He looks confident, and as he waits, he continues to warm up and stretch. The people nearby can hear him muttering to himself, "I'm ready. I can do it."

The second athlete appears. He slowly shuffles out with his head down, and as he waits, he stands and fidgets with his watch. Those nearby hear him mutter, "I'm gonna get killed."

Two athletes, same size, same abilities...Even before the competition starts, everyone knows who's going to win.

Whether you're an athlete preparing for competition or a student tackling a difficult subject, it's important that you believe in yourself. You need to recognize the talents and abilities that you possess, and you must know, and believe, that you can succeed.

Take a minute now, and in the grid below, list the courses that you're currently taking. Then in the "Grade" column, write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course this grading period.

Course	Grade

Think of these grades as your academic goals for this grading period. *Believe in yourself, and believe that you can achieve these goals!*

STEP 2

Be Organized

If you're organized, you have what you need, when you need it. This section will give you several ideas on how to get organized. You, of course, must determine what's going to work best for you.

Using an assignment notebook. Get an assignment notebook, take it with you to every class, and use one page for each day's assignments. When you're given an assignment, write it on the page under the date it's due. For example, if today is January 11 and your history teacher assigns pages 50-65 for tomorrow, write this down on the January 12 page.

When you're given a large assignment, use your assignment notebook to break the assignment down into smaller parts. For example, if you have an English paper due at the end of the week, you could break this assignment down into smaller parts by giving yourself the following separate assignments:

Jan. 10: get resources at library

Jan. 11: do outline

Jan. 12: write rough draft

Jan. 13: write final draft

Use three-ring notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because you can easily insert handouts, and if you miss a class, you can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong. Buy a hand-held 3-hole punch and put it in your notebook. You'll then be able to punch your handouts right there in class and immediately put them in your notebook along with your notes for the day.

Use folders for school work. Use a different color folder (with pockets) for each class. In these folders, keep current assignments, along with all return assignments, quizzes, and tests. Old tests and quizzes can help you study for future tests, and they may come in handy if there's ever a question about your grade. In each of your folders, keep a record of your test, quiz, and homework grades for that class. This will eliminate surprises at report card time. If you are ever unsure as to how you're doing in a class, talk to your teacher.

Have phone numbers for classmates. Make sure that you have a phone number for at least one person in each class. If you're absent, you'll then have someone you can call to find out what you've missed. Phone numbers are also helpful when you have a question about an assignment or an upcoming test.

Keep your locker and backpack neat. Never put loose or folded up papers (homework assignments, handouts, etc.) in your locker, backpack, or book. Always put them in the appropriate folder or notebook, and always keep your locker and backpack neat, clean, and organized.

Get organized before you go to bed. Put completed homework in the appropriate folders, and put everything you need for the next day in the same place each night. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, leave yourself a note so that you don't forget it.

Step Two Review

Be Organized

- Use an assignment notebook.
- Use three-ring notebooks for class notes.
- Use folders for schoolwork.
- Have phone numbers for classmates.
- Keep your locker and backpack neat.
- Get organized before you go to bed.

STEP 3

Manage Your Time Well

With good time management, you have time for the things you have to do, and you still have time for the things you want to do.

Use class time and study halls. Some students study best at night; others study best earlier in the day. Most students also have activities, sports, and jobs that they have to work around.

At the end of each day, determine how much time you have available, look at how much homework you have, and then develop a study plan for the day. To help keep yourself organized and “on track,” have a study plan in mind before you get home from school. For example:

3:00 – 5:00	Band practice
5:00 – 6:00	Do math homework
7:00 – 8:00	Study for history quiz and do biology questions

Prepare for sabotage. Identify anything that could interrupt or ruin your study plan, and then figure out how to eliminate or avoid it.

Step Three Review

Manage Your Time Well

- Use class time and study halls.
- Create your own study plan.
- Prepare for sabotage.

STEP 4

Be Successful in the Classroom

If you follow the advice in this section, you'll enjoy school more and get better grades.

Be in school, on time, every day. When you miss school, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work, you can never make up all of what you miss, even if you're out of school for only one day. To get good grades, you must be in school every day. Unless you have an extended illness or a chronic health problem, you should miss no more than five or six days of school a year.

