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Studying Strategies

PARENT TIP #9

Help My Teen Study for Tests

By Susan J. Demas

What Louie Meizlish learned in high school has lasted a lifetime. Granted, Meizlish is only 26, but the study skills he developed at Groves High School in Birmingham, Mich., have served him well through a history degree at the University of Michigan and his work toward two advanced degrees.

Meizlish, a former legislative and congressional aide, has pursued a master's degree in Public Administration at Cooley Law School and will be starting his first year of law school this fall at Wayne State University in Detroit.

He follows the same maxim that helped him finish his first year of college by taking Advanced Placement classes while still in high school.

"If I have a big test coming up, I try to get eight or more hours' sleep consistently for five or seven days beforehand," says Meizlish. "Your concentration improves significantly."

Smart students like Meizlish know that it takes more than knowing the material – you have to study smart, too. So what can you do to help your teen?

TV shows often have characters pull out top marks after dramatic all-night cram sessions, but that's usually a recipe for squeaking by with a "D" or a "C." In reality, repetition is your child's friend and slow and steady gets the "A."

Start with the basics. Teens should prepare for that big test by taking top-notch notes every day and reviewing them at night. This is especially helpful in history and social sciences. And in this case, a little effort goes a long way. Research shows students do better on tests when they take as little as five minutes every night to just review their class notes and think about what they learned that day.

It's a Fact.

Good study skills are what separate good students from great students. Take some time to help your teen bone up on his test-taking battle plan and he'll reap the rewards.

What's Your Teen's Test-Taking IQ?

1. He takes thorough notes in class. **YES/NO**
2. He talks to teachers and has a good sense what will be on the test. **YES/NO**
3. He takes notes on his reading at home. **YES/NO**
4. He has his own studying techniques with practice questions, mnemonic devices, etc. **YES/NO**
5. He knows what format tests will be in and how much of his grade they're worth. **YES/NO**

If you answered **NO** to any of these questions, it's time to school your child in the art of study skills. He'll thank you for it.

They also need to keep up with reading assignments, which can pile up, especially in English. Successful students take notes on their reading to help it gel in their minds. Teachers won't lecture on everything, so by summarizing important points in your reading, he'll be organizing information have a leg up for test time.

And some things never change. Teens can't forget to do their homework, especially in math and foreign language, where practice does make perfect. All that work conjugating verbs and solving quadratic equations will help improve his time, confidence and, of course, performance on exams.

High school students should also talk to their teachers. If your teen just isn't getting photosynthesis, there's no one better to consult than his biology teacher. Chatting with teachers outside of class is a good way to get a sense of what may be stressed on exams. Some teachers will give out past exams to study, so ask. And building relationships is important. This also will help prepare them for college, where top students visit professors during office hours.

Lastly, make sure your teen does his homework on the test. He should find out how much of his final grade it's worth, what the format is and what he'll need (i.e. a graphing calculator or notes if it's open book).

Not all tests are created equal. Your student will study for a multiple choice exam differently than a long essay exam. For the former, he'll need to study for breadth of information – knowing the dates of battles and names of kings during 19th century Europe. He'll want to emphasize memorization of a lot of details.

But if it's an essay exam, that will test his depth of knowledge. Your teen will need to know the basics of when things happened and who was involved. But he'll also need to know why. Writing sample essays on key concepts will help him prepare far better than memorizing dates.

Just remember: Your teen has to study for the test at hand. Even if he knows the material backwards and forwards, this can make the difference between an "A" and a "B."

Susan J. Demas is a contributing editor to EduGuide from Lansing, Michigan.

Top Test-Taking Techniques

Tell your teen to check these out before his next big test:

- ☒ **Make up your own test.** Design your own test questions and answer them to get you in the groove.
- ☒ **Use mnemonic devices.** Memorization tricks that use word association, acronyms or humor to lock new information in to long-term memory.
- ☒ **Overstudy.** You can never study too much, especially for a big exam. If your teen has it down cold, this might help your teen overcome his nervousness.
- ☒ **Answer easy questions first.** Once he's taking the test, he should tackle the questions he knows first to make sure he doesn't run out of time. Plus, he'll probably relax as he remembers how much he really does know.
- ☒ **There are no stupid questions.** If he's not sure what a test question is asking, he should ask the teacher. The last thing he needs is to miss out on points due to a technicality.

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