



Enhanced Learning **Educational Services** *"the study skills specialist"*

1. MOTIVATION

Motivating your students can be hard going. There are two arguments you can present to them to encourage them to use their time at school wisely.

KEEP DOORS OPEN

Most students do not know what sort of a career they want to pursue when they leave school. By working to the best of their ability, they keep as many doors or paths open as possible. Slacking off now can mean limited choices later on. Career counsellors or aptitude tests can be useful in giving some direction.

DEVELOP HABITS OF SUCCESS

If your student has a bad habit (like biting their nails) they have probably struggled to break this habit. Poor study habits and work ethics are the same – difficult to break later on. Things that teachers and schools put up with will not be tolerated in the workplace. Developing habits of success can make life easier.

For many students though, the future can seem a long way away and a bit irrelevant. For these types of students, the carrot and the stick are the main motivators. Try and find ways to reward your students for positive behaviours rather than punishing them for negative ones. Make the goals small and manageable, and keep the rewards small too or you will set higher and higher standards for the type of reward needed for motivation.

A fabulous book written by an educational psychologist is 'How to Motivate Your Child for school and beyond' by Andrew Martin. It has lots of great strategies and insights and suggestions. A must read for any parent who is looking for ways to motivate their student.

2. IN THE CLASSROOM

Students need to Listen, Participate, Concentrate – make it active!!!

Retention: 10% if just listen, 40% if take notes, and 90% if actively take notes and participate.

Parents need to know what is happening in the classroom and work together with students and teachers to improve and to make class time more efficient. Ask for the plain unvarnished truth at parent teacher interviews! Get specific. Do they talk in the lesson? Do they listen to instructions? How much of the lesson are they on task for? Do they use class time effectively? Call the teacher if you are unsure of how effective your student is in the classroom. It may be necessary to ask for a change of seats to ensure students use class time well. Students will not take the initiative to sit next to someone else and it can be difficult for a teacher to justify moving a student. A parent asking for a change could be the excuse they have been looking for. If there are particular subjects of concern, ask your student's teacher to record how on track they have been in that lesson in their diary. If they really are not improving, ask the school for some sort of progress card that the teacher signs off each lesson indicating how well they worked that lesson.

3. GETTING ORGANISED

On a regular basis, maybe twice a term, arrange a time with your student for them to sit down with you and show you their folders or exercise books. It is a good exercise to see if they can clearly explain the work they have covered so far. Each subject should have a folder at home with a contents page at the front listing the topics covered so far. Topics should be separated by dividers. All work in each topic should be sorted into the things to learn at the front of that section (ie notes or handouts) and the things to practice at the back (ie tests, assignments, worksheets etc). Your students should be able to show you a clear progression of each of the topics they have covered so far this year. If their work is very disorganised, help them sort everything into topics and label things clearly. Help them do a contents page. Another strategy is to ask the teacher to send you a copy of the list of topics they will be covering in class that term. You can then use this list to help your student organise their notes. You may like to have your student ask a friend if they could borrow their notes for an evening and you could sit with your student to use these notes as a guide as to what should be in their folders or books.

Student Steps for Getting Organised

1. Have a folder for each subject with dividers for each topic. Within each topic sort your papers into things to learn and things to practice.
2. File away all sheets, handouts, past essays etc.
3. Further sort each topic into things you will need to learn, and material you either already know well or don't need to learn. File the work you don't need to learn under your bed.
4. Each time you finish a topic, make a summary or set of study notes for that topic. Start reducing the material in your folder by condensing it into the essential elements, ie the key points.

4. MANAGING WORKLOAD

Encourage your students to plan out their work, break it down into pieces and allocate the work over a period of time. They should write into their diaries when they plan on doing these steps. If students are feeling overwhelmed, sit down together and get them to write out a list of absolutely everything they need to get done. Help them prioritise these and draw up a grid of the next few weeks. Help them slot the pieces of work into the available time.