Learn how to adapt to different teachers. In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and they make the rules. You might have one teacher who counts you tardy if you're not in your seat when the bell rings, and another teacher who considers you on time if you've got one foot inside the door. It doesn't matter whether or not you agree with the first teacher's rule; it only matters that you are in your seat when the bell rings. Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different sets of rules, personalities, and teaching styles.

Be prepared for each class. To be prepared, you need to have books, paper, pencils, etc. with you when you go to class. You also need to have all of your homework done. When you've done your homework, you get more out of the class, the lecture makes more sense, and you can participate in discussions. If you haven't done your homework, you may not even understand the lecture or class discussion.

Be prepared also means that you come to class ready to learn. Try taking a couple of seconds as you walk into each class to think about what you're going to be doing that day. This will make it easier for you to focus on the subject when the class starts.

Sit in the front of the class if possible. It is easier to pay attention and to stay involved when you sit in the front of the classroom. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, overheads, etc. If you have problems paying attention and you sit in the back of the class, ask your teacher if it would be possible for you to move closer to the front.

Be aware of your body language. This guidance counselor's story illustrates the importance of body language:

One day a student named Jason complained to me that his English teacher always picked on him. Jason assured me that he never talked out in class, that he always did his homework, and that he did everything his teacher asked him to do.

The following week I was in Jason's English class to talk about scheduling. Jason, who was sitting in the back row, never spoke out of turn, never talked to his neighbors, and he did everything he was supposed to do. Nevertheless, as my presentation went on, I became more and more infuriated with him. Why? Because of his body language.

Throughout the period, Jason would look at his friends and roll his eyes, or he'd slump his shoulders, let his head drop back, and then he'd sigh. Jason's behavior was clearly saying to me, "This is stupid and boring, and I don't want to do this." I found Jason's behavior distracting and irritating. Of course, I also discovered why Jason and his English teacher weren't getting along very well.

The next day I called Jason into my office and explained to him what I had observed the previous day. Jason was genuinely surprised that I had even noticed him in the class.

What Jason didn't understand is that when teachers are up in front of a classroom, they see everything. They know who is paying attention, who's taking notes, and who is listening to the class discussion. They also know who's doing homework for another class, writing personal notes, daydreaming, and napping (even when students think they've positioned their hands and books to hide it). If you choose to do any of these things, don't kid yourself into thinking that your teachers don't notice, even if they don't say anything. Teachers notice, and they conclude that you don't care about what's going on in their class. It's not enough for you to say that you want to get good grades; your body language has to communicate this also.

Always do your homework. Don't look at homework as something you should do. Think of homework as something you *must* do. Since a significant portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Always have homework completed on time, and whenever possible, do extra credit work.

Participate in class. Many teachers give participation points. These are easy points to get, and participating in class helps keep you focused. Participating also makes the class more interesting.

Be a good group member. The number one reason people get fired from their jobs is because they can't get along with the people they work with. It's not surprising, then, that businesses are encouraging schools to teach students how to work together in small groups. When you have to do a group project, 1) do your share of the work and do it well, 2) accept that everyone is different, and try to be open to all ideas, 3) support the other members of the group.

Treat others with courtesy and respect. Treat your teachers and classmates the same way that you want to be treated. Be polite, look at your teachers when they're speaking, and listen when others are talking. Also, be very aware of your tone of voice. The same words, in a different tone of voice, can communicate a very different message.

Remember that teachers are people too! They enjoy having students say hello to them in the halls, and they appreciate it when students show an interest in them. For example, if a teacher's been out ill, a simple compliment like "I hope you're feeling better" can brighten that teacher's day. Positive comments such as, "I really like this book we're reading," and expression of thanks, "Thank you for the extra help," are also very much appreciated.

Involve your parents. When your parents ask you what you did in school, tell them. For example, "Well, in biology we studied photosynthesis and we looked at slides under the microscope. Tomorrow we have a lab..." Your parents will like the fact that you're talking to them about what's going on in school.

Whenever possible, let your parents help you with your homework and your studying. You can ask them to drill you on vocabulary words, read over a paper you've written, listen to you practice a speech, or help you study for a test. You'll get better grades, and your parents will see for themselves that you're really trying to do well in school.

If you ever have a problem with a subject, teacher, class, or fellow student, let your parents know. They can help you deal with whatever the situation is, and if necessary, they can intervene on your behalf.

