It Takes Skills
Learning How to be a Better Student
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## Resources
- The Study Skills Handbook by Judith Dodge
- Writer’s Express written and compiled by Dave Kemper, Ruth Nathan, and Patrick Sebranek
- The Educated Child by William J. Bennett, Chester E. Finn Jr., and John T.E. Cribb Jr.
- Making the Grade Learning Adventures for Your Family by the staff at Score@Kaplan
- Instructor Magazine
- World Book Encyclopedia
It takes skills—and hard work!

Inventor Thomas Edison once said that genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration. “There is no substitute,” he added, “for hard work.”

Those words ring true today, especially when it comes to school. You don’t have to be the smartest kid in class, as long as you have good work habits and strong study skills.

In this special supplement, you’ll learn all about those work habits and study skills. From getting organized to preparing for and taking tests, we’ll provide the information you need to succeed — in school AND in life.

The ways we learn

You’ve probably noticed by now that people learn in different ways. One classmate might have a mathematical way of perceiving the world, while you might be more “hands on.”

The experts have noticed this, too, and in recent years they’ve come up with seven types of intelligence that determine the ways people learn. Take a look at the “seven smarts” and see where you fit in.

1. Verbal/linguistic — You know the type; it’s the person who always has his “nose in a book.” People with verbal/linguistic intelligence love word games and puzzles, too, and most likely enjoy writing.

2. Logical/mathematical — People who think in clear, logical ways and enjoy analyzing problems and situations possess this kind of intelligence. They love brain teasers and are always curious about the natural world.

3. Visual/spatial — This type of intelligence includes a sensitivity to color and imagery as well as a sense of space and spatial relationships. People who possess visual/spatial intelligence usually love to doodle and draw, are good with maps, and prefer geometry over algebra.

4. Body/kinesthetic — “Hands-on” intelligence can be found in many types of people, including dancers, athletes, and inventors. They are usually confident in their movements and are well coordinated.

5. Musical/rhythmic — People who have a good sense of rhythm and can sing along or imitate a song they have heard have strong musical/rhythmic intelligence.

6. Interpersonal — People who exhibit the ability to get along, communicate, and work together with others are said to have interpersonal intelligence. They are usually involved in many activities and are often the leaders in social situations.

7. Intrapersonal — Those of us who are self-reliant, independent, and enjoy solitude most likely have strong intrapersonal intelligence. These type of learners are self-directed and have well-defined goals in life.

— Adapted from Making the Grade Learning Adventures for Your Family, by the staff at Score@Kaplan

Learning with the newspaper

While you won’t find the answers to tomorrow’s math test in today’s newspaper, you will find lots of other information. And, believe it or not, it’s information that will help you in school!

The newspaper is the ideal study companion for students of all ages. In addition to helping you find out more about the world, reading the newspaper enhances nearly every basic academic skill you are expected to learn.

As you complete this study on, uh, studying, be sure to have your newspaper handy. We’ll show you just how easy it is to learn how to learn through the pages of your newspaper.
First things first: Get organized!

If there’s one thing good students have in common, it’s being organized. There are exceptions to the rule, of course. But even those who seem to be in a constant state of disarray very likely have a method to their “madness.”

Good organizational skills might include keeping your desk and bookbag orderly, recording your assignments in a journal, and having a set time and place to study. Such steps not only make it easier for you to keep track of things (like your homework!), they can help you improve your study habits, too.

Organizing your study time

There is a time and place for everything, the saying goes, and that’s especially true for studying. Determining when and where you study is one of the most basic organizational skills you can acquire.

For starters, find a quiet place to study each day. At home, it should be free from distractions and should have adequate lighting. At school, go to the library or find a study nook in your classroom.

Equip your study area with the supplies you’ll need: pencils, paper, dictionary, thesaurus, etc. Keep them in a special container or in a designated drawer or cabinet.

Make sure you sit in a comfortable, upright chair. Never study while lying down; it’s too easy to fall asleep.

When choosing a study time, think about when you are the most alert. Then plan ahead — a week at a time if possible.

Be flexible. You can usually count on doing half an hour of homework for each class period. But if you are having trouble with a subject or it’s getting close to test time, you’ll need to spend more time studying.

Never wait until the night before a test to study. Instead, study regularly throughout the school year. You will remember more about a subject soon after it’s presented in class than you will if you try to “cram” it all in the night before.

Divide your study time into 20- to 30-minute periods, with short breaks in between. Stretch, get a snack, walk around the block — anything to help you feel refreshed.

Organizing your thoughts

If organizing your study time makes it easier to study, then wouldn’t organizing your thoughts make it easier to think?

