Dear Students,

When you get good grades, your parents, relatives, and teachers are proud of you, school is more fun, and most importantly, you feel good about yourself. Whether you are an A student, or a student who only dreams of getting As, this book can help you improve your grades.

Linda O'Brien

Throughout this book you will find quotes from high school juniors John, Maria, Kate, Brad, Greg, Sarah, and Marcus. These students have some great tips and advice for you!

How to Get Good Grades in Ten Easy Steps

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What Kind of Student Are You?

Put check marks in the spaces that best describe you.

1. I complete homework assignments.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

2. I have everything I need with me when I go to class (book, pencils, paper).  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

3. I use the time teachers give us in class to start on my homework.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

4. I take good notes.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

5. I ask and answer questions in class.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

6. I know how to memorize information.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

7. After reading an assignment in a textbook, I know what I’ve read.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

8. I’m good at finding information online.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

9. I get along well with my teachers.  
   - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

10. I am good at taking tests.  
    - Almost Always  - Sometimes  - Hardly Ever

Give yourself 2 points for each Almost Always, 1 point for each Sometimes, and 0 for each Hardly Ever response. **Your Score**

What Your Score Means

16 - 20 points: You are a good student. This book will be mostly a review for you. It could, however, help you raise your grades even higher.

11 - 15 points: You are a student who could be getting better grades. With this book, you will definitely be able to improve your grades.

6 - 10 points: Your grades probably aren’t very good. This book can help you change that. It could even change how you feel about school.

0 - 5 points: Your grades need serious improvement. Don’t give up. This book can help you turn your grades around.

Regardless of your score, this book can help you improve your grades!

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Step One
Believe in Yourself

“To succeed, we must first believe that we can.” — Michael Korda, Author

In order for you to succeed, you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. Here’s a little story to help illustrate this idea.

Two high school athletes are preparing to compete against each other. They are the same size, and they have about the same athletic abilities. Everyone assumes that it will be an exciting match.

The first athlete runs out. He looks confident, and as he waits, he warms up and stretches. The people nearby hear him say to himself, “I’m ready. I can do this.”

The second athlete appears. He slowly shuffles out with his head down, and as he waits, he fidgets with his watch. Those nearby hear him mutter, “I’m gonna get killed.”

Two athletes, same size, same abilities… Even before the competition begins, everyone knows who’s going to win.

Whether you’re an athlete preparing for competition or a student tackling a difficult subject, it’s important that you believe in yourself. You need to recognize the talents and abilities you have, and you must believe that you can succeed!

In the grid below, list the courses that you are currently taking. Then in the “Grade” column, write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course this grading period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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Think of these grades as your academic goals for this grading period. Believe in yourself, and believe that you can achieve your goals!
Step Two
Be Organized

If you're organized, you have what you need when you need it. This section will give you a number of ideas on how to be organized. Of course, you must determine what works best for you.

Use a student planner. Take a student planner with you to every class and record each assignment under the date it’s given. Also write down the date each assignment is due. When an assignment is completed, check it off. Use your planner to also keep track of test dates and activities.

"When I look at my student planner at the end of the day, it reminds me of which books I need to take home." Maria

"Using a planner helps me get things done on time so that I'm not turning assignments in late." John

Break down assignments. Large assignments are much easier to do if you break them down into smaller parts. For example, if you have an English paper that's due at the end of the week, you could give yourself these four assignments.

- Mon. — Do research
- Tues. — Do outline
- Wed. — Write first draft
- Thurs. — Finish paper

After you break a large assignment down, write the smaller assignments in your planner. This will help make sure that you do your big assignments over a period of time, not at the last minute.

Use three-ring notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because handouts can easily be inserted, and if you do miss a class, you can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong. If you purchase a 3-hole punch and keep it in your notebook, you can hole punch your handouts in class and put them in your notebook as soon as you get them.

Use folders for schoolwork. Have a different colored pocket folder for each class. In these folders, keep your current assignments, along with returned assignments and tests. When a folder starts to get full, throw out the papers you don't need, and put the papers you want to keep in a file at home.

Have phone numbers for classmates. Make sure that you have a phone number for at least one person in each class. If you're absent or have a question about an assignment, you'll then have someone to call.

