

# TEAMMATES™

MENTORING PROGRAM

## How to get GOOD grades

### *In 10 Easy Steps*

*Adopted by Linda O'Brien, Woodburn Press Booklets*

*This guide is full of helpful advice and practical tips that will help students succeed in school.*

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# What Kind of Student Are You?

To find out what kind of student you are, read the following 10 questions and put check marks in the spaces that best describe you.

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. I complete homework assignments.	_____	_____	_____
2. I have all necessary materials when I go to class (book, pencil, etc.)	_____	_____	_____
3. I use the time teachers give us in class to get started on homework.	_____	_____	_____
4. I take good notes.	_____	_____	_____
5. I ask and answer questions in class.	_____	_____	_____
6. I use tricks to memorize information.	_____	_____	_____
7. After reading an assignment in a textbook, I know what I've read.	_____	_____	_____
8. I get along with my teachers.	_____	_____	_____
9. I am good at taking tests.	_____	_____	_____
10. I am happy with my grades.	_____	_____	_____

Give yourself 2 points for each *Always* response, 1 point for each *Sometimes* response, and 0 for each *Never* response. Add up your score.

## What Your Score Means

**20-15 points:** You are a very good student. This guide will be mostly a review for you. It could, however, help you raise your grades even higher.

**14-10 points:** You are a student who could be getting better grades. With this guide, you will be able to improve your grades significantly.

**9-5 points:** You're probably not getting very good grades. This guide can help you change that. It could even change how you feel about school.

**4-0 points:** Your grades need serious improvement. Don't give up. This guide can help you turn your grades around!

*Regardless of your score, this book can help you improve your grades!*

## 1. STEP ONE - Believe in yourself

- a. In order for you to succeed, you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. Whether you're preparing to take a test or tackling a difficult subject, it's important that you believe in yourself. You need to recognize the talents and abilities that you possess, and you must know, and believe, that you can succeed!

Take a minute now, and in the grid below, list the subjects that you're currently taking. Then in the "Grade" column, write down the highest grade you think you can earn in each course this grading period.

Course	Grade

Think of these grades as your academic goals for this grading period. *Believe in yourself, and believe that you can achieve these goals!*

## 2. STEP TWO – Be Organized

- a. 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 an assignment Notebook, Student Planner, or Agenda. Take an assignment notebook, planner, or agenda with you to every class. When you're given an assignment, write it down under the date it's due. For example, if today is January 11<sup>th</sup> and your history teacher assigns pages 50 – 65 for tomorrow, write this assignment on the January 12<sup>th</sup> page. When you've completed an assignment, check it off.

When you're given a large assignment, use your notebook, planner, or agenda to break the assignment down into smaller parts. For example, if you have an English page due at the end of the week, you could break the assignment down into smaller parts by giving yourself the following four assignments:

- *Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>: Get resources at library*
- *Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>: Do outline*
- *Jan. 12<sup>th</sup>: Write a rough draft*
- *Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>: Write final draft*

Use Three-Ring Notebooks for class notes. Three-ring notebooks work well because you can easily insert handouts, and if you miss a class, you can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong. Buy a 3-hole punch and put it in your notebook. You'll be able to punch handouts right there in class, and immediately put them in your notebook along with your notes for the day.

Use Folders for Schoolwork. Use a different color pocket folder for each class. In these folders, keep your current assignments, along with returned assignments, quizzes, and tests. When a folder starts to get full, take the returned papers out and put them in a safe place at home. 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.

In each of your folders, keep a record of your test, quiz, and homework grades for that class. Keeping a record of your grades will eliminate surprises at report card time.

Have Phone Numbers for Classmates. Make sure that you have a phone number for at least one person in each class. You'll then have someone to call if you have a question about an assignment, and if you're absent, you'll have someone to call to find out what you've missed.

Keep Your Locker and Backpack Neat. Never put loose or folded papers (homework, handouts, etc.) in your locker, backpack, or books. Always put them in the appropriate folder or notebook, and always keep your locker and backpack neat, clean, and organized.

Get Organized Before you go to bed. Put completed homework 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 so that you don't forget it.

### Step Two Review – BE ORGANIZED

- *Use an assignment notebook, student planner, or agenda*

- *Use three-ring notebooks for class notes*
  - *Use folders for schoolwork*
- *Have phone numbers for classmates*
- *Keep your locker and backpack neat*
  - *Get organized*

### 3. STEP THREE – Manage your time well

- a. With good time management, you have time for 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 your homework, to ask questions, or to get help.

