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reproducible overheads  
and worksheets

# Effective STUDY STRATEGIES for Every Classroom Grades 7-12

▶ **29** lesson plans for teaching

note-taking, summarizing, researching

and test-taking skills

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# Table of Contents

## Introduction

<b>Study Skills for Students</b> .....	1
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## Section 1

<b>Note-Taking Strategies</b> .....	7
Lesson 1: Using Signal Words .....	9
Lesson 2: Following Note-Taking Guidelines .....	25
Lesson 3: Using Abbreviations .....	29
Lesson 4: Using Symbols .....	35
Lesson 5: Using the ‘5W’s and How’ Note-Taking Method .....	41
Lesson 6: Taking Notes using the Cornell Method .....	47
Lesson 7: Using a T-Chart .....	53
Lesson 8: Creating Concept Maps .....	61
Lesson 9: Using a Four-Square .....	75
Lesson 10: Using a Vocabulary Tri-Fold .....	83
Articles .....	89

## Section 2

<b>Summarizing Strategies</b> .....	105
Lesson 11: Understanding Topics and Main Ideas .....	107
Lesson 12: Identifying Supporting Details .....	115
Lesson 13: Paraphrasing .....	123
Lesson 14: Using Introductory and Closing Statements .....	131
Lesson 15: Using Transitions .....	141
Lesson 16: Understanding Compare and Contrast .....	151
Lesson 17: Separating Facts and Opinions .....	159
Lesson 18: Writing a Summary .....	169

## Section 3

### **Research Strategies** ..... 183

Lesson 19: Using Different References ..... 185

Lesson 20: Understanding Alphabetization ..... 195

Lesson 21: Using Guide Words ..... 201

Lesson 22: Using a Thesaurus ..... 207

Lesson 23: Using an Encyclopedia ..... 215

Lesson 24: Using an Almanac ..... 221

Lesson 25: Doing Efficient Searches on the Internet ..... 225

## Section 4

### **Test-Taking Strategies** ..... 233

Lesson 26: Understanding and Taking Different Types of Tests ..... 235

Lesson 27: Preparing for Standardized Tests ..... 253

Lesson 28: Recognizing and Responding to Question Categories ..... 263

Lesson 29: Overcoming Test Anxiety ..... 273





# Study Skills for Students

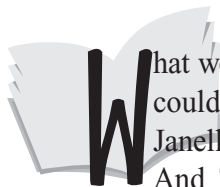
These four students each faced a different academic task. Because they were so ill-prepared, failure was inevitable...

### PREPARATION

- 1 **Stuart** has a quiz over Chapter 2 of *The Hobbit*. His English teacher said students could use one note card during the quiz. Stuart spends the night before the quiz writing, almost verbatim and in tiny print, as much of the chapter as he can squeeze on his note card.
- 2 **Janelle's** in-class history assignment is to write a brief summary of the 1963 March on Washington. Janelle decides to copy all of the notes she took during the lecture and turn that in as her summary.
- 3 **Reggie's** geography assignment is to write a two-page report about Thailand. He uses the Web site "Wikipedia" as his sole information source.
- 4 **Tori** is nervous about her afternoon algebra exam. She stresses out any time she has to take a test. On this day, she decides to skip lunch because her nerves have her stomach in knots. Better to go into the exam room on an empty stomach than one full and queasy, she thinks.

### PERFORMANCE

- 
- Stuart** had to squint to read his own writing, but worse, his notes only covered the first few pages of the chapter. He failed the quiz.
- 
- Janelle** regurgitated the teacher's words, but she didn't synthesize the information or remove extraneous information and inconsequential facts. Her notes were not a summary, and she had to redo the exercise.
- 
- Reggie's** Thailand report included the phrase "[citation needed]." The term, which appears often on some Wikipedia entries, was a dead giveaway that he had copied word-for-word information from the Web site. He earned a zero on the assignment and a detention for plagiarism.
- 
- Tori** was so hungry during the exam, her stomach growled repeatedly. She couldn't concentrate on the questions. Embarrassed, she worried more about keeping her stomach from rumbling than finishing the formulas. Class ended before she answered all of the questions.



What went wrong for these students? One could argue that Stuart was sloppy. Janelle was confused. Reggie was lazy. And Tori was sick. And there would be some truth in such assumptions. But for the vast majority of students who experience similar failings, the problem isn't a lack of desire or poor health. It's a more fundamental problem: A basic lack of study skills. Too

many students simply have not learned how to learn.

