

Effective Study & Test-Taking Strategies for Kids with Learning Difficulties

Effective study strategies are the gateway to school success, graduation, college entry, and job advancement. Poor study habits can bar even bright students from many important opportunities that would otherwise enable them to realize their potential. For many children who have learning and/or attention difficulties, studying is an overwhelming challenge. Consider your child's current study skills; he may not know **what** to study or **how** to approach studying, may have difficulty **remembering the information** even when he has studied, may have trouble **expressing what he knows** (especially in essays). If your child struggles with these problems, he is far from unique.

From late elementary school into college, problems with studying and test-taking represent a major hurdle for many children and adolescents, especially those who have learning and attention problems¹. These difficulties are often identified only after discrepancies are discovered between these students' high grades for class work and their low scores on standardized tests. Their test scores frequently do not reflect their strong conceptual understanding or their level of ability. As a result, study sessions are often highly charged and extremely stressful for these students and their parents.

It is now recognized that **many children and adolescents with learning difficulties need explicit, intensive instruction in study strategies**^{2,3,4,5,6}. This article will describe strategies your child may need to learn, including prioritizing and shifting approaches, and identifying global themes while ignoring irrelevant details⁷. Self-monitoring strategies such as checking, planning, and revising are critical, as your child, like many others, may not use these automatically^{8,9}. Finally, your child may need to be taught explicitly how to figure out which strategy is appropriate when preparing for a test¹⁰.

Identifying Problem Areas

How can you help your child improve his study skills and reduce the stress involved? You can play a critical role in preventing a negative cycle where your child's poor test performance discourages him from applying himself and learning more effective study strategies. The first step is to determine why your child is having difficulty. Here are some questions to consider and discuss with your child:

- Does your child usually know what to study?
- Does he use a systematic method for studying?
- Does he seem to have inefficient study skills (i.e., he spends long hours studying, yet performs poorly on tests)?

Knowing What to Study

Children are often unaware of the breadth and depth of the material to be covered in an upcoming test. To determine your child's level of awareness, ask him:

- Has he checked in with the teacher about the content of the test?
- Has the teacher provided a study guide or practice test?
- Is there a review session your child can attend?
- Does your child have a plan for studying?

Help your child understand that **his teacher may offer clues about important details to focus on when studying for a test**. Phrases teachers use to signal importance include:

- "Write this down"
- "Let me summarize"
- "Let me say it again"
- "This is important"