Step Four Review

Be Successful in the Classroom

- Be in school, on time, every day.
- Learn how to adapt to different teachers.
- Be prepared for each class.
- Sit in the front of the class if possible.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Always do your homework.
- Participate in class.
- Be a good group member.
- Treat others with courtesy and respect.
- Involve your parents.

STEP 5

Take Good Notes

Texts usually cover material that's been presented in class. It is, therefore, important to have good notes from which to study.

Be an active listener. In order to take good notes, you must pay attention and actively listen to what your teacher is saying.

Kelly is listening to the radio while she's getting ready for school. The DJ plays several songs, and then he announces that he's going to play a new release by Kelly's favorite artist. As soon as she hears this, Kelly stops getting ready and she listens intently to the song on the radio. As she listens, Kelly tries to catch every word in order to understand the meaning of the lyrics.

In this scene, Kelly went from passive listening to active listening. When you're actively listening in class, you are not just hearing the words the teacher is saying, you are also thinking about, and trying to understand, the information that's being presented.

Take notes to help you pay attention. You can think much faster than anyone can talk. This is one of the reasons that your mind sometimes wanders when you're listening to a lecture. When you take notes, however, your mind has something additional to do, and you don't have time to think about anything else. Taking notes, then, helps you stay focused.

Recognize important information. You can often hear a change in your teacher's voice when he or she is going to say something that's important for you to know. Teachers often speak louder, speak slower, or they give verbal cues like "the most significant outcome," "the main point," "the most important reason," "the three causes," etc.

Anything that your teacher writes on the board or overhead should be considered very important. Double underline or put a star beside any information that you think is important. You'll then know to give that information special attention when you're studying later.

Take notes that are easy to read.

- **Put the name of the class, the date, and the page number at the top of each page of notes.** This is easy to do, and it will help keep your notes organized.
- **Write on every other line and only use one side of the paper.** Your notes will be neater and easier to read. You'll also have space if you want to add something later.
- **Use symbols and abbreviations whenever possible.** The following symbols will help you take notes faster.

=	same or equal	↑	up or increasing	w	with
≠	not equal	↓	down or decreasing	w/o	without
>	greater than	→	resulting in	w/in	within
<	less than	*	most importantly	b/c	because
~	approximately	eg	for example	v	very
Δ	therefore	ie	that is	esp	especially

- **Use pencil or erasable pen to keep your notes neat.**
- **Leave a wide margin on the left side of each page. As you're taking notes, listen for key words, and then write these key words in the margins.** Key words (topics, people, places, events, etc.) help you organize your thoughts, and they make your notes more understandable. Key words are also helpful to use when you are reviewing for a test; just cover up your notes, look at each key word, and then test yourself to see what you can remember about that topic, person, place, or event.

Go over your notes as soon as possible. While the information is still fresh in your mind, go over your notes and clarify anything that's confusing. Fill in the spaces, and make sure that you have all of the key words written in the margins. Of course, while you're going over your notes, you are also "fixing" this information in your memory.

If you are really serious about getting the best grade possible in a class, completely redo your notes. Eliminate the unimportant information, and rewrite the rest of your notes using your own words. Your notes will be much clearer, and as you rewrite them, you'll also be learning the material. This is time consuming, but it pays off.

Get copies of class notes if you're absent. When you are absent, it is your responsibility to ask your teacher for handouts and assignments. It is also your responsibility to make up any work that you've missed. *Do not just assume that your teacher will tell you if there's something you need to know or do.* Also, get copies of the notes you've missed, and put them in your notebook as soon as possible.

Step Five Review

Take Good Notes

- Be an active listener.
- Take notes to help you pay attention.
- Recognize important information.
- Take notes that are easy to read.
- Go over your notes as soon as possible.
- Get copies of class notes if you're absent.

STEP 6

Know How to Read a Textbook

When you know how to read a textbook, you understand & remember what you read.

Textbook authors have already done a lot of your work for you. They've inserted boldfaced subtitles that tell you exactly what you're going to be reading about. They've put all of the important words in **bold** or *italic* print, and they've added pictures, charts, graphs, lists of vocabulary words, summaries, and review questions. The textbook authors have provided these "learning tools" in order to make it easier for you to learn and retain the information they're presenting.

In this section you will discover how to use the learning tools that the authors provide. You will also learn how to scan, read, and review. Once you know how to scan, read, and review, you'll be able to understand and remember what you read the first time through.

