

STUDY SKILLS

Introduce your students to the real satisfaction that comes from being organized and prepared for learning! This chapter contains tips and practical steps to help your students form good study habits. There are also strategies to encourage your students to make the most of their time and efforts. Included is a sample schedule and checklist, and ideas for assessing your students' progress.

Task 1

What type of an attitude did you have in school towards learning of a subject you did not like and how were you helped to overcome them? Give examples.

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

A positive attitude is a powerful tool that fosters enthusiasm, promotes self-esteem, and creates an atmosphere conducive to learning. If your students do not believe in themselves and their abilities, it is important to change that belief for learning to take place. You can nurture a positive learning attitude by verbalizing positive expectations and by expressing praise for jobs done well and on time. Try these tips for building positive attitudes:

- Show students that well-deserved self-praise is healthy by commenting aloud on your own performance. *Example:* "I like the way I read that story." Frequently mention the satisfaction you get from some work-related job you have done well.
- Look for opportunities to praise your students' efforts. Even a little recognition, as long as it is genuine, goes a long way. *Tip:* Avoid hollow praise—save words like "terrific" for truly outstanding accomplishments. Use a smile, a light touch on the shoulder, or a wink to recognize everyday efforts.
- Encourage your students to look upon their educations as their "jobs." But rather than working for someone else, they are working for themselves. Explain that they are building the foundation for their futures—each thing they learn is like a brick laid for a future skyscraper! What they do now can help them stand tall and strong throughout their lives.

- Encourage your students to develop an interest in what they are learning. Interest is a great aid to learning. Explain that the more they learn about a subject the more their interest will increase.
- Give your students positive reinforcement for desired behavior and attitudes.
- Set up a reward system for accomplishing short- and long-term goals. When used properly, rewards can be an effective way to bring about desired study habits.
- Make the tips you present on organization, time management, and study habits meaningful and relevant to your students. *Example:* As you give an in-class assignment, ask the students to estimate how long they think you should allow for completing it and why. Tell them how you estimate the time an assignment or other activity could take and how you rely on these skills daily.
- Show your students how you schedule your time and activities. Stress the importance of organizing one's time.
- Point out to your students that everyone is required to do tasks of which they are not particularly fond. Talk to them about some of the things you must do and how you motivate yourself to tackle them.
- Encourage your students to use “mind-motivators”—thoughts that get them mentally moving. Have them think about activities they must force themselves to do, such as practice. Tell students to motivate themselves by applying “mind talk” to do these things. *Example:* “If I start this now, I’ll be done before dinner, and still have time to go out and play!” Help them practice this technique—it works!
- Impress upon your students that they are in control of what they do. Tell them to visualize being the driver on the “bus of life,” not a passenger.

A good thumb rule: You have two main responsibilities in helping your students form good study habits. One is to ensure that the subject is presented clearly and reinforced appropriately. The other is to teach your students how to study and learn on their own.

Task 2

Compare your last week's study time with the learning that you just completed. Write an essay in not less than 300 words of how you can improve it.

TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Have you ever wondered how you were going to get everything accomplished in the time available?

Your students experience the same problem. The solution does not lie in finding more hours in the day but in using time more efficiently. Try these time-management techniques with your students:

- Instruct your students to track how they spend their time for two full days. Realizing how they spend their time will make your students better time managers. Follow up by asking them to evaluate their use of time in the 48-hour period. *Example:* spend time in such a way that you accomplish what you need to do and still have time for things you like to do?
- Use a timer in your learning environment to encourage students to work within time limits. This is especially helpful for students who are capable but lack self-discipline with regard to time use.
Tip: Invite students to use the timer in the Learning Zone and to try the same technique in their study areas at home.
- Instruct the students to make a study or practice schedule and stick to it.

A good thumb rule: Management tools such as schedules, checklists, and contracts motivate students and allow them track their own progress.

- Prevent daydreaming. Call a “time to think break.” After a moment or two, snap your fingers to signal that it is time to tackle the work again. Your students can self-direct their study time using this technique.
- Teach your students to rely on daily lists, crossing off tasks they complete throughout the day. *Example:* Things To Do Today—Remember lunch money, turn in homework, get to soccer practice by 4:00, study, write Grandmother a thank-you note.
- Tell your students to attach permanent time-saving checklists to their work areas with any reminders they need frequently. *Example:* Did I put my name on my paper? Did I write down my assignments?
- Conduct an end-of-the-week chat with your students. Review their activities that week, and ask them to check their lists and assignment notebooks to review what they accomplished. If they did not get everything done, ask them how they can

improve the next week. Establishing the habit of a weekly review will help teach them to evaluate their priorities.

- Teach your students to tackle tasks in manageable chunks. This will help keep them from viewing their workloads as overwhelming.
- Point out to your students that they can reduce stress on long-term projects by anticipating and planning for deadlines well in advance. This serves the dual purpose of ensuring enough time to complete the assignment and allowing for review and revision of their work.
- Support your students if they are having difficulty getting their assignments done and managing time. Create work contracts with them and reward them for reaching short-term milestones. This develops great work habits and leads to more competent long-term time planning.

