

START HERE

Tesla STEM Academic Success Toolkit

Practical steps for getting unstuck, studying more effectively, and managing your workload.

1. What to Do When You're Struggling

First, figure out what is actually getting in the way. Then choose one next move.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?	TRY THIS NEXT
I do not understand it.	Go to teacher office hours. Bring the exact problem, direction, note, or concept where you got stuck.
It feels too big.	Find the smallest useful next step. Open the assignment, find the directions, or complete one piece.
I am worried I will not do it well.	Make a rough first attempt. Your job right now is to make something you can improve.
I cannot get started.	Try a 5-minute start or one focused work block. You do not have to feel motivated before you begin.
I keep getting distracted.	Change the environment: move your phone, close extra tabs, or block distractions for one work block.
I study, but it does not stick.	Stop only rereading. Close your notes and try to recall, explain, solve, or answer from memory.
I do not know what I need to study.	Practice without notes. Write missed ideas on a "Still Need to Know" list and start there next time.

2. Using Teacher Office Hours Effectively

- Get help with homework before you turn it in.
- Clarify class material, assignment expectations, or due dates.
- Ask how to practice or study effectively for that subject.
- Plan ahead for tests, essays, or large projects.
- Break a big project into smaller, more manageable pieces.

You do not need a perfect question.

Bring the problem where you got stuck, a question you missed, your study guide, or try: "I tried ____, but I get stuck here. Can you help me figure out my next step?"

Find your teacher: [Tesla STEM Staff Directory](#)

STUDY SMARTER

3. Study and Test Preparation Strategies

Study actively - not just longer

1. RETRIEVE IT

Close your notes and try to answer, explain, solve, draw, or recall from memory. Then check what you missed.

2. SPACE IT

Come back to the material across several study sessions instead of doing all of your studying at once.

Other useful ways to work with the material

- Use practice questions or a practice test to find weak spots.
- Teach the idea to someone else - or explain it out loud to yourself.
- Organize notes into a short guide, concept map, or flashcards - then use them to quiz yourself.
- Use a study space or study group that helps you focus.

Keep a “Still Need to Know” list.

When you miss a practice question or cannot explain something without notes, write it down. Start your next study session with that list instead of reviewing everything again.

How do I know I learned it?

Ask: “Can I explain or solve this without looking at my notes?” If not, identify what still needs practice.

Build a 3-day test plan

Use each day to plan, check yourself, and adjust.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO	TIME I WILL SPEND
3 days before	Find out what you already know and what needs the most work.	_____
2 days before	Practice from memory. Check mistakes. Update your “Still Need to Know” list.	_____
1 day before	Retrieve again. Focus on the items you still miss.	_____

After the test: use the result to improve your next plan

- What worked?
- What was not helpful?
- What will I change next time?

Test-taking strategies: [Cornell - How to Tackle Exam Questions](#)

More study strategies: [Cornell - How to Study](#)

MAKE THE WORK DOABLE

4. Time Management and Procrastination

Keep one planner - electronic or paper. Put assignments, tests, projects, and major commitments in one place. Check it every day and update it as plans change.

Before choosing a tool, identify the barrier. Different problems need different solutions.

WHAT IS THE BARRIER?	TRY THIS
I do not know what to do.	Clarify the task or ask your teacher.
The assignment feels too big.	Choose the smallest useful next step.
I am worried I will do it badly.	Make a rough first attempt. Improve it later.
I cannot make myself begin.	Use a 5-minute start or one focused work block.
My phone/browser keeps pulling me away.	Move it, mute it, or block it for the work block.
I work better around other people.	Work beside someone who is also working; agree on what you will finish before a break.
I mean to do it, but it never happens.	Make an If-Then plan tied to a specific cue.
I am overwhelmed by everything I am behind on.	Pick one priority. Do not make a giant catch-up plan first.

When your brain is making it harder to start

"I have to do this perfectly."	Try: "My job right now is to make something I can improve."
"I am going to fail."	Ask: "What can I control before the test?" Then choose one action.
"I am not motivated."	You do not have to feel motivated before you start. Try five minutes, then decide what is next.

Turn intentions into an If-Then plan.

IF _____, THEN I WILL _____.

Example: If it is 7:00 after dinner, then I will put my phone on the charger and do 10 practice questions at the kitchen table.

Need help getting started? Use a focused work block.

- Work for about 25-30 focused minutes, then take a short break.
- During the block, use an active strategy: solve, retrieve, quiz yourself, or explain.
- Make distraction harder: move your phone, turn off notifications, or close extra tabs.

If your schedule regularly requires you to stay up very late to keep up, treat that as a scheduling problem - not a sleep problem.

Reevaluate your priorities and commitments, and ask an adult for help making the workload more sustainable. Protecting sleep is part of the plan.

Focused work: [Pomodoro Technique](#)

Planning & organization: [Cornell - Managing Time](#)

TOOLS YOU CAN REUSE

5. Quick Tools and Resources

Pick the resource that matches the problem

I NEED HELP WITH...	START HERE
Teacher questions / office hours	Tesla STEM Staff Directory
Plan for a test	How to Study for the Test Worksheet
Plan for finals / multiple tests	Cornell: Five-Day Study Plan
Dense reading / comprehension	SQ3R Reading Strategies
Procrastination	Cornell: Break the Cycle of Procrastination
Digital distractions	UNC: Decreasing Digital Distractions
Focused work	University of Arizona: Pomodoro Technique
Actual focus timer	Tomato Timer
Study space	Creating an Effective Study Space
Stress / well-being support	Tesla STEM Social/Emotional Resources

Planning several tests or finals?

Use the table below to map each test: what needs practice, how you will practice, and when you will do it. Need help building a realistic schedule? [Cornell: Guidelines for Creating a Study Schedule](#)

TEST / DATE	WHAT NEEDS PRACTICE	HOW I WILL PRACTICE	WHEN
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Keep what actually helps you.

After trying a strategy, ask: Did this make it easier to start, focus, or learn? Keep what works. Change what does not. Ask for help early when you are stuck.

For Families: Sleep Is Part of Academic Success

Students cannot learn effectively if they are routinely sacrificing sleep to keep up with schoolwork and activities. Staying up late or pulling all-nighters can backfire: exhausted students are more likely to feel overwhelmed or anxious and have more difficulty focusing, remembering what they studied, and solving problems.

If your student is regularly working late into the night, look at the whole schedule - classes, extracurriculars, sports, work, volunteering, family responsibilities, and other commitments. **The answer may be to prioritize, reduce, pause, or say no to something - not simply to work later.**

Ask together: Is this schedule sustainable? What truly needs to be a priority right now? Is there anything to reduce or pause? Can we set a reasonable homework stopping time and protect sleep?

Academic success is not about fitting the maximum number of commitments into every day. Students need time to learn, recover, and sleep.