Scan. Scanning give you a quick overview of the material you're going to be reading. To scan, read the title, the subtitles, and everything in bold and italic print. Look at the pictures, graphs and charts, go over the review questions, and read the summaries.

Scanning provides you with a great deal of information in a very short amount of time. In addition to providing you with an excellent overview of the material, scanning also provides you with a kind of "information framework." Having this framework of topics and main ideas makes it much easier to read, understand, and remember the more detailed information.

Read. When your reading has a purpose, your comprehension improves, and it's easier to stay focused. To give your reading purpose, try turning each boldfaced subtitle into a question. Keep your question in mind as you read, and when you finish the section, see if you can answer your question. Your question will give you something specific to look for, and it will help keep your mind from wandering. You will, therefore, remember more of what you read.

Before you start to read a section, look to see if there are any vocabulary words, names, places, or events in bold or italic print, and then ask yourself, "Why is this word, person, place, or even important?" You should, of course, have an answer to that question when you finish reading the section.

Review. Okay, you've scanned and read the material. This is when most students will say, "I'm done," and close their book. Taking a few extra minutes for review, however, will make a huge difference in what you're able to remember later. When you review, you lock the information into your brain before it has a chance to evaporate.

To review, go back to the beginning and go through the same process you did when you scanned the material. This time, as you read the boldfaced subtitles, briefly restate the purpose or point of each section to yourself using your own words. As you look at the vocabulary words and the words in bold and italic print, think about what they mean and why they are significant. If you really want to lock the information into your brain, review everything again a day or two later. When you go to study for a test, you'll be amazed at how well you already know the material.

While it may take a little practice to get the Scan, Read, and Review process down, you'll soon realize that this process doesn't mean more work; it just means better comprehension, better retention, and better grades.

Step Six Review

Know How to Read a Textbook

- SCAN by reading subtitles, words in bold and italic print, summaries, charts, and review questions.
- READ with a purpose.
- REVIEW by scanning the material to check your comprehension.

STEP 7

Study Smart

Students who “study smart” find that they spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

Find a good place to study. Although it’s usually best to have one place where you study regularly, it doesn’t matter where you study, as long as it has a surface for writing, it’s well lit, and it’s comfortable. In addition to paper, pens, and pencils, your study area should be equipped with a calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, and a one-volume encyclopedia.

Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others can work with music or the TV on. If you like to listen to music when you study, try listening to classical music. Research has shown that classical music can actually improve your concentration.

Get started. Getting started on your studying is usually the hardest part. Don’t put it off until later, don’t make excuses, and don’t wait until you’re “in the mood.” Begin with something simple, or a subject that you like, and just get started.

Know your learning style. We all learn differently. Some learn best by seeing material (visual learners) and some learn best by hearing the information (auditory learners). Some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners) and some learn best through the use of technology. Think about how you learn and adjust how you study accordingly.

Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, TV, reading, and demonstrations. If you’re a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts and diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and make use of color in your notes. Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, TV, films, and music. If you’re an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme. If you’re a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Move around while you study, use objects whenever possible, and role play ideas and concepts. If you’re a technological learner, use computers, the Internet, and high-tech equipment to help keep you interested, motivated, and focused.

As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the wider variety of methods you use while studying, the more you remember.

Organize your study time.

- Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you're going to do it. Make sure that your plan is realistic.
- Prioritize your work in order to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- Always allow more time than you think you'll need.
- If you have something to memorize, work on that first, and then go over it again at the end of your study session.
- Study your least favorite subject first to get it out of the way.
- Alternate types of assignments (e.g., read English, do math, read history).
- Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. After studying for 20 minutes, try taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, etc.).

Know how to study for tests.

- Know what the test is going to cover so that you'll know what to study. For essay tests, it's important to understand the big picture and to know main points and key facts. For fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tests, you need to know more detailed information.
- Pay particular close attention in class the day before a test. This is when teachers often go over information that you need to know.
- Have all of your reading done ahead of time.
- If your textbook has review questions, know the answers to all of these questions. Also, go through your textbook and make sure that you know the meanings of all the words in bold and italic print.
- If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use the review sheet to come up with questions that you think might be on the test.
- You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of a mirror.
- Review often and review out loud. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. *Review is the key to learning anything!*
- Write down any names, dates, formulas, and/or facts that you need to remember on an index card. Take this card with you the day of the test, and go over it as often as you can before you take the test.

