

## HOW TO GET GOOD GRADES

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.*

If you read and follow the suggestions outlined, you will find that you are on your way to getting the best grades you have ever gotten. You may not get the grades you want overnight, and it will require some work on your part, but if you want to improve your grades, these suggestions can definitely help you do it.

**BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.** *In order for you to succeed, you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. You must recognize the talents and abilities that you possess, and you must know, and believe, that you can succeed.* Take a minute now and write down the courses you're currently taking and write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course this marking period. Think of these grades as your academic goals for this marking period. Believe in yourself, and believe that you can achieve these goals.

**BE ORGANIZED.** *If you're organized, you have what you need, when you need it. This section will give you several ideas on how to get organized. You, of course, must determine what's going to work best for you.*

- **Use your Agenda.** Take it with you to every class, and use it for each day's assignments. When you get an assignment, write it down on the page under the date it's due. When you're given a big assignment or project, use your Agenda to break the assignment down into smaller parts. For example, if you have an English paper due at the end of the week, you could break this assignment down into small parts by giving yourself four separate assignments: get resources at library; do outline; write rough draft; write final draft.
- **Use a three-ring notebook for notes.** These notebooks work well because you can easily insert handouts, or notes, where they belong.
- **Use folders for schoolwork.** Have a different colored pocket folder for each class. Keep current assignments along with all returned assignments, quizzes, and tests. Old tests and quizzes can help you study for future tests, and they may come in handy if there's ever a question about your grade. Keeping a record of your grades eliminates surprises at report card time.
- **Have phone numbers for classmates.** Make sure you have a phone number for at least one person in each class. Then if you are ever absent, you'll have someone to call to find out what you missed.
- **Keep your locker and backpack neat.** Keep things organized so that you can easily find what you need. Always put loose papers in the appropriate folder or notebook as soon as you get them.
- **Get organized before you go to bed.** Put completed assignments in the appropriate folders, and put everything you need for the next day in the same place each night. If there's something you need to remember to do in the morning, leave yourself a note to make sure you don't forget it.

**Manage Your Time Well.** *With good time management, you have time to do the things you have 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 start on homework, to ask questions, or to get help.
- **Create your own study plan.** Some students study best at night; others study best in the morning. Many students also have activities, sports, and jobs that they have to work around. Determine how much time you have available each day, take a look at the amount of homework you have, and then develop a study plan. To help keep you “on track,” try to have a plan in mind that you can follow every day.

**BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE CLASSROOM.** *If you follow the advice in this section, you'll enjoy school more and you'll get better grades.*

- **Be in school, on time, everyday.** When you miss school, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, homework explanations, assignments, quizzes, and tests. You can never make up all of what you miss. You, therefore, need to decide that you will be in school every day. Unless you have an extended illness or a chronic health problem, you shouldn't miss school more than a few days a year.
- **Learn how to adapt to different teachers.** In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and they make the rules. Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different personalities, teaching styles, and expectations.
- **Be prepared for each class.** To be prepared, you need to have books, paper, pencil, etc. with you when you go to class, and you need to have all of your homework done. When you've done your homework, you get more out of your classes, the lectures make more sense, and you can participate in class discussions. If you haven't done your homework, you may not understand the lecture or the class discussion. Being prepared also means that you're ready to learn.
- **Be aware of your body language and nonverbal behavior.** Don't slouch or move around in your seat, and keep your eyes on your teacher. If you choose to do any of 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 conclude that you don't care about what's going on in their class. It's not enough for you to say that you want to get good grades; your body language and nonverbal behavior have to communicate this also.
- **Always do your homework.** Do not look at homework as something you should do; think of homework as something you must do. Since a portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Always have homework completed on time.
- **Participate in class.** Teachers often give participation points. These are easy points to get, and participating in class helps keep you focused.

**BE A GOOD GROUP MEMBER.** *Here are a few things to remember when you have to do a group project:*

- Do your share of the work and do it well.
- Accept that everyone is different and try to be open to all ideas.
- Be positive, and encourage and support the other members of the group.

