

How to Be a Successful Student

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Successful students know how to focus on their studies when it matters while also taking breaks when they need them. They can manage their time wisely, stick to meaningful study schedules, and make the most of their time in the classroom. In the process, successful students also know how to have a good time, and love gaining knowledge as much as they enjoy getting stellar grades.

Part
1

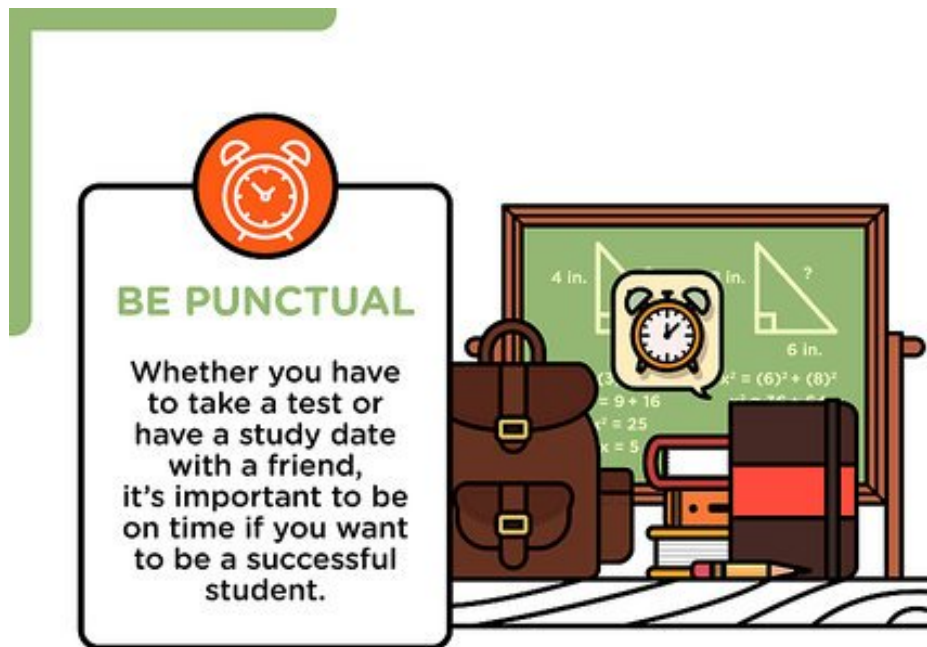
Part 1 of 3: Developing the Qualities of a Successful Student



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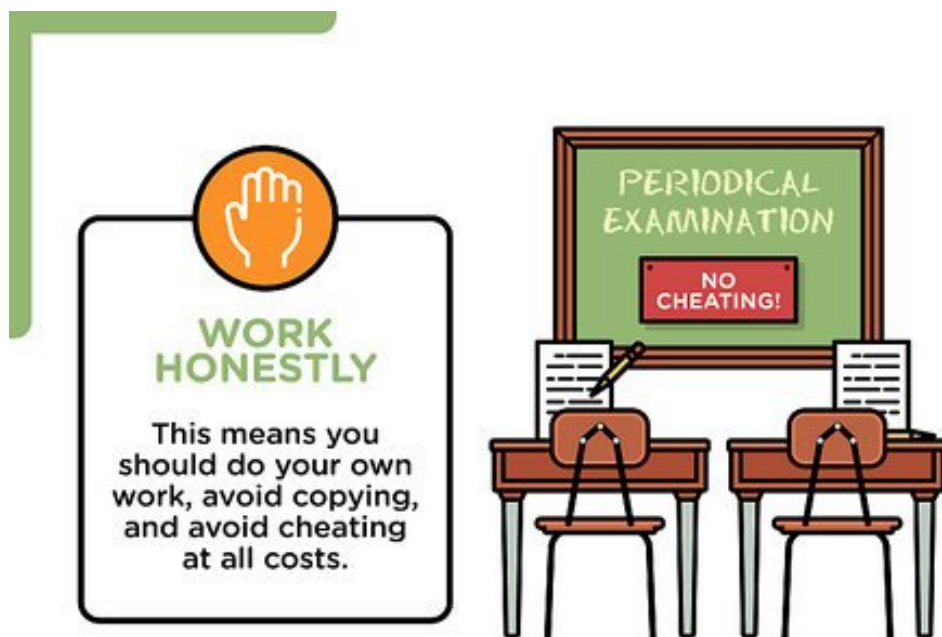
1 Make your studies a priority. ^[1] Successful students know how to succeed because they've made their studies their top priority.^[2] Though it's important to make time for friends, family, extracurricular activities, and even some solo down time, you should never neglect the time you need to spend studying. If you have an important exam coming up and don't feel prepared, then you should probably skip the big party two days before it. If you're really behind on your French, then you may need to skip that new episode of *Criminal Minds* for the time being. This doesn't mean that you can never do the things you want to do, but that you should recognize when studying should be at the top of your list.^[3]

- That said, you can't ignore everything in the world just so you can study. If a friend or family member is having a crisis, you can't ditch him or her just to study, either.



