

Study Skills: The Fast track to success



STUDY SKILLS PACKET

Contents:

Motivating Yourself to Study.....	2
Setting a Goal.....	3
Learning Styles.....	4
Learning Style Assessment.....	5
Time Management.....	7
Ways to Beat Procrastination.....	8
Planning to Manage your Time.....	10
Improving Concentration.....	12
VCR ³	13
Listening Skills.....	14
Note Taking.....	15
Reading Skills.....	17
Ten Ways to be Test Wise.....	18
Managing Academic Stress.....	19

Motivating Yourself to Study

Becoming motivated is a process – it's not one giant leap to becoming something you want to be. Motivation rarely comes overnight; rather, you become motivated by experiencing one small success after another as your confidence grows, and gradually, you try something bigger and more challenging.

Here are some ways to increase your motivation to study:

- Reward yourself for studying: for example, after a successful study session, have a treat like a nice big ice cream cone
- Remind yourself of your goals, write them on sticky notes and place them where you can see them
- Eliminate distractions
- Develop an interest in what you are studying, understand why these subjects are important
- Take breaks
- Establish a comfortable work environment
- Use a motivational poster or read inspirational stories

SETTING A GOAL

A *goal* is something you **want** to achieve. A *short-term* goal is something you want to achieve soon. Examples of short-term goals are finishing your homework and doing well on tomorrow's test. A *long-term* goal is something you want to achieve at some later date. Examples of long-term goals are writing a paper and passing a class.

To set appropriate goals, you must know what is important for you to accomplish. Then you must set specific and clearly stated goals. If you do not have clearly stated goals, your effort will lack direction and focus. Write your goals to have a record of them and when you write something, you are more likely to do it.

Each goal you set should state WHAT you will do and WHEN you will accomplish it. If at all possible, the goal should also include WHERE and HOW you will accomplish it. Implied in each goal you set is your WILL (determination) to do it.

For example, a goal for a research paper might be stated as follows:

I will (your determination) finish gathering information for my research paper (what you will do) by November 20 (when you will accomplish it).

Characteristics of appropriate goals

Your goals should be:

- **within your skills and abilities:** knowing your strengths and weaknesses will help you set goals you can accomplish.
- **realistic:** setting a goal to learn the spelling of three new words a day is realistic. Trying to learn the spelling of fifty new words a day is not realistic.
- **flexible:** sometimes things will not go the way you anticipate and you may need to change your goal. Stay flexible so when you realize a change is necessary, you will be ready to make the change.
- **measurable:** it is important to be able to measure your progress toward a goal. It is especially important to recognize when you have accomplished your goal and need to go no further. Failure to measure your progress toward a goal and recognize its accomplishment will result in misdirection and waste.
- **within your control:** other than when working as part of a group, accomplishment of your goal should not depend on other students. You can control what you do, but you have little or no control over what others do. You may do what you have to do, but if others don't, you will not accomplish your goal.

LEARNING STYLES

A learning style is the way in which you begin to concentrate on, process and retain new and difficult information. Knowing how you learn will help you set and achieve goals.

The three learning styles are:

- **Auditory:** prefers verbal instruction; would rather listen than read, recites information out loud, enjoys talking, discussing issues and talking out problems.
- **Visual:** thinks in pictures, prefers demonstrations and descriptions, would rather read than listen to a lecture, avid note-taker, likes charts, graphs and pictures.
- **Kinesthetic:** prefers the hands-on approach to learning, likes to take notes and use scrap paper, learns best by doing something, touching, manipulating.

Learning Style Assessment

Directions: Read each statement carefully and thoroughly. After reading the statement, rate your response using the scale below. There are no right or wrong answers.