**TREAT OTHERS WITH COURTESY AND 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 one of voice, can communicate an entirely different message.

Remember that teachers are people too. They enjoy having students show an interest in them. For example, if a teacher's been out ill, a simple comment like, "I hope you're feeling better" can brighten that teacher's day. Teachers also appreciate it when students make positive comments. Of course, a thank you is always appreciated!

**INVOLVE YOUR PARENTS.** *Make your parents your allies.* When they ask what you did in school, tell them. They'll love the fact that you're talking to them about school.

Whenever possible, let your parents help. You can ask them to drill you on vocabulary words, read over a paper you've written, listen to you practice a speech, and/or help you study for a test. You'll get better grades, your parents will appreciate you giving them the opportunity to help, and they'll see for themselves that you're really trying to do well in school.

If you are having a problem with a subject, teacher, class, or fellow student, let your parents know. They can help you deal with whatever the situation is, and if necessary, they can intervene on your behalf.

**TAKE GOOD NOTES.** *Tests usually cover material that has been presented and discussed in class. It is, therefore, important to have good classroom notes from which to study.*

- **Be an active listener.** In order to take good notes, you must be an active listener. When you are actively listening in class, you are not just hearing the words the teacher is saying, you're also thinking about, and trying to understand, the information that's being presented.
- **Take notes to help you pay attention.** You can think faster than anyone can talk. This is one of the reasons that your mind sometimes wanders when you're listening to a lecture. When you take notes you stay focused because your mind has something additional to do, so you don't have time to think about anything else.
- **Recognize important information.** You can often hear a change in your teacher's voice when he/she is going to say something that's important for you to know. Teachers often speak louder, speak slower, or they give verbal clues like "the most significant outcome," "the main point," "the most important reason," "the three causes," etc.
- Anything your teacher writes on the board or overhead should be considered very important.

Underline or put a star beside this information so that you will know to give it special attention when you're studying later.

- **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. Write on every other line and only use one side of the paper. Your notes will be neater and easier to read, and you'll have space if you want to add something later.
  - ▶ Use symbols and abbreviations whenever possible.
  - ▶ Use pencil or erasable pen to keep your notes neat.
  - ▶ Leave a wide margin on the left side of each page. As you're taking notes, identify the key words (topics, people, places, events, etc.), and write them in the margins. This will help you organize your thoughts, and make your notes more understandable. Key words are also helpful to use when you're reviewing for a test.
- **Go over your notes as soon as possible.** While the information is still fresh in your mind, go over your notes and clarify anything that's confusing. Fill in the spaces, and make sure that the key words are written in the margins of your notes. Of course, while you are going over your notes, you're also "fixing" this information in your memory. If you are really serious about getting the best grade possible in a class, completely redo your notes. Your notes will be clearer, and as you rewrite them, you'll also be learning the material. This is time consuming, but it pays off.
- **Get copies of class notes if you're absent.** When you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and to ask your teacher(s) for handouts and assignments. Do not assume that your teacher(s) will tell you if there's anything you need to know or do. Be sure to also get copies of any notes you missed and put them in your notebook.

**KNOW HOW TO READ A TEXTBOOK.** *When you know how to read a textbook, you comprehend and remember what you read.*

Textbook authors have already done a lot of your work for you. They've inserted boldfaces subtitles that tell you exactly what you are going to be reading about. They've put all the important words in **bold** or *italic* print, and they've added pictures, charts and graphs, lists of vocabulary words, summaries, and review questions. The textbook authors have done all of this to make it easier for you to learn and retain the information they're presenting. Once you know how to **scan**, **read**, and **review**, you will be able to comprehend and remember what you read the first time through.

- **Scan.** Scanning gives you a quick overview of the material you're going to read, and provides you with a great deal of information in a very short amount of time. To scan, read the title, the subtitles, and everything in **bold** and *italic* print. Look at the pictures, graphs, and charts, go over the review questions, and read the summaries.
- **Read.** When your reading has a purpose, your comprehension improves and it's easier for you to stay focused. To give your reading purpose, try turning each boldfaced subtitle into a question. For example, you could turn "The rules of the Game" into "What are the rules of the Game?" Keep your

question in mind as you read, and when you finish that section, see if you can answer it. Your question gives you something specific to look for, and it helps keep your mind from wandering.

