

Developing Study Skills for Success



Developing strong study skills is key to success in school. Parents can be influential in helping their children form good study habits that will support learning throughout the school years and beyond.

Getting Organized

-  Create a "study area" in the home, preferably at the beginning of the school year. Let your children choose a place they feel would be conducive to learning. Stock the area with supplies, such as a ruler, pens/pencils, computer, books, etc. The space should be well lit and free from major distractions.
-  Help your children write a daily and weekly schedule of homework assignments, tests, or other projects. By organizing this information, your children will learn how to plan and manage their time. For example, if they know they have a math test next Wednesday, they can plan to bring their math book home this Friday for studying over the weekend and the beginning of next week.
-  Teach them to prioritize tasks. At first, you may need to help them outline what they need to do, and when. For example, if they have a project due on Tuesday, and think it is a smart idea to start it on Monday, you may have to intervene gently and get them to revise the plan to allow for more work time.

A Few Words about Learning

Have you ever noticed that your children seem to know material right before a test, but then forget it at the time OF the test? Here is some information about how learning occurs and tips parents can use to help children learn:

○ Learning happens over time and with repetition.

Information is stored in one's **short term memory** - for a mere 20 seconds - when it is first presented. For long-term learning to occur, information has to move from **short-term** to **long term memory**. This happens when the material is **repeated** or practiced. The information children will remember depends greatly on how much they study it. If they read a chapter once, they will probably remember less than half of it by the next day. However, if they review the material over several days, they will retain much more. Also, when children continue to study *after* the material is supposedly learned (called "overlearning") they will likely remember much more.

❖ **Study Skills Tip:** Encourage your children to keep studying even after they feel they "know it all" - e.g., have them recite their spelling words one or two more times even after they have mastered the list. When studying for a test, have them start days ahead of time. Explain that cramming the night before is not very effective.

○ Understanding the big picture as well as facts & details are both important when learning.

The "big picture" is a broad understanding of a topic. Within the big picture are related facts and details that are also important. Just understanding the big picture is not enough, and facts/details are meaningless when they aren't incorporated into a broader framework. So, understanding both components when learning new material is *essential*.

❖ **Study Skills Tip:** Have your children review class notes and texts to get a "big picture" understanding of a topic and talk to your child about your knowledge on the subject. Making study cards can be effective in learning facts & details. One 3" x 5" index card could contain a single math formula, vocabulary word, historical fact, etc. While reading a chapter, have your children pull out and write specific details that might be important on the cards. They can use both sides; e.g. a word on one side, and the definition on the other. Teach them to study the cards frequently, over several days, until mastered. Encourage them to put the ones they have difficulty with in a separate pile for extra review later.

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A Few Words about Learning...continued

○ Learning happens if the material is meaningful to the student.

If material is meaningful, in that it relates to other areas or interests in your children's lives, they will understand and recall it more easily. For example, when learning about fractions, kids will probably be able to visualize "1/4" if reminded of the pizza the family ate one night; the one that was cut into eight slices, two slices per family member, or 1/4 of the pizza per person (in a family of four).

Facts will become more meaningful if your children see how those details are connected to other information, or the details' place in the "big picture." For example, when learning about Mt. Everest, your children will probably remember more if they see an atlas detailing where Mt. Everest is, read stories about the great mountain, and look at pictures from Mt. Everest- including ones of mountaineers ascending with all their high-tech gear.



❖ **Study Skills Tip:** Guide your children in making these meaningful connections. As for Mt. Everest, you could talk about why mountaineers use certain gear to ascend the peak, which could lead to a discussion about harsh weather conditions, the lack of oxygen found at high elevations, etc. Or, compare and contrast Everest to a local mountain your children may be familiar with, e.g. , Mt. Washington in neighboring New Hampshire is 6,288 feet high, while Everest is over 29,000 feet high - one can easily drive or hike to the summit of Mt. Washington, but not Everest. However, as mountains, they have something in common in that they are both products of geological forces. Parents can help their children make meaningful connections in all areas of study.

○ Studying hard in short spurts of time with frequent breaks can maximize learning.

Research has shown that children will learn more if they study for brief periods, with frequent breaks, than if they study for a long block of time.

❖ **Study Skills Tip:** Help your children set small, yet attainable goals for each 20-30 minute time block, such as "do eight math problems" or "read one section or chapter." After each short time block of continuous studying, encourage them to take a short break for about five minutes. This way, they are less likely to get tired or lose the ability to concentrate.

The "SQR3" Method of Studying and Learning

Survey: Before your children read a chapter/section, have them figure out what the main idea is. They can "survey" the section by reading the title; skimming the section; or reading the outline, introduction, key words off to the side, headings, etc. to do this.

Question: Your children will understand more of what they are reading and stay more focused if they are trying to answer a specific question. When using a textbook, teach your children to look at the questions at the end of each section or look at the heading to formulate their own. For example, if the heading is, "Mountains in North America" questions your children could ask themselves could be, "Where are the mountains in North America?" or "What are the Mountains in North America called?"

Read: Then, they should read the chapter with their question(s) in mind and continue reading until the question(s) can be answered. Make sure they make study cards along the way (see previous page)!

Recite: After reading and answering the question (s), encourage them to look away from the book, then try asking and answering the question(s) aloud. They should keep reading & reviewing until they can do this for each section.

Review: Children should review all materials, such as notes, study cards, and more.

✍ **Study Skills Tips:** Monitor what your children are doing and ask about their progress with their studies. Help them organize, make sure they understand what to do, demonstrate the above study skills, etc. Check up on the quality of their work and track their grades. Check for understanding by having your children explain a topic they learned about to you. Be positive and encouraging. Praise their efforts and accomplishments warmly.

Source: Dr. Mark C. Edwards, *Center for Effective Parenting*, 1999.