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Information Sheet 64

Successful study secrets for high school students

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Class tests, yearly exams and essays are frequent aspects of life as a high school student but achieving good results depends on study preparation.

Students know, and are often told, they should go to their room and study, but the act of studying can be elusive.

One of the most common statements parents of high school students make is that their child never reviews their work, doesn't study or doesn't know how to study. Students may reply that they have no homework and hence there is nothing to study or that they don't know what they are supposed to study.

In this article we will provide some practical tips and strategies for high school students with learning support needs on studying and how to be better prepared for class tests, yearly exams and essays.

Why study?

Studying for a class test or exam is different to routine school homework.

Homework refers to work set by the teacher for completion overnight and usually involves finishing an exercise or preparing for the next lesson.

Studying is separate from homework and is concerned with revising and remembering a topic in preparation for a test or exam.

For a class test based on one topic it is not too onerous to reread all of the notes from a school workbook as a review. However in a school exam, when there is a whole year's worth of work to review, it becomes a larger task and will mean that only one read can occur before the exam.

Study notes solve this problem. They summarise a whole section of a class workbook into one or two pages that can then be easily reviewed on a frequent basis. The more frequently the student reviews their study notes, the more likely this information will be stored into their long-term memory and be accessible during exams.

Reading study notes in a passive way and then going on with the afternoon or evening's activities is one form of studying, but there are better ways. Having some kind of active involvement with the study notes after they have been read will help cement this information into long-term memory and is a much more accurate test of whether the student knows and can use this information in a test situation.

Who should initiate study?

The student needs to start the process of studying in the first instance. They may need some help from their classroom teacher to re-explain or clarify anything unclear after the unit has finished. Parents can also assist by being an examiner during the review process.

When to study

It is best to start studying a topic as the topic is coming to a close. Often students need to have completed the unit of work at school before summaries can be created that include the whole topic.

What to study

Not everything covered at school needs to be prepared into study notes and revised. However, much of the work covered in high school will be tested in an exam and will need to be reviewed throughout the year. If in doubt, a student should ask their teacher what needs to be studied.

For Mathematics, important formulas and rules need to be summarised and reviewed on a regular basis. Although there are some great formula books available for purchase, for maximum

About us

Learning Links is a charity and non-profit children's learning organisation formed in 1972 by parents and professionals to help children with disabilities and learning support needs.

Our vision is of a community where all children and families have equal access to learning opportunities and quality support.

Our services

Children under 6

- Early childhood intervention for babies, toddlers and preschoolers with a disability or developmental delay.
- Assisting children with disabilities to transition to school.
- Speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.
- Mobile toy library service.
- An inclusive preschool.
- FREE story time sessions at Fairfield Library.

Children attending school

- Specialist assessments to determine your child's educational needs.
- Reading and maths support for children who are falling behind at school.
- Speech therapy and occupational therapy.
- Social skills and anxiety management groups.
- Transition to school groups.
- Counselling.

Parents, carers and families

- Case management services.
- Support to families who have just received a diagnosis of a disability for their child.
- Programs to help parents support their child's communication.
- A range of programs to develop parenting skills.
- Support groups for carers of children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition (MyTime).
- FREE program for parents living in Cabramatta on how to tutor children of preschool age (HIPPPY).

Workshops

Learning Links also delivers workshops for parents, carers and professionals working with children on a range of topic areas including ADHD, autism, behaviour, child development, children's learning, children's wellbeing, communication, counselling and fine motor skills.

Learning Links has services at various locations around Sydney. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, and some programs Australia-wide and in New Zealand. A complete list of locations and contact numbers is on the back page.

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benefit students should create their own notes with their own examples to have a memory of the work they have covered. Formula books and posters are a great way to supplement the student's own notes and will help them pick up anything they have missed.

For high school English, students are either tested on their ability to write in a variety of styles or their knowledge and understanding of a set text. For example, in class a student will learn how to write in a variety of text types such as newspaper articles, narratives or plays. In their exams they may be asked to write a newspaper article, but it will be about a different topic to that covered in class.

In later high school grades, texts such as novels, plays or poems are analysed more closely and essay questions about these texts will often appear in the exams. In these cases students should prepare text summaries that include information about characters, themes and language techniques.