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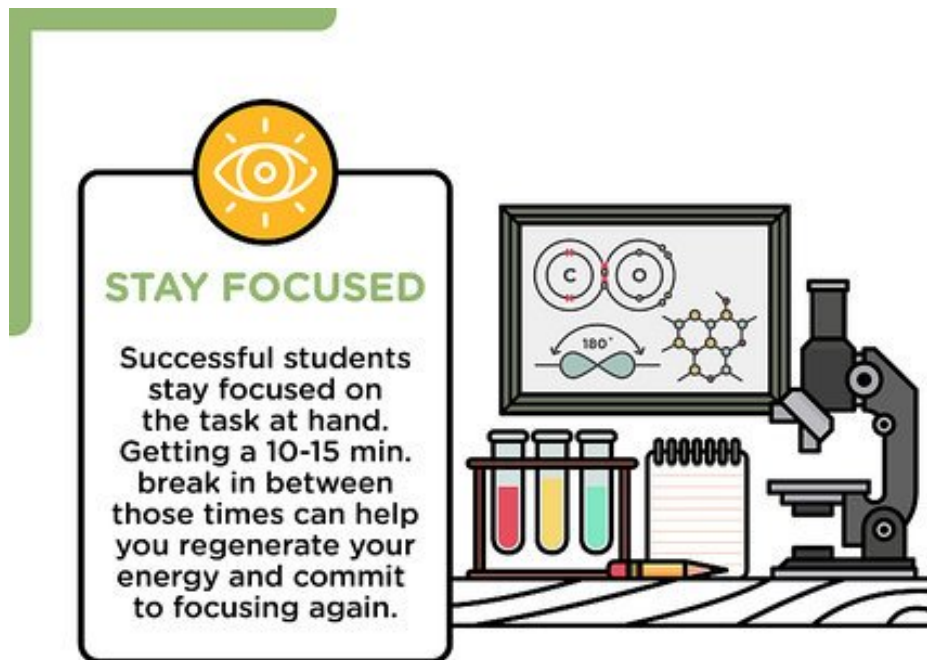
2 Be punctual. [4] Develop the habit of judging time and learn how to arrive where you need to be on time. In fact, you should plan to be a bit early anywhere you go so you have time to get situated, focused, and ready to learn when you get there. Whether you have to take a test or have a study date with a friend, it's important to be on time if you want to be a successful student.[5]



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3 Work honestly. This means you should do your own work, avoid copying, and avoid cheating at all costs. Cheating won't get you anywhere, and what may seem like a shortcut one day can actually get you into a lot of trouble the next. It's never worth it to cheat on a test, and you're far better off not doing well on an exam you're not prepared for than getting caught cheating. Even if you're not caught, cheating makes you think it's okay to take shortcuts when it comes to life and studying, and it can lead to some bad habits down the line.

- Don't fall into peer pressure, either. In some schools, cheating is considered the norm, and it seems like so many kids are doing it that you might as well join in. This kind of group thinking is very dangerous and can keep you from reaching your full potential.



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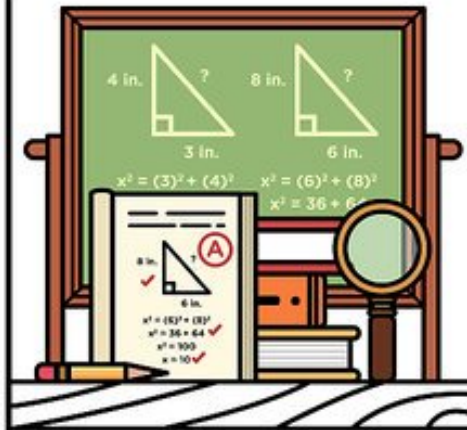
4 Stay focused. [6] Successful students stay focused on the task at hand. If you have to study one chapter of your history book for an hour, you need to commit to doing so instead of letting your mind wander. If you need a break, take a short 10 minute one, but don't let it run over into an hour long break with only 10 minutes of studying. You can actually train your mind to concentrate for longer and longer periods of time, so even if you feel like you can't focus for more than 15 minutes straight, just work on building up to 20 minutes, and then building up to 30 minutes and so on.[7]

- That said, most people really shouldn't focus or do one task for more than 60 or 90 minutes. Getting a 10-15 minute break in between those times can help you regenerate your energy and commit to focusing again.



DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO ANYONE ELSE

Successful students succeed on their own terms. Learn to brush the others aside and to focus on doing the best that you can do.



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5 Don't compare yourself to anyone else. [8] Successful students succeed on their own terms. They don't care what their brother, neighbor, or lab partner does in school because they know that in the end, all that matters is their own success. If you get too bogged down in what other people are doing, then you're bound to be disappointed in yourself or to become so competitive that your mind gets poisoned. Learn to brush the others aside and to focus on doing the best that you can do.

- Don't compare yourself with anyone. With this, you are insulting yourself.



WORK ON MAKING INCREMENTAL PROGRESS

Successful students know that it's hard to improve by leaps and bounds and focus on the details instead of jumping ahead to the final product.



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6 Work on making incremental progress. [9] If you want to be a successful student, then you shouldn't aim to go from a "C" to an "A" average. Instead, you should work on going to a "C+" and then a "B-," and so on, so your progress is manageable and so you don't get disappointed. Successful students know that it's hard to improve by leaps and bounds and focus on the details instead of jumping ahead to the final product. If you want to be a successful student, then you have to be okay with improving little by little.[10]



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7 Get excited about the material. Successful students aren't just machines who work to get "A"s no matter what. They actually care and are interested in the material that they study, and their passion for knowledge helps them improve. Of course, you can't get excited about every little thing you're learning, from photosynthesis to linear equations, but you can try to find something that you care about in every class.^[11] This will keep you focused and will make it more fun for you to learn.

- If you really find something you're passionate about in class, then you should do some outside reading to get even more excited about the topic. For example, if you loved reading *The Sun Also Rises* in class, try reading *A Movable Feast* or some of Hemingway's other works on your own, too.