Keep your locker and backpack neat. Never stick loose or folded papers inside books, your backpack, or your locker. Always put them in the correct folder or notebook. Keeping your locker and backpack neat, clean, and organized makes it much easier to locate materials.

Get organized before you go to bed. Each night, put completed homework in the right folders and get everything organized for the next day. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, leave yourself a note.
Step Three
Manage Your Time Well

With good time management, you have time for the things you need to do, and you still have time for the things you want to do.

Use class time and study halls. Always use the time teachers give you in class to ask questions, start on homework, or get help.

“If I use my study hall and the time teachers give us in class, I don’t have nearly as much homework to do at night.” Marcus

Create your own study plan. Some students study best at night; others like to study earlier in the day. While it’s good to have a regular time to study every day, many students have sports, activities, or other responsibilities they need to work around.

At the end of each school day, look at how much homework you have, consider the time you have available, and develop a study plan.

Eliminate disruptions. Identify anything that could interrupt or ruin your study plan. Then figure out how to eliminate or avoid it.

“I used to get interrupted by phone calls. Now I tell my friends not to call until 9:00—just make sure that my homework’s done by then.” Kate

“I can’t start watching TV until I have all of my homework done. If I turn on the TV, my homework probably won’t get done.” John

Step Four
Be Successful in Class

If you follow the advice in this section, you’ll enjoy school more and you’ll get better grades.

Be in school every day, on time. When you miss school, you miss class presentations, notes, discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn’t matter how good you are about making up your work, you can never make up all of what you miss, even if you’re out of school for only one day. To get good grades, you must be in school every day.

Unless you have an extended illness or a serious health problem, you should miss no more than a few days of school a year.

Learn how to adapt to different teachers.

In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and they make the rules. You might have one teacher who counts tardy if you’re not in your seat when the bell rings, and another teacher who considers you on time if you have one foot inside the door. It doesn’t matter whether or not you agree with the first teacher’s rule; it only matters that you are in your seat when the bell rings.

Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different sets of rules, personalities, and teaching styles.

“It’s really important to know what your teachers want and how they grade. Do they want you to ask questions? Do they give points for participation? Do they grade homework?” Brad

Be prepared for each class. Have everything you need with you when you go to class (books, paper, pencils). Also have all of your homework done. When you’ve done your homework, you get more out of the class, the material being taught makes more sense, and you can participate in discussions.

Being prepared also means that you come to class well rested and ready to learn.
Know how you’re doing. If your teachers post grades online, check them often. If they don’t, keep your own record of your homework, quiz, and test grades for each class.

Be aware of your body language. This counselor’s story illustrates the importance of body language.

“One day a student named Jason complained to me that his English teacher always picked on him. Jason told me that he never talked out in class, he always did his homework, and that he did everything his teacher asked him to do.

The following week, I went into Jason’s English class to talk about scheduling. Jason, who was sitting in the back, never spoke out of turn, never talked to his neighbors, and he did everything he was supposed to do. Nevertheless, as my presentation went on, I became more and more irritated with him. Why? Because of his body language.

Throughout the period, Jason would look at his friends and roll his eyes, or he’d slump his shoulders, let his head drop back, and then he’d sigh. Jason’s behavior was clearly saying to me, “This is stupid and boring, and I don’t want to do this.” I found Jason’s behavior distracting and annoying. Of course, I also found out why Jason and his English teacher weren’t getting along.

The next day I called Jason into my office and explained to him what I had observed the previous day. Jason was truly surprised that I had even noticed him in the class.” — Ms. Johnson

What Jason didn’t understand is that when teachers are up in front of a classroom, they see everything. They know who is paying attention, who’s taking notes, and who is listening to the class discussion. They also know who is doing homework for another class, writing personal notes, daydreaming, and “napping” (even when students think they have their hands and books set up to hide it).

If you choose to do these things, don’t kid yourself into thinking that your teachers don’t notice, even if they don’t say anything. Teachers notice, and they just assume that you don’t care about what’s going on in their class. If you want to get good grades, make sure this is the message your body language is sending. Sit up straight, be alert, and look at your teachers when they are talking.

Always do your homework. Don’t look at homework as something you should do. Think of homework as something you must do. Since a large portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Complete all of your homework on time and, whenever possible, do extra credit work.