These concepts are covered in English classes and students need to use this information to answer written questions.

For other school subjects the key content covered during the year will appear in a class test or school exam. As a topic is finished, study notes should be prepared and reviewed before the test or exam. If this is an ongoing subject, these notes may be required for subsequent exams or even later years, otherwise they have served their purpose for the current year.

How to study

1. Review the work covered in class at the end of a topic

Read notes from the school workbook or textbook. Check any information that is not clear with the class teacher.

2. Prepare study notes

Write or type important facts from school notes – use subheadings, list definitions, draw diagrams to summarise information, compose short sentences that summarise a whole paragraph of information.

Notes can be prepared on flashcards (paper or electronic versions), in exercise books, or typed on a computer.

3. Create study questions to match notes

For each line of study notes students should write a corresponding question to check their knowledge and allow them to engage with their study notes in an active way. Actual maths problems and their solutions can be created to test the child's understanding of formulas or rules. For example, Study note: Tutankhamun is the most famous pharaoh in Egypt because his tomb is the only one discovered to be intact; Question: Why is Tutankhamen the most famous pharaoh?

Creative study notes: Mind maps

Some students learn best using visual aids such as drawings, maps and pictures. Representing the material they need to study in a visual way can help these students immensely. Mind maps can be drawn by hand or using a variety of computer programs such as Mindset and Inspiration.

Creative study notes: Mnemonics

Rhymes, acronyms and sentences created to help students remember a range of frequently used facts are known as mnemonics.

Rhymes are good for spelling rules and students can try to turn any information they are learning into a rhyme. These rhymes don't have to make sense to anyone else but the student for example, "you hear with your ear".

Study notes format

Write sentences summarising important content.

Write a corresponding "Wh" question to lead you to this important information. This question will be used to check a student's knowledge of the content.

Who? _____

What? _____

Where? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

How? _____

Acronyms can help reduce a list of things to remember into something more manageable. Acronyms take the first letter of a number of pieces of information to create a word, usually not a real word. In Maths, for example, the trigonometric functions are remembered as SOHCAHTOA (sine opposite hypotenuse, cosine adjacent hypotenuse, tan opposite adjacent).

Lists of information can also be placed into a sentence to aid memory. Never Eat Soggy Weetbix, for example, is a way to remember the directions of the compass North, East, South and West.

Creative study notes: Stories

Related facts can also be turned into a story and by retelling the story in their minds out loud, or on paper, the student will easily recall these facts.

How can study notes be revised?

The more times a student reads their study notes, the greater the chance they will remember them.

Q&A

Students re-read their notes and ask themselves, or have someone else ask, the questions to check how much information they are remembering. Questions that were answered incorrectly, or took a long time to answer, should be reviewed the next day.

Review in different ways

Students who learn best aurally (listening to information) can read their study notes aloud, record it digitally by using a digital recorder, mobile phone, or a computer recording program and these can be listened to again.

The “speak” function on Microsoft Word and other programs available on handheld electronic devices can “read” study notes aloud to students.

