Strengthening Your Child's Home

STUDY SKILLS

Success in school requires children to use good study skills. Effective studying requires many different skills. While many study skills are taught and monitored at school, success in school will require the use of these skills outside of school hours, for example, when completing homework and studying for tests. Parents can play an important role in helping their children develop good study habits and skills. The ideas described below are specific strategies and techniques parents can use to strengthen their children's home study skills. This handout focuses on three important aspects of effective studying: organization, study strategies, and motivation.

ORGANIZATION

Study Environment

Find a Good Study Place: One of the most basic habits you can teach your child is to study in one place. Help your child choose a particular location that she can use each time she studies. An effective workplace is one that has adequate space to spread out, is well lit, has the needed supplies close at hand (see list to right), and is relatively free from distractions.

Study Supplies

- Pencils/pens/markers
- Pencil sharpener
- Eraser
- White out
- Glue/paste/tape
- Writing paper
- Index cards
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Calculator
- Dictionary/Thesaurus

Limit Distractions: Observations and surveys of children and adolescents have shown that they frequently choose to study while listening to a radio or watching television. Should this practice be discouraged? Based on studies in this area, the answer appears to be "it depends."

Audio and visual distractions will tend to interfere more with difficult assignments than with easy and routine assignments. In addition, meaningful background sounds, such as TV, speech, and vocal music, tend to be more distracting than instrumental music or other nonvocal background noise. As a general rule, you should try and control and limit meaningful distractions, such as telephone, TV, vocal music, and interruptions from others during study time, particularly during difficult tasks. Do not worry as much about nonvocal background noise during easy and routine assignments, if your child is completing his work.

Time Management

Monitor How Much Time Your Child Is Spending in Study:

Your child will need to study at home for two primary reasons: to complete homework assignments and to study for tests. The trend in education since the early 1980's has been for schools to assign greater amounts of homework. This is due primarily to the declining test scores of American students and the research that shows that homework can improve learning.

National surveys of school districts, teachers, and students indicate that the majority of school districts and teachers assign homework, and the majority of students report doing it. Based on these surveys of students and teachers from across the country, you should expect your child

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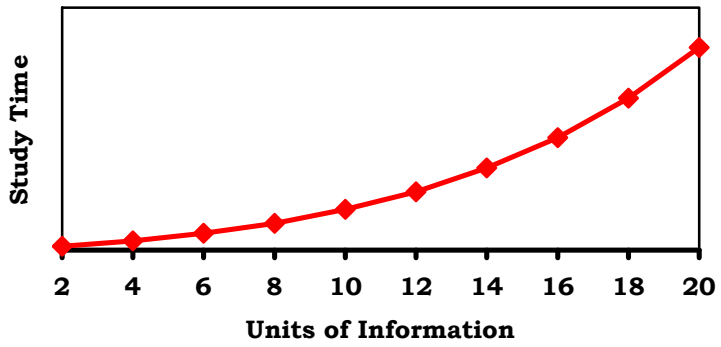
to have some homework to do each week. You should expect the number of nights and the amount of homework to increase as your child progresses from elementary to high school (see table below). If your child is spending more or less time than is expected on homework, check with your child and the teacher to find out why.

Amount and Frequency of Homework by Grade Level

Level	*Amount*	*Nights per week*
3rd-6th grade	30 to 45 minutes	3
7th-9th grade	45-75 minutes	4
10th-12th grade	75-120 minutes	4 or more

In addition to homework, your child may need to study for tests at home, particularly if her test grades are not as high as they could be. Studying for tests may involve rereading, reviewing, outlining, making and reviewing study cards, and studying class notes. How much time your child should spend studying for tests will depend on how much material there is to learn. Studies in human learning indicate that as the units of information to learn increase, the amount of time needed to learn each unit also increases (see figure below). For example, if it takes a child 10 minutes to learn one section of a chapter, it may take the child 30 minutes to learn two sections of a chapter. As a general rule, the more material there is to learn, the more time it will take to learn each unit of that material.

Amount of Study Time Needed Per Unit of Information



Each child needs to determine how much time is typically needed to learn a section of material, plan enough time into her schedule, and use the study skills discussed below.

