

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10

HIGH SCHOOL



October 2023

Encourage your teen to answer six questions while reading

How much does your teen retain after reading an assignment? One strategy that helps students remember more of the history and literature they read is to take notes while reading.

What should your teen write down? Suggest thinking like a reporter. While reading, your teen can look for and write down answers (and information that's relevant) to these six questions:

1. **Who?** Who was there? Who were the most important people or characters involved?
2. **What?** What were the most important things that happened?
3. **Where?** Where did this event take place? Why is the place significant? Would the event have been different if it had occurred elsewhere?
4. **When?** When did the event happen? Were there any important reasons the event happened when it did, and not earlier or later?
5. **Why?** Why did the event happen? Why is it important to know about it?
6. **How?** How did it happen? How did it turn out? How did it affect what came next?

Encourage your teen to practice this with news articles. News reporters aim to answer these six questions in the first few paragraphs.



Give your teen's brain a workout

Thinking is essential for learning, and the more students do it, the better. In school, your teen is expected to analyze and evaluate material, make connections and support conclusions. At home, ask your teen to:

- **Examine all sides** of an issue. Encourage your teen to develop arguments defending opposing viewpoints with equal dedication.
- **Double-check information.** Instead of assuming something online is true, have your teen verify the facts with credible sources.
- **Explain situations,** examples and problems in detail. To do this well, your teen will need to develop a strong vocabulary and an ability to express ideas clearly.
- **Identify bias** and assumptions. Is that website or social media post promoting an agenda? Does it present complete information, or cherry-pick facts to make a point? Is a "fact" really an idea based on an assumption? Stereotypes, for example, are usually unfair and misleading.

Share concentration tips

If maintaining concentration when studying is a challenge, suggest that your teen:

- **Set goals** for each study session.
- **Stand up.** A short mental break can help students regain focus.
- **Jot down** unrelated thoughts to remember later, then keep studying.

Offer support, not control

Some decisions, such as matters of safety, require parental control. But too much parental control over schoolwork doesn't help teens take responsibility for learning.

Provide supplies and a place to work, and say you will do all you can to support your teen's efforts. Then leave the decision of how to do the work up to your student. Later, discuss the results—and what your teen has learned about what to do next time.



Reduce digital downsides

Too much of some screen activities can affect students' academic performance, mental health and well-being. To help keep the digital world and the real world in balance:

- **Suggest a lunchtime pact.** Teens benefit from real-life social interactions. Recommend this deal to your teen and friends: "The first person to pick up their phone during lunch has to throw everyone's trash away."
- **Have your teen** do a mood check when using digital media. Say that whenever mood takes a dive, your teen should talk to a friend or trusted adult in person.



Source: L. Kolb, "6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones," ISTE.

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How can I help my teen learn math I don't understand?

Q: I don't remember much high school math. Now my teen is struggling with it, and I don't know how to help. What can I do?

A: Many parents find themselves in this situation. But you *can* support your teen in math—even if you don't understand the concepts involved. Here are several ways:



- **Be positive.** Studies show that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in it. Make it clear you think math is worth learning, and your teen is capable of learning it. Say things like, "That looks complex, but I know you will be able to figure it out."
- **Ask for a lesson.** Have your teen explain to you, step by step, how to go about solving a homework problem.
- **Remind your teen to show all work.** If a problem or concept is still confusing, your teen can ask the teacher to clarify. The teacher will be able to see where your student went off track.
- **Encourage your teen to set aside time every day** to work on math, whether there is an assignment due or not.
- **Talk about math** as you use it in everyday life. Whether you are using it on the job, to budget or to double a recipe, you'll show your teen that math is something adults need to know.



Are you helping your teen solve academic problems?

Does your teen find one class more of a challenge than the others? Perhaps the teacher isn't a favorite, or the subject is complex. Do you know how to help your teen cope? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you discuss** what your teen thinks is the reason for the issue?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your teen to ask the teacher for help making a plan for improvement?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your teen find other resources for help, such as online videos or tutoring?
- ___ **4. Do you celebrate** every sign of your teen's progress?
- ___ **5. Do you reach out** to the teacher yourself if your teen continues to struggle?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your teen find solutions for academic issues. For each no, try that idea.

"Complaining is finding faults.
Wisdom is finding solutions."

—Ajahn Brahm

Model civility when arguing

Research shows that the *way* adults and teens disagree matters. In a disagreement, hear your teen out and acknowledge valid points. Calmly state your views, and give reasons for them. Then, see if you can come to a mutual decision.

Your example will help your teen learn to make points persuasively and respectfully—a key communication skill for school. Teens with this skill are also better equipped to resist peer pressure.

Source: J.P. Allen and others, "Predictors of Susceptibility to Peer Influence Regarding Substance Use in Adolescence," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

Provide an attitude boost

Having a positive attitude doesn't mean ignoring things that go wrong. It means being able to see a bigger picture—that doesn't look *all* bad. To nurture positivity, encourage your teen to be:

- **Hopeful.** Help your teen build on strengths.
- **Flexible.** After a disappointment, help your teen look in new directions.
- **Proactive.** Encourage your teen to look for opportunities to make goals happen.

Teach your teen to plan for schoolwork

Planning and setting priorities are skills that take practice. To instill habits that help keep schoolwork on track, have your teen:



- **Write** all assignments in a planner.
- **Create** a schedule each week for completing assignments. Seeing everything in one place lets your teen anticipate conflicts and plan ways around them.
- **Allow extra time** for the unexpected.

Source: D. Goldberg, *The Organized Student*, Simon & Schuster.

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