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The Oxford Learning Difference

A Good Attitude Leads to Better Grades

Success in school depends on many factors: an active mind, classroom participation, completing homework and assignments, and—perhaps most importantly—good study habits.

Many factors contribute to good study habits, but the most important one is attitude. Students with a positive attitude groan less when presented with extra homework and they stay on top of schoolwork by continually taking notes and thinking actively about their learning.

A good attitude is a natural partner to strong study skills. However, a good attitude and strong study skills do not necessarily mean good grades. Students with a good attitude will look on the bright side and see that failure is an opportunity for growth. It won't beat them down or lead to negativity.

So where do bad school attitudes come from? Students who continually perform poorly on assignments will lose motivation and eventually stop trying. They will build up a wall around themselves in the form of a bad attitude. It's difficult to break this cycle, but it is not impossible.

Attitude is a state of mind. This is important to realize, because the brain is highly adaptive. It can learn new things every day. Metacognition (a fancy word for being aware of what your brain is doing) makes it possible for students with a bad attitude about school to improve their attitude and develop better study skills and grades.

A good attitude in school goes a long way toward helping children succeed in school.

Enjoy the newsletter.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

Here are Oxford Learning's **DOs and DON'Ts of Summer** to help your child stay sharp all summer long:

Do

- Exercise often
- Learn something new
- Stay in touch with school friends
- Read books
- Go to the library
- Talk about what you are doing and why
- Stay organized
- Keep to a schedule
- Take up a new hobby
- Make time everyday to write in a scrapbook or journal
- Keep skills sharp with workbooks
- Attend a day camp

Don't

- Relax all summer
- Disconnect from normal routines
- Sleep in every morning
- Stay up late every night
- Play video games all day
- Drop all projects
- Stop using a calendar or agenda to keep track of activities
- Spend all day in front of the TV
- Stop learning

From the Frontlines

The Facts about Summer Learning

Summer learning is not a new concept. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have been studying the idea that students lose academic ground since the 1970s.

The subject of summer learning becomes increasingly important each year as education becomes more competitive. Students don't have time to waste in the quest for better grades. And yet, every summer, that is what happens—students simply lose academic momentum and neural connections that were developed over the school year.

By not maintaining an academic routine that stimulates the cognitive functioning, students lose their learning momentum. They also lose academic standing.

According to the research, students who do not engage in academic activities over the summer break are statistically and consistently more likely start the new school year behind.

They are also more likely to perform more poorly on standardized testing, even on tests that they had already taken.

These are the facts:

- On average, students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency in math skills during the summer months.
- Teachers typically spend between 4 to 6 weeks re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer.
- Students spend an average of 60 days not engaging in any sort of mental activity.

The solution to preventing summer learning loss is as clear as the numbers above. As little as 2-3 hours a week of active learning over the summer can prevent academic summer learning losses—that's a summer learning fact that you can count on.

Outside the School Yard

Summer Learning Opportunities Are All Around

Children don't have to be in a classroom to be learning! In fact, some of the most important lessons in life are learned outside of school, especially in summer.

The trick is to harness the learning opportunities that are happening all around, and turn them into valuable, useable summer learning experiences that challenge the brain—even the simplest summer activity can be a learning opportunity.

Here's how to turn summer fun into summer learning:

- Write a little every day. Keep a journal, create a scrapbook, or write a short story—it's a great way to develop vocabulary skills and handwriting ability.
- Play games. Sudoku, crossword puzzles, Boggle, Scrabble, and Upwords, etc. challenge the mind. Discuss any strategies used to reach a solution.
- Make alphabet lists. Select a category (e.g. fruits and vegetables) and begin listing items according to the alphabet. The first person gets A (apple), the second B (beets), and so on—it's a great game to play in the car!
- Plant and grow. Plant some seedlings and watch them grow. Create a chart and track their growth schedule.
- Learn a life skill. Whether it is recognizing local trees, changing a car tire, or learning how to read a map, summer is a great time to develop handy life skills that are rarely taught in a classroom.
- Go for a hike. Discuss local plant life. Research a new trail to hike on. Have kids map out a trail route and document what they discovered.