“If you don’t do your homework, it kills your grade!” — Brad

Have good computer skills. More and more teachers are using technology in the classroom, and they expect their students to be able to locate information online. If you’re struggling with technology, talk to your teacher and get some help. Don’t let your lack of computer skills hurt your grades.

Be a good group member. Knowing how to work well in a group is a very important skill. Whether you’re working on a school project, involved in an extracurricular activity, or working at a job, you need to be able to get along with the other people in the group.

Whenever you’re involved in a group project, do the following:

1) Do your share of the work and do it well.
2) Try to be open to new ideas.
3) Support the other members of the group.

Participate in class. Participating in class makes the class more interesting. It also helps keep your mind focused. Get involved in class discussions, and ask and answer questions. Many teachers give participation points, so participating can also help you get a better grade.

“If I tune out, the class goes on forever. If I participate, the time goes a lot faster.” — John

Treat others with respect. Treat your teachers and classmates the same way that you want to be treated. Be polite, look at your teachers when they’re speaking, and listen when others are talking. Also, be very aware of your tone of voice. The same words, in a different tone of voice, can communicate a very different message.
involve your parents. When your parents ask what you did in school, tell them something about your day. For example, “Well, in English we started reading this new book about...” Your parents will like the fact that you’re talking to them about what’s going on in school.

A good way to involve your parents is to ask them for help every once in awhile. You could, for example, ask a parent to read over a paper you have written, listen to a speech, or help you study for a test. You’ll get better grades, and your parents will see that you’re really trying to do well in school.

If you ever have a problem with a teacher, class, or another student, let your parents know. They can help you deal with any situation.

Take responsibility for your grades. If you get a good grade on an assignment or test, be proud of your accomplishment. If you receive a poor grade, don’t make excuses. Take responsibility for your grade and then figure out how you can get a better grade the next time.

Always do your own work. You’ll learn more, and your grades will be something that you can really be proud of.

Step Five
Take Good Notes

Tests usually cover material that has been presented in class. It is, therefore, important to have good notes from which to study.

Be an active listener. In order to take good notes, you must pay attention and actively listen to what your teacher is saying.

Kylie is listening to the radio while she’s getting ready for school. The DJ plays several songs, and then he announces that he’s going to play a new song by Kylie’s favorite artist. As soon as she hears this, Kylie sits down next to the radio and listens carefully to the song. She tries to hear every word so that she can understand the meaning of the lyrics.

In this scene, Kylie went from passive listening to active listening. When you’re actively listening in class, you aren’t just hearing the words the teacher is saying, you are also thinking about and trying to understand the information that’s being presented.

Take notes to help you pay attention. You can think much faster than anyone can talk. This is one of the reasons that your mind sometimes wanders when you’re in class. When you take notes, however, your mind has something additional to do, and you don’t have time to think about anything else. Taking notes, therefore, helps you stay focused. Taking notes, of course, also shows your teacher that you are interested in the class and that you’re paying attention.

Recognize important information. You can usually tell when a teacher’s saying something that’s important for you to know. Teachers often speak louder or slower, or they repeat information. They also give clues by saying things like “the main point,” “the most important outcome,” or “the biggest reason.” Of course, anything a teacher writes on the board or overhead should be considered very important.

In your notes, put a star beside the most important information. You’ll then know to give it special attention when you’re studying later.

“I highlight anything in my notes that’s really important.” Marcus
Take notes that are easy to read.

- Put the name of the class, the date, and the page number at the top of each page of notes. It will help keep your notes organized.
- Put the subject of your notes at the top of the page.
- Skip lines between topics and only use one side of the paper. Your notes will be neater, and they’ll be easier to read. You’ll also have space if you want to add something later.
- Use symbols and abbreviations to help you take notes faster. Here are some of the most common abbreviations.
  - = same or equal
  - ≠ not equal
  - > greater than
  - ≥ greater than or equal to
  - < less than
  - ≤ less than or equal to
  - * most importantly
  - † up or increasing
  - ‡ down or decreasing
  - w with
  - w/o without
  - w/in within
  - → resulting in
  - b/c because
  - eg for example
  - esp especially
- Don’t worry about grammar or punctuation.
- Leave a wide space or margin on the left side of each page. As you’re taking notes, listen for key words. When you hear a key word, write it in the left-hand margin. Key words (topics, people, places, events) help you organize your thoughts, and they make your notes easier to understand.