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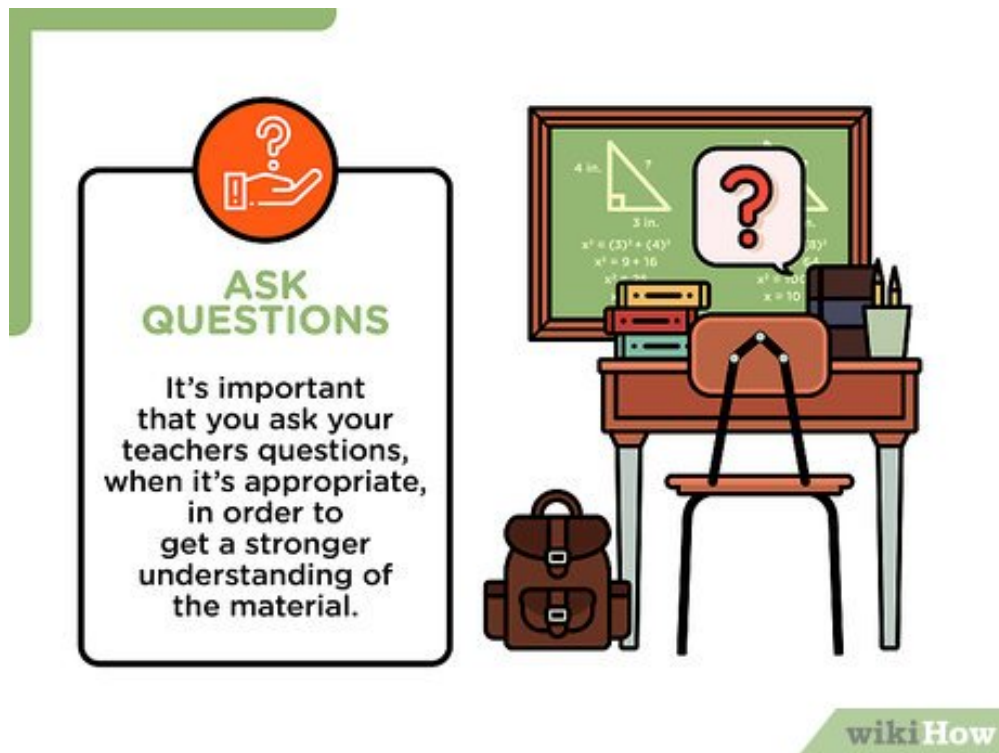
1 Pay attention. If you want to be a successful student, then paying attention in class is absolutely crucial to your success. While you don't have to love every single subject that comes your way, you should be motivated enough to listen to your teachers, to avoid texting your friends, and to be focused enough to really hear what your teacher is telling you, and to be able to pick up on the most important aspects of each lesson.

- In order to pay attention, it's important to keep your eye on the teacher.
- If you're confused about something, you can quickly ask for clarification. If the lesson goes on and you feel yourself getting more and more lost, it'll be hard to pay attention.



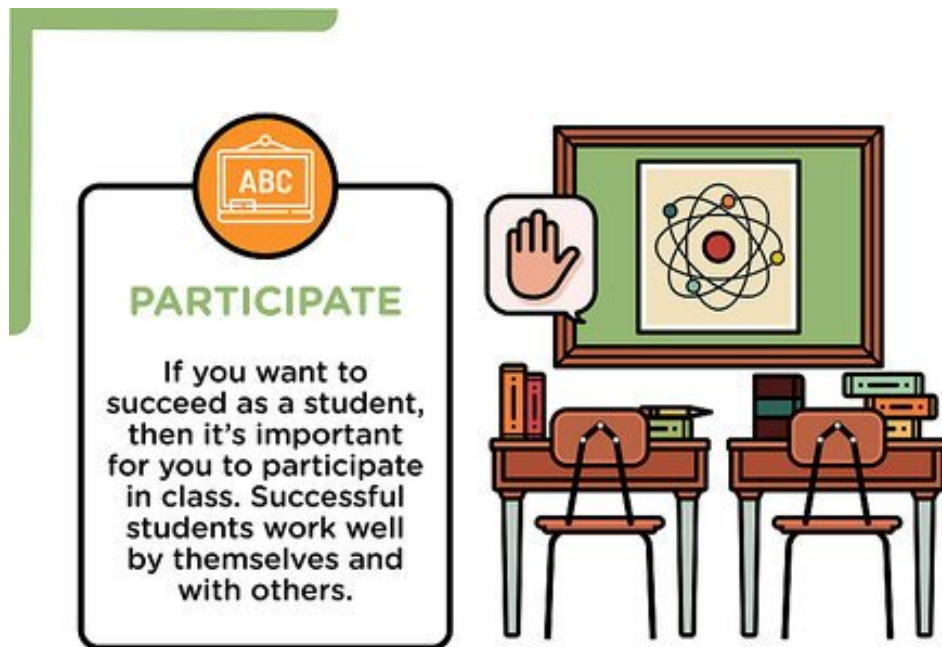
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2 Take notes. Taking notes is also crucial to your success as a student. Not only will taking notes help you study later, but doing so will also keep you engaged in the classroom, and will help you learn the material because you'll have to jot it down in your own words.^[12] Some people even use different highlighters or pens to organize their notes as they take them to really help them absorb the material. Taking notes will make you feel more accountable in the classroom and will help you listen to your teachers.^[13]



3 Ask questions. If you really want to succeed in the classroom, then it's important that you ask your teachers questions, when it's appropriate, in order to get a stronger understanding of the material. You shouldn't interrupt the lessons, but you should ask questions if you really have them in order to avoid being confused and to prepare for your exams. Asking questions will also keep you active in the discussion and will help you learn the material, too.

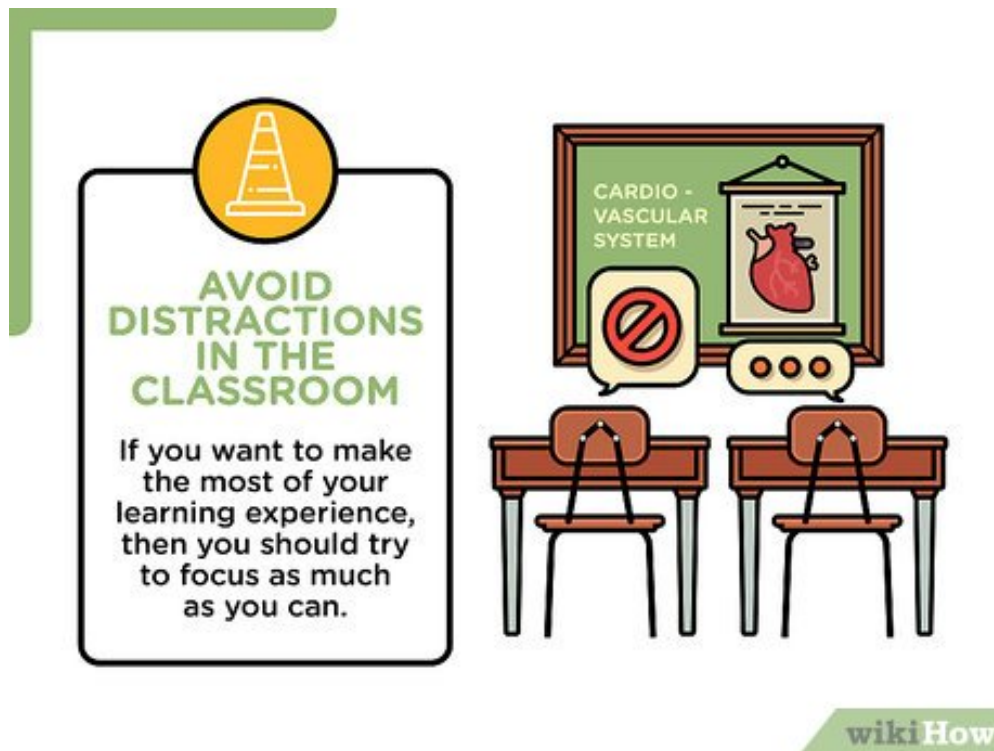
- At the end of each class, you can also review your notes and prepare questions to ask the next time if anything is unclear. Some teachers want you to wait until the end of the lecture to ask questions. If this is the case with your teacher, be respectful of that.