Not surprisingly, the answer is YES! Every task is easier when you are organized.

In Writer’s Express, A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners, the authors provide this seven-step process for becoming a more organized thinker:

1. Be patient. Answers to every question and solutions to every problem don’t always come easily. Good thinking takes time.

2. Set goals. Again, decide what you want to accomplish now and later.

3. Think logically. Look at all sides of a question and support your thoughts with good reasons, examples, and facts.

4. Ask questions. Like a good newspaper reporter, ask questions about everything — what you hear, what you read, what you see. Remember the five W’s of newspaper reporting: who, what, when, where, and why. They come in handy when studying, too.

5. Think about your thinking. As you think and work, make changes if necessary. (Slow down, speed up, back up, etc.)

6. Write things down. Jotting down your thoughts can help you think more clearly.

7. Use organizers. Lists, outlines, and graphics are all effective ways to organize your thoughts.
Organizing your life

Good organizational skills can be applied to every aspect of your life, whether you’re planning a birthday party or trying to maintain a hectic daily schedule. Setting goals and time management are two of the skills that can help you keep things running smoothly. When your life is running smoothly, chances are you’ll do better in school.

**Setting Goals**

Have you ever heard, “No one plans to fail. They just fail to plan?” Those words sum up nicely the importance of having a plan whenever you set out to accomplish something.

Before you can have a good plan, though, you have to set goals. And the key to setting — and attaining — goals is to be realistic. Don’t expect to learn to play the piano in a day. Set step-by-step goals that are possible to achieve. And remember: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

Finally, be sure to reward yourself when you achieve your goals. Positive reinforcement will encourage you to work even harder the next time.

**Time Management**

If you constantly put things off to the last minute or can’t remember where you have to be and when, then you need to learn a few basic time management skills.

First, try making “to do” lists each day. Jot down the things you NEED to do, then prioritize them. Don’t make the mistake of overburdening yourself with too many things. You might also make a reminder list — one for home and one for school.

Second, keep a calendar. It will help you schedule long-term projects and important events and activities while still leaving time for studying.

Third, learn to break down big jobs into little ones. If you have to give a speech in class, determine how long you have to complete the speech. Then assign yourself a set amount of time each day to prepare. Working a few minutes every day for a week is better than three or four hours the night before the speech is due.

In writing, describe the place where you study after school. Check your description against the suggestions listed in this guide under “Organizing your study time.” Assign your study place a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F. With your parents, discuss improvements you need to make, then make them.

Now, find a lengthy article in today’s newspaper. Take the article to the place where you study and read it through once. Without referring back to the article, write down the five W’s of the story: who, what, when, where, and why. Were you able to concentrate enough to remember the details? How important was your study time and place in helping you concentrate on the assignment? Discuss.

Using information found in your newspaper, plan a weekly schedule for your favorite comic strip character. Be sure to include study time, chores, TV time, sports activities, entertainment, and anything else your character might need or want to do each day during the week. When you’re finished, put your newfound time management skills to work and create a weekly schedule of your own.

Find a story in your newspaper’s sports section about a team that needs to improve its game. Imagine that you are the coach and come up with a game plan to help the team get better before the next competition. How much “study” time do the players need? How much “homework” should they do? Write out your game plan and share it with the class. For discussion: How is practicing for a game like studying for a test?

Long before you learned how to read and write, you learned how to think. You learned how to understand, which goes beyond recalling what you know and requires you to show you understand it well enough to talk or write about it. And you learned how to apply information, or use what you’ve learned.

Now, you’re learning more sophisticated ways of thinking. You’re learning to analyze, which means to study information carefully. You’re learning to synthesize, or use what you already know to create new information. And, you’re learning to evaluate, which requires you to judge or defend what you have learned.

For this activity, you will use the newspaper to demonstrate these different ways of thinking. Ask your teacher to select a lengthy newspaper story for the class to read. Then, with a partner, test each other on your abilities to recall, understand, and apply information from the story. As a bonus activity, demonstrate your abilities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information in the story. Be prepared to explain your thoughts.
Play to Win

Tips to help you make the grade

When you do your homework, be flexible! Count on a half an hour of homework for each class period. But if you’re having trouble with a subject, give yourself extra time to work it out. And definitely plan on spending more time studying when test time rolls around.

It’s OK to take breaks when you’re studying. After 20 or 30 minutes of study time, stretch, get a snack, walk around the block, or, uh — play a quick game of marbles.

Studying for a test is like preparing for a game. Take time to get prepared, come up with a game plan, then practice, practice, practice!
Whether you're learning to play the violin or studying for a big test, practice makes perfect! Don't wait until the night before the test (or your recital!) to study. Study a little bit every night.