The reasons why students lack proper study skills vary. Some young people simply have never been taught how to take notes, use an encyclopedia or online research tools, review appropriate material, identify important facts and information, prepare for tests, or use other critical strategies that support

academic achievement. Many others simply lack experience using study skills or have misguided notions about how to succeed and who succeeds in the classroom. For example, we know students who believe that if they spend 30 minutes studying for an exam or working on an assignment, they will automatically be successful. To them, success is determined by an arbitrary length of time rather than the quality or effectiveness of that study time.

Then of course, there are a few students who believe good grades are not based on merit but on popularity. They have the self-defeating belief that teachers award the best grades to the students they like the most. So when they earn a poor grade, the fault lies with a teacher who is “out to get them,” not with their own lack of preparation or performance. (As an educator, it’s important that you evaluate your relationships with students so such attitudes don’t become accepted as fact and an excuse for failure. For effective strategies on reaching out and connecting with students and building a sense of trust and community in your classroom, we recommend reading *The Well-Managed Classroom, 2nd Ed.*, another Boys Town Press publication.)

When discussing study skills, teachers often lament the lack of formal instruction offered to students in this area or the limited practical experience their students have in applying study strategies in their everyday activities. But what’s even more disheartening to some are the students who were taught study skills yet continue to struggle. Why is this? In our experience, many of these students may have poor reading skills, or they really haven’t mastered good study habits.

Students who struggle with the printed word are at a severe disadvantage in the classroom. The ability to decode words, read sentences, and comprehend information is

essential for learning. Imagine for a moment that you are a student who struggles to decode words. You have to focus so much energy on pronouncing words and phrases in the text, you can’t concentrate on anything else. What is an exam question really asking you? What is the meaning of a paragraph? What is the main idea in the text? It’s nearly impossible to know the answers to such questions if you’ve spent several minutes simply trying to decode a single word.

Here’s another way to think about what some of your students might be experiencing:

Say, for example, a student’s brain is made up of 10 apples that he or she can work with at any given time. Because the student struggles with decoding, eight apples are dedicated to pronouncing individual words and phrases. That leaves two apples for comprehension. But reading requires equal amounts of decoding and comprehension at all times. As a result, the student’s ability to comprehend the material is compromised.<sup>1</sup>

Given the challenges that confront poor readers, it may be necessary for you to assess the reading skills of students before introducing the study strategies outlined in this manual. Students will need basic comprehension skills in order to get the most benefit from the lesson plans. There are many excellent reading intervention programs for adolescents, including Reading Is FAME® from Boys Town, that can reverse reading failure in students. If you are working with youth who have significant reading deficiencies, you may need to adjust and adapt the lessons accordingly.

Comprehension problems, however, are not limited to poor readers or students labeled “academically challenged.” A-level students can struggle, too. In one study of high-achieving ninth-graders, a surprising number admitted that they FREQUENTLY experience confusion after reading several pages of

text. Their inability to comprehend what they just read is magnified by the fact that they do not regularly or effectively use study skills. Poor note taking, last-minute cramming for exams, and failing to review and organize material were all problem areas for these honors students.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of how academically gifted students may be, many have a limited understanding and repertoire of good study habits. This helps to explain why even students who were taught study skills in the past sometimes have trouble accessing their prior knowledge and implementing the strategies effectively and efficiently. As you assess the study skills that your students lack or need to improve, ask yourself these questions:

- Do my students understand or know what study skills are?
- Do my students have trouble generalizing study skills to different contexts and subject areas?
- Do my students rely on a limited number of strategies and employ them poorly?
- Do some of my students read below grade level, and if so, which study skills can provide them the most immediate benefit?

Today's classrooms are filled with students who are as cognitively different as they are culturally diverse. The better you can understand the reasons why your students' struggle with study skills, the more targeted and successful your instructional approach will be. The lesson plans contained in these pages are designed to help you empower all of your students to achieve their academic goals.

As classroom teachers, reading specialists, and education consultants with more than 100 combined years of instructional and administrative experience, we see firsthand what students are capable of achieving when they learn how to learn. We also know the

struggles young people endure when they lack such ability. Study skills are often a determining factor in academic achievement. Research shows that students who possess a broad range of study skills outperform (in terms of grade point, test scores, and other performance measures) those who rely on a single skill. And "superior academic performance" is associated with students who know how to take notes, summarize and synthesize information, identify main ideas, and understand which study strategies are most appropriate for any given task.<sup>3</sup>

We all want students to excel in and outside of the classroom. By teaching essential study strategies, we can make learning easier for students and give them the confidence and ability to consistently achieve their academic goals.

## How to Use This Book

We've seen and used many study skills books. To our surprise and disappointment, most were not written by teachers who worked in the trenches (which may explain why some of the suggestions and strategies seemed so impractical). Other books focused on only one or two skill areas. This meant we had to search for and sort through multiple books, which wasn't very efficient. Those experiences motivated us to create a more practical guide to study skills instruction – one that is teacher-tested, user-friendly, and broad-based, with enjoyable learning activities.