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4 Participate. If you want to succeed as a student, then it's important for you to participate in class. You should not only ask questions when you have them, but you should also answer your teacher's questions, be an active member of group activities, volunteer to help your teacher during class, and make sure to be as active as possible in the classroom so you can really get the most out of the learning experience. Participating will also help you develop a good relationship with your teachers, which will also help you in the classroom.

- You don't have to raise your hand after every question, but you should make an effort to talk when you have something to say.
- Remember the principle of 3-3-3. In every class, answer at least 3 questions. This may boost up your participation scores.
- Participation is important in group work, too. Successful students work well by themselves and with others.



5 Avoid distractions in the classroom. If you want to make the most of your learning experience, then you should try to focus as much as you can. Avoid sitting next to your friends or chatty students, and put away your food, your magazines, your phone, or anything else that is keeping you from your studies. You can reward yourself by talking to your friends, reading your magazines, or doing whatever else you do for fun later, but you can't let it get in the way of your study habits.

- If other students are an easy distraction or you feel like you might just talk to them because you're bored of the current topic, ask the teacher if you could move seats. If not, try your best to ignore the distraction and if they continue, ask them politely to stop.
- Try not to think about one class when you're sitting in another. Be present in the room you're in and worry about the next class when you get there.



DEVELOP POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR TEACHERS

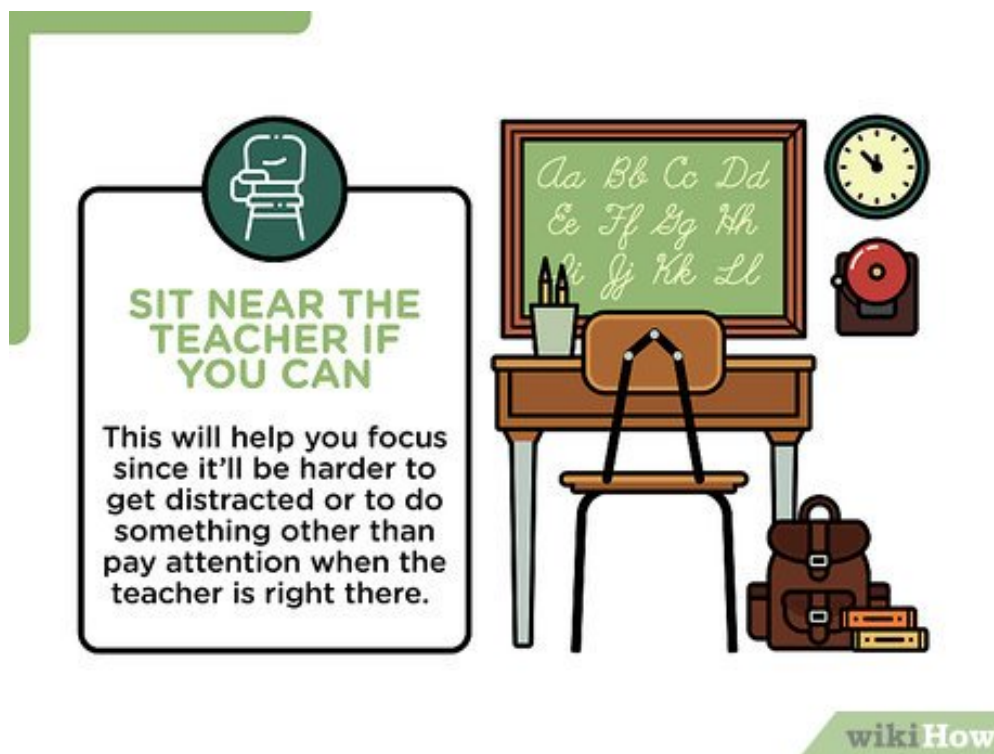
Another way to really succeed in the classroom is to develop strong connections with your teachers.



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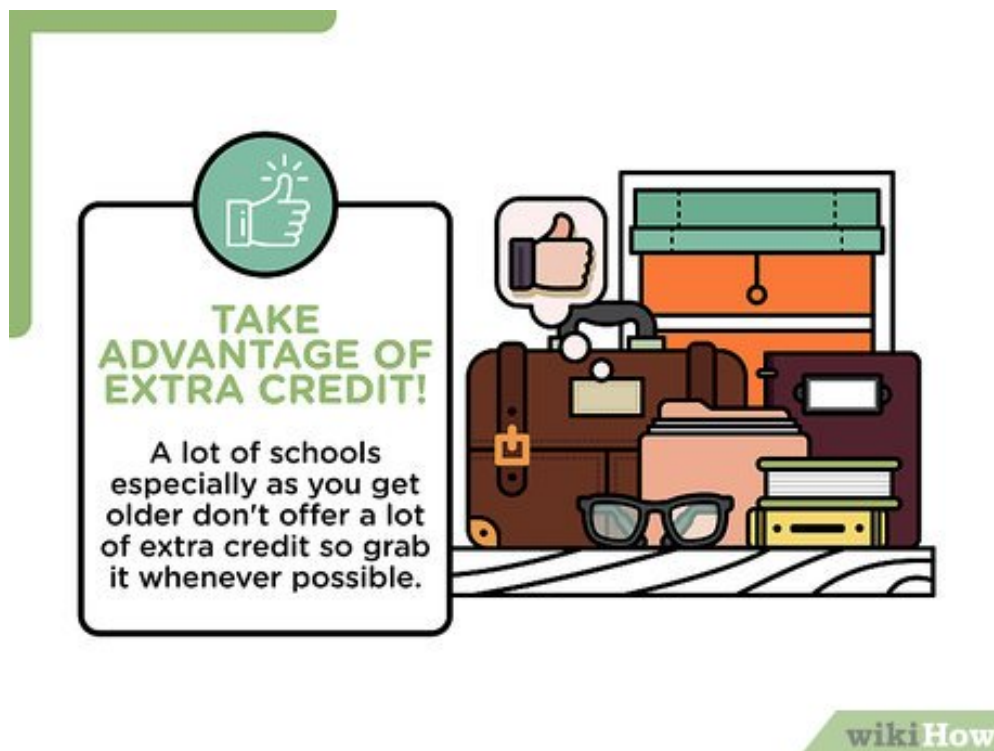
6 Develop positive relationships with your teachers. Another way to really succeed in the classroom is to develop strong connections with your teachers. While you don't want to suck up or attempt to become best friends with them, building a strong rapport with your teachers can help you when you need to ask them for extra help and can also make you gain a stronger interest in the material. Work on showing up to class on time and following your teacher's rules so that you can make the most of your studies.^[14]