Help Your Child Develop a Daily and Weekly Schedule: One of the benefits of studying is that it can help children develop their skills in organizing and managing their time. In order for studying to not interfere with important social and recreational activities, your child will need to learn to plan ahead. Teach your child how to make both daily and weekly schedules for his activities (see figure below). On a daily basis, have your child decide what needs to be done that day and when to do it. This should include a listing of all homework assignments and other activities and responsibilities. It is often a good idea to decide ahead of time on the order of homework assignments, sandwiching the harder assignments in between the easier assignments. At the beginning of the week, it is helpful to list out all the activities for the coming week. This will help your child plan. For example, if your child has a Social Studies test on Wednesday and he needs three days to study for it, he can plan on bringing his Social Studies book home Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights.

Things To Do Today	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
3:00-3:30 Snack and watch TV 3:30-4:30 Homework: 1. Read 2. Math worksheet 3. Write out spelling words 4:30-5:00 Eat supper 5:00-6:30 Baseball practice 6:30-7:30 Play outside 7:30-8:00 Practice instrument		Baseball game 7:30	SS Test!!! Guitar lesson 5:00	Book report due	Spelling test		Pool party 4:00

Daily and weekly schedule example

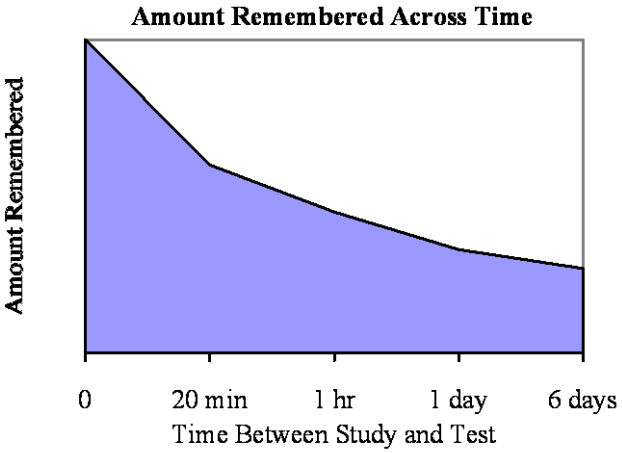
STUDY STRATEGIES

In this section, we will review some principles and strategies that will help you teach your child effective study skills. First, we will examine three principles of learning that will help you understand how learning and forgetting take place. Next, we will review three general and three specific study strategies that can lead to effective learning.

Three Principles of Learning

A common problem children experience is that they seem to know the material the night before a test, only to find that they cannot remember some of the material at the time of the test. The reason for this has to do with how learning and forgetting occur. You can help your child develop a good study strategy by using three principles that research has shown are important in learning: repetition, overlearning, and meaningfulness.

Repetition. When information is first presented to a person it is stored in her short-term memory. Short-term memory can hold information for only about 20 seconds. For information to stay in short-term memory longer than this it must be repeated or practiced. In addition, short-term memory can only hold from 5 to 9 units of information at one time. In order for learning to take place, information needs to move from short-term memory into long-term memory. Long-term memory can hold an almost infinite amount of information for an unlimited period of time. Information is moved from short-term to long-term memory by repetition and practice over time.



As can be seen in the figure at the right, the passing of time has a negative effect on memory. The longer the time from learning to testing, the less material is remembered. In addition, forgetting is rapid immediately after the study period. After one day, most forgetting has occurred. The amount of material that is remembered will depend on how many times the material is studied. For example, if a child reads a chapter for the first time, one day later the child may only be able to remember about 40% of the material. However, if the child reviews the material several times over several days, the child may be able to remember 85% or more of the material.

Overlearning. This principle states that additional study after the material has been learned will increase the performance when tested at a later time. For example, if your child studied some new material and was able to perfectly remember it at the end of the study time, the next day he will likely only be able to remember about 40% of the material. However, if he studied an additional 20 minutes after he knew the material perfectly, he may remember 80% of the material the next day. This means that if your child spends additional time studying after he knows the material, he will have to study less the next day to perfectly learn the material and he will perform better when tested later.

Meaningfulness. Research has shown that material that is meaningful and is able to be related to other ideas and information is remembered easier than material that is less meaningful and unrelated to other ideas and information. For example, your child is more likely to remember that Mammoth Cave in Kentucky is a tourist site in the southeast region of the United States if he sees a picture of how large the cave is, learns that it has an underground river, and that it is one of the only places that has eyeless fish. Recall will likely be easier because these several pieces of information are all related in a meaningful way. Thinking of eyeless fish can lead to thinking of underground rivers, pictures of caves, Mammoth Cave, tourist sites, and Kentucky. Since the original information was meaningfully related to other information, your child will likely have an easier time recalling it during a test than if she just tried to remember that Mammoth Cave is a tourist site in the southeast region.

