



DEVELOPING STUDY HABITS AND THE GIFTED STUDENT

By Mark Erlandson

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Now that my daughter is a high school senior and headed off to college in the fall, among the items I worry about is whether we have properly prepared her to be academically successful there. At first blush, the idea seems absurd. We have read to her since she was a baby, provided intellectually stimulating activities while limiting television and electronics, even sent her to an elite boarding school.

What else could we possibly have done? While it is too late for me, don't let it become too late for you: Teach your gifted child good study habits.

Many gifted students have never really experienced a true academic challenge during high school, especially those who were not enrolled in special schools, even if they have taken AP or honors classes. For them, education is the memorization of facts to be regurgitated at a later date. Therefore, when these students encounter the more rigorous and demanding curriculum of college, they may be without the effective study skills and habits necessary since colleges require more application of concepts rather than just memorization of facts. (See my last blog for a discussion of the "grit" they will also need to meet this challenge.) Most students look at studying as simply re-reading or restudying class material that was not very challenging to begin with.

This type of study experience will only lead to boredom and frustration. Therefore, if your child is not challenged in his or her regular classes, provide challenging material and projects yourself. Although many experts recommend making this material interesting as well, it is probably best to provide a mixture of both subject matter that your child enjoys and subject matter he or she finds less interesting. Life requires us to persevere and use our study skills in both situations.

Here are some important study skills gifted students need to acquire:

1. **Time management** – often gifted students have been able to still succeed while procrastinating and completing assignments at the last minute. Help your child learn to:
 - study at a regular time every day and week – make it a habit;
 - set a daily, weekly, and semester schedule, assigning amounts of time to each subject or project;
 - be sure to revise this schedule periodically;

- prioritize goals on a daily basis – priorities will change as deadlines approach;
- break long-term projects into short-term attainable steps.

2. **Motivation** – help your child to:

- recognize the “real world” application of the material being learned, e.g., a poetry analysis develops not only analytical skills applicable across a spectrum of occupations, but the creativity employers emphasize and 21st century jobs require;
- define success as learning new material and working hard, not getting an A on an assessment. Praise effort.

3. **Organization:**

- find a place free of everyday clutter to study;
- visit office supply stores to get an idea of all of the possible products available to help with organization;
- let the student select the organizational method (your method may not work for them);
- realize the first choice of organization aids may not work and another method may need to be tried.

4. **Studying in chunks:**

- try not to study for longer than 25 minutes as studies show the brain struggles to concentrate on a specific topic for longer than that;
- break for about five minutes at a time, no longer;
- if possible, change your environment when you change subject or topic, e.g., study for the math exam in the bedroom and the literature exam in the kitchen (it will help your brain to recall and organize information);
- start with a harder subject/topic and then alternate with easier ones.

5. **Note-taking:**

- take notes when listening to a lecture. (Practice with a TED lecture online if the content presented in class is too easy);
- develop an abbreviation and punctuation system that makes sense to you;

- use indentation and white space on the page to separate and organize information;
- consider a formal method of note-taking, e.g., Cornell notes;
- check your notes as soon as possible after taking them to make sure they are complete and coherent;
- re-write your notes as a way of reviewing for an assessment;
- use mnemonic devices to help recall information from notes.

Two very helpful sites for finding more information about study skills and strategies are Study Guides and Strategies and Cybrary Man's Educational Web Sites: Study Skills/Organization. Dartmouth College has some excellent videos for those who are visual learners.

In some ways, being gifted can sometimes seem more like a curse. Developing study habits is one way to combat that.