Create Your Own Study Plan. Some students study best at night; others study best earlier in the day. Many students also have activities, sports, and jobs that they need to work around. At the end of each school day, determine how much time you have available, look at how much homework you have, and then develop a plan. To help keep yourself organized and “on track”, have a study plan in mind before you get home from school each day. For example:

3:00 – 5:00: Band practice

5:00 – 6:00: Do math homework

7:00 – 8:00: Study for history quiz & do science review questions

Prepare for Sabotage. Identify anything that could interrupt or ruin your study plan, and then figure out how to eliminate or avoid it.

#### Step Three Review – MANAGE YOUR TIME WELL

- *Use class time and study halls*
- *Create your own study plan*
- *Prepare for sabotage*

## 4. STEP FOUR – Be Successful in Class

- a. Be in School, on Time, Every Day. When you miss school, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work, you can never make up all of what you miss, even if you're out of school for only one day. To get good grades, you must be in school every day. Unless you have an extended illness or a serious health problem, you should miss no more than five or six days of school a year.
- b. Learn How to Adapt to Different Teachers. In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and the make the rules. You might have one teacher who counts you tardy if you're not in your seat when the bell rings, and another teacher who considers you on time if you've got one foot inside the door. It doesn't matter whether or not you agree with the first teacher's rule; it only matters that you are in your seat when the bell rings. *Part of you education is to learn how to adapt to different sets of rules, personalities, and teaching styles.*
- c. Be Prepared for Each Class. To be prepared, you need to have books, paper, pencils, etc. with you when you go to class. You also need to have all of your homework done. When you've done your homework, you get more out of the class, the lecture makes more sense, and you can participate in discussions. If you haven't done your homework, you may not even understand the lecture or class discussion.  
Being prepared also means that you come to class ready to learn. Try taking a couple of seconds as you walk into each class to think about what you're going to be doing that day. This will make it easier for you to focus on the subject when the class starts.  
Of course, to be physically and mentally alert, you need to eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep.
- d. Sit in the Front of the Class if Possible. It is easier to pay attention and to stay involved when you sit in the front of the classroom. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, overhead, etc. If you have problems paying attention, and you sit in the back of the class, ask your teacher if you can move closer to the front.
- e. Be Aware of Your Body Language. When teachers are up in the front of a classroom, they see EVERYTHING! They know who is paying attention, who's taking notes, and who is listening to the class discussion. They also know who's doing homework for another class, writing personal notes, daydreaming, and "napping" (even when students think they've positioned their hands and books to hide it). 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 just figure that you don't care about what's going on their class and as a result you don't care about receiving the best grade possible. It's not enough for you to say that you want to get good grades; your body language has to communicate this also.
- f. Always Do Your Homework. Don't look at homework as something you should do. Think of homework as something you MUST do. Since a significant portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Always complete your homework on time, and whenever possible, do extra credit work.
- g. Participate in Class. Participating in class makes it more interesting, and it helps keep your mind focused. Ask and answer questions, and get involved in class discussions.  
Many teachers give participation points so participating not only makes class more interesting, it can also help you get a better grade.



- h. Be a Good Group Member. Knowing how to work well in a group is very important. Whether you're working on a school project, involved in an extra-curricular activity, or working at a job, you need to be able to get along and work with the other members of the group. Whenever you are involved in a group project, 1) do your share of the work and do it well, 2) try to be open to new ideas, and 3) support the other group members.
- i. 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 tone of voice, can communicate a very different message. Remember that teachers are people too. They enjoy having students say hello to them in the halls and they appreciate it when 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.
- j. Involve Your Parents. When your parents ask you what you did in school, tell them. For example, *"Well, in English we just started reading this new book. It's a book about....."* Your parents will like the fact that you're talking to them about what's going on in school. A good way to involve your parents is to have them help you with your homework from time to time. Ask a parent to drill you on vocabulary words, read over a paper you've written, listen to you practice a speech, or help you study for a test. You'll get better grades, and your parents will see that you're really trying to do well in school. If you ever have 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.
- k. Take Responsibility for your Grades. If you get a good grade on a test or paper, be proud of your accomplishment. If you receive a poor grade, don't make excuses. Take responsibility for the grade, and then figure out how you can do better. Always do your own work. You'll learn more, and your grades will be something that you can really be proud of.