Based on these three principles of learning, three general and three specific learning strategies are recommended below.

Three General Study Strategies

Begin Early. Learning takes time. In order for your child to learn most effectively, he should start early. Rather than waiting until the night before a test to study, he should start studying several days before the test. Remember, if your child tries to learn new material the night before the test, most will be forgotten at test time. The material must be practiced over time. If your child does not start early, there may not be enough time to adequately learn the material. The more material he has to learn, the earlier he should start.

Study Often. Learning requires concentration and frequent repetition over time. The following strategies will help your child study and learn most effectively.

- ***Study Hard for a Short Time and Take Breaks***

  The harder your child concentrates on the material being learned, the more learning will take place. Unfortunately, most children are only able to concentrate for brief periods of time. If your child is studying continuously for more than 20 minutes, it is likely that she will get tired and lose her ability to concentrate hard. Your child will learn better if she studies for brief periods with rest periods in between than if she studies in one continuous block of time. For example, your child would likely learn better by studying for 20 minutes at four different times, with rest periods in between, than to study for 80 minutes at one time with no rest periods.

Study Technique

⇒ *Study brief but hard*. Set a timer for 20 minutes (less if your child is young or unable to keep concentration for this long; you can gradually increase the time up to 20 minutes as your child learns how to concentrate). Encourage her to concentrate hard during this time.

⇒ *Set small goal*. Set a small goal for each study period. For example, read one section of a chapter and answer three questions; or complete 10 math problems.

⇒ *Take a break*. Take a 5-minute break after each study period. This is your child's reward for working hard. Your child should move around or engage in some enjoyable activity during this time. Set a timer to let your child know when it is time for another study period.

⇒ *Do it again*. Continue this process until the material needed to study that evening is completed.

- ***Study Over Several Days***

One of the most common mistakes that students make is to study the material until they "know it" and then not study it again. Remember that much of what is learned one day is forgotten by the next day. Learning will require reviewing the material over several days. The following is a good strategy to follow when studying for a test.

Study Technique

⇒ *Study until mastered*. Your child's first goal should be to study the material until it is mastered. For example, your child should study his spelling words until he is able to spell them all correctly.

⇒ *Study some more*. Once your child "knows" the material, have him spend some additional time "overlearning" it. For example, he can study his spelling words one more time after he was able to spell them all correctly. This will result in more of the material being remembered the next day.

⇒ *Study what you forgot.* The next day, have your child do a self-test of the "learned" material to see what he remembered. Have him study only that material that was forgotten. Have him study this "forgotten" material until it is mastered.

⇒ *Study several nights*. Repeat this process for several nights. You should find that your child remembers more of the material each day.

⇒ *Review before the test*. The night before the test, your child should review all the material, including the text, graphic material, class notes, study cards, and any other material that might be on the test.

Make it Meaningful. Your child will remember the material if it is made meaningful and related to other ideas. Many textbooks try and do this by providing pictures, examples, graphs, and maps. Make sure your child reviews this material as he reads. In addition, you can help your child learn the material by discussing with him how it relates to current events or everyday life. For example, math can be made more relevant by showing your child how it is used in everyday life.

Three Specific Study Strategies

Generally, there are two types of information that your child will need to know in order to do well on tests: an overall understanding of the ideas that were taught and specific facts and details.

Gaining a Broader Understanding. In addition to learning details and facts, your child will need to understand the "big picture." Details and facts will be remembered easier if they are meaningfully organized into a general structure. Reviewing the text and class notes all at once can help your child with this. Textbooks do a good job of providing summaries, pictures and graphics to help your child get the big picture. In addition, making and reviewing an outline of the material will help your child organize the material. It is also helpful to have your child tell you about the material. You have to be able to understand the material in order to be able to tell someone about it.

Learning Specific Details. Understanding the big picture is not enough to do well on tests. Tests often require students to know the relevant details. One of the best methods of learning specific facts is to use study cards. Study cards are useful for learning vocabulary, dates, people, formulas, processes, and other specific information. An example of a study card is provided below. Your child should do well on tests if he knows the general idea of the material covered and has memorized the important details.