- **Review.** Okay, you've scanned and read the material. This is when most students will say, "I'm done," and then close their book. Taking a few extra minutes for review, however, will make a huge difference in what you are able to remember later. To review, go back to the beginning and go through the same process you did when you scanned the material. This time, as you read the boldfaced subtitles, 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 significant. If you really want to lock the information into your brain, review everything again a day or two later.

While it may take a little practice to get the **Scan, Read, and Review** process down, you'll soon realize that this process does not mean more work; it just means better comprehension, better retention, and better grades. When you go to study for a test, you'll be amazed at how well you know the material.

**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's well lit, it's comfortable, and it has a surface for writing. Equip your study area with paper, pens, and pencils, a calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, and a one-volume encyclopedia.
- **Get started.** Getting started on your studying is usually the hardest part. Don't put it off until later, don't make excuses, and don't wait until you're "in the mood." Begin with something simple or a subject that you like, and get started.
- **Know your learning style.** We all learn differently. Some students learn best by seeing the material (visual learner), some learn best from 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, TV, reading, and demonstrations. If you are a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts, and diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and make use of color in your notes.
  - ▶ Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, TV, films, and music. If you are an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme.
  - ▶ If you are a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Try moving around while you study, use tools and objects whenever possible, write or type notes, and role play ideas and concepts.
- **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. Make sure that your plan is realistic.

- ▶ Prioritize your work in order to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- ▶ If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- ▶ If you have something to memorize, work on that first, and then go over it again at the end of your study session.
- ▶ Always allow more time than you think you'll need.
- ▶ Alternate types of assignments.
- ▶ Study for 20 minutes and then take a short break. Research shows that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session.
- **Know how to study for tests.**
  - ▶ Know what the test is going to cover so that you'll know what to study.
  - ▶ Pay close attention in class the day before a test. Teachers sometimes discuss what the test is going to cover, and they often go over information that you need to know.
  - ▶ If a teacher gives you a review sheets, study it until you know everything on it.
  - ▶ Have all of your reading done ahead of time. If your textbook has review questions, go over them, and be sure you know the answers.
  - ▶ You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of a mirror.
  - ▶ Review often. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. Review is the key to learning anything.
- **Use tricks to help you memorize information.**
  - ▶ Use study cards or flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.
  - ▶ Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes say it, and then look at it again.
  - ▶ If you are an auditory learner, use rhyming or rhythm to help you memorize things. Make up a rap or memorize to a beat.
  - ▶ Right before you go to sleep at night, go over any information that you want to remember. Your brain will commit it to memory while you sleep.
  - ▶ Use acronyms to help you memorize. For example, the acronym for HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
  - ▶ Look for an easy or logical connection. For example, to remember that Homer wrote the *Odyssey*, just think, "Homer is an *odd* name."
  - ▶ Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help you trigger your memory.
- **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. Start off by brainstorming and taking notes; then make an outline. From your outline, write a rough draft. Rewrite the paper until you have it just the way you want it, and then write the final draft. It's important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take it out and read it again, you'll see and

hear things that you didn't notice before. To get a good grade on a paper, you must:

- ▶ follow directions exactly,
  - ▶ make sure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors,
  - ▶ have someone else read your paper to give you suggestions,
  - ▶ make sure your paper looks neat, and
  - ▶ always turn your paper in on time.
- **Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.**
    - ▶ Use props whenever possible. Props, such as posters, books, or sporting equipment, give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of them.
    - ▶ When you give a presentation or speech, pretend that you are telling your best friend something really important.
    - ▶ Effective speakers make eye contact with those in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.