Step Four Review – BE SUCCESSFUL IN CLASS

- *Be in school, on time, every day*
- *Learn how to adapt to different teachers*
  - *Be prepared for each class*
- *Sit in the front of the class if possible*
- *Be aware of your body language*
  - *Always do your homework*
  - *Participate in class*
  - *Be a good group member*
- *Treat others with courtesy and respect*
  - *Involve your parents*
- *Take responsibility for your grades*

## 5. STEP FIVE – Take Good Notes

Tests usually cover material that's been presented in class. It is important to have good notes from which to study

- a. Be an Active Listener. In order to take good notes, you must pay attention and actively listen to what your teacher is saying. When you're actively listening in class, you aren't just hearing the words the teacher is saying, you're also thinking about, and trying to understand the information that's being presented.
- b. Take Notes to Help You Pay Attention. You can think much faster than anyone can talk. This is one of the reasons that your mind sometimes wanders when you're listening in class. When you take notes, your mind has something additional to do and you don't have time to think about anything else. Taking notes helps you stay focused. Taking notes also shows your teacher that you are interested in the class and that you're paying attention.
- c. 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 cues like "the most significant outcome," "the main point," "the most important reason," "the three causes," etc. Anything that your teacher writes on the board or overhead should also be considered very important. Double underline or put a star beside any information that you think is important. When you're studying later, you'll know to give this information special attention.
- d. Take Notes that Are Easy to Read.
  - i. Put the name of the class, the date, and the page number at the top of each page of notes. This is easy to do, and it will help keep your notes organized.
  - ii. Put the subject of your notes at the top of the page.
  - iii. Skip lines between topics and only use one side of the paper. Your notes will be neater and easier to read. You'll also have space if you want to add something later.
  - iv. Use symbols and abbreviations whenever possible.

<i>w</i> – <i>with</i>	<i>v</i> – <i>very</i>
<i>w/o</i> – <i>without</i>	<i>esp</i> – <i>especially</i>
<i>w/in</i> – <i>within</i>	<i>eg</i> – <i>for example</i>
<i>b/c</i> – <i>because</i>	<b>**</b> - <i>most importantly</i>
  - v. Use pencil or erasable pen to keep your notes neat.
  - vi. Leave a wide margin on the left side of each page. As you're taking notes, listen for **key words**. When you hear a key word, write it in the left-hand margin. Key words (topics, people, places, events) help you organize your thoughts, and they make your notes more understandable. Key words can also help you review for a test. Just cover up your notes, look at each key word, and then test yourself to see what you can remember about that topic, person, or event.
- e. Go Over Your Notes as Soon as Possible. While the information is still fresh in your mind, take five minutes to go over your notes. Redo anything that's confusing, fill in the spaces, and make sure that you have all of the key words written in the left-hand margins. While you are going over your notes, you are 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. Eliminate the unimportant information, and rewrite the rest of your notes using your own

words. Your notes will be much clearer, and as you rewrite them, you'll also be learning the material. This is time consuming, but it pays off.

- f. Get Copies of Class Notes if You're Absent. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to ask your teacher about assignments, handouts, etc. It's also your responsibility to make up any work that you've missed. *Do not just assume that your teacher will tell you if there's something you need to know or do.* Get copies of the notes you've missed, and put them in your notebook as soon as possible.

Step Five Review – TAKE GOOD NOTES

- *Be an active listener*
- *Take notes to help you pay attention*
- *Recognize important information*
- *Take notes that are easy to read*
- *Go over your notes as soon as possible*
- *Get copies of class notes if you're absent*

## 6. STEP SIX – Know How to Read a Textbook

*When you know how to read a textbook, you understand and remember what you read.*

Textbook authors have already done a lot of your work for you. They've inserted boldfaced subtitles that tell you exactly what you're going to be reading about. They've put all of the important words in **BOLD** or *italic* print, and they've added pictures, charts, graphs, lists of vocabulary words, summaries, and review questions. The textbook authors have provided these "learning tools" in order to make it easier for you to understand and remember the information they're presenting.

In this section, you will discover how to use the learning tools that the authors provide. You will also learn how to **Scan**, **Read**, and **Review**. Once you know how to scan, read, and review, you'll be able to understand and remember what you read the first time through.