3 = Often applies

2 = Sometimes applies

1 = Never or almost never applies

1. ____ I remember information better if I write it down or draw a picture of it.
2. ____ I remember things better when I hear them instead of just reading or seeing them.
3. ____ When I get something that has to be assembled, I just start doing it. I don't read the directions.
4. ____ If I am taking a test, I can "see" the page of the text or lecture notes where the answer is located.
5. ____ I would rather the teacher explain a graph, chart, or diagram than just show it to me.
6. ____ When learning new things, I want to "do it" rather than hear about it.
7. ____ I would rather the teacher write the information on the board instead of just lecturing.
8. ____ I would rather listen to a book on tape than read it.
9. ____ I enjoy making things, putting things together, and working with my hands.
10. ____ I am able to quickly conceptualize and visualize information.
11. ____ I learn best by hearing words.
12. ____ I have been called hyperactive by my parents, friends or teachers.
13. ____ I have no trouble reading maps, charts, or diagrams.
14. ____ I can usually pick up on small sounds like bells, crickets, frogs or distant sounds.
15. ____ I use my hands and gesture a lot when I speak to others.

Assessment continues on the next page...

Refer to your score on each individual question. Place that score beside the appropriate question number below. Then, tally each line at the side.

<u>SCORE</u>					<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>LEARNING STYLE</u>
1	4	7	10	13		VISUAL
2	5	8	11	14		AUDITORY
3	6	9	12	15		KINESTHETIC

What is your top score?

Top score _____ Learning Style _____

TIME MANAGEMENT

6:00am		6:00	
6:15		6:15	
6:30		6:30	
6:45		6:45	
7:00		7:00	
7:15		7:15	
7:30		7:30	
7:45		7:45	
8:00am	Start School	8:00	
2:00pm	End School	8:15	
2:15		8:30	
2:30		8:45	
2:45		9:00	
3:00		9:15	
3:15		9:30	
3:30		9:45	
3:45		10:00	
4:00		11:15	
4:15		11:30	
4:30		11:45	
4:45		12:00am	
5:00			
5:15			
5:30			
5:45			

Ways to beat procrastination

- **Face up to the results of procrastination:** what will happen if you procrastinate? How will you feel if you fail the test? How miserable will you be over the weekend if you have to write a last-minute paper while everyone else is at the game?
- **Concentrate on the rewards of managing yourself and your time:** Think about the rewards you will get when you finish a big task; going to the game, hanging out with your friends, feeling good when you tell your parents.
- **Break up big tasks into smaller ones:** If you have to write a paper, can you work on one segment tonight and another one tomorrow? If you start early and finish a small segment each day, a big paper is just a series of small tasks.
- **Give yourself a time limit to accomplish a task:** Work will expand to take up as much time as we allow it to. Push yourself to work faster and more efficiently.
- **Set a regular time for study and do not vary from it:** Determine your personal best time and best place.
- **Start studying with positive, realistic thoughts:** Push negative thoughts out of your mind. Tell yourself that you are growing and becoming more competent.
- **Establish study habits:** Refer to the appropriate pages later in this packet.
- **Face fear:** Make up your mind that you are going to overcome fear by studying and preparing every day.
- **Get help from parents/teachers:** Show your teacher what you've done so far and ask if you are on the right track.
- **Avoid whining and people who whine:** You have this job to do and it's not going away – just do it!
- **Reward yourself when you've accomplished an important task:** You've accomplished a goal or task so you deserve a reward; talk to some friends, watch a TV show, check Facebook.

- **Look at this task in terms of your long-range goals:** Where does this fit in to what you want in the long-term; a B+ in a class, getting you into your dream college?
- **Don't get involved in too many organizations, accept too many commitments or overextend yourself:** Stop and think about how much you really want to do something before you say yes. How much time will it take? Make choices wisely.
- **Force yourself to jump in:** Even if your initial work isn't satisfactory, you've made a start and chances are that you will get focused as you progress. Sometimes you just have to do it!
- **Start on the difficult, most boring tasks first:** If you hate a subject, work on that one first so that you can get it over and done with.
- **Practice "do it now":** Practice multitasking; what tasks can you do at the same time so that you can be more efficient?
- **Find a quiet place to study and concentrate:** Find that place and keep it your own.
- **Take time to smell the roses:** Don't over manage yourself so that you don't have the time to do the things you really enjoy doing. If you lose those, you won't want to do the hard things.
- **Balance your load:** You have school, home and other responsibilities and they all have to get done. Find a way to balance so that none of them are compromised.
- **Use visual reminders of what you have to do:** Place post-it notes or other visual cues where you can see them to help you stay focused.