Use tricks to help you memorize information.

- Use flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.
- Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Do this until you know it.
- Right before you go to sleep, go over any information that you want to remember. Your brain will commit it to memory while you sleep.
- Use acronyms to help you memorize. For example, the acronym HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- Use the first letter of the words you want to remember to make up a silly, ridiculous sentence. For example, if you need to remember the names of the planets for a test, just make up a silly sentence like, “My very elegant mother just scooped up nine piglets” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto). As soon as you get your test, say this sentence to yourself, and at the top of your test, write MVEMJSUNP (the first letter of each of the planets). When you need to write in the names of the planets on the test, you’ll have your memory cue ready.

The technique can be used in many ways. For example, if you need to remember the five main causes of the Great Depression, take five key words, and then use the first letter of each of these words to make up a silly sentence.

- Look for an easy or logical connection. For example, to remember that Homer wrote the *Odyssey*, just think, “Homer is an *odd* name.”
- Information is easier to remember if it’s grouped or categorized. Use lists and diagrams to group related terms, facts, ideas, etc.
- Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help trigger your memory.

Know how to write a paper. The key to writing a good paper is to spread it out over as much time as possible. Writing a paper should be a process, not a one-time event. Start off by brainstorming and taking notes, then make an outline. From your outline, write a rough draft. Rewrite the paper until you have it just the way you want it, and then write the final draft. It’s important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take it out and read it again, you’ll see and hear things that you didn’t notice before.

To get a good grade on a paper:

1. follow the directions exactly;
2. have someone else read your paper to give you suggestions;
3. make sure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors;
4. make sure that your paper looks neat; and
5. turn in your paper on time.

Remember to always identify another person’s words or ideas by using quotation marks or footnotes. If you present another person’s words or ideas as your own, it’s plagiarism.

Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.

- Use props whenever possible. Props (posters, books, sports equipment, etc.) give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of your props.
- To help add enthusiasm and energy to your voice, pretend that you are telling your best friend something really important.
- Effective speakers make eye contact with those in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.

Have good computer skills. If you don't know how to type or how to use a computer for word processing, sign up for a keyboarding or computer class as soon as possible.

Step Seven Review

Study Smart

- Find a good place to study.
- Get started.
- Know your learning style.
- Organize your study time.
- Know how to study for tests.
- Use tricks to help you memorize information.
- Know how to write a paper.
- Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.
- Have good computer skills.

STEP 8

Use Test-Taking Strategies

In order to do well on any test, you must study hard & be prepared. Having done that, you can further improve your test performance by using these test-taking strategies.

Get off to a good start. Have everything you need for the test with you when you go to class (pencil, erasable pen, calculator, etc.). If you have a couple of minutes before the test starts, try to relax. Think about something else or talk to your classmates. As soon as you get your test, write anything that you want to remember (facts, dates, equations, formulas, memory aids, etc.) in light pencil at the top of your test. Put your name on the test, and read the directions carefully.

Develop a plan. Before you begin answering the questions, quickly look over the entire test and develop a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes on each essay question, and 10 minutes checking over your answers.

Mark the questions that you want to return to. As you go through the test, put a dot or light check mark by any answer that you're not sure of. After you've gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones that you've marked, and try them again.

Don't panic if you don't know the answers to the first few questions. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for your brain to get into gear. Chances are, you'll know the answers when you come back to them.

Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.

- As you're reading a multiple-choice question, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look down at the answer choices.
- If you're not sure of an answer, eliminate the choices you know are incorrect by crossing them out. Then make an educated guess.
- If two of the choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.
- Read all of the answer choices. At least a couple of the answers will probably sound like they could be correct. Don't be tempted to mark the first answer that sounds good.

Look for key words in True/False questions. Statements with *always, never, every, all,* and *none* in them are usually false. Statements with *usually, often, sometimes, most,* and *many* in them are usually true. Read True/False questions very carefully. One word will often determine whether a statement is True or False.

Know how to approach essay questions.

