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The Oxford Learning Difference

The Sport of School

Starting a new school year is a lot like trying out for a sports team. To make the cut on a team, kids know that they need to prepare. They need to put in the time to practise their skills, to train their muscles to get into top shape, and to work with somebody else—a parent, a coach, or a friend—who will give them feedback and encouragement. Without these, the chances of making the team decrease.

Heading back to school is no different. Like hamstrings, biceps, and abs, the brain is a muscle. It needs practice and fine-tuning in order to function at the top of its game. And, just like hamstrings, biceps, and abs, the brain can get out of shape after a period of underuse. The brain needs a good workout before school starts so it can get back into shape and be ready for the year ahead. It needs to run the drills, take a few practice shots, and feel confident that it's up for the challenge.

Whether school is already in session or not, set aside time every day to review last year's schoolwork. Try a few math problems. Re-read an old essay or book report. Write a paragraph. Watch a science video on the Internet. Or, get brains back into academic habits by re-establishing school-year routines such as bedtimes and wake-up times.

Of course, the best athletes know that there is no such thing as an off-season. Anyone who really wants to stay at the top of his/her game never stops training. That's why there's Oxford Learning—to keep athletes (aka students) performing at peak levels all year long. Consider Oxford Learning as the coach: we help students excel at the sport of school, for this grade, and every grade.

This newsletter is packed full of great tips your family can use to start to this school year with a slam-dunk.

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Creating an Academic Action Plan Helps Families Start the New School Year Off On the Right Foot

With every new school year comes the opportunity to make academic changes and improve grades. It's an opportunity to get rid of bad habits and improve thinking, learning, and studying skills. It's an opportunity to make this school year the best ever! But in order to seize the opportunity that the new school year brings, parents and children need to have a plan for success in place; they need to set academic goals.

That doesn't just mean resolving to get better grades. At-home habits that support in-school learning are equally important to overall school success.

Here are some at-home resolutions that lead to better grades:

Use a family calendar. Manage school, family, and extracurricular activities with a daily reminder courtesy of a wall calendar.

Get informed. Ask about important school dates (big projects, standardized tests) well in advance to avoid last-minute scrambles.

Handle homework. Develop a homework strategy. Set a schedule, stick to a timeframe, and take frequent breaks to keep stress levels low. Parents can work on their own projects during homework time and be available to help if needed.

Hone study skills. The best study skill is to start early. By being aware of test dates and projects, parents can ensure that their kids are not leaving work until the last minute, causing stress for everyone.

Stick to a routine. Kids of all ages need adequate sleep as part of their overall school routines, and parents can help ensure that they are getting the rest that they need to stay sharp in class by establishing and following bedtime and morning routines.

Tip:

When setting goals for a new school year, follow the CAM rule:

Goals should be:

- Clearly stated
- Achievable
- Measurable

For instance, if a student's goal for this year is to get better grades in math, it is more realistic to aim to increase each math test score by five points, and set a goal of doing an extra 15 minutes of math homework a night, than it is to set a goal of "scoring high" on the first test. By setting a clear goal of improving 5 points per test, there is a greater likelihood of success. A realistic goal is an achievable goal.



5 Considerations for a Better Start to the New School Year

1. **Consider reviewing last year's final report card.** This will give your family an academic refresher and a little reminder of the highs and lows of last year.
2. **Consider setting some academic goals.** Now that you've reviewed the outcomes of last year, start considering what academic achievements could be reached THIS year. Both parents and children can identify changes that they'd like to see this school year.
3. **Consider a routine overhaul.** A new school year is an opportunity to deal with any and all bad habits that can get in the way of learning. These include morning and evening routines, eating habits, and after-school routines as well as homework and study habits.
4. **Consider using an agenda for more than just school.** Agendas are more than just places to write down homework, they are great for keeping track of to-do lists, questions to ask teachers, and even chores. Students can also use agendas to prioritize workflow, keep track of work hours, schedule extracurricular activities, and count down to tests and exams.
5. **Consider getting extra support right off the bat.** It's never too soon (or too late) to enlist some extra support. Why wait to find out what will happen with grades this year? Get on top of any potential issues BEFORE they become a problem.

The Biggest Homework Challenge

The topic of homework is always controversial—too much and it causes stress; not enough and it causes concerns. But, regardless of how much or how little homework students bring home, most families can agree that homework is something they have struggled with at one point or another.

A while ago we sent out a questionnaire asking parents to identify what their family's biggest homework struggle was. Maybe not so surprisingly, the vast majority of parents reported disorganization as their family's biggest challenge.

- Disorganization:** leaving assignments to the last minute, forgetting work at school, etc.
- Distractions:** too much TV, Internet, video games, texting
- Scheduling:** lots of extracurricular activities, not enough time
- Comprehension:** not understanding questions, which can lead to frustration

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First Month Checklist

The first weeks of school are critical. The habits that are formed during the first weeks can follow students—and parents—for the rest of the school year.

As soon as school is back in session, ensure that students are on track and hitting the important milestones with this checklist.

Communicate with teachers

Don't wait until the first report card to find out that things are off-track. If parents have concerns, they should take 10 minutes to chat with the teacher about progress and nip any problems in the bud.

Do homework, even when there is none

There is no escaping homework, so the sooner that students learn good homework habits, the less they'll struggle. Students should do homework at the same time every night, even if none was assigned.

Use agendas

Agendas are the number-one school organizational tool. Students should be writing down homework, assignments, and to-do lists in their agendas every day. If schools don't provide agendas, one should be purchased—it's that important.

Talk about school

School is a major part of kids' lives. If they are unwilling to discuss their day, something may be amiss. Parents should talk to kids about their day and have an open dialogue about school and learning challenges.

Monitor frustration/stress levels

Between learning new subjects and balancing homework, chores, and social lives, it can be easy for students to become overwhelmed. This can be very de-motivating and can lead to drops in grades and bad attitudes about school. Get them help as soon as struggles are noted.

Keep an eye on procrastination

Leaving school work to the last minute or not wanting to do schoolwork is a sign of poor organizational skills. Last minute rushing means poor preparation and poorer grades.

Watch out for forgotten work

Forgetting work, misplacing assignments, or losing textbooks are sure signs of an off-track student. If students are showing signs of disorganization, seek help as soon as possible.

Open book bags

Get kids in the habit of opening and sorting through book bags right after school. Students should come home, open book bags, take out lunch boxes, and place agendas somewhere visible so that they don't get distracted and leave homework until the last minute.

Tip:

According to research, one of the biggest back-to-school mistakes that students can make is waiting too long to ask for help. If students wait, it often takes more work to correct a problem than if they had sought assistance right away, at the 'I'm-not-understanding-this stage.'



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