In developing the content, we incorporated the best-known, most effective, and most practical study skills into simple, easy-to-use lesson plans. Our decision about which study strategies to include involved the following considerations:

- Can the skill be generalized to every subject?
- Is it easy to teach and learn?

- Can it be practiced by individual students and in groups?
- Does it help further students' knowledge and mastery of the subject matter being taught?
- Is it a skill a student can use throughout his or her school career and beyond?

Based on these criteria, our personal classroom experience, and the consultation work we've done with school systems across the country, it was clear that four specific types of study skills offered the greatest potential for positive change and academic success – **note taking, summarizing, researching, and test taking.**

These four study skills are ones that every student should know and be able to use. In their popular book, *Classroom Instruction that Works* (2001), authors Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack identified nine types of instructional strategies shown to have a “strong effect on student achievement.”<sup>4</sup> Included among the nine strategies are several associated with study skills – summarizing and note taking, identifying similarities and differences, and organizing information. These strategies, among many others, are the focus of the lesson plans in this manual.

To make this book practical, inclusive, and focused on best practices, we wrote whole lesson plans that, hopefully, will make you feel more competent and confident to teach study skills. The lessons incorporate two key concepts of effective teaching:

- 100-percent active participation by students
- Continuous checking for understanding by the teacher

## **GROW Input Method**

The lesson plans are designed to be taught using the **GROW Input** method of direct instruction. This strategy, as outlined in these

lessons, reflects the work of Madeline Hunter as well as the contributions of other educators and educational agencies, including Suzann Morin-Steffen, the Utah Learning Resource Center, and the Loess Hills (Iowa) Area Education Agency 13.

**GROW Input** is an instructional strategy that encourages you to continually engage students by asking questions and seeking feedback. As you teach the lessons, ask questions that relate to both academics and comprehension (for example, do they understand what I'm asking them to do in a lesson?). You may need to do some pre-teaching prior to the lessons, reminding students that they should think of answers to every question asked because they may be called on at any time. When students answer questions correctly, praise them. If a student doesn't know an answer, provide prompts until he or she can answer correctly. This approach shows you will stick with students rather than “abandon” them if they answer incorrectly or respond with “I don't know.” As an instructional method, **GROW Input** fosters active participation from all students, helps them maintain focus, and ensures that they are “with” you and “get” it.

The steps or stages of the **GROW Input** method are built into each lesson's introduction. You start by **G**aining students' attention, then **R**eview key details (if applicable) from a previous lesson, state the lesson's **O**bjective, and explain **W**hy the objective or skill has value for the students. After this introduction, you start teaching the actual lesson (the **I**ntput). We've provided directions and talking points to guide your instruction, including how and when to use the support materials. (Each lesson plan has pages with information and illustrations that are labeled “Overhead.” You can convert these pages into transparencies or any other format that corresponds with the available technology.) Prompts are

included as reminders to continually engage students by asking for feedback and checking for understanding. At the end of each lesson are suggestions on how to summarize the lesson and move on to other follow-up activities or a new lesson. For added convenience, the enclosed CD-ROM allows you to easily reproduce the lessons, support materials, and worksheets as needed.

We've broken the content into four sections that build on each other. Section 1 emphasizes note taking, including a lesson on the Cornell Method. If students are poor note takers, it will be far more difficult for them to develop or master any other study strategies. Section 2 complements note taking with lessons designed to strengthen students' abilities to summarize information. With note taking and summarizing as a foundation, Section 3 adds another essential strategy – using research tools (encyclopedias, almanacs, and the Internet). All of these lessons lead naturally into the final section of the book, test taking. Lesson plans on overcoming anxiety and distinguishing between different types of exam questions are included.

The goal of this manual is to provide a fresh perspective and a more practical approach to study skills instruction. We know your professional experience has given you valuable insights into effective teaching strategies and methods. Hopefully, this book will complement your efforts to improve the study skills of all your students.

## About the Authors

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<sup>1</sup> Laberge, D., & Samuels, S.J. (1974). Toward a theory of automatic information processing in reading. *Cognitive Psychology*, 6, 293-323.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley, B., Slate, J.R., & Jones, C.H. (1999). Study behaviors of college preparatory and honors students in the ninth grade. *The High School Journal*, 82, 165-171.

<sup>3</sup> Purdie, N., & Hattie, J. (1999). The relationship between study skills and learning outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Australian Journal of Education*, 43 (1), 72-86.

<sup>4</sup> Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J., & Pollock, J.E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.