Some good homework practices:

1. using the school diary to write in when to DO work, not when it is DUE
2. highlighting completed work, cross out and reschedule work not done
3. having a time set aside each day that is schoolwork time
4. using a wall planner to see clearly when tests and assignments are due

Students NEVER have no work to do:

1. Homework
2. Tests and Assignments
3. Summaries, Study Notes, Review
4. There will always be summaries that can be made, work that could be redone, extra exercises to be attempted as well as other work.

5. PREPARING FOR EXAMINATIONS

Four weeks before exams – encourage students to find out topics etc to be included in exams.

Check if students have their notes organised and summaries made, and find out if they have any work missing. Preferably this should also happen about a month before the exams.

Help students draw up a grid of the time before the exam and plan out what work they will do to prepare. Or get them to do one and give it to you for suggestions.

Remind your students to do the following a month or so before:

1. complete fact finding
2. finalise summaries and notes highlighting key words and phrases
3. identify which particular skills are being examined
4. identify main concepts, themes and issues they are expected to know

DO A PLAN!

Draw up a timetable of the available time left to study

Use the grid to plan out when they are going to DO each piece of preparation.

6. MAKING EFFECTIVE SUMMARIES / STUDY NOTES

Ideally, students should make or at least start study notes for their subjects each time they finish a topic. This way they are reviewing their work as they go, and when they get to examination time it is not such a huge task to undertake. Some features of good summaries are as follows:

1. point form as much as possible, avoid long sentences, rephrase in own words
2. relevant information only to be included
3. neat, legible, easy to read, well set out with a logical structure
4. improve layout with wide margins, different colour and headings, box key points, numbering etc
5. loose leaf sheets are useful as can rewrite sections and add in extra information
6. never ending process, keep refining, improving, adding in
7. summary must be comprehensive and include all information needed
8. mind maps: one page visual overview of the topic

Some ammunition for you with your student to use about summaries!

Why Make Summaries?

Every time you start a summary you are actually studying as you have to think about how the topic is arranged, what it means and the best way to make it clear rather than just copying out notes. It improves concentration and memory and is a selective process helping you gain the main ideas and facts. It helps you translate information into terms that are meaningful for you. The mind flinches from scrappy data. The better you organise your notes into groups and sub-groups of connected ideas the better you will be able to learn them. It gives you a fantastic time advantage closer to the exams if your notes are well organised and you can start studying straight away.

How Do You Make Summaries?

Go through all the resources you have to make sure your summary includes everything you should know. This helps you work out what you do and don't understand. Write things in a logical order and only have the minimum number of important words to read through, no lengthy sentences. This eliminates excessive notetaking by forcing the use of key words or phrases rather than sentences. It must be easy to read and well organised. Mind mapping is a method you can use for visualising information in a kind of map or diagram. It gives you an overview of a large amount of information. By organising the information clearly and logically it focuses attention on essential information and helps establish the link between all supporting points. The organisation, neatness and legibility of the notes made is very important to help support the brain in making and retaining patterns for memory. Use highlighting, colour, headings, boxes, bullet points to help your memory retain information.

7. STUDYING FOR EXAMS

Students need to both LEARN and PRACTISE for exams.

LEARN

Parents can be of great help in making students' learning of material more active by testing students or helping them with flashcards or having students verbally explain or talk about a particular topic. Learning styles are also important. Students should try to access different learning styles in the way they study (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) but they should also play to their strengths. If students are not happy with their results, the results will not change unless they change the way in which they study. The main thing to avoid is just sitting still and reading. Students should always have a pen in their hand and be highlighting, making notes on what they have read or reading then writing down in their own words what they can remember.

LEARNING

Parents can suggest to students to:

1. Make and refine summaries.
2. Write it. Speak it
3. Test themselves. Have someone test them.

4. Teach it. Explain it to someone else.
5. Make flashcards, mnemonics, mind maps, acronyms.
6. Use tapes, tables.
7. Write definitions, lists.
8. Write in own words.
9. Use over learning.

PRACTISE

Although parents can't help much with the practise side of things, they can ensure students have all the resources they need. There are great study guides available for most subjects which can give students an extra source of questions to practise from. Prior to examinations, encourage students to ask their teachers for past papers to use for study.

