

Teaching Study Skills to Empower Your Students

by Winston Sieck - October 16, 2016

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Too often, conscientious students show up to class thinking that your job is to lay out the perfect plan for them to learn.

And theirs is simply to glide through it.

It's frustrating because you do try to design lessons that will help all of your students to master the material. But the pressure shouldn't rest solely on your shoulders.

What's your student's responsibility in this joint effort?

Teaching study skills to your students is a great way to show them how they can take more ownership of their learning. It doesn't have to take much time, as you can integrate [study skills activities](#) into the normal flow of your class.

Here are some quick tips on how to teach study skills in your class from day one.

Provide students with study tips and strategies and discuss them in class

To get started, include a resource with [rock solid study tips](#) on your teacher page. Assign the reading to your students. Have them identify their top 3 strengths (and 1-3 they need to work on).

Then, hold a short class discussion to talk over the reading. Listen to their reactions, and toss in a few gentle suggestions to nudge your students towards independent learning.

Relay that your job as a teacher is to help them learn some material, but also to prepare them to study further on their own. And that means they need to be able to do some of the things that you currently do for them.

Teach students to make their own study guides

Many students will sit down with their book when it is time to study, read it through and call it good. If you give them a unit study guide, they do the same. Unfortunately, as you well know, this does not mean the information has been absorbed. Instead, carve out a little time to teach your students how to make a study guide on their own.

This begins with teaching them how to pick out important information from the text or your classroom lecture. Once they can pick out these tidbits, teach them how to write questions that can be used to study. With these tools, your students can quiz themselves, and thus be well prepared for their tests.

By teaching your students to make study guides for themselves, rather than providing worksheets for them to fill in, you prepare them for what they will need to do in college.

You don't need to do this for every test. But do it once. Give them some insight into the support you usually provide, and what'll be expected of them later.

Teach your students that "study skills" go beyond studying

When students think about "study skills," they think about the night before a test or quiz and the studying they do at that time. Study skills involve much more than simply test prep. Teaching your students to apply proper study skills to all of their academic work will improve their learning across the board.

For example, organization is a basic study skill. Students need to know where their books and work are, so they can access what they need for a project, test or quiz. Give students the organizational tips and materials they need to keep their backpacks, desks and lockers organized.

Time management is a huge struggle for teens (and the rest of us). Teach some strategies to help them learn how to [avoid procrastination](#) and arrange their time wisely.

In his work on individual learning and motivation, Professor Bruce Tuckman [indicates](#) one helpful time management tool is a "to do" list. Teach your students how to keep an agenda or other "to do" list, and they will be better able to manage their time and accomplish their tasks.

Then, when you are preparing lessons for the classroom, give students the opportunity to be responsible for their own time.

Teach Goal Setting

Finally, teach students to set small, attainable goals, and then work towards them a little bit at a time.

Consider a science teacher that gives the class the task of memorizing the periodic table of the elements. That is an overwhelming task for kids of any age, and some students won't even try because it is so overwhelming.

To make it more attainable, teach the students to break down the information into easy-to-digest chunks, [setting small goals to learn](#) the information a little bit at a time.

Whether they learn a row or column at a time or one particular type of element, breaking it down into smaller pieces will make the task of learning the entire set of data more manageable.

This is not something students naturally know how to do, so teach them.

Communicate with parents and involve them in the process of teaching study skills

Unlike teachers, parents do not receive extensive training and education in order to help their children learn and develop in a school setting.

The parents of your students may not realize the best ways to help their teens study or prepare for a day at school. Of course, you can't spend much time trying to teach parents.

The best thing you can do is offer ways to help them learn how they can help their teen succeed. Both in your class and beyond.

At the beginning of the school year, provide parents with information about the study skills that you will be working on throughout the year. Make [some resources](#) available to them that define a reasonable role for parents.

Suggest that interested, engaged parents try to foster these study skills and independent learning at home. Rather than try to master the material for their teen or force a strict study schedule, they can be more like a [coach](#) - providing pointers on technique from the sideline.

Foster independence by teaching study skills

The work you do planning instruction demonstrates good study techniques.

Organizing lessons and breaking complicated ideas into chunks that are easier to absorb. Figuring out assignments that invite students to process the content more deeply. Giving quizzes to keep kids on track and helping them see how well they really understand.

Teens need the scaffolds you provide to make headway with the intellectual demands of your classroom.

But they also need to better appreciate the structure you provide. To realize that it's a starting point for their own efforts. And come to terms with the fact that it won't always be there.

That's what teaching study skills does.

In so doing, you help your students to become independent learners who are well prepared for whatever comes their way.

Retrieved: 02-11-2018
Updated: 02-09-2018
Published: 10-16-2016
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