A good thumb rule: Keep students from feeling overwhelmed by the many time-related issues they face each day. Instruct them to set short, easily attainable time and work goals and to note their successes in accomplishing their tasks. Keep telling them, “Inch by inch, it’s a cinch.”

- Share these six time management techniques with your students:
 1. Tell them to study difficult subjects *first*. If math is hardest for you, do it first. If you put these subjects off to do later, they may never get done.
 2. Ask them to determine their best time to study. Some students study best when they first get home from school. Others do better after dinner. Some even like to get up early in the morning. Tell them to try studying at different hours to discover your best learning time.
 3. Tell them to turn off the television, radio, and stereo when they study. They may not like it, but the vast majority of research shows that silence is the best music for their study time.
 4. Tell them to hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door of their study area when they are working. (Discuss this with family members first.) They will save lots of time if they are not interrupted while they study.
 5. Stay off the phone during your study time. Tell someone in your family to take messages for you.

6. Do not get too relaxed! Study where you will be comfortable, but not so comfortable that you get sleepy.

NOTE-TAKING TIPS

Note-taking is one of the most frequently used strategies for learning material.

Here are some tips that will help your students become better note-takers.

- Preview information before presenting it.
- Write key words, names, and definitions on a chart or chalkboard as you speak.
- When presenting lessons, make sure you are not talking too fast and that audiovisual materials are visible and audible to everyone.
- Teach your students to recognize note-taking cues. Point out that information written on the board or chart is one cue for note-taking. However, make sure your students know that the material written on the board is not the *only* information they need to record. Teach them to listen for certain verbal cue words or phrases. *Examples:* “First” or “The reason for” or “There are three causes.” Other cues include repeated phrases or pauses by the speaker. Have your students brainstorm a list of other note-taking cues.
- Teach your students some “shorthand” methods for recording notes—symbols used in place of high-frequency words. These must be “read” later, so neatness counts!
- Provide skeletal notes—the basic content of what you plan to teach. Include headings, subheadings, key words or phrases, questions, etc. Leave blank spaces for your students to fill in remaining key information.
- Review your students’ notes and suggest ways they can improve them. Periodically collect your students’ notes. Your suggestions should be concrete and apply directly to the lesson’s material.
- Let your students review each other’s notes on the same material and describe their note-taking strategies to one another.

ORGANIZING YOURSELF

Get off to a great start by spending some time getting organized before school begins.

Follow these steps:

1. Gather all the materials you will need—pens, pencils, plan book, skill charts, books, and so on.

2. Plan a rough month-by-month outline of the topics and skills you will be covering. Use the outline as a general guide to help you prepare for the lessons ahead of time. The outline may change as you adapt to the specific needs, interests, and abilities of the class.
3. Write a detailed outline for the first week of school. Include activities that can be inserted or changed at the last minute since schedules and routines may not be firmly established for awhile. Here are some ideas:
 - Story - time—Keep on hand your favorite read-aloud stories or a book of riddles to share with the class.
 - Music—Select three songs to teach students, or choose a taped song to which they may listen and clap out the rhythm.
 - Game—Choose an activity that is simple yet fun. *Example:* Have the students can play “Name Bingo” by making bingo cards with their names.
4. Prepare a “welcome” letter for parents and students. Home educators can compose a “getting started” letter with their children, then use the letter as a springboard for a family discussion.
5. Create a substitute teacher kit. Fill it with a class list, seating chart, floor plan, bus schedule, daily schedule, reproducible activities, special instructions, books to read, emergency procedures, and other items.

A good thumb rule: Color code your lesson plans. *Example:* Write in red the supplies you need to gather. Write in blue the pages you need to reproduce.

ORGANIZING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Get ready for the new school year by planning your classroom carefully. Here are a few steps you can take to get and stay organized:

1. Decide on a decor for your learning environment. Make sure it is active and motivational—one that enhances and enlivens learning—such as a science, social studies, or seasonal themes.
2. Evaluate the physical space in your classroom and organize furniture and other items to use the space most efficiently. Look for potential trouble spots, such as places where some students will not see well or where some might be especially distracted.

3. Create a pocket folder or a big envelope for each month. Store seasonal ideas, pictures, and other items you plan to use during a particular month in its special folder.
4. Label a folder for each day of the week. Then file worksheets and other materials you plan to use that week in the appropriate folders. Reuse these folders week after week.
5. Compile a list of your children's names, addresses, and phone numbers and make several copies. Keep one copy inside your plan book, one copy at home, and another copy at your work area.
6. Set up a work area for adult and student helpers. Be sure to include supplies and a "To Do" list.
7. Set up folders for instructional materials by topic or skill. Use boxes for extensive subjects or units.

Example: Collect and store in a box all materials for a unit on rain forests—books, worksheets, bulletin board ideas, pictures, magazine articles, art ideas, and so on. Keep adding to the box as you come across more items.

Store the folders and boxes in a convenient place in your room.