- Don't worry about people thinking you're the teacher's pet if you're nice to your teachers. You're just making an effort to be a better student.
- If your teachers like you more, they'll be more willing to help you and to answer your questions, and will be more understanding if something comes up.



7 Sit near the teacher if you can. If you're in a classroom where you can choose your own seats, then you should think about sitting toward the front of the room, near the teacher. This will help you focus since it'll be harder to get distracted or to do something other than pay attention when the teacher is right there. It'll also help you build a stronger bond with your teacher, especially if you're in a large lecture hall, because teachers tend to engage more with the people who are sitting in front.

- Don't worry about people thinking you're a brown noser. You're just doing the best you can to absorb the material you need to know.



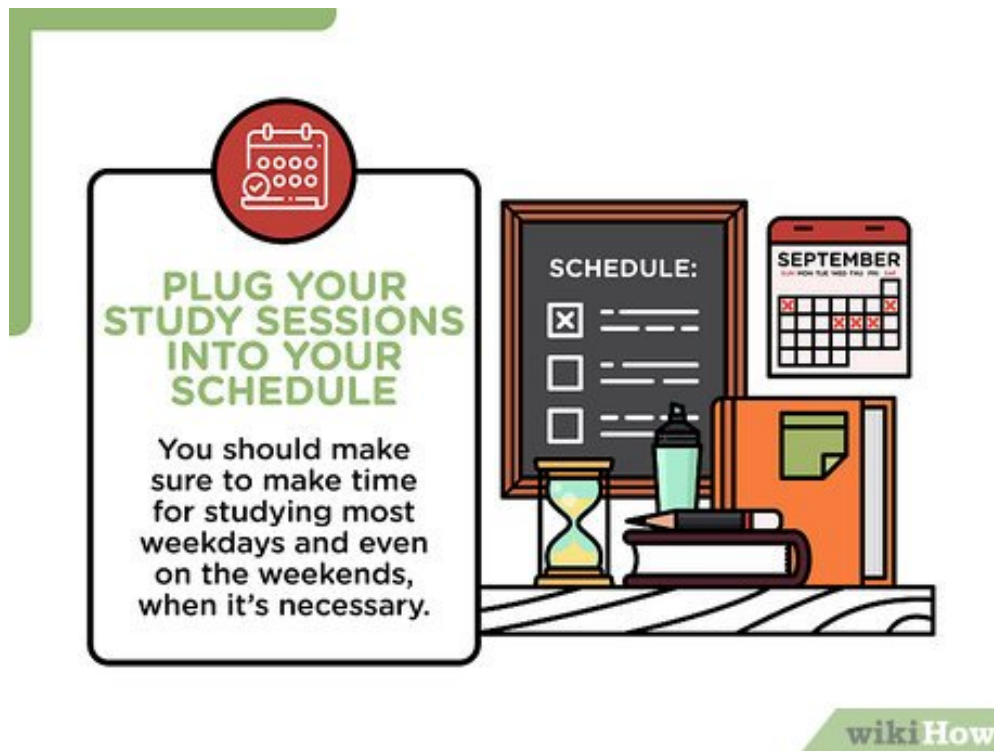
8 Take advantage of extra credit! Take the opportunity to gain extra credit whenever possible. A lot of schools especially as you get older don't offer a lot of extra credit so grab it whenever possible.



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1 Create a game plan for each study session. One way to succeed when you study is to have a solid game plan before each study session.^[15] This will ensure that you're focused, that you meet your goals, and that your sessions are productive. Block off your studying in 15 or 30-minute chunks of time and write a list of what you will do during each time period, whether you're studying flashcards, reviewing your notes, or taking practice tests. This will keep you from feeling overwhelmed or unmotivated.^[16]

- Having a list that you can check off will make you more motivated. You'll feel accomplished and focused as you check each item off your list.



2 Plug your study sessions into your schedule. Another important method for succeeding in your studies is to make sure that you have a planner and that you block off study time in advance. You should make sure to make time for studying most weekdays and even on the weekends, when it's necessary. Though you don't want to bite off more than you can chew, you want to avoid filling your calendar with social events and extracurricular activities and ending up with no time to study.^[17]