Keywords can also help you review for a test. Just cover up your notes, look at each key word, and test yourself to see what you can remember about that topic, person, place, or event.

Go over your notes as soon as possible. While the information is still fresh in your mind, take five minutes to go over your notes. Fill in the spaces, rewrite anything that’s confusing, and put a question mark by anything you don’t understand. Also, make sure that all of your key words are written in the left-hand margin. Of course, as you’re going over your notes, you’re “locking” the information in your memory.

If you are really serious about getting the best grade possible in a class, completely redo your notes. Eliminate the unimportant information and rewrite the rest of your notes using your own words.

Get copies of notes and handouts if you’re absent. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to ask your teacher about assignments, handouts, and tests. It’s also your responsibility to make up any work that you’ve missed. Don’t just assume that your teacher will tell you if there’s something you need to know or do. Also, get copies of any notes you’ve missed and put them in your notebook.

“[I]f I know I’m going to miss school, I try to get work ahead of time. If I’m out sick, I get the work and the notes I missed the next day. I really try not to miss school though—it’s such a pain to make things up.” Greg

Step Five
Take Good Notes

- Be an active listener.
- Take notes to help you pay attention.
- Recognize important information.
- Take notes that are easy to read.
- Go over your notes as soon as possible.
- Get copies of notes and handouts if you’re absent.
The Beatles

The Beatles dominated the music industry. The Beatles were a British rock group that dominated the rock and roll industry during the 1960s. The Beatles had an enormous impact on music. They were, in fact, the single most important component in the creation of the modern day "pop" culture.

The band members of this dynamic group were Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and John Lennon. Their playful, yet irreverent public image captured the imagination of an entire generation.

The Beatles got their start in Liverpool.

In the summer of 1957, John Lennon and Paul McCartney began playing together in Liverpool, England. Later that year, Paul invited guitar player George Harrison to join the group. The band was becoming popular around the area and was booked to play a series of concerts in Hamburg, Germany. The group perfected their musical skills in the Hamburg beer halls, playing standard American rock and roll songs.

The Beatles change their image.

On returning from Hamburg, the Beatles were discovered by Brian Epstein. As their manager, Epstein changed the image of the group by replacing their black leather jackets and tight jeans for collarless suits. He also gave them a new style of haircut. In 1963, Epstein got the Beatles their first recording contract. Shortly before entering the studio, drummer Ringo Starr was added to the group. The early Beatles recordings were instantly successful, and soon the band was headlining tours.

The Beatles find success in the U.S.

In 1964, The Beatles' music was released in the United States. The sales were tremendous, breaking all previous records. The band came to New York in April, where screaming fans met at the airport, and 70 million people watched them on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Throughout the 1960s The Beatles' popularity grew. Their Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album was released in 1967 to unprecedented critical acclaim. A series of creative, commercially successful albums followed.

The Beatles go their separate ways.

By the end of 1968, the members of the group had began to go in different directions. Paul McCartney continued to write "pop" melodies while George Harrison immersed himself in Eastern spirituality. John Lennon grew more distant from the band as he grew closer to his wife, Yoko Ono. In April of 1970, McCartney released his first solo album and announced the end of The Beatles.

Throughout the 1970s, The Beatles music continued to be popular, and they were constantly encouraged to reunite. Lennon’s death in 1980 put an end to any hope of a reunion.

The Beatles were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988.

Best Selling BeatlesAlbums (in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Album</th>
<th>Millions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The White Album</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbey Road</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sgt. Pepper</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Review Questions

1. Who discovered The Beatles?
2. What year did The Beatles start their recording career? When did they break up?
3. After their break up, did The Beatles ever reunite? Why or why not?

READ. When your reading has a purpose, you have a reason to stay focused and your comprehension improves.

To give your reading purpose, try turning each section heading into a question. For example, you could turn the heading, The Beatles change their image, into the question, "How did The Beatles change their image?" Keep your question in mind as you read, and at the end of the section, see if you can answer it. Questions give you something specific to look for and they help keep your mind from wandering. You are, therefore, able to remember more of what you read.
Before you start to read a section, look to see if there are any vocabulary words, names, places, or events in bold or italic print. Then ask yourself, “Why is this word, person, place, or event important?” You should, of course, have an answer to that question when you finish reading the section. For example, after reading the The Beatles change their image section, you should know who Brian Epstein is.