Planning to manage your time

The key to managing your time is planning. Planning involves three steps:

1. Making a list of what you need to do on a given day
2. Prioritizing the items on the list
3. Scheduling these items on a calendar

An example of Step 1 - a short list of things to get done

- Research religion project
- Study for a history quiz
- Read chapter 5 for bio
- Make plans for the weekend
- Go to practice
- Attend classes

An example of Step 2 – prioritizing the list

Must Do

Attend classes

Go to practice

Study for history quiz

Would like to Do

Research religion project

Read chapter 5 for bio

Fun Stuff

Make weekend plans

An example of Step 3 – scheduling items on the calendar

6:00		7:00	Dinner
6:15	Wake up	7:15	
6:30	Eat breakfast and get ready for school	7:30	
6:45		7:45	Dinner ends
7:00	Leave for school	8:00	Study for history quiz
7:15		8:15	
7:30		8:30	
7:45		8:45	Finish studying
8:00	School starts	9:00	Start researching religion project
2:00	School ends	9:15	
2:15	Practice starts	9:30	Stop researching
2:30		9:45	Watch TV
2:45		10:00	
3:00		10:15	
3:15		10:30	
3:30		10:45	bed
3:45		11:00	
4:00	Practice ends	11:15	
4:15		11:30	

This doesn't have to be a complicated process and it need only take a few minutes at the end of the day.

Use your planner to accomplish this!

Improving Concentration

- **Study in a quiet place that is free from distractions and interruptions:** Try to create a space designated solely for studying.
- **Make a study schedule that shows what tasks you need to accomplish and when you plan to accomplish each task:** This will provide you with the structure you need for effective studying.
- **Try to study at the time of day you work best:** Some people work well early in the morning, others late at night. You know what works best for you.
- **Make sure you are not tired and/or hungry when you study:** Otherwise, you won't have the energy you need to concentrate. Also, maintain your physical fitness.
- **Don't try to do two tasks at the same time:** You won't be able to concentrate on either one very well. Concentration means focusing on one thing to the exclusion of all else.
- **Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks that you can complete one at a time:** If you try to complete a large task all at once, you may feel overwhelmed and may be unable to maintain your concentration.
- **Relax; it's hard to concentrate when you're tense:** It's important to relax when working on a task that requires concentration. Meditation is helpful to many students.
- **Clear your mind of worrisome thoughts:** Mental poise is important for concentration. You can get distracted by your own thoughts. Monitor your thoughts and prevent yourself from following any that take you off track. Don't daydream.
- **Develop an interest in what you are studying:** Try to relate what you are studying to your own life to make it as meaningful as possible. This can motivate yourself to concentrate.
- **Take breaks whenever you feel fatigued:** There is no set formula for when to take breaks. You will know when you need to take a break.

VCR³

A method for improving concentration:

- Visualizing
- Concentrating
- Relating
- Repeating
- Reviewing

Visualize: try to create word pictures in your head or create visual aids as you read or study information. Using your visual skills is one of the most effective ways to commit information to long-term memory.

Concentrating: try not to let your mind wander, stay focused. If you find yourself having trouble with this, take a short (two-five minute) break. For example, obviously reading a text book is harder to concentrate on than something you prefer to read, but try to approach a chapter knowing what you want to get from it, this will make it easier to concentrate on it.

Relating: connecting the information to something you already know or understand will assist you in filing or storing the information for easy retrieval.

Repeating: saying the information out loud to yourself or to a study partner facilitates its transfer to long-term memory. If the details of what you are reading become sketchy, reread the information. Memory experts agree that repetition is one of the strongest tools to increase the retention of material.

Reviewing: looking over the information is another form of repetition. The more you see and use the information, the easier it will be to remember it when the time comes to retrieve it.

