

High School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Five steps can help your teen improve writing assignments

High school students are expected to write in nearly every subject. Writing is also part of many high-stakes tests and college applications. So how can you help your teen strengthen his writing skills?

Research shows that five steps can improve writing. Encourage your teen to:

1. **Prepare.** He should spend time brainstorming and listing key points to include. Or he can try writing for 10 minutes. This will help your teen figure out what he already knows about the topic.
2. **Research.** He can search online, read newspaper and magazine articles, or check out a book from the library. The extra research will deepen his understanding and make his writing more interesting.

3. **Make an outline.** Teens hate this step—but it works. Have your teen try different kinds of outlines. The traditional numbers-and-letters outline works well for some teens. Others prefer a tree or even a series of connected circles.
4. **Write more than one draft.** The first draft is the “down draft”—it’s the time for your teen to get his ideas down on paper. Once it’s finished, he should set it aside for a while. When your teen comes back to it, he may have ideas for how to rephrase or reorganize.
5. **Proofread.** Your teen should read over his final draft and check carefully for any spelling or grammatical errors.

Source: J. Unger and S. Fleischman, “Research Matters: Is Process Writing the ‘Write Stuff?’” *Educational Leadership*, ASCD.

Encourage your teen to stay in school



High school graduates make more money than high school dropouts—on average, about \$10,000 more each year. But if money alone isn’t enough to motivate your teen to stay in school, share these other surprising statistics.

- High school graduates:
- **Live longer** than high school dropouts.
 - **Are less likely** to commit crimes.
 - **Are more likely to give back** to their communities by voting and volunteering.
 - **Are more likely to raise** better-educated children.

Getting your teen to stay in school can be as simple as telling her how important her education is. It’s often hard for teens to see “the big picture”—the effect that finishing high school has on the rest of their lives. So talk about how proud you are of your teen’s efforts, and how much you appreciate your own education—or why you wish you had learned more.

Source: “The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools,” *Issue Brief*, Alliance for Excellent Education.

Share facts with your teen about the dangers of marijuana use



Since 1975, the *Monitoring the Future* survey has kept track of students' attitudes towards alcohol and drugs. One of the most

disturbing trends this year is the continued decline of "perceived risk of regular marijuana use." That means more kids are beginning to believe that there's no risk to using marijuana regularly—and that's simply not true!

Marijuana can be:

- **Addictive.** In fact, over half of teens in rehab are there for help fighting marijuana addiction.
- **Dangerous.** Driving while high (or riding with someone who is) could be deadly. People under the influence of marijuana have slower reflexes and can't judge distances accurately.
- **Linked to school failure.** Students who use marijuana regularly are more likely to get lower grades

and drop out of school. Even occasional users experience negative effects on attention, memory and learning that can last for weeks.

Now that you know the facts, make sure your teen understands that using marijuana is a risky choice. Ask her if she thinks a short-lived high is really worth the effects marijuana can have on her future.

Source: R.A. Miech, Ph.D. and others, *Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2014*, The University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

"By the time they graduate high school, about 46% of U.S. teens will have tried marijuana at least once in their lifetime."

—National Institute on Drug Abuse

Bolster your teen's vocabulary with flash cards, games & texting



In order for your teen to be successful on college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT, he needs to have a strong

vocabulary. Your teen may already be learning a list of specific vocabulary words in school. Here's how to reinforce that learning at home:

- **Use flash cards.** Being drilled on words and their definitions might not be your teen's favorite activity, but it is effective—and a simple way for you to get involved. Just read the definition and have your teen provide the word. Or read the word and ask your teen to name two synonyms.
- **Declare a "Word of the Day."** Look at your teen's vocabulary list and choose a new word each day. Challenge family members to use this word in regular conversation. Whoever uses it correctly the most times might win a small reward—like being able to choose tomorrow's dinner menu.
- **Text your child** a vocabulary word and its definition. Or just text him a word and ask him to text you the definition. Sure, he might groan, but you know your teen will read the text. Teens just can't seem to stay away from their phones, so texting is a great way to sneak in some learning.

Do you know how to help when your teen struggles?



For many teens, there is one class that is a real challenge. Perhaps the teacher isn't their favorite. Perhaps the subject

is harder to learn. Whatever the issue, their grades begin to suffer.

If your teen is struggling in a class, do you know how to handle the problem? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your teen about the class and asked her why she thinks she is struggling?
- ___ **2. Have you encouraged** your teen to spend time working on this class every day? Minds are like muscles that get stronger with practice.
- ___ **3. Have you encouraged** your teen to talk with the teacher to develop a plan for improvement?
- ___ **4. Have you helped** your teen explore resources, such as tutoring?
- ___ **5. Do you celebrate** every sign of your teen's progress?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are taking positive steps to help your struggling student. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Discipline creates structure for your still-developing teenager



Your teen has matured emotionally, intellectually and physically since her elementary school days, but she still has a long way to go. The part of her brain that controls impulses and helps her make good decisions is not yet fully mature. That's one reason why teens need structure and discipline.

Your efforts to teach your teen how to maintain control will pay off in all settings, especially at home and at school. Here are some guidelines:

- **Expect difficult moments.** When your teen acts first and thinks later, blurts out the wrong thing or is moody, it is not necessarily because she wants to hurt you.
- **Be firm, yet flexible,** with your teen. Discuss family rules and make sure she understands the

consequences for breaking them. Consider granting her more freedom as she shows she can handle more responsibility.