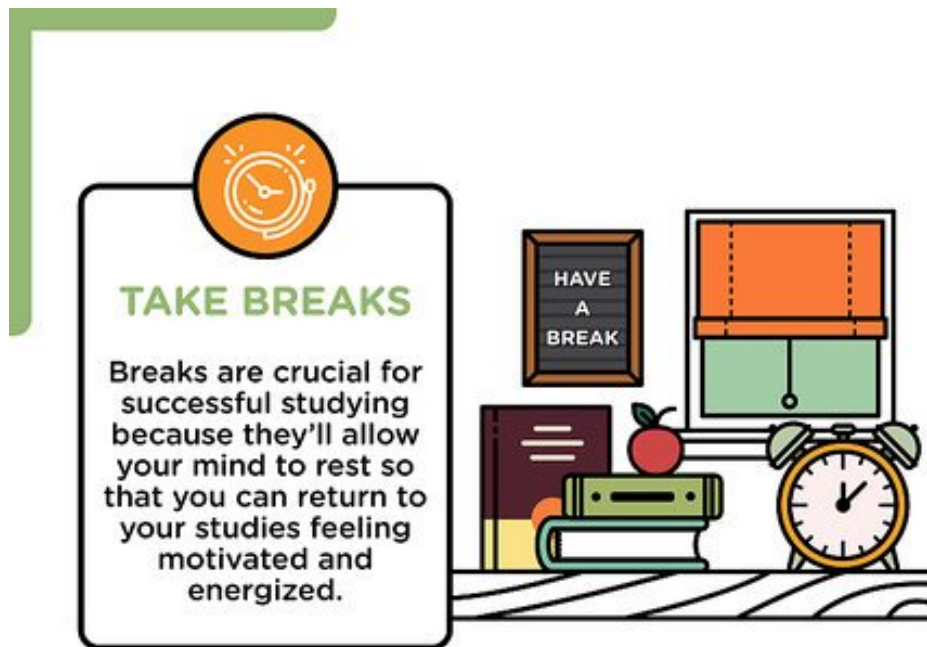
- If you make a point of blocking off time to study, then you won't end up planning social events during that time, which will keep you from studying. You may not even realize that your social calendar is booked until you try to make time for your studies.
- You can even set a monthly schedule to make sure you take your material week by week, especially if you have to review for a big exam.



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3 Find a studying method that suits your learning style. [18] There are different types of learners out there, and not every type of learning, such as using flashcards or taking thorough notes, is best for every type of learner. It's important to be aware of your learning style so that you can best tailor your studying to suit your needs. Many people are actually a combination of different learners, so multiple styles may appeal to you. Here are some of the most common learning styles and some tips for studying:[19]

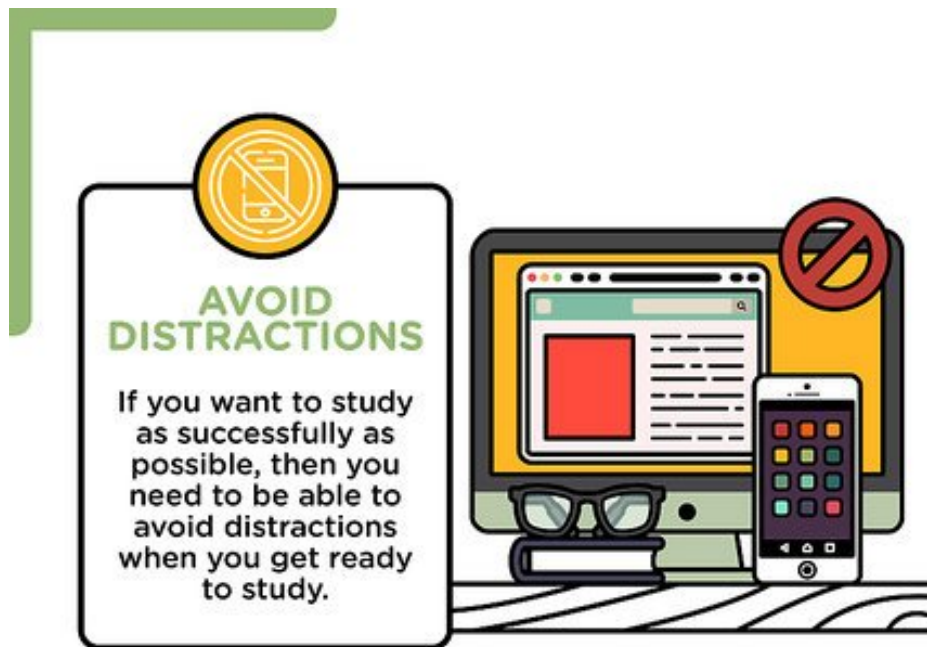
- Visual learners. If you're a visual learner, then you learn by using images, pictures, and spatial understanding. Charts, diagrams, and color-coded notes may work best for you. When you take notes, flow charts or even some relevant drawings may be more effective than large blocks of words.
- Auditory learners. These types of learners learn best by listening. Try recording your lectures and repeating them, or really honing in on your teacher's words and taking some notes later. You can also repeat your notes or the course materials to yourself or talk to experts or participate in group discussion to study more effectively.
- Physical or kinesthetic learners. These learners learn best when they use their bodies, their hands, and their senses of touch. You can learn by tracing words to reinforce the subject matter, memorizing notes by walking, or by using any activities that make you move around or touch things while learning.



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4 Take breaks. You may be surprised to find that breaks may be the key to your success. No one can study for eight hours straight, not even that one person who is super driven or has an IV of coffee steadily pumping in his veins. In fact, breaks are crucial for successful studying because they'll allow your mind to rest so that you can return to your studies feeling motivated and energized. Plan to take a break every 60 or 90 minutes, and do something that will allow you to rest your eyes, have some nourishment, or get some fresh air.^[20]