- a. **Scan.** Scanning gives you a quick overview of the material you're going to be reading. To scan, read the title, the subtitles, and everything in bold and the italic print. Look at the pictures, graphs, and charts. Also go over the review questions and read the summaries. Scanning provides you with a great deal of information in a very short amount of time. In addition to providing you with an overview of the material, scanning also provides you with an "information framework". Having this framework of main ideas makes it easier to understand and remember the more detailed information.
- b. **Read.** When your reading has a purpose, your comprehension improves, and it's easier to stay focused. To give your reading purpose, try turning each boldfaced subtitle into a question. Keep your question in mind as you read, and when you finish the section, see if you can answer your question. Your question will give you something specific to look for, and it will help keep your mind from wandering. You will remember more of what you need. Before you start to read a section, look to see if there are any vocabulary words, names, places, or events in bold or italic print, and then ask yourself, "Why is this word, person, place, or event important?" You should have an answer to that question when you finish reading the section.
- c. **Review.** This is when most students will say, "I'm done," and close their book. Taking a few extra minutes for review will make a huge difference in what you're able to remember later. When you review, you lock the information into your brain before it has a chance to evaporate. To review, first ask yourself, "What is the main idea the author is trying to get across?" Then 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. When you go to study for the test, you'll be amazed at how well you already know the material. While it may take a little practice to get the **Scan**, **Read**, and **Review** process down, you'll soon realize that this process doesn't mean more work; it just means better grades.

### Step Six Review – KNOW HOW TO READ A TEXTBOOK

- *SCAN* by reading subtitles, words in bold and italic print, summaries, charts, and review questions
  - *READ* with a purpose
  - *REVIEW* by scanning the material to check your comprehension

## 7. STEP SEVEN – Study Smart

*Students who “study smart” find that they spend less time studying and yet they get better grades.*

- a. 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 has a surface for writing, it’s well lit, and it’s comfortable. In addition to paper, pens and pencils, your study area should be equipped with a calculator, dictionary, and thesaurus.  
Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others like to have music playing in the background. If you like to listen to music while you do your homework, try playing classical music very softly. Research has shown that classical music can actually improve your concentration.
- b. Get Started. Getting started on your studying is often the hardest part. Don’t put it off until later, don’t make excuses, and don’t wait until you’re “in the mood”. If you have a hard time getting started, begin with something simple, or a subject that you like.
- c. Know Your Learning Style. We all learn differently. Some learn best by seeing the material (visual learners) and some learn best by hearing the information (auditory learners). Some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners) and some learn best through the use of technology. Think about how you learn, and adjust how you study accordingly.  
Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, reading, and demonstrations. If you’re a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts and diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and use color in your notes. Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, films, and music. If you’re an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme. If you’re a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Move around while you study, use objects whenever possible, and role play ideas and concepts. If you’re a technological learner, use computers, the Internet, and high-tech equipment to keep you interested, motivated, and focused.  
As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the wider the variety of methods you use while studying, the more you remember. William Glasser, an expert in the field of education, has stated that *“Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else.”*
- d. 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 are going to do it. *For example – 1) Study vocabulary, 2) Do math, 3) Read history pages 25-40.*
  - Prioritize your work to make sure 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.
  - Always allow more time than you think you’ll need.
  - If you have something to memorize, work on that first, and then go over it again at the end of your study session.
  - Do difficult assignments first, while you’re still fresh and alert.
  - Alternate types of homework (read English, do math, read history).

-Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. After studying for 20 minutes, try taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, etc.)

- e. Know How to Study For Tests. Know what the test is going to cover so what you'll know what to study. For essay tests, it's important to understand the big picture and to know main points and key facts. For fill-in-the-blank and multiple choice tests, you need to know more detailed information.
- When reviewing a topic, ask yourself – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How (5Ws + H).
  - Pay particularly close attention in class the day before a test. This is when teachers often go over information that you need to know.
  - Have all of your reading done ahead of time.
  - If your textbook has review questions, know the answers to all of these questions. Also, go through your textbook and make sure that you know the meanings of all the words in **bold** and *italic* print.
  - If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use the review sheet to come up with questions that you think might be on the test.
  - You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of the mirror.
  - Review often and review out loud. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. *Review is the key to learning anything!*
  - Write down any names, dates, formulas, and/or facts that you need to remember on an index card. Take this card with you the day of the test, and go over it as often as you can before you take the test.
- f. Use Tricks to Help You Memorize Information. Use flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.
- Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Do this until you know it.
  - Right before you go to sleep, 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 HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
  - Use the first letter of the words you want to remember to make up a silly, ridiculous sentence. For example – if you need to remember the names of the planets for a test, just make up a silly sentence like “My very elegant mother juggled seven ugly neckties” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune). As soon as you get your test, say this sentence to yourself and at the top of your test write MVEMJSUN (the first letter of each of the planets). When you need to write in the names of the planets on the test, you'll have your memory cue ready.
  - Look for an easy or logical connection.
  - Information is easier to remember if it's grouped or categorized. Use lists and diagrams to group related terms, facts, and ideas.
  - Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help trigger your memory.
- g. 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. Go through the following ten steps when you have a paper to write. 1) Choose a topic. 2) Gather information. 3) Make an outline. 4) Write a rough draft. 5) Read your paper out loud. 6) Think of ways to improve your paper, and then rewrite it. 7) Have someone else read it. 8) Write the final draft.