Studying is a team effort! Find a study buddy — help you review material for a test, to plan a special browse the Internet for a research assignment. Friends are great for bouncing ideas around with, too.
Let’s study!

Don’t you just hate studying? Isn’t it enough that you have to spend six or seven hours a day in class?

Whoa! Now that we have your attention, let’s back up a minute.

While it’s possible that you might not like to study, it’s a known fact that time spent in class is NOT enough time for you to learn everything you need to learn. Even the most able students cannot accomplish what needs to be accomplished within the confines of the traditional school day.

That’s why you have homework, special projects, and study assignments. To be the best student you can be, you have to devote a little extra time to the learning process.

Besides that, you don’t have to hate studying and working hard. Once you “learn how to learn,” you might actually look forward to your study time each day. One thing’s for sure, you’ll like the end result.

Reading to remember

The studying process usually begins when you read, and often it involves reading chapters in a textbook. Whatever the source of your study materials, the key is to read to remember. And the key to remembering is to concentrate.

Concentrating is easy when you’re interested in what you’re reading. But when it’s a subject that causes your eyes to glaze over, focusing on what you’re reading can be difficult. To increase your abilities to concentrate on your reading, consider these tips:

■ First, get prepared. Set the right mood, pick the best time, and find a quiet, well-lit place to read.

■ Then find an angle that interests you. Think about what you know and what you want to know about the topic. Consider how the information might affect you or someone you know. And look for ways you can use the information.

■ Ask questions. Do what good reporters do: Think of a list of questions about your assigned topic. Then try to find the answers as you read. Question yourself, too. Stop and ask, “Do I understand what I’ve just read?” “What’s the main idea?” If it helps, underline the main idea and important details and make notes that you can review later.

■ While you’re reading, read at a rate that fits the difficulty of the material. If it’s a more difficult topic, slow down so you can concentrate better. Speed up in areas that are easier to understand.

■ Finally, take breaks. A good rule of thumb is to divide your study/reading time into 20- to 30-minute periods with breaks in between.

Get ‘involved’
The best way to retain information is to get involved with it. For example, describe or explain what you’re learning to a parent or friend. Make an outline, chart, map, or diagram of the text you’re reading. Create a study review chart or make lists of important facts. Visualize the time and place in which an event took place. The more you engage the information you’re studying, the more you’ll learn!
Get it down in writing

When a reporter interviews someone for a story, he’s not expected to remember everything that was said. He has to take notes. By the same token, you can’t remember everything you hear in class. You should take notes, too.

In fact, note-taking is one of the most useful and important tools in the studying process. It increases your concentration, helps you organize and process information, and helps you retain that information.

It doesn’t matter which note-taking strategy you use, as long as you get the most important ideas down. Here are a few suggestions:

- Listen carefully!
- Write as neatly as possible.
- Jot down the main ideas — not every single word.
- Use abbreviations and symbols to help you get the information down quickly.
- Organize your notes so they’ll be easy to review.
- Read over your notes and recopy any that are difficult to read.
- Circle words or ideas that you are unclear about and highlight those that you consider the most important.
- At home, review your notes and fill in any missing information. If rewriting the notes helps you retain the information, do it!

Listen up!

Did you know that when you’re in school you spend more time listening than you do speaking, reading, and writing combined? That’s why it’s important to be a good listener.

Listening involves more than hearing the noises and sounds around you. It involves making sense out of those noises and sounds. Listening is thinking about what you hear.

So, next time you are told to “Listen up!” remember these hints:

- Listen with a good attitude.
- Keep your mind active when you’re listening — take notes!
- Avoid distractions.

A good listener:
- Looks at the speaker.
- Never talks or does other things.
- Can repeat what is said.
- Follows directions.
- Thinks along with the speaker.
- Pay attention to the speaker’s body language. Listening involves hearing what is said but also seeing how it is said.
- Think about what is not said as well as what is said. Listen for the speaker’s tone of voice.
- Try to relate to what is being said.
- Listen for the main ideas and key words.
- Make a mental picture of what you hear.

- w/ = with
- @ = at
- w/out = without
- intro = introduction
- cont. = continued
- gov’t = government

Practicing your listening skills and your note-taking abilities at the same time with this activity: Ask your teacher to read a lengthy newspaper article aloud to the class. Listen carefully and jot down the main idea(s) and details. (Don’t forget your shorthand.) When the teacher is finished reading, write a summary of the story.