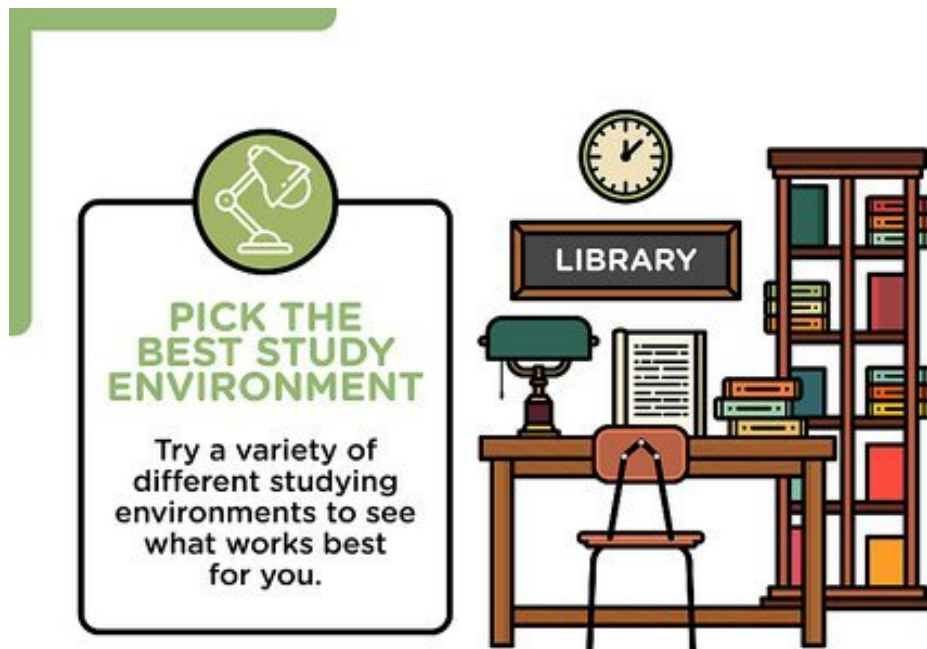
- Taking breaks help to break down the data you have remembered into chunks.
- You may do the following during your break:^[21]
 - Listening to music.
 - Reading a book.
 - Having a nap.
 - Take a shower.
 - Play video games.
 - Surf on social media.
- Successful students know when they need to rest. They can sense when they're getting tired or when studying is no longer productive. Don't think it's lazy for you to take a break and remember that it's really the best you can do for your studies.



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5 Avoid distractions. If you want to study as successfully as possible, then you need to be able to avoid distractions when you get ready to study. This can mean avoiding studying with an unproductive friend, turning off your phone, or making sure you only use the Internet to help you study, not to check up on your celebrity gossip. Though it can be impossible to avoid distractions entirely, you can make an effort to minimize them before you even sit down to study, which will help you focus and not get off-track.^[22]

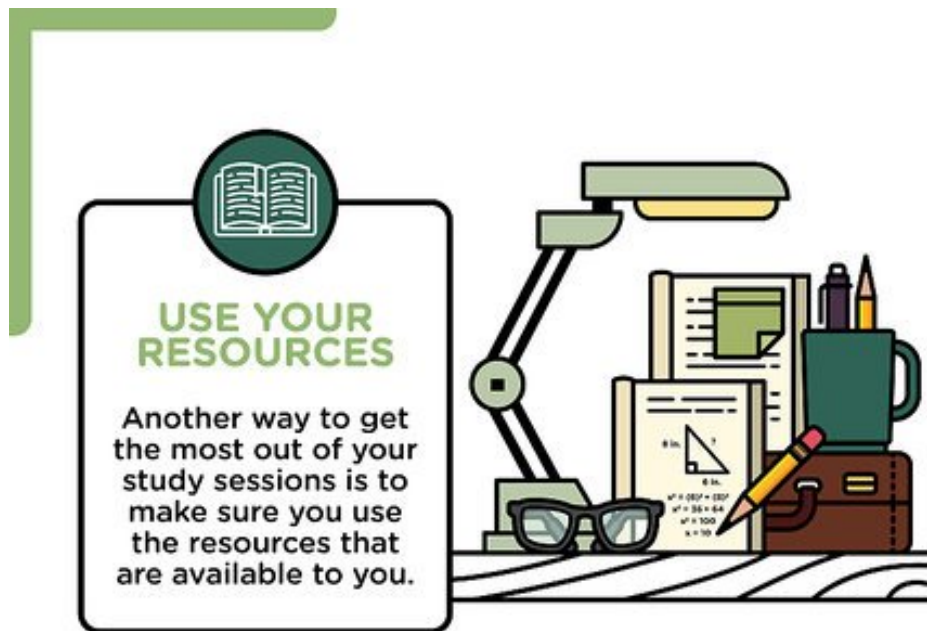
- You can even disable your Internet if you don't need it to study to keep yourself from being distracted. If you really don't need your phone, you can turn it off, too.
- If something is worrying you, then devote time to figuring it out and then get back to your studies if you can. If you feel bothered all day, then you won't be able to get your work done.



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6 Pick the best study environment. Your study environment can be crucial to your success as a student. However, everyone is different. Some people like to study in their bedrooms, with absolute silence. Others like to study on a blanket outdoors, blasting their favorite music. Some people like to study on their bed. Some people like to study in the library or in a coffee shop, where they are surrounded by other people doing the same. Try a variety of different studying environments to see what works best for you.^[23]

- If working in a loud coffee shop hasn't been going well lately, then try studying in the quiet of your room or even at a park where you can feel alone.



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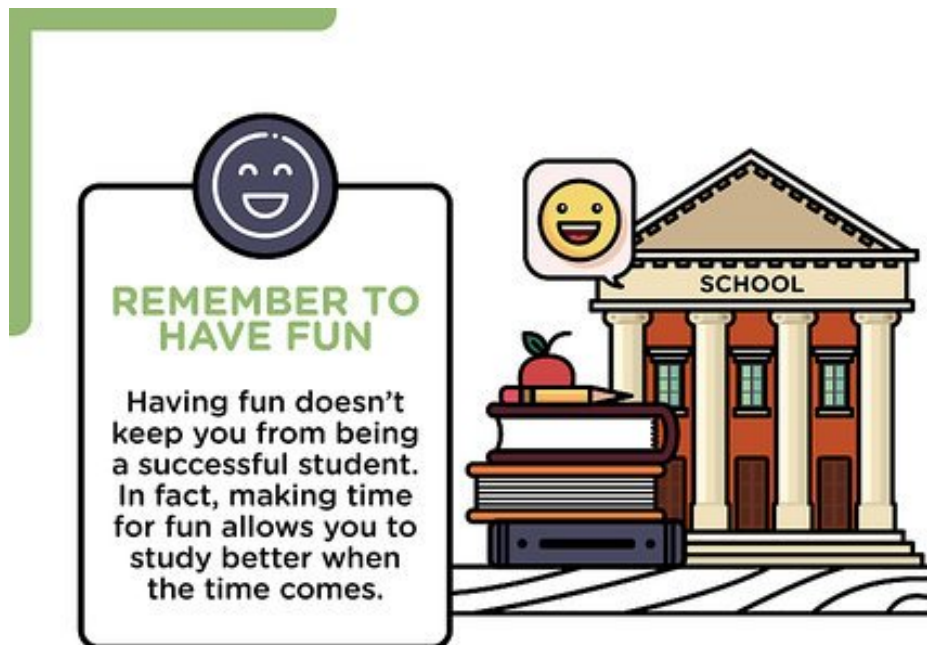
7 Use your resources. Another way to get the most out of your study sessions is to make sure you use the resources that are available to you. Talk to your teachers, your librarians, and your knowledgeable friends to get help on any materials you don't understand. Use your library and your online resources to supplement your studies; check out the extra problems in the back of your textbook to get a deeper understanding of the material. Do what you need to do to take advantage of all of your resources to succeed.[24]

- Successful students are also creative. When they can't get all the answers they need from a textbook, they look for other people, places, or online sites that can help them.



