



Spring 2011

# The PARENTING EDGE

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## The Oxford Learning Difference

### Get ready for summer now

Summer is a special time in the life of the student—it's a break from the normal school-going routine. It's a time for summer camps, soccer, baseball, and swimming lessons. It's a time for days at the beach, and for road trips. But, without some academics, summer can also be a time that children lose up to 30% of their learning momentum.

A little bit of learning over the summer months goes a long way. In fact, keeping children's brains sharp over the summer is the best way to prevent a slow start when school starts up again. Summer is also the perfect opportunity to catch up in trouble areas and get a head start on next year.

Summer is the ideal time to keep the brain exercised—after all, students' developing brains have spent the entire school year learning, growing, and getting a work out. Keep that momentum going this summer, and your child will head back to school next fall prepared, eager to learn, and more confident than ever before! It can all happen simply by including some academics in your summer planning.

Just like the sporting activities that you've scheduled for the summer months, you need to plan for your child's education this summer. A little bit of academic preparation NOW will go a long way towards making this summer the best—and the smartest—summer ever!

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## The end of procrastination

Your child has been assigned a big project...and it's due tomorrow!

Why do students put off a big project until the last minute? It's not because they don't want to do the work, or because they aren't doing well in school.

Procrastination is a result of not understanding the steps involved. It's a by-product of not knowing where to start, and a lack of understanding of how getting the project done on time is important. Procrastination is a motivation issue, and motivation is a comprehension issue.

When it comes to projects and assignments, kids need to understand two things in order to be motivated to get the job done:

- Kids need to understand how to **organize the project**. They need to break down the project into manageable parts so that they can follow **step-by-step** until the project is done, within a reasonable time frame.
- Kids need to understand why the project is **meaningful** to them. Kids look for instant gratification—it's their nature. **Long-term results** (such as getting into a good college) are meaningless to kids. Finding ways to make a project meaningful and relevant gives them motivation to get the job done!

Helping students develop **motivation** and a better understanding of the steps involved are the keys to helping students complete homework on time, finish projects ahead of the due date, and stop procrastinating for good!



## What are the first steps in beginning a project?

1. Break the project down into its component phases:
  - Phase 1—research
  - Phase 2—writing
  - Phase 3—editing
2. Estimate the length of time that each phase will take.
3. Use an agenda or calendar to find small blocks of time to work on the project.
4. Follow the schedule!



## Go to bed! You have school tomorrow!

Your child wants to stay up late. Sometimes it is easier to say yes rather than engage in a battle.

However, reduced sleep time can do more than simply make your kid grouchy in the morning—it can have a substantial impact on academic performance.

Children's brains are in a growth stage until the age of 21, and the majority of that growth occurs during sleep. A short reduction in sleep time—even as little as 15 minutes—can have a detrimental effect on classroom learning.

Studies on sleep loss show that:

- Standardized test scores among sleep-reduced students were roughly seven points lower than those from students who got a full night's sleep
- Measurement tools showed that, during class time, one hour of sleep loss is equivalent to the loss of two years of cognitive growth
- For teenagers, 15 extra minutes of sleep can mean the difference between an A and a B

After a particularly gruelling day of class, kids need even more sleep so that the brain can properly process and store information.

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## It's not too late to get better grades

While the prospect of spring's warmer temperatures can be exciting for students, staying focused on school is important—after all, there is still homework to be done, tests to write, projects to complete, and plenty of time to improve grades before the final report card.

Start a discussion with your child's teacher about what can be done starting *right now* to ensure that this school year ends on a high note!

- If grades are a concern, ask what can be done to improve grades in the time left. Are there extra assignments that could be completed, or missed homework that could be made up between now and the end of the school year?
- Ask for tips and suggestions to help with staying on track and keeping focused.
- Get a head start on end-of-year projects and essays.
- Create a countdown schedule using an agenda or family calendar.
- Ask about summer school. It's a fantastic opportunity to catch up or get ahead...and it can be fun too!

Don't slack off! Keep that learning momentum going until the *last day* of class. Stay on task, and stay motivated. It takes a little planning, but there is still time to get great grades this school year.



# Insider exam prep tips

It's never too early for teens to start prepping for final exams. These tips can help:

- **Get Organized.** Avoid last-minute cram sessions by using an agenda or calendar. Plan out a study schedule. Working backwards from the test date, schedule time to review all materials.
- **Review with a Pen and Paper.** When reading over notes, write down all of the subject headings, subheadings, and bolded words. This will help provide a clear picture of the material. Plus, the physical act of holding a pen and writing makes study time active rather than passive.
- **Ask Questions.** By starting the review early, there is plenty of time to ask the teacher questions about any material that may be confusing.
- **Put it in Your Own Words.** Rather than trying to commit facts to memory, try explaining what was just read to an imaginary person without reading from the text. This helps to develop real understanding of the material as opposed to simply memorizing it.
- **Be Efficient.** Before beginning to review a chapter, identify which parts are well understood. Once these are identified, focus on studying the material that is less familiar. A common mistake is spending too much review time going over material that is understood.
- **Use Mnemonic Devices.** To remember all items in a list, write the first letter of each item and create a sentence. For example, to remember all of the great lakes, use HOMES, or Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.
- **Make Jot Notes.** During class, make jot notes in the margin of notebooks while the lesson is still fresh. This is as simple as identifying key words or phrases. This improves recall of the entire lesson.
- **Test Yourself.** Test memory and understanding with a quick self-test:
  - Read over all notes.
  - Cover them up with a sheet of paper.
  - Recite aloud what was just read, paraphrasing when possible.
  - Ask questions and answer them.
  - Check the facts. Were all the details and facts recalled correctly? Pay attention to any missed facts or examples. Chances are if any facts or details were missed during the self-test, they'll be missed on the exam as well. Review the details that were missed until they are remembered.

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