School Strategies

Read to Stay Sharp this Summer

What's the simplest and easiest way to keep kids' minds active over the summer break? Reading!

Camps, classes, and workbooks are all great—but reading is still the best way to incorporate learning into a busy summer schedule. It's also a great way to wind down after a long and activity-filled day.

Time and again, a child's enjoyment of reading along with his/her reading skills have been shown to be the single best predictor of school success. Everything from vocabulary development to math proficiency stem from a child's reading abilities.

But it's not enough to just snuggle up with a good book—reading has to be active in order to keep the mind sharp and avoid summer learning losses.

These tips will help your family turn reading into an effective way to stay sharp this summer:

- Read together as a family—take turns reading a paragraph or a page. This is a great way to introduce your kids to larger chapter books that they might be too intimidated to read on their own.
- Read anything—even comic books! Comic books are acceptable reading material as long as kids take the time to sit down and think about what they are reading.
- Talk about it—talk about the characters in a book and speculate about what they would do in the different situations. Imagine what Harry Potter would do if he met ...?
- Go to the Library—most libraries have reading programs that help children to choose books that are age-appropriate. They also help children to set reading goals for themselves. Plus, kids love having a library card—it's practically a rite of passage!
- Consult a reading list—not knowing what to read next is one of the biggest challenges that readers young and old face. Help the young reader in your life overcome this common stumbling block by consulting an online reading list for title suggestions, or by reading all the books by the same author.
- Set a reading goal—armed with a library card and a book list, challenge all members of your family to set a reading target for the summer. Encourage kids to take note of vocabulary words and to select books that develop their reading skills.



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IN FOCUS TIP

TIP

You can't expect leg muscles to run a marathon after they've been resting for two months, so it is fair to expect the brain to simply pick up and learn after a summer of relaxation? There's a certain amount of preparation that is necessary to be able to perform at an adequate level. Start training the brain before school starts and you'll be off and running from the first day of class!

Looking Ahead in the School Year

Getting Ready for Back to School

Learning over the summer is the absolute best way to ensure that students of all ages are ready for the new school year. If families only do one thing to have a better school year, this is it.

However, when it comes to gearing up for a new school year, mental preparation is only one part of the picture—re-introducing school routines and habits while it's still summer also helps kids have a smooth transition back into the classroom.

These habits can help your family develop better school year routines well before the school year has even begun!

1. **Set the alarms.** Re-instate school day wake up times well before school begins. The sooner that kids have a regular morning routine, the less rushed mornings will be.
 2. **Eat breakfast.** Research shows that a nutritious breakfast gives kids the energy they need to be mentally alert all day. Make a healthy breakfast part of your daily routine, the whole year through.
 3. **Prepare the night before.** Avoid last-minute searches for green socks, pencil cases, or team jerseys. Take 10 minutes at night to gather up everything needed for the next day, whether school is in session or not.
 4. **Eat healthy lunches.** Avoid lunchbox squabbles by consistently providing a healthy lunch. If possible, eat lunch around the same time everyday. You can easily help your child's stomach get on a schedule so that little bellies don't grumble while they are in a classroom. You want them focused on learning, not on their hunger.
 5. **Limit screen time.** Start creating a homework routine now by limiting computer and TV time during the after-school hours. Use this time to get kids into the habit of coming to the table and working on a project such as journaling or reading.
 6. **Bedtimes.** In the summer, kids are often too busy playing to recognize that they are tired. Sure, putting them to bed early may not make you the most popular parent, but their growing bodies will thank you, especially when earlier wake up times roll around!
 7. **New gear.** Shopping isn't necessarily a habit that you want your kids to get into, but new school supplies such as backpacks, binders, and pencil cases can help kids get excited about heading back to school.
- Remember—it's easier to develop good habits than it is to break bad ones!