9) Check for spelling and grammatical errors. 10) Make sure that your paper looks neat and clean and turn it in on time.

It's very important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take your paper out and read it again, you'll see and hear things that you didn't notice before. If you use the Internet for research, make sure that you use reliable sites. Also remember to always identify another person's words or ideas by using quotation marks or footnotes. If you present another person's words or ideas as your own, it's plagiarism.

- h. Use Tricks When Making a Presentation or Speech. Use props whenever possible. Props (posters, books, sports equipment, etc.) give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of your props. To help add enthusiasm and energy to your voice, 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.
- i. Have Good Computer Skills. If you need to improve your computer skills, see your counselor and sign up for a keyboarding or computer class as soon as possible. And remember – *practice always makes perfect!*

Step Seven Review – STUDY SMART

- *Find a good place to study*
  - *Get started*
- *Know your learning style*
- *Organize your study time*
- *Know how to study for tests*
- *Use tricks to help you memorize information*
  - *Know how to write a paper*
- *Use tricks when making a presentation or speech*
  - *Have good computer skills*

## 8. STEP EIGHT – 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.*

- a. Get Off to a Good Start. Have everything you need for the test with you when you go to class (pencil, erasable pen, calculator, etc.). 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, etc.) at the top of your test. Put your name on the test and read the directions carefully.
- b. 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 2 essay questions, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes on each essay question, and 10 minutes checking over your answers.
- c. Mark the Questions That You Want to Return To. As you go through the test, put a dot or light check mark by any answer that you aren't sure of. After you've gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones that you've marked and try them again. Don't spend a lot of time on difficult questions, and 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.
- d. Increase Your Odds on Multiple-Choice Questions. As you're reading a multiple-choice question, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the answer 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, one of them is probably the correct answer. Read all of the answer choices. At least a couple of the answers will probably sound like they could be correct. Don't be tempted to mark the first answer that sounds good.
- e. 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 if a statement is True or False.
- f. Know How to Approach Essay Questions. Read each question and then start with the easiest one. This will give you confidence, and it'll give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions. Note how many points each essay is worth, and adjust the time you spend on each question accordingly.
  - 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 your ideas into a simple outline; if not, just number your ideas in the order you want to present them.
  - Begin writing. Use clear, concise, complete sentences, and write neatly. In your opening paragraph, restate the question, 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 the most important points, draw conclusions, and write a brief summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.
  - If you don't know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write down what you do know about the subject. You may hit on something and get partial credit. If you don't



have the time to complete an essay, write to your teacher a note explaining that you ran out of time. Then briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.

- g. Improve Your Math Test Scores. 1) Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be. 2) If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or a diagram. 3) Don't spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, go on and come back to it later. 4) Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, if you were on the right track you may get partial credit.
- h. Be Prepared for Open Book Tests. Use the following tips to help you locate information quickly during an open book test. 1) Highlight your notes. 2) Put self-stick notes or bookmarks in your textbook to help you locate important information. 3) Write down all of the information that you know you'll need on a separate sheet of paper.
- i. Check Your Answers. If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have made a careless mistake.
- j. Go Over All Returned Tests. Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. You may see one or more of these questions again. Also check to make sure that your test was graded correctly. Teachers sometimes make mistakes. Keep a record of your test scores and keep returned tests in your folders.