You can further practice your listening and note-taking skills by role-playing an interview with a partner. One of you will assume the identity of a historical or present-day figure you are studying, and the other will be a reporter assigned to interview this famous person. (You can switch roles later.) After you have conducted the interview, write a story from your notes.
An ounce of prevention: Preparing for and taking tests

Do you suffer from test anxiety?

Do cold chills run down your spine at the mere sound of the word “test?” Or do you experience extreme panic the night before a big exam?

Whatever the symptoms, the anxiety that often accompanies tests can be bothersome at best and debilitating at worst. Unfortunately, there is no cure. But there is something you can do to control this malady. A little preventive medicine is proven to keep the doctor — and poor test performance — away.

Rx for test success

While you might not suffer from full-blown test anxiety, it’s likely you feel some apprehension before a test. A healthy regimen of study and preparation will not only ease that apprehension, it will help you do your best work when you are put to the test.

Consider these tips:

■ Know when the test is scheduled and what it will cover.

With the exception of pop quizzes, teachers usually give you advance warning about a test. As soon as she schedules a test, write it down on your calendar or in your assignment book.

At the same time, make sure you are clear about what the test will cover and which materials you will need to study. Don’t be afraid to ask what kind of test it will be (multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, essay, etc.). And keep track of all the material — handouts, homework assignments, quizzes, and notes — that will be covered on the test. The more information you have, the better prepared you’ll be.

■ Review, review, review.

The best thing you can do to prepare for a test is to study — regularly and thoroughly. Don’t wait until the night before the test. Set aside time to study every night for a week before the test.

During classroom review, listen for clues about some of the things that might be on the test. You can tell what the teacher considers to be most important by paying attention to topics discussed in class, information copied on the board, and the types of questions asked.

At home, review all your material, not just the textbook. As you review, recite the most difficult information out loud or talk it over with a parent or friend.

■ Practice and drill.

A little old-fashioned repetition goes a long way in helping you remember some kinds of information, such as math facts, spelling words, and important ideas. Anticipate the questions that might be on the test, then drill yourself on the answers. You might also take a practice test — one you write yourself. Come up with questions you think might be on the real test, then practice answering them. If you have a study partner, give each other practice tests.
The long and short of testing

Aside from those standardized tests that come along every once in a while, there are basically two types of tests. One is the long-answer test and the other is the short-answer.

The long-answer test is also known as the essay test and is usually more challenging. Such tests are designed to check your understanding of a subject and include questions that ask you to compare and contrast, define, describe, explain, prove, and/or list. To study for an essay test, you should review the facts and look for cause-and-effect relationships.

The short-answer test is also called the objective test and comes in many forms: true/false, multiple choice, matching, and fill in the blanks. This type of test examines your knowledge of facts, details, and main ideas.

To study for a short-answer test, you should review the who, what, when, and where of a topic. Who was the 16th president of the United States? When was he elected? Where did he give his most famous address? What were his most important accomplishments?

Test-taking tips

Everyone needs a strategy (or two or three) for test-taking success. See which ones work best for you:

- As soon as you receive the test, look it over to see what's in store. Then budget your time. You don't want to get stuck on one question or problem.
- Read the directions carefully.
- During the test, read each question carefully, underlining or circling key words if necessary. Make sure you know what each question is asking.
- Skip over questions that seem more difficult to answer, then come back to them after you’ve answered the others.
- Write each answer neatly.
- If you have time, go back over your answers. Check for careless mistakes, correct your spelling and punctuation, and make sure your answers include all the necessary information.

Show your work

When you take math and science tests, it’s a good idea to show your work. Even if the final answer is wrong, you might get partial credit for demonstrating your knowledge of the procedures involved.

Activities

- Assume the identity of a newspaper advice columnist. Write a letter of advice to someone who wants to know how to prepare for a test.
- There’s going to be a test. In one week, you will be tested on one section of the newspaper — the sports section, the comics, the entertainment section, etc. Plan a study strategy for the test, then start studying. Have a classmate test your newspaper knowledge. How effective was your study strategy? Discuss your thoughts with the class.
- Find a newspaper article for a partner to read. Then write a short-answer test for your partner to take after he or she “studies” the article. Be sure to include multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and matching questions.
- With a partner or in small groups, design a newspaper ad that promotes the importance of test preparation. Beforehand, discuss your target audience (the people you’re trying to reach) and research the advertising techniques listed below to see which one(s) would be most appealing to that audience:
  - Attention-getters
  - Slogans
  - Testimonials
  - Product comparisons
  - Product characters
- Ask your teacher to read a newspaper article about a serious issue in your community. Discuss the article, then create an essay question about the issue involved. Exchange questions with a classmate, and write an answer to the question you’re given, using facts and details from the article to support your thoughts.