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Study Tips for Students: Preparing for Success at Exam Time

Here at PW and Hadley, we introduce 10 days of study tips prior to each exam period. One tip per day is discussed during the 8 minute home room class. These same tips are sent home via email to all parents and guardians too so don't hesitate to talk about this at home. We hope this helps you prepare yourselves for an intense exam period.

#1 Be motivated & positive, attitude is everything:

The first step towards success is deciding that studying is an important part of achieving success and being motivated to do what it takes to reach your end goal. If you believe you will be successful – it's half the battle.

Review your Term 1 and / or 2 Report Cards. Think about any improvements you've made since September. Remember that even the smallest improvement is a step towards success. Talk with your parents, guardians or teachers about approaching exams and any anxiety or doubt you may feel. They will probably tell you that with the right amount of planning and focus, you can be successful.

#2 Setting up a study spot:

The place where you study and review your subject material is as important as how much you study. Create a spot for yourself at home that is used only for studying over the next few weeks – not your bed, not the living room, not the cafeteria or coffee shop! The best spot will be a desk in your bedroom, a desk in the basement, a table somewhere in your home – anywhere that is mostly free of interruptions and distractions.

You will use this space a lot! Make sure you have pencils, pens, calculators, geometry sets, erasers, extra paper – whatever you need to be able to do your work. If you have trouble finding these supplies, please contact a teacher or the school to see if we can help.

#3 Create a plan:

You will have looked at the exam schedule many times to find out which day you write which subject. Some subjects will require more study time than others. List exam subjects from most difficult to easiest. Beside each subject, list

- a) what material is going to be covered
- b) how much time you think it will take you to review that material
- c) which teachers you should visit during lunch hour to get help with review or to answer any questions you may have (particularly for the top 3 most difficult exams on your list!).

#4 Make a study calendar:

With the information created above, you can now start mapping out your evening and weekend study time. Yes, almost all successful people, whether at school or in their jobs, work in the evenings and on weekends – not all the time, but when there are important tasks that must be accomplished well.

A daily evening calendar that is set up in 20 minute blocks is most effective – you will remember the most at the beginning and end of these 20 minute sessions.

Make sure you leave time for dinner, socializing online, any evening activities you participate in, and ensuring you are not up too late and staying on top of homework.

Include the 2 weekend days in this calendar and block study time the same as you would during the evening. Add exam day evenings in there too, for these evenings can be used for review.

#5 Set some goals:

Perhaps you are almost passing a subject, perhaps you are having difficulty earning that last 2-3%. Perhaps you are passing well, but would love to move into the 75-80% grade range or higher. Perhaps the CEGEP program you want requires minimum grades that you're not quite at. What would make that small difference? What gives you the most trouble? Is it the style of test – short answer, multiple choice, essay answers? Ask your parents or guardian about their school or work experience and what they found has helped in these situations. You may be surprised at the experience they have!

Most teachers have practice tests, old exams, sample questions that they are happy to provide you with and will even go over your answers during a lunch hour work session. All of these little steps will make a difference with help and support from teachers and parents.

#6 Reading the text book and class notes is not enough!

It has been proven that you only have a 25% retention rate when you only read your notes/textbooks. Everything else you do increases that retention rate substantially.

Passively looking at the words on a page is what most people do and never go beyond. The techniques suggested below requires your mind to work with the material, reorganize it, and, in the process, make it part of yourself. As long as you are a passive studier, the information will always be someone else's.

You can learn more actively by...

- ✓ Reading aloud to yourself or a partner
- ✓ Teaching the material to someone
- ✓ Making up a rhyme
- ✓ Rewriting key ideas in your own words
- ✓ Drawing a picture/diagram
- ✓ Recopying class notes, copy from textbooks or make cue cards
- ✓ Ask yourself pertinent questions and answer them aloud
- ✓ Make connections and associations – what do you know that will help you retain the information?
- ✓ Make it weird

#7 Chunk the material, and repeat, repeat, repeat!

Summarize! This is called chunking the material. A best practise of studying is to try to organize your material so that common elements are reviewed together. It is easier to memorize five headings with five items each than to try and cram 25 seemingly unrelated pieces of data into your long-term memory. There won't always be a pattern, but the act of analyzing the lists in search of patterns will help you memorize the material.

Sifting out the most important information in a piece of text will help you realize what you need to know and what you do not. When you summarize this information, not only are you going over the information again (repetition), but you are forced to determine which information is MOST important for each exam. Summarizing also allows you to "make it personal" by putting it in your own words and making the facts and information more meaningful.

#8 You are never done studying!

Up until the moment you walk into the exam room, there is always studying time available. Information can never be reviewed too many times. Stick with it! Whenever you can – on the school bus, in the caf, in the car - go over the information one more time.

#9 Exam Day – be prepared:

You need to be rested, which means getting a good sleep. Cramming the night before, staying up late to finish work – all of this works against succeeding at exams. Students should eat breakfast, bring snacks on the bus and have all necessary supplies. Being rested and fed ensures that upon arrival at school, students can stay calm and focused, or at least be better able to stay calm and focused.

#10 Coping with Exam Stress and Anxiety:

Everyone experiences a certain level of stress when placed in these kinds of situations – there is a healthy, productive level of stress. When the stress reaches too high a level, it is counter-productive – it causes your brain to essentially "shut down". Many students suffer from anxiety, but there are strategies and tools you can use to help feel more at ease during these times.

Stay in a positive state of mind by telling yourself "I can do it!", by picturing yourself being successful. Upon arrival at school on the morning of an exam, students should avoid talking with their peers who feel they are under-prepared, express negativity about the test or exam, etc.

Students should arrive at least 10 minutes ahead of a scheduled exam in case there are any issues that arise. You should come with all needed materials (pencils, eraser, calculator, dictionary, geometry set, water, etc.). Above all, you should stay calm and focused, because if you've followed steps 1 through 9, in all likelihood you will be successful!