- Read each question and then start with the easiest one. This will give you confidence, and it will give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions. Note how many points each essay is worth, and adjust the time you spend on each question accordingly.
- Before you do any writing, brainstorm. Jot down the key words, ideas, and points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize these ideas and points into a simple outline; if not, just number the ideas in the order you want to present them.
- Begin writing. Use clear, concise, complete sentences, and write legibly. In your opening paragraph, restate the question, and tell the reader what he or she can expect to learn from your essay. In your middle paragraphs, present examples, details, evidence, and facts to support the points you're making. In your final paragraph, restate the most important points, draw conclusions, and write a brief summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.
- If you don't know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write down what you do know about the subject. You may hit on something and get partial credit. If you don't have time to complete an essay, write your teacher a note explaining that you ran out of time. Then briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.

Improve your math test scores.

1. Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be.
2. If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture of a diagram.
3. Don't spend too much time on one problem.
4. Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, if you were on the right track, you may get partial credit.

Be prepared for open book tests. During an open book test, you must be able to locate information quickly. To help you do this:

1. highlight your notes;
2. put self-stuck notes or bookmarks in your textbook to help you locate important information; and
3. write down all of the information that you know you'll need on a separate sheet of paper.

Check your answers. If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have made a careless mistake. *Always use all of the time that you're given.*

Go over all returned tests. Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. You may see on or more of these questions again. Also check to make sure that your test was graded correctly (teachers sometimes make mistakes). Keep a record of your test scores, and keep returned tests in your folders.

Step Eight Review

Use Test-Taking Strategies

- Get off to a good start.
- Develop a plan.
- Mark the questions that you want to return to.
- Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.
- Look for key words in True/False questions.
- Know how to approach essay questions.
- Improve your math test scores.
- Be prepared for open book tests.
- Check your answers.
- Go over all returned tests.

STEP 9

Reduce Test Anxiety

A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Excessive worry, or test anxiety, can lower your test score.

It's possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can't think clearly. The brain is like a computer in that it contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you're not able to "access" it when you need it. Having test anxiety is like not having the password for your computer. The information is there, but you can't get to it.

To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. Then try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you:

- Start studying early. The night before a test, review the material and get a good night's sleep. Cramming increases test anxiety.
- Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself calmly and confidently walking into the test. See yourself answering the questions correctly, and then see yourself receiving the grade you want. Go through this mental imagery exercise several times before the day of the test.
- Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. How you act can definitely affect how you feel. If you act confident, you just may find that you feel more confident.
- Try these common relaxation techniques:
 1. Take a deep breath, hold it, and then slowly release the breath and the tension. Do this until you feel your body relax.
 2. Start at the top of your head, flexing, and then relaxing each part of your body.
 3. Close your eyes and let your arms hang down at your sides. As you relax, visualize the tension from your head, neck, and shoulders flowing down your arms and out through your fingertips.
 4. Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

The more you practice positive thinking and relaxation techniques, the better you'll get at using them. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your counselor.

STEP 10

Get Help When You Need It

When you have a problem, do something to resolve it.

At some point, you're going to have a question or a problem concerning a class, school rule, teacher, or fellow student. Most questions can be answered and most problems resolved if you explain your question or situation to the appropriate person (e.g., principal, teacher, counselor).

If you need academic help, or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. If the problem continues, or if you feel that you can't talk to your teacher, see your counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or harassed by another student, tell a teacher, counselor, or principal immediately. If you ever have a problem and you don't know where to go for help, talk to your counselor.

Every student has his or her share of normal teenage problems. Some students, however, have problems that are so overwhelming that they cannot pay attention in class or concentrate on their schoolwork. Even though they may put up a good front, these students need to get help.

If you are dealing with any of the following, please talk to a parent or counselor immediately: alcohol, drugs, a pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, a health concern, problems at home, depression. Thousands of students across the country are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.

Tips for Parents

Your children need you to be interested and involved in their academic progress. Your children must, however, be responsible for their own grades, and behavior.

Be interested. Make sure that your child knows that his or her academic progress is important to you. Attend all open houses and parent conferences. Know when each grading period ends, and make sure that you see all progress reports and report cards as soon as they come out. If you do not see a progress report or report card, immediately call the school and request a copy. *Do not assume that someone will call you if there's a problem.*

Discuss classes and set goals. Sit down with your son or daughter at the beginning of each grading period and help him or her set realistic academic goals for the term. Your child will better understand what your expectations are, and having goals will give your child something to work towards. For example, at the beginning of the grading period, Kathy and her parents decided that she should be able to earn A's in math, social studies, English, PE, and art. Since Kathy finds Spanish and biology more difficult, they decided that they'd be happy with B's in these two subjects.