Listening Skills

- **Be Cognitively Ready to Listen When You Come to Class:** Make sure you complete all assigned work and readings. Review your notes from previous class sessions. Think about what you know about the topic that will be covered in class that day.
- **Be Emotionally Ready to Listen When You Come to Class:** Your attitude is important. Make a conscious choice to find the topic useful and interesting. Be committed to learning all that you can.
- **Listen with a Purpose:** Identify what you expect and hope to learn from the class session. Listen for these things as your teacher talks.
- **Listen with an Open Mind:** Be receptive to what your teacher says. It is good to question what is said as long as you remain open to points of view other than your own.
- **Be Attentive:** Focus on what your teacher is saying. Try not to daydream and let your mind wander to other things. It helps to sit in the front and center of the class and to maintain eye contact with your teacher.
- **Be an Active Listener:** You can think faster than your teacher can speak. Use this to your advantage by evaluating what is being said and trying to anticipate what will be said next. Take good written notes about what your teacher says. While you can think faster than your teacher can speak, you cannot write faster than your teacher can speak. Taking notes requires you to make decisions about what to write, and you have to be an active listener to do this.
- **Meet the Challenge:** Don't give up and stop listening when you find the information being presented difficult to understand. Listen even more carefully at these times and work hard to understand what is being said. Don't be reluctant to ask questions.

Note Taking

Taking good notes is a three-stage process in which there are certain things you should do **before** class, **during** class, and **after** class. Here are the three stages of note taking and what you should do during each stage.

1. Get Ready to Take Notes (Before Class)

- Review your notes from the previous class session before you come to class. This will help you remember what was covered and get you ready to understand new information your teacher provides.
- Complete all assigned readings before you come to class. Your teacher will expect that you have done this and will use and build upon this information.
- Bring all note taking materials with you to class. Have several pens and pencils as well as your notebook.

2. Take Notes (During Class)

- Keep your attention focused on what your teacher is saying. Listen for "signal statements" that tell you what your teacher is about to say is important to write in your notes. Examples of signal statements are "The most important point..." and "Remember that..." Be sure to include in your notes information that your teacher repeats or writes on the board.
- Write quickly so that you can include all the important information in your notes. Do this by writing abbreviated words such as med for medicine, using symbols such as % for percent, and writing short sentences.
- Place a ? next to information you write in your notes but about whose meaning you are not sure.

3. Rewrite Your Notes (After Class)

- Rewrite your notes to make them more complete by changing abbreviated words into whole words, symbols into words, and shortened sentences into longer sentences.
- Make your notes more accurate by answering any questions you had when writing your notes in class. Use your textbook and reference sources to obtain the

information you need to answer your questions. If necessary, ask your teacher or other students for help.

- Check with other students to be sure you did not leave out important information.

General Hints about note taking

- **Use a loose leaf notebook for taking notes:** You can then remove or insert pages as needed. You cannot do this if you use a spiral notebook.
- **Write your notes on the front side of pages only:** This will allow you to lay the pages side by side when reviewing your notes for a test.
- **Write the date at the top of each page of your notes and number the pages:** This will help you to keep your notes in the proper sequence.
- **Keep your notes for each class separate from your notes for other classes:** You can use different color tabs to help you do this.
- **Be selective in what you write:** On average, the speaking speed of teachers is five to six times faster than the writing speed of students. Quite simply, do not try to write everything your teacher says.
- **Use abbreviations and symbols to increase your note taking speed.**
- **Don't be too concerned with spelling and grammar:** These notes are for your use and will not be graded.
- **Ask your teacher to repeat something you think you may have missed.**
- **As you write points made by your teacher, translate these points into your own words:** Doing this will increase your understanding of your notes and your ability to remember the information they contain.
- **If your teacher provides a definition for a word, write that definition in your notes word for word.**
- **Write legibly:** You will have to read your notes later on.
- **Include in your notes information your teacher writes on the board.**
- **Stay especially alert during the last few minutes of class.** Teachers sometime use the last few minutes to cram in everything they wanted to cover but didn't.

Reading Skills

You have to read so much for school, how do you stay focused and really get the necessary information from your textbooks? Here are some hints for accomplishing this task.

At the beginning of the school year, preview the book: read the contents page. The chapter headings will give you a clue as to what you will learn during the year. If there is a glossary and/or index at the end of the book, scan the pages to get more detail about what you will learn about during the year.

Reading an assigned chapter: the title and subheadings often give you a clue to the important ideas that will be covered in the chapter. Look at the illustrations and read the captions to get a fuller idea about the chapter. Are there graphs, charts, maps, diagrams? What do they show? Graphic aids can sum up some kinds of information more clearly than words can. Are there study questions at the end of the chapter? Look for the answers as you read.