PRACTISING

1. practise essay writing / planning by doing typical exam questions : focus on being relevant and answering questions
2. read examiners' reports and sample answers, note the significant points, look at marking criteria
3. do as many past papers as you can under exam conditions (plus old tests, essays, exams)
4. quiz yourself to find out what you really know, not what you think you know
5. do as many different questions and types of questions you can find
6. keep a list of common mistakes and things to ask your teachers about
7. clear up any doubts or insecurities about your understanding

Some additional points:

1. Good study environment means no TV, good lighting, ventilation etc
2. Music : Baroque (60 beats per minute) helps memory vs today's music which has 140 beats per minute and lowers the brain's ability to retain info.
3. Study Breaks: most people can concentrate for about 45 mins to 1 hour. Take a 5 min break, drink water, clear your head. For most effective study, break the 45 mins down to 2 x 20 min study blocks.

8. EXAMINATION TECHNIQUES

Ask your student if they'd like to spend 5 minutes or so talking about examination techniques and what they need to focus on in the exam. Give your students a quiz on the following. For example you could ask them "What should you do the morning of the exam?"

The morning of the exam ensure you have had a decent breakfast and you arrive well on time with correct equipment.

At the start of the exam read through all instructions / criteria and look through the whole paper taking note of choices. Remember your strengths and plan your attack. Some students like to jot down points for all their plans first.

You can memory dump formulas or things you think you might forget, but don't spend too long doing this.

Which questions first? Depends on your style. Play to your strengths and do the questions that will help you build confidence and momentum. Some recommend leaving the multiple choice till last – ask your teacher what is best in their subject.

The marks are an important guideline for the depth of response required by the examiner. Don't just write everything you know – answer the question!

Avoid liquid paper. It takes time, you may forget to go back, and even worse you might have been right!

Write neatly so examiners don't waste time deciphering and then feel your work is disjointed.

Allocate and plan out your time before you start. Keep a watch in front of you at all times and don't spend too long on just one question.

If you finish early, check and check again, especially the details. Attempt EVERY question – don't leave anything out.

If you have a mental blank, leave it and come back : let your subconscious work on it. Stay hydrated though, dehydration causes massive reduction in short term memory.

Common Mistakes:

1. Not showing all working
2. Careless adding up
3. Leaving out an answer
4. Copying question incorrectly
5. Making diagrams too small
6. Leaving out or not attempting a question
7. Telling everything you know without answering the question
8. Not concentrating on small details ie significant figures etc
9. Not reading the question carefully

9. MANAGING STRESS

QUALITY SLEEP : destress, remove negative thoughts

EXERCISE : burn off stress hormones

HEALTHY FOOD : avoid caffeine and sugar

MANAGING EXAMS : be thoroughly prepared, plan study time.

Active Strategies for Students

1. warm bath, peace and quiet
2. 10 minute afternoon siesta
3. laugh, smile
4. talk to someone, write to self, journal
5. breathe deeply, relax muscles one by one

Mental Strategies for Students

1. Perspective: don't make mountains out of molehills.
2. Visualise and imagine it all going well. Systematic desensitisation. Imagine the situation, make it seem really real. Mental rehearsal.
3. Chill out, sit out, meditate, withdraw from problems and have a quiet time to calm your mind.
4. Change your self talk. How stressed you become is directly related to what you are telling yourself in your head. You can reprogram that. Are you negative in your self talk?
5. The Catastrophe scale. Imagine a ruler marked 1 (everything is great) to 100 (the most horrid thing you can think of) and work out where your current issue sits on the scale. Reminds us that reality is not as bad as it seems.
6. Focusing: change the focus from the negative thing to positive things.
7. Guided Imagery : see self in beautiful place in control of life, affirmations.

10. POST EXAMINATION EVALUATION

Ensure you get to see every examination paper. Make time with your student to sit down and discuss the paper together. Ask them what they did well and what they answered well. Ask them what they didn't know and need to improve on next time. What did they find hard? Did they do enough revision? Should they redo and resubmit any particular questions? Do they need to add anything to their summary notes? What did they learn from the experience. It certainly doesn't hurt to call your student's teacher and have a quiet chat about the exam and their performance. This way you can get some further feedback about what they need to do to improve.