

Fall 2011

# The Oxford Learning Difference

## Get Active About School

Active learning. It's a term that we hear quite often. But what is it really? Active learning is a critical skill that is inherent in most children. Naturally curious from birth, children are always seeing connections, noticing details, and attributing meanings.

Success in life—and in school—requires a thriving and independent mind that is always questioning and seeking answers. However, not all “good students”—those who are non-disruptive in the classroom, obey the teacher, get along with others, memorize lessons, and get decent marks—are using active learning skills.

An active mind doesn't just learn. An active mind thinks about learning. An active mind asks questions, is curious, sets goals, is motivated, and achieves.

Children's minds should never be off—from the time that they wake up in the morning to the time that they go to sleep at night, children should be continuously noticing similarities, inferring meaning, and creating connections.

Oxford Learning builds active learning skills right into all students' programs, so that they are challenged to actually think about what they are learning. We do this because we know that the more a child is mentally active outside the classroom, the easier school becomes.

School gets easier with active learning because once students “get it,” their brains are switched on, then the student begins to live up to his or her full potential.

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# 6 Tips to Get into the Homework Groove

- 1. Take Envy-Worthy Class Notes.** The first step in making homework easier begins in class with good note taking. That means actively paying attention in class! Students need to write the date and class at the top of every page and use different colours to underline key words and phrases.
- 2. Use Your Agenda.** An agenda a very important tool that helps students stay organized. For more than just copying down homework assignments, it's a great tool to help students prioritize workflow, organize time, and keep track of questions to ask their teachers.
- 3. Know What Works.** There's a lot of differing advice about how to proceed with homework. Completing is the name of the game, so whether students prefer getting math out of the way first, or reading for English while sitting on the couch, the important thing is to develop a routine that helps them get into the homework groove easily.
- 4. It's Time.** The brain is wired to develop habits and to recognize schedules. By having a regular time to crack the books, students will find themselves getting into the homework groove regularly and effortlessly.
- 5. Homework Habitat.** Having a set place to dump book bags and keep school supplies helps students get organized, eliminates time-wasting activities such as searching for that calculator or pencil sharpener, and goes a long way toward helping establish a groovy homework routine.
- 6. Remove Distractions.** Turn the TV off. Take the ear buds out. Step away from the laptop. If certain questions require online support, save them until the rest of the homework has been completed. However, if work is completed better with a little background noise, then put the radio on at a low volume, (see Tip 3) and be sure that any "rockin' out" isn't distracting from the task at hand.



## Make Studying Hands-On

What do your fingers and hands have to do with how well you remember what you study?

New research shows that the physical act of handwriting stimulates critical activity in specific areas of the brain that develop a sort of visual memory of words and letters. In the study, researchers asked two groups to learn an unknown alphabet. One group studied the alphabet by writing the letters out by hand. The other group studied solely off computers. It shouldn't surprise you that the group who wrote out the letters had better recall and did better on tests of that alphabet.

There are many ways to go about the process of studying. One of the tried-and-true study techniques is to create STUDY NOTES using pen and paper.

It may seem an old-fashioned practice, given the abundance of personal technology that students have at their fingertips; however, the physical act of writing creates a "motor memory" in the brain that helps both the brain—and the body—remember.

Not only do study notes help students organize the material they need to study, it's also an ACTIVE approach to studying that helps students remember information better.

## Tips: How to Create Study Notes:

- Grab a pen and paper.
- Read over all in-class or textbook notes.
- Write down subject headings, subheadings, and bolded or key words.
- Focus on writing down the ideas or concepts that are the most challenging or that are the most difficult to remember.

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## Do you know the FIVE MOST COMMON SIGNS that your child might be struggling in school?

Here they are:

5. Your child frequently makes comments such as, "The teacher picks on me," or "Do I have to go to school today?" or "This assignment is pointless."
4. Daily homework is not completed.
3. Assignments and projects are missed completely or submitted late.
2. Your child receives poor tests scores, and poor grades on projects and assignments.
1. Your child is uninterested in school and school-related activities.

Not all of these signs of school trouble have to happen at the same time, but when one or more happens frequently, it's a sign that things may be getting off track. The sooner that parents and students get help, the easier it will be to get back on track and put an end to school troubles.



# Looking Ahead In The School Year

## How Involved Should You Be in Your Child's Education?

Studies show that when parents are engaged in education, their children perform better in school. All parents want their kids to succeed in school, and sometimes that means rolling up the sleeves and lending a helping hand.

The ultimate aim of education is to have children who are organized, independent thinkers, responsible, and capable of taking academic risks. The majority of children need a little support from Mom and Dad to get to that point.

But how much help is too much?

While parents should be involved and aware of what is going on at school, they should not actively complete homework for their kids.

Here are some getting-involved tips:

**Communicate.** Talk to your kids about school every day. Ask specific questions about classes. Rather than asking, "How was school?" ask, "How was math class? What did you learn?" Parents should know their kids' schedules, teachers' names, and when upcoming projects and assignments are due.

**Don't Wait for the Report Card.** One of the biggest mistakes is waiting too long to correct problems. Rather than waiting for the first report card or progress report, follow up after tests and assignments. If there's a quiz on Friday, ask how it went on Monday. If marks are not what they should be, arrange a talk with the teacher and make a plan.

**Help with Homework.** There are many DOs and DON'Ts when it comes to homework help. It boils down to two basic rules: (1) help with homework, but (2) don't do the work for kids. Parents should help create a homework-friendly atmosphere, be available for consult, and monitor frustration and stress levels.

**Organization.** Whether it's emptying book bags right after school, picking out school clothes the night before, or enforcing bedtimes, an organized routine teaches kids consistency, which pays off in school. Kids who learn organizational skills at home transfer those skills to school.

**Set Goals Together.** Part of the communication process involves setting academic goals for the school year. Help kids learn to think about long-term outcomes by discussing personal and academic ambitions, big or small. Be sure to keep goals realistic, achievable, and measurable.

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