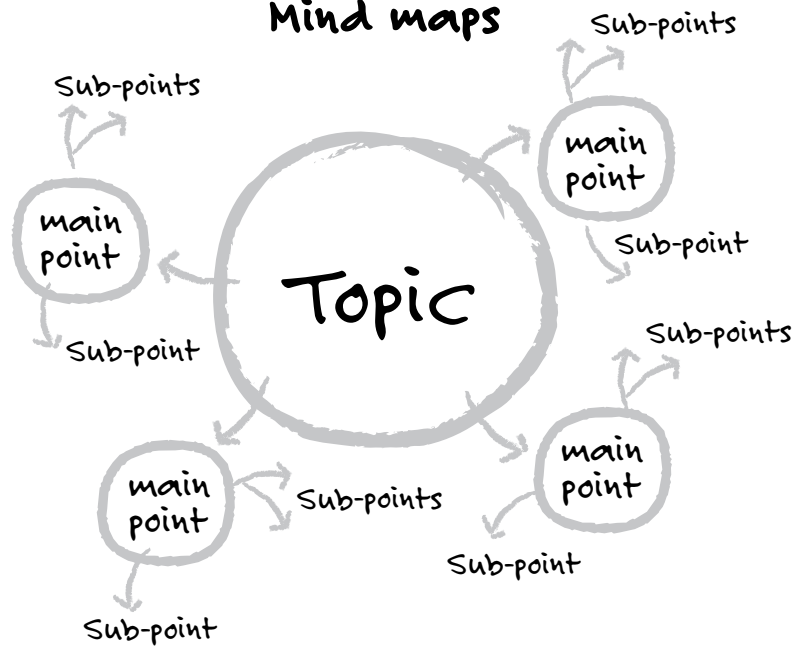
Practise papers

Practise papers should be used whenever they are available. Many schools keep past papers on their website to allow students to practise.

How do I motivate my child to study?

Most students will feel unmotivated to study at some point in their life. Here are a few tips for improving study or homework motivation.

Mind maps



A dedicated place

Good light, airflow and adequate space are needed for the ideal study space. Where possible, remove unnecessary distractions including magazines, television noise or mobile phones.

Always ensure all study materials including books, pens, dictionaries or computers are in the study area prior to commencing study. Searching through the school bag in the middle of study time can be distracting and frustrating.

A dedicated time

Negotiate with your child on finding a regular study time. Extra-curricular activities, dinner time and even favourite television programs will need to be considered. Some teenagers will prefer to come home and commence study right away, whilst others may require a break first.

Regular breaks are also very important. A quick break every 15-20 minutes is a good way to maintain concentration. This break could involve getting something to drink, stretching, doing 10 star jumps or listening to a favourite song.

Goals and rewards

Work with your child to create study goals and rewards. It’s easier to feel motivated when there is a clear target to aim for and relevant rewards for achievement. Goals should be short, medium or long term. Below are some examples of goals and rewards but remember these will vary for each individual child and family.

A positive approach

If your child is struggling with study, remind them that it is normal to have this difficulty and try to help them pinpoint exactly what he or she is finding difficult. If you are able to find the core problem, you can brainstorm solutions together or help them to identify the best place or person to help them further.

Other strategies for helping your child to stay positive about study include the following:

- Teach them to remember their past successes. This can often improve mood and remind children, and adults, that the task at hand is not impossible and they have succeeded before.
- Suggest visualising in their mind the next few steps to take. Prior to study time, they might close their eyes and imagine going to their study space, getting their books ready and having a successful study session.
- Everything counts. Remind your child that every sentence they read or word written counts and will contribute to their success.
- Keep it in perspective. If you hear your child saying “I can’t do ANYTHING,” or “Everything sucks,” remind them that this topic is just one topic out of one subject and it does not mean they are bad at every topic and every subject. You may even remind them that school is one part of their life and that they still have family, friends and other extracurricular activities. Sometimes parents need to remember this too!



Addressing test anxiety

Knowing that they have prepared for a test is the best way to reduce a student's test anxiety. Remind your child prior to an exam that they have prepared as well as they could have. Some children and adolescents suffer from significant test anxiety and visiting a counsellor can help.

Good luck!

Learning to study is an important skill for all students to learn. It requires active learning throughout the school year and not just at test time.

Reviewing and summarising topics on a regular basis helps save time and energy at final exam time. Using creative learning and memory techniques can also be a fun and effective way to study.

For parents, providing a dedicated study area, encouraging goal setting and following through on rewards will further encourage your child to study.

A positive attitude towards learning in general and a realistic balance between schoolwork and other life commitments will reduce the anxiety and distress too often associated with study. With a little support, both parent and teenagers can embrace learning and stay happy.

Goals and rewards

Goals (from small to big)	Reward
I will complete 4x15 minutes of study from 4pm to 5.15pm.	After every 15 minutes of work there is 2 minutes of free time. At 5:15pm, when the goal has been met, there should be a larger reward such as the commencement of a favourite TV program, phone or gaming time.
I will complete summarising Chapter 8 by Sunday 9 October.	Permission to visit a friend, see a movie or attend a family dinner.
I will complete all Chapters (1-10) before the exam on Wednesday 1 November.	I will feel prepared and more confident about the test. I will feel less anxious about the test. An additional reward to recognise this achievement is also suitable.
To become a teacher.	If I study hard at school, it means I may get into University and be able to be a teacher when I am older. I will feel proud and happy.



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