Example of a Study Card

Erosion	*A natural process by which material is worn away from the earth's surface* *Weather can cause erosion*

Study Technique: Using Study Cards

- Have your child read with a pencil and stack of 3" X 5" index cards. Every time she comes across an important term, date, person, or other important fact, have her make a study card at that time.
- Have her write the term, date, person, or other fact on one side of the card and the definition, event, accomplishment, or corresponding information on the other side.
- When reviewing the cards, have her place the ones she can correctly recall into one pile and the ones she misses in another.
- Have her continue reviewing the stack of cards that she does not know until she learns them all
- Repeat this process for several days

Reading Textbooks. One of the best ways for your child to learn and remember what he has read is to use the SQ3R method.

S = *Survey*
Q = *Question*
R1 = *Read*
R2 = *Recite*
R3 = *Review*

- ***Survey:*** Before your child reads a section or chapter he should get an understanding of the purpose and main idea of the section. For this he will need to survey what he is going to read. He can survey the material by reading the title and skimming the section. Skimming involves reading any outline of the section, reading the introduction, main headings, and noting key words.
- ***Question:*** Your child will comprehend more of what he reads if he is reading to try and answer some specific question. Keeping a question in mind will keep him

alert and focused as he reads. Before reading the first section under a heading, have him select a question. Textbooks often have questions at the end of each section that he can use. He can also make up questions from the headings. For example, if the heading is "Natural Resources of the Southeast," a question might be "What are the important natural resources of the Southeast?"

- ***Read:*** With the question in mind, have your child read to the end of the section under the heading until he can answer the question. As he comes across important facts, he can make up study cards. He should also make notes or study cards listing the questions and their answers.
- ***Recite:*** After your child has read and answered the question, he should look away from the book and notes and try to answer the question out loud. If he cannot do this, have him look over the book and notes again until he can.

  Have your child repeat the "question, read, and recite" steps for each section heading until the entire chapter is completed.
- ***Review:*** Once the chapter is completed using the above steps, have your child review all the study material, including the major headings in the book, notes, and study cards. If there are any questions or study cards that he cannot answer, he should reread the section and study his notes and study cards.

MOTIVATION

Parents can play in important role in motivating their children to develop effective study skills. Three strategies are discussed in this section: monitoring, praising efforts, and using tangible rewards.

Monitoring

One of the ways you can communicate to your child that studying is important is by asking her about and keeping up with how she is doing with her studies. There are a number of ways you can monitor your child's work and performance.

- Help her organize her assignments
- Make sure she understands what she is supposed to do
- Teach or remind her to use good study skills
- Check how she is using the study skills
- Check the quality of her work
- Check the grades on her class work, homework, and tests

Knowing how she is doing will allow you to provide her with feedback about her performance.

Praise Efforts

Praise Often. Parents should make a special effort to give their children frequent praise for the effort that they put into their studies and for using effective study skills. A general rule for using praise: ***do it often, do it immediately, and do it powerfully.***

A powerful praise is one that is given in a warm tone of voice and includes a statement letting the child know what it is you are please with.

> *"I really like how you worked hard on your homework tonight! And you did it all by yourself! I am very proud of you!"*

Be Positive and Encouraging. Your general approach with your child around studying should be positive. Avoid using criticism or punishment to try to get your child to study, these strategies will work against what you are trying to accomplish in the long run. You want your child to approach new challenges with confidence in his abilities, to have a feeling that he has control over his learning, and to be proud of his accomplishments. These goals are accomplished through being supportive and encouraging over time. When problems arise, your job should be to understand the problem and come up with solutions.

Frequent praise that is related directly to children's effort and independence can produce in them positive emotions, confidence, and an increased sense of control over learning. When this happens, children are likely to independently put forth effort and persist at new learning challenges.

Tangible Rewards

Tangible rewards can be used to help motivate children who are having some difficulty with motivation to study. A convenient method to manage tangible rewards is the use of a behavior chart.

Setting Up a Behavior Chart

- *Define what behavior you would like to see.* The behavior should be specific, clear, simple, and positively stated. For example, "Bringing home your assignments and books" or "Completing all your homework on time."
- *Initially reward a reasonable goal.* Do not set your expectations so high that your child cannot achieve the goal. The goal should represent an improvement, not perfection. If the goal is set too high, the child may give up before getting a chance to be rewarded. The goal can be gradually increased as the child begins to improve.
- *Make a chart* by simply listing each day of the week and leaving room for marks, stickers, or stars to be placed under each day.
- *Create a "menu" of daily and weekly rewards.* It also may be necessary to change the rewards frequently so that the child will keep interested.
- *Provide daily and weekly rewards for goals met.* Be sure to consistently provide the promised rewards when your child achieves her daily and weekly goals.

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