When you have completely finished your reading, you should also be able to answer all of the Review Questions.

**REVIEW.** Okay, you’ve surveyed and read the assignment. This is when most students will close their book and say, “I’m done.” Taking a few extra minutes for review, however, will make a huge difference in what you are able to remember later. **When you review, you lock the information into your brain before it has a chance to evaporate.**

To review, go through the same process you did when you surveyed the material. This time, as you read the section headings, briefly restate the purpose or point of each section to yourself using your own words. As you look at the vocabulary words and the words in bold and italic print, think about what they mean and why they are important.

If you really want to lock the information into your brain, review everything again a day or two later. When you go to study for the test, you’ll be amazed at how well you already know the material.

It may take a little practice to get the Survey, Read, and Review process down, but you’ll soon realize that this process doesn’t mean more work. It just means better grades.

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**Step Six**
**Read to Learn**

- **SURVEY** the assignment to get an overview.
- **READ** with a purpose.
- **REVIEW** to check your understanding.

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**Step Seven**
**Study Smart**

Students who “study smart” find that they spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

**Find a good place to study.** Although it’s usually best to have one place where you study regularly, it doesn’t matter where you study, as long as it has a surface for writing, it’s well lit, quiet, and comfortable. Your study area should also be equipped with paper, pens, pencils, calculator, dictionary, and thesaurus.

Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others like to have music playing in the background. If you like to listen to music while you do your homework, try playing classical music very softly.

“I like to listen to music while I’m doing buswork-type homework, but not when I’m studying.” Maria

“The library is a really good place for me to study. It’s quiet, and I don’t have any of the distractions that I have at home.” Greg

**Get started.** Getting started on your studying is often the hardest part. Don’t put it off until later, don’t make excuses, and don’t wait until you’re “in the mood.” If you have a hard time getting started, begin with something you can finish quickly or a subject you like.

**Know your learning style.** We all learn differently. Some learn best by seeing the material (visual learners), some learn best by hearing the information (auditory learners), and some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners). Think about how you learn and adjust how you study accordingly.

Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, reading, and demonstrations. If you’re a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, form images in your mind, and use color in your notes.

Auditory learners learn best from presentations, discussions, films, and music. If you’re an auditory learner, read and review in-
formation out loud, have discussions, make up rhymes to remember things, and explain what you’ve learned to someone else.

If you’re a kinesthetic learner, you learn best when you’re doing hands-on activities. Move around while you study, rewrite or type your notes, use objects whenever possible, and act out ideas.

"I must be a visual learner because I have to see what I’m trying to learn." John

As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the more methods you use to study, the more you’ll remember. William Glasser, an expert in the field of education, stated:

"Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else."

Organize your study time.

➢ Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you’re going to do it.

➢ If you have a lot to do, prioritize your work to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.

➢ Focus on one thing at a time.

➢ If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.

➢ Always allow more time than you think you’ll need.

➢ If you have something to memorize, work on that first. Then go over it again at the end of your study session.

➢ Do difficult assignments first, while you’re still fresh and alert.

➢ Alternate types of homework (read English, do math, read history).

➢ Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. After studying for 20-30 minutes, try taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, go for a short walk).

"When I study, I take short breaks between subjects." Brad

Know how to study for tests.

➢ Know what the test will cover and what kind of test it will be. For essay tests, it’s important to understand the big picture and know main points and key facts. For multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank tests, you need to know more detailed information.

➢ Have all of your reading done ahead of time.

"I try to get all of the reading done a couple of days before the test. Then I just need to skim and review." Greg

➢ Pay particularly close attention in class the day before a test. This is when teachers will often go over information you need to know.

➢ If your textbook has review questions, know all of the answers. Also, go through your textbook and make sure that you know the meanings of all the words in bold and italic print.

➢ If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use it to come up with questions that might be on the test.

➢ You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching material to yourself in front of a mirror.

➢ Review often and review out loud. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. Review is the key to learning and remembering anything!

➢ Write down any names, dates, formulas, and/or facts you need to remember on index cards. Take these cards with you the day of the test and go over them as often as you can.

Know how to memorize and remember information.

➢ Use flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.