8 Get a study buddy or study group. Some people do even better in school when they have a study buddy or a study group. Working with other people can help you feel motivated and like you're not so alone in your studying efforts. You can also learn from other people, and can even learn by teaching others what you know. Though working with a partner or a group doesn't work for everyone, you should give it a try to make the most of your studies.^[25]

- Not everyone is a social learner. You can test the water by studying with a friend and then inviting more students to join in.
- Make sure your study group is directed and organized, so you don't end up getting off-topic too much. If you feel the group is getting off-topic, don't be afraid to kindly say something.



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9 Remember to have fun. Though it may sound like fun is beside the point when it comes to being a successful student, it can actually be the key to your achievements. Just as taking breaks during a study session can help you focus more on your studies, taking breaks from studying completely to do yoga, hang out with your friends, watch a movie by yourself, or just to relax can help you regain the energy you'll need to really succeed in school.

- Having fun doesn't keep you from being a successful student. In fact, making time for fun allows you to study better when the time comes.
- Making time for your friendships will also let you relax a bit more about getting an imperfect grade. If your studies are your only interest, then you'll be putting too much pressure on yourself.



Expert Q&A

Question

How can I be a more motivated student?



Sean Alexander,
MS
Academic Tutor
Expert Answer

Aside from your classes, what do you love? Think about what you are passionate about. Take that answer and try to see how your classes are relevant to that. For example, let's say you love history but don't like math. In terms of history, where do you think humans would be if they never figured out math? Try to wrap what you like into all of your subjects like that.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 1

Question

How can I understand difficult concepts as a student?



Sean Alexander,
MS
Academic Tutor
Expert Answer

Try to break it down into steps. For example, if you are studying a physics problem, break down the problem into segments. Most people can understand something intellectually if it is broken down into a step process you can follow each time.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 1

Question

Is doing revision in morning likely to be successful?



Community Answer

Doing revision in the morning is the best, as you have just woken up from a long break and you are likely to feel energetic and refreshed. This will help you to pay more attention and concentrate more clearly on your studies. However, not everyone is a morning person and your preferred time for studying can vary as you age—you need to work this out for yourself, throughout life.

Helpful 338 Not Helpful 23

Question

How can I study without anyone laughing?



Community Answer

Studying is not supposed to be funny, if someone laughs at you for studying then maybe they're just immature and not with the program. Remember the reason you're studying is that you can have a successful life. Laugh even harder back at them because you know that education is needed for every person in this day and age. Let them fail, while you achieve your goal.

Helpful 240 Not Helpful 23

Question

How do I clear my mind if I get bad results?



Community Answer

Don't worry, think about how you can revise and do better next time. Learn from your mistakes, that is the true key to being successful and clearing your mind of clutter.

Helpful 289 Not Helpful 33

Question

Is there a way that I can learn to be focused when I study?



Community Answer

Try to take breaks while studying, especially if you are studying for more than two hours. This will allow your mind to refresh itself. The break does not have to be long: 5 to 10 minutes will be plenty.

Helpful 235 Not Helpful 29

Question

How can I stop wasting time on social media like Facebook?



Community Answer

Turn off all your devices and your internet. It should help you to focus more. If you really need to use the net, block all social media and focus only on doing research and revision.

Helpful 241 Not Helpful 30

Question

What can I do if I don't understand what I'm studying?



Community Answer

You could ask a teacher, parent, or guardian about whatever you're having trouble with. They could explain it in a way that you can understand. You can also try signing up for tutoring classes instead.

Helpful 189 Not Helpful 25

Question

How can I study more for exams?



Community Answer

Put a piece of chocolate at the end of each paragraph, and when you have read the entire paragraph, eat the chocolate and process all the information you plan on retaining. Tip: Don't stay up late studying. That only makes absorbing information a lot harder.

Helpful 220 Not Helpful 33

[See more answers](#)



Tips

- Get a good night's sleep! This is very important. Your brain will function differently on 4 hours of sleep than it will on 8 hours. Recommendations for sleeping schedules: Ages 1-11 should be getting 10 to 12 hours of sleep a day. Ages 12-17 should be getting a minimum of 7-8 hours.
- Don't waste your time. Use each and every second productively and carefully.
- Make time for breakfast in the morning, even if you're in a rush. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, because your body, like cars and lots of other machinery, needs fuel to be able to work properly throughout the day. Going to school on an empty stomach will leave you with more than a few problems. You could get sleepy, you could be too hungry to focus, you'll feel sick or lazy, or powerless.
- Make sure not to start studying the day before the test. As soon as you get your material, study it! You'll remember it better because it will be more engraved in your

memory.

- Do something that you'll remember when studying, then repeat it when taking a test/quiz. Such as chewing gum, sucking on hard candy, etc. This will help you remember it.
- Be confident and stay motivated.

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This article was co-authored by **Sean Alexander, MS**. Sean Alexander is an Academic Tutor specializing in teaching mathematics and physics. Sean is the Owner of Alexander Tutoring, an academic tutoring business that provides personalized studying sessions focused on mathematics and physics. With over 15 years of experience, Sean has worked as a physics and math instructor and tutor for Stanford University, San Francisco State University, and Stanbridge Academy. He holds a BS in Physics from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an MS in Theoretical Physics from San Francisco State University. This article has been viewed 565,900 times.

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