**USE TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES.** *In order to do well on any test, you must study hard and be prepared. Having done that, you can further improve your test performance by using these test-taking strategies.*

- **Get off to a good start.** Have everything you need for the test. 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, memory aids, etc.) in light pencil at the top of your test. Put your first and last name on your test, and read the directions carefully.
- **Develop a plan.** Before you begin answering questions, quickly look over the entire test and develop a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and two essay questions, you could plan 10 minutes for the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes for each essay question, and 10 minutes to check over your answers.
- **Mark the questions that you want to return to.** As you go through the test, put a dot or light check mark by an answer you're not sure of. After you have gone through all the questions, go back to the one(s) you've marked and try again.
- 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. Chances are you'll know the answers when you go back to them later.
- **Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.** As you're readying a multiple-choice questions, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the choices. If you're not sure of an answer, eliminate the choices you know are incorrect by crossing them out. Then make an educated guess. If two of the choices are similar or opposite, probably one of them is the correct answer. Read all of the answer choices. There will probably be a couple of choices that sound like they could be correct; don't be tempted to mark the first one that sounds good.

- **Look for key words in True/False questions.** Statements with *always, never, every, all, 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 essay question and then start with the easiest one. This will help you gain confidence, and it will give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions.
  - ▶ Before you do any writing, brainstorm. Jot down the key words, ideas, and points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize these ideas and points into a simple outline, if not, just number them in the order you want to present them.
  - ▶ Write legibly, and use clear, concise, complete sentences. Studies have shown that when two identical essays are graded, the one that's easier to read gets the higher grade. In your opening paragraph, state the questions and tell the reader what he/she can expect to learn from your essay. In your middle paragraphs, present examples, details, evidence, and facts to support the points you're making. In your final paragraph, restate main points, and write a quick summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.
- **Improve your math test scores.** Before you start to solve a problem, try to eliminate what the answer will be. If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or a diagram. Don't spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, go on and come back to it later. Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, it may show that you were on the right track.
- **Be prepared for open book tests.** During an open book test, you must be able to locate information quickly. To help you do this:
  - ▶ Make sure you have your textbook,
  - ▶ Highlight your notes,
  - ▶ Put self-stick notes or bookmarks in your textbook to help you locate important information, and, if allowed, rewrite all of the information you'll need to know on a separate sheet of paper.
- **Check your answers.** If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have read the question wrong or made a careless mistake.
- **Go over all returned tests.** Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. If you have questions, ask to meet with your teacher. Keep a record of your test scores, and keep returned tests in your folders.

**REDUCE TEST ANXIETY.** *A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Excessive worry, or test anxiety, will lower your test scores.*

It's possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can't think clearly. The brain is like a computer in that it contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however if you're not able to "access" it when you need 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. The night before a test, review the material and get a good night's sleep. Cramming increases test anxiety.
- Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself calmly and confidently walking into the test. See yourself answering the questions correctly, and then see yourself receiving the grade that you want.
- Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. How you act can definitely affect how you feel. If you act confident, you may just find that you feel more confident.
- Here are five common relaxation techniques that you might want to try:
  - 1) Take a deep breath, hold it, and then slowly release the breath and the tension.
  - 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) Close your eyes and let your arms hang down at your sides. As you relax, visualize the tension from your head, neck, and shoulders flowing down your arms and out through your fingertips.
  - 5) Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

Positive thinking and relaxation techniques are like anything else. The more you practice them, the better you get. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your counselor. Libraries and book stores also have books and tapes designed to help students who struggle with test anxiety.

**GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT.** *When you have a problem, do something to resolve it.*

There will be times when you'll have a question or a problem concerning a class, school rule, teacher, or fellow student. Most questions can be answered and most problems resolved if you go to the appropriate person (secretary, teacher, counselor, or principal) and clearly explain the situation.

If you need academic help, or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. If the problem continues, or if you feel that you can't talk to your teacher, see your counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or harassed by another student, tell a secretary, teacher, counselor, or principal immediately. If you ever have a problem and are not sure where to go for help, talk to your counselor.

Every student has his/her share of normal teenage problems. Some students, however, have problems that are so overwhelming that they cannot pay attention in class or concentrate on their schoolwork. Students who are dealing with any of the following need to talk to their parents and/or to their counselor immediately: alcohol, drugs, pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, a health concern, problems at home, depression. Thousands of students across the country are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.