Throughout the term, recognize effort and improvement. Acknowledge each academic success, even if it's only a good grade on a quiz or homework assignment. At the end of a term, you can offer "rewards" if goals are met and/or "consequences" if they're not.

Rewards are particularly good when you want to encourage a change in attendance, effort, or behavior. Eventually, doing well will be its own reward. Consequences should be logical whenever possible. For example, a logical consequence for routinely being late to school is an earlier bedtime. Never take away a positive activity (sports, school plays, music lessons, scouting, etc.) as a consequence.

Be available to help. Be available to help with homework, but don't give more help than is wanted. Your son or daughter may not ask again. Keep in mind that it is your child's responsibility to be organized, to get homework done, and to prepare for tests.

Listen. Talk to your child about what's happening in school and be a good listener.

Encourage involvement. Students who are involved in school-related activities enjoy school more and they have greater academic success. Encourage your child to be involved in one or more activities at school.

Monitor activities and jobs. Make sure that your child is not spending too much time watching TV, playing computer games, or talking on the phone. Also, make sure that your child is not working too many hours or working too late at a job.

Important “don’t’s”

- Don’t nag about school or grades. Your child will tune you out.
- Don’t allow your child to miss school unless he or she is truly ill. You will send a message that school isn’t important.
- Don’t criticize a teacher in front of your child. Your child will only lose respect for that teacher.
- Don’t make your child’s failures (or successes) your own. Your child may see getting poor grades as a way to rebel.
- Don’t have expectations that are unrealistic. If your child knows that your expectations cannot be met, he or she may not even try.

Work with the school. Know that teachers, counselors, and principals are there to help your child get the best education possible. A health problem, death in the family, or divorce can affect your child’s attitude and/or performance in school. If such a circumstance should arise, contact the principal or counselor and explain the situation. If you have a concern that relates to a specific teacher or class, call the teacher. For other questions and concerns, call your child’s counselor.

If Your Child is Not Doing Well in School...

Most students who don't do well in school feel like failures. They are frustrated, discouraged, and sometimes angry. The "I don't care" attitude they often display is a defense mechanism. It's important for these students to know that their parents have not given up on them. They also need to know that their parents are interested, supportive, and willing to take the time to help them figure out how to be more successful in school.

Students who are not doing well in school usually have problems in one or more of the following areas:

Attendance – It is extremely important for students to be in school, on time, every day. Unless a child is truly ill, he or she needs to be in school.

Accountability – It's human nature to be tempted to "slack off" when we're not held accountable. How seriously would most workers take their jobs if they knew that their bosses would never know how hard they were working or how many days they missed?

Your child needs to know that you care, and that you will be checking on how he or she is doing. Your child needs to know that successes will be recognized and that poor performances will be noticed. It's also important that your son or daughter know that you will be consistent in your interest. See every progress report and report card, and if your child has a low grade in a class, contact the teacher.

Alcohol/Drug Abuse – Students who abuse alcohol or drugs are often distracted to the point where their school performance is affected. If you know or suspect that your child is drinking or using drugs, talk to him or her about it. If you need information or advice, talk to your doctor or to the school counselor. They can help.

If you believe that there are other reasons for your child not doing well in school, make an appointment to see your child's counselor. Recognizing that there is a problem is the first, and most important, step in finding a solution.

Final Thoughts

- We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. *Aristotle*
- The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. *Benjamin Mays*
- The man who believes he can do something is probably right, and so is the man who believes he can't. *Anonymous*
- The whole world steps aside for the person who knows where he is going. *Anonymous*
- He who never fell never climbed. *Anonymous*
- Successful people have learned to make themselves do the thing that has to be done when it has to be done, whether they like it or not. *Aldous Huxley*
- Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently. *Henry Ford*
- Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them. *Ann Landers*
- The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving. *Oliver Wendell Holmes*
- Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up. *Thomas Edison*
- All things are difficult before they are easy. *Thomas Fuller*
- You are never a loser until you quit trying. *Mike Ditka*
- Success is a state of mind. If you want success, start thinking of yourself as a success. *Anonymous*