Step Eight Review – USE TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

- *Get off to a good start*
  - *Develop a plan*
- *Mark the questions that you want to return to*
- *Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions*
- *Look for key words in True/False questions*
- *Know how to approach essay questions*
  - *Improve your math test scores*
  - *Be prepared for open book tests*
    - *Check your answers*
  - *Go over all returned tests*

## 9. STEP NINE – Reduce Test Anxiety

*A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Excessive worry, or test anxiety, can lower your test score.*

- a. It's possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can't think clearly. The brain, like a computer, contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you're not able to "access" it when you need it. The information is there, but you can't get to it. To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. They try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you:
  - i. Start studying early. Cramming increases test anxiety.
  - ii. Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself confidently walking into the test, answering the questions correctly, and receiving the grade you want. Go through this mental exercise several times before the test.
  - iii. The night before a test, review the material and then get a good night's sleep.
  - iv. Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. If you act confidently, you just may find that you feel more confident.
  - v. Try these 4 common relaxation techniques:
    1. Take a deep breath. Then slowly release your breath, along with any tension. Do this until you feel your body relax.
    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. Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

The more you practice these techniques, the better you'll get. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your counselor.

## **10. STEP TEN – Get Help When You Need It**

- a. Most questions can be answered, and most problems resolved, just by talking to the right person (e.g., secretary, principal, librarian, teacher, counselor, mentor). If you need academic help or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. For most other questions or problems, go to the office or talk to your counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or harassed by another student, tell a counselor, teacher, or principal right away.

Every student has his/her share of normal teenage problems. Some students however have problems that are so overwhelming that they can't pay attention in class or concentrate on their school work. Even though they may put up a good front, these students need to get help. If you're dealing with any of the following, please talk to a parent or counselor: alcohol, drugs, a pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, problems at home, depression. Thousands of students are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.

## TIPS FOR MENTORS

- Be interested. Make sure that your mentee knows that his/her academic progress is important to you. Know when each grading period ends and ask to see progress reports if possible.
- Discuss Classes and Set Goals. Sit down with your mentee at the beginning of each grading period and help him/her set realistic academic goals for the term. Your mentee will better understand the concept of expectations when they have goals to work towards. Throughout the term, recognize effort and improvement. Acknowledge each academic success, even if it's only a good grade on a quiz or homework assignment.
- Be available to Listen. It's not the mentor's role to be their mentee's tutor, teacher, counselor, etc. But it's okay to listen to their concerns and issues with their academic progress and other things that's happening in school. Keep in mind that it is your mentee's responsibility to be organized, get homework done, and prepare for tests. However, you can provide them with advice and keep them accountable.
- Encourage School Involvement. Studies show that students who are involved in school-related activities enjoy school more and they have greater academic success. Encourage your mentee to be involved in one or more activities at school.
- Monitor Activities and Jobs. Make sure that your mentee is not spending too much time watching TV, playing computer games, or talking/texting on the phone. Also, make sure your mentee is not working too many hours or working too late at a job. This may affect their ability to do their homework and get adequate sleep.
- Important "Don'ts".
  - Don't nag about their grades. Your mentee will tune you out.
  - Don't criticize your mentee around other kids. Your mentee may feel embarrassed and will begin to lose trust in the mentoring relationship.
  - Don't set expectations for your mentee that are unrealistic. If your mentee knows that your expectations cannot be met, he/she may not even try.
- Know The Resources at School. Know that teachers, counselors, librarians, and principals are there to help your mentee get the best education possible.

### If Your Child is Not Doing Well in School...

Most students who don't do well in school feel like failures. They are frustrated, discouraged, and sometimes angry. The "I don't care" attitude they often display is a defense mechanism. It's important for these students to know that you have not given up on them. They also need to know that you are interested, supportive, and willing to take the time to help them figure out how to be more successful in school.

Students who are not doing well in school usually have problems in one or more of the following areas:

- Attendance. It is extremely important for students to be in school, on time, every day. Unless a child is truly ill, he/she needs to be in school.
- Appropriateness of Courses. We can't expect students to get good grades if they are in the wrong classes. If any of your mentee's courses are too difficult, too easy, or not right for them, encourage them to meet with their counselor. You may also want to encourage them to look into career-oriented (vocational) programs. Many students are happier and more successful in programs where there is a more "hands-on" approach to learning.
- Accountability. It's human nature to be tempted to "slack off" when we're not held accountable. How seriously would most workers take their jobs if they knew that their bosses would never know how hard they were working or find out how many days they missed? Your mentee needs to know that you will be monitoring his/her academic progress throughout the year and that successes will be recognized and

poor performances noticed. Your mentee needs to know that you care, and that you will be consistent in your interest.

- Alcohol/Drug Abuse. Students who abuse alcohol or drugs are often distracted to the point where their school performance is affected. If you know or suspect that your mentee is drinking or using drugs, talk to him/her about it.