"If you have a lot to memorize, spread it out over a period of time. Just keep going over and over it." Brad

➢ Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Do this until you know it.
Know how to write a paper. The key to writing a good paper is to spread it out over as much time as possible. Writing a paper should be a process, not a one-time event. When you have a paper to write, go through the following ten steps.

1. Choose a topic that interests you.
2. Gather information. (Librarians can be very helpful with this.)
3. Make an outline.
4. Write a first draft.
5. Read your paper out loud and think of ways to improve it.
6. Revise and rewrite your paper.
7. Have someone else read it.
8. Write the final draft.
9. Check for punctuation, spelling, and grammar errors.
10. Make sure that your paper looks neat, and turn it in on time.

When you’re writing a paper, it’s very important to put it away at least once or twice. When you take it out and read it again, you’ll see and hear things that you didn’t notice before.

Be sure to always identify another person’s words or ideas by using quotation marks or footnotes. If you present another person’s words or ideas as your own, it’s the same as cheating. It’s called plagiarism.

Review

Step Seven
Study Smart

▷ Find a good place to study.
▷ Get started.
▷ Know your learning style.
▷ Organize your study time.
▷ Know how to study for tests.
▷ Know how to memorize and remember information.
▷ Develop your public speaking skills.
▷ Know how to write a paper.

Develop your public speaking skills.

▷ To help add enthusiasm and energy to your voice, pretend that you’re telling your best friend something really important.

▷ Use props whenever possible. Props (posters, sports equipment, books) give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of your props.

▷ Good speakers make eye contact with the people in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.
Step Eight
Be a Good Test Taker

To do well on any test, you must study hard and be prepared. You can further improve your test performance by using these test-taking tips.

Get off to a good start. Have everything you need for the test with you when you go to class (pencil, calculator, etc.). If you have a couple of minutes before the test starts, try to relax.

As soon as you get your test, write anything that you want to remember (facts, dates, equations, formulas) at the top of your test. Put your name on the test and read the directions carefully.

Develop a plan. Before you begin answering questions, quickly look over the entire test and make a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes on each essay question, and 10 minutes checking your answers.

Mark the questions you want to return to. Put a dot or check mark by any answer you’re not sure of. After you have gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones you’ve marked and try them again.

Don’t spend a lot of time on difficult questions, and don’t panic if you don’t know the answers to the first few questions. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for your brain to get in gear.

"If you aren’t sure of an answer, always go with your first instinct." Greg

Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.

▶ When you read a multiple-choice question, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the answer choices.

▶ If you’re not sure of an answer, eliminate the choices you know are wrong by crossing them out. Then make an educated guess.

▶ If two of the choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.

▶ Read all of the answer choices. At least a couple of the answers will probably sound like they could be correct. Don’t be tempted to mark the first answer that sounds good.

"Use the test to help you take the test. Sometimes questions give you information that help you answer other questions." John

Look for key words in True/False questions. Statements with all, always, never, every, and none in them are usually false. Statements with usually, often, sometimes, most, and many in them are usually true. Read True/False questions very carefully. One word will often determine whether a statement is True or False.

Know how to approach essay questions.

▶ Read each question and then start with the easiest one. This will help you gain confidence. It will also give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions. Note how many points each essay is worth, and adjust the time you spend on each accordingly.

▶ Before you do any writing, do some brainstorming. Jot down the key words, ideas, and points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize your ideas into a simple outline. If not, just number your ideas in the order you want to present them.

▶ Begin writing. Use clear, concise, complete sentences and write neatly. In your opening paragraph, restate the question and tell the reader what he/she can expect to learn from your essay. In your middle paragraphs, present examples, details, and facts to support the points you’re making. In your final paragraph, restate the most important points, draw conclusions, or write a brief summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.

▶ If you don’t know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write down what you do know about the subject. You may hit on something and get partial credit. If you don’t have time to complete an essay, write your teacher a note explaining that you ran out of time. Then briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.
Improve your math test scores. 1) Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be. 2) If you’re having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or a diagram. 3) Don’t spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, go on, and come back to it later. 4) Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, you may get partial credit if you were on the right track.

Be prepared for open book tests. These tips will help you locate information during an open book test. 1) Highlight your notes. 2) Write down any information you know you’re going to need on a separate sheet of paper. 3) Put self-stick notes in your textbook to help you locate specific information.

Check your answers. If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have made a careless mistake. Use all of the time that you’re given.