- **Always know where your teen is,** who she is with, what she is doing and when she will be home.
- **Remember the difference** between an explanation and an excuse. Your teen's age and developing brain may give an explanation for some of her behavior. However, they are not excuses for being rude or defiant.
- **Focus on the big issues.** These include things such as schoolwork and respect for others. Try not to nag your teen about the smaller issues, like the occasional messy room.

Source: D. Walsh, Ph.D., *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, Free Press.

Conversations, websites & books promote critical thinking skills



Strong critical thinking skills will help your teen meet the demands of school and, one day, the workplace. He can strengthen his critical thinking skills through:

- **Conversations.** With your teen, imagine you're explaining customs to someone from another culture—or even another planet. Think about driving, for instance. Why do people drive on the right side of the road in the United States and on the left side of the road in other countries? Or consider team sports. Why is there so much focus on winning and losing? Why do fans care which team wins, when they're

not actually part of the team? Questions beginning with *why*, *how* and *what if* will get your teen's thought process flowing.

- **Evaluating websites.** With the wealth of information a search engine provides, it can be difficult to find a reliable source. Remind your teen to think critically when he is choosing websites as sources for a research paper. He should decide which website is the most useful, the most credible and the most up to date.
- **Reading books.** Help your teen find books of logic puzzles and brain teasers. Encourage him to read a mystery book and try to solve the mystery before the main character does.

Q: My son is a big kid. Now that he's in high school, the other kids are teasing him. He doesn't want to ride on the bus to school. He says no one will sit with him because he's too fat. He has even started cutting gym class. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Sadly, your son is not the only student facing this issue. Students who are overweight are often taunted by classmates.

What's happening to your son is bullying—which has a negative effect on his self-esteem and his academic achievement.

To support your son:

- **Talk to him.** Sometimes, kids who are the victims of bullying start to feel that it's their fault. Let him know you're on his side.
- **Help him focus** on the things he's good at. If he likes art or music, find ways for him to spend more time on these activities. He'll feel a sense of accomplishment because he's doing something well. He may also have a chance to meet kids who share his interests.
- **Have him talk** with another adult. He should certainly talk to the gym teacher about why he is avoiding class. The teacher needs to know what's going on in the locker room so he can stop it. Your son should also talk with his counselor.
- **Help him make a plan** for healthy living. Talk with a doctor to set appropriate goals. Can he make better food choices? Can he add more activity to his day? The results won't be immediate, but over time, he may see a big change.

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

How successful students manage their homework



Busy students must learn to set priorities in order to meet all of their responsibilities. Here are some of the skills

successful students know—and that your teen can learn:

- **Use a planner.** Teens have a lot on their minds. And when something gets forgotten, it's more likely to be an English reading assignment than the lyrics to a favorite song. So make sure your teen has—and uses—a planner. He should write down every assignment. Check regularly to see that he does.
- **Use electronics only as a backup.** Many teachers post assignments and deadlines online. Those are great in a pinch, but a planner will help your teen see the big picture. "Yikes, I have a math test *and* an English paper, both due on Tuesday."
- **Put after-school commitments in the planner.** That way, your teen can see what nights he's busiest. If a big project is due on Friday and he works on Thursday night, he'll see he must finish the project by Wednesday night.
- **Expect the unexpected** when working on projects. The book your teen needs for his term paper may not be in the library if he waits until the night before the paper is due to check it out. Planning ahead is a great habit to help your teen develop!

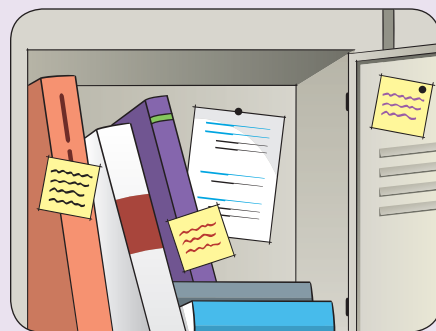
Source: D. Goldberg, *The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond*, Simon & Schuster.

Share strategies to help your high schooler get organized

Your teen has a science test tomorrow and she can't find her notes. She may have left them in her locker. Or did she accidentally throw them away? Either way, she doesn't have them—and she needs to use them to study.

Being organized is vital to your teen's school success. To promote organization, encourage her to:

- **Clean out her backpack** every Friday. She should throw away trash and file school papers.
- **Organize her locker** once a week. If she can't see her math book, she is not likely to bring it home.
- **Use sticky notes.** She can place one on the spine of each book



she needs to bring home. She can also use them to jot down important reminders.

- **Prepare for tomorrow tonight!** Have your teen take time each night to prepare for the next day. She can make her lunch, put her homework in her backpack and place her gym shoes by the door.

Your teen can use mnemonic devices to remember facts



A *mnemonic* device is any trick that helps your teen recall facts.

If he's ever recited,

"Thirty days hath

September ..." to remember the number of days in a month, he was using a mnemonic device.

Here are a few popular ways to use mnemonics. To remember information, your teen can try:

- **Acronyms.** The five Great Lakes are often remembered with the letters in the word HOMES: *Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior*.
- **Acrostics.** The first letter in each word stands for one of the items on the memory list. "Please

Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally" is a way to remember the order of operations in math: *parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction*.

- **Rhymes.** When was Columbus's first voyage? "Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety-two."
- **Music.** It worked to teach your child the ABCs, so have him set key facts to a popular song and he'll never get it out of his head.
- **Chunking.** He can combine longer lists of words or numbers into smaller groups.

Source: M.K. Ruben, *How to Tutor Your Own Child: Boost Grades and Inspire a Lifelong Love of Learning—Without Paying for a Professional Tutor*, Ten Speed Press.