What are you supposed to learn: did your teacher give you an assignment sheet, a comprehension questions, a graphic organizer? Before you begin reading, make sure you've got all the worksheets you need. Then fill them in as you read.

Underline, highlight, and write in the margins: if possible, write in the margins of your textbook and highlight important ideas, comments and questions. If you can't write in the book, write in a notebook and be sure to write the page number of the textbook to which this information applies.

Take notes: paraphrasing key concepts will help you figure out how well you understand what you're reading. Summing up the most important ideas will help you recall what you read.

Draw a picture: sometimes the best way to summarize information is by drawing a picture. Here's an example: if you're learning about photosynthesis, draw the sun and its rays hitting the leaf of a plant. Add details to show the process the plant uses to turn light energy into glucose, oxygen and water. You can draw diagrams to compare and contrast or to show cause and effect relationships, scale, a series of events, a complex system or a cycle.

Stop if you don't get it: if you don't understand a passage, reread it! Try to use the context; the words and sentences around the part you don't understand to figure it out. If you're still puzzled, decide how important that information is. If it's important, ask the teacher or another student to explain it to you.

As you read and after you're finished, ask yourself questions: try these; what main point is the author making? Does this information support the author's argument or contradict it? Why is this fact important to the author's overall message? What did I learn that I didn't know before? If somebody asked me to explain what I just read, could I?

Adjust your speed: is the material difficult to understand or packed with facts. Slow down and reread. Speed up if the material is familiar and easy to understand.

Ten Ways to Be Test Wise

To reduce test anxiety, add these strategies to your high school study skills.

- **Review your notes for about five minutes every night:**
Frequent review helps your brain store information in long-term memory.
- **Take notes on assigned readings:**
Organizing and summing up information helps you remember it.
- **Use mnemonic devices.** Words or rhymes can help you remember facts. For example, the word **HOMES** can help you recall the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- **Find out as much as you can about what the test will cover:**
Listen carefully for hints in the days before the test. Teachers often stress and review information that will be worth big points on a test.
- **Ask about the question formats:** Will there be multiple-choice questions? Short answers? Essays? Will you have to draw a diagram? A time line? Make up practice questions about the test material in the format you expect to encounter. Then answer them. If you're not sure what kind of questions will be on the test, assume you will have to write an essay. Pulling together the information necessary to answer an essay question will help you answer a question in any format
- **How important is the test?:** If it's a quiz worth a tiny fraction of your final grade, don't spend days studying for it. Set your priorities based on a test's importance to your grade.
- **Bring everything you need to the test:** For example, if you need a calculator, don't depend on your best buddy to have an extra.
- **Read the test directions carefully:** What does the question ask you to do? Compare and contrast? Show all your work? Give examples? Stick to what the question requires, no more and definitely no less.
- **Answer the easy questions first:** Your confidence will rise, and you can use that momentum as you focus on the harder questions.
- **Ask for help:** If you don't understand a question, ask your teacher to clarify it for you.

Managing Academic Stress

When you're stressed, it's hard to concentrate and keep to a study schedule. If you make these six tips part of your high school study skills plan, you will keep your stress level under control.

- **Eat healthy food:** Start the day with a healthy breakfast of whole grain toast or oatmeal, milk, yogurt, cheese, fruit, eggs, meat and you'll get better grades than students who skip breakfast or eat junk food.
- **Sleep:** Teenagers need eight to ten hours of sleep a night. You may not think you're tired, but if you are stressed, lack of sleep could be a major reason. Try this: for one week, sleep a full eight hours or more every night and notice how you feel. If you feel better, keep it up.
- **Study when you're most alert:** Schedule your study time when your energy is highest. If you know you feel sluggish from four to five in the afternoon but are energetic from seven to eight in the evening, study then.
- **Exercise:** Students who swim or jog regularly (at least twice a week) are less stressed, less anxious, less confused, and do better in school than students who don't exercise.
- **Laugh:** If you feel yourself stressing out (you can't focus, you're feeling panicky), take a break from studying. Go to a funny web site or watch a good sit-com for half an hour. Laughter can restart a stuck brain.
- **Ask for help when you need it:** If you are struggling in a subject, don't wait for the teacher to do something; stay after class and ask your teacher for help. Asking questions is the quickest way to defuse test anxiety and lessen stress.