Go over all returned tests. Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. You may see one or more of these questions again. Keep a record of your test scores, and keep all returned tests.

Step Eight
Be a Good Test Taker

► Get off to a good start.
► Develop a plan.
► Mark the questions you want to return to.
► Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.
► Look for key words in True/False questions.
► Know how to approach essay questions.
► Improve your math test scores.
► Be prepared for open book tests.
► Check your answers.
► Go over all returned tests.

A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Too much worry, or test anxiety, can lower your test score.

It’s possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can’t think clearly. The brain, like a computer, contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you’re not able to “access” it when you need it. Having test anxiety is like not having the password for your computer. The information is there, but you can’t get to it.

To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. Then try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you.

► Start studying early. Cramming only increases test anxiety.
► Mentally practice going through the test. Close your eyes and see yourself walking confidently into the room, answering the questions correctly, and receiving the grade you want. Go through this mental exercise several times before the test.
► The night before a test, review the material, and then get a good night’s sleep.
► Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. Tell yourself that you’re ready and that you are going to do fine.
► Try these relaxation techniques:
  1. Take a deep breath. Then slowly release your breath, along with any tension. Do this until you feel your body relax.
  2. Start at the top of your head, flexing, and then relaxing each part of your body.
  3. Close your eyes and visualize warm sunshine washing over you, melting away the tension, and relaxing all of your muscles.
  4. Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

The more you practice these techniques, the better you’ll get. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your counselor.
Step Ten - Get Help When You Need It

When you have a problem, do something to resolve it.

Most questions can be answered and most problems resolved, just by talking to the right person (secretary, principal, teacher, counselor). If you need academic help or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. For most other questions or problems, go to the office or talk to your counselor. If you ever feel threatened or harassed by another student, tell a principal, counselor, or teacher immediately.

All students have problems and concerns they have to deal with. Some students, however, have problems that are so overwhelming that they can't pay attention in class or concentrate on their work. Even though they may put on a good front, these students need to get help.

If you're dealing with any of the following, please talk to a parent, counselor, or adult you trust as soon as possible: alcohol, drugs, pregnancy, abusive relationship, eating disorder, bullying, depression, problems at home. Thousands of students are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.

Have you ever seen a grown elephant at a circus or zoo with one foot roped to a stake in the ground? This huge elephant will walk a few feet, but when he feels the tug of the rope around his foot, he'll stop. The elephant could easily break the rope if he wanted to, so why do you suppose he doesn't give the rope a good yank and break it?

Well, when that elephant was a baby, he had just such a rope tied to his foot. Even though he tried and tried, he found that he just wasn't strong enough to break it—so he gave up. Now, as a grown elephant, he continues to believe that he can't break the rope, so he doesn't even bother trying.

Just like this elephant, if you think that you can't succeed, or if you allow past failures to keep you from trying, you'll never get anywhere. Think positively, keep trying, and you will succeed!

Tips For Parents

Your child needs you to be interested and involved in his/her academic progress. Using these tips will help make sure that your child succeeds in school.

Show interest. Attend all open houses and parent conferences. You'll learn valuable information, and it sends a message to your children that school is important.

Know when each grading period ends, and make sure that you see all progress reports and report cards as soon as they come out. If you do not see a progress report or report card, call the school and request a copy. Do not just assume that someone will call you if there's a problem.

Recognize extra effort and improvement, and show interest in your child's work. Make it a point to acknowledge each academic success, even if it's only a good grade on a quiz or homework assignment.

Discuss classes and set goals. Sit down with your child at the beginning of each grading period and help him/her set realistic academic goals. Your child will better understand what your expectations are, and having goals will give your child something to work towards.

At the beginning of the grading period, Kate and her parents decided that she should be able to earn As in math, English, art, PE, and social studies. Since Kate finds Spanish and science more difficult, they decided that they would be happy with Bs in these two subjects.

You can, of course, offer rewards if goals are met and/or consequences if they're not. Rewards are particularly effective when you want to encourage a change in effort or behavior. (Eventually, doing well will be its own reward.) Consequences are most effective when they are reasonable and logical. For example, a reasonable and logical consequence for routinely being late to school might be an earlier bedtime. Never take away a positive activity (sports, school plays, music lessons, scouting) as a consequence.

Listen. Talk to your child about what's happening in school and be a good listener.