

SOAR

Learning & Soft Skills

by Susan Kruger Winter, M.Ed.



StudySkills.com
info@StudySkills.com

Executive Producers: Brian Winter, M.Ed. & Susan Kruger Winter, M.Ed.
Producer: Jessie Hren

Designed by Teodosija Paunov & Anita Stumbo
Illustrations by Karl Mayry
Photographs by Dan Kruger, Cathy Scott Stoey, Brian Winter

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Published by Grand Lighthouse Publishing, Lake Orion, MI

LCCN: 2024915624
ISBN-13: 979-8-218-45700-6
SAN: 257-6570

Printed in the United States of America

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Dear Student ...

Hello, I'm Susan, creator of SOAR®. Believe it or not, I struggled in school. Throughout K-12, I felt lost and "stupid." However, everything changed in college, when I learned how to learn.

Overnight, I earned straight A's, and college became a breeze! My confidence soared—I realized I could achieve anything! It made me wonder, why didn't someone show me these strategies sooner?

I spent many years overwhelmed and often shed tears over schoolwork. The same strategies that changed my life in college could have simplified middle and high school, too.

I soon realized—while I could not change my past—I could change the future for others! Ever since my second year of college, I've been teaching other students how to efficiently organize and study.

SOAR is for everyone! Whether you're acing your classes but feeling the pressure, or you're struggling to keep up, SOAR can help you get *better* grades in *less time*.

Plus, these strategies offer more than academic success; they also promise professional and financial rewards because employers are desperately seeking these skills in the workplace.

If SOAR helps you improve your life in any way, you will make all of my frustration worthwhile. I hope you will seize this opportunity to change your life forever!

This book/course is dedicated to your success.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan".

Susan

SOAR

How *are you smart?*

***The first step** to getting better grades in less time is to understand why the skills in this book/course are important, how they are helpful, and to identify our own strengths that can motivate us to pursue success.*

This step provides a solid foundation to understand more about ourselves and explore what this book/course has to offer!

CHAPTER 1 : Why Study Skills?

CHAPTER 2: What Are Your Strengths & Superpowers?

CHAPTER 3: How Does Our Brain Learn?

Why Study Skills?

Section A

Welcome to SOAR!

Our mission is to help you:

- Get better grades in less time,
- Feel more confident, and
- Learn simple strategies to optimize your success in school and future jobs!

Begin by filling out the **Learning & Soft Skills Scorecard**, below. This Scorecard helps you see the common school problems solved in this course. It will also serve as a pre- and post-assessment to track your progress.

#	DO YOU ...	Always	Occasionally			Never
1	Feel incapable of being successful in school?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Feel “dumb” or less intelligent than others?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Feel that you are often slower at learning new things compared to others?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Think your intelligence and abilities cannot change over time?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Study just to pass tests rather than to truly learn the information?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Give up easily when tasks become difficult instead of trying new strategies to overcome challenges?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Feel homework and studying take up too much of your free time?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Struggle to balance schoolwork with personal time for hobbies and socializing?	1	2	3	4	5
9	Often delay starting homework or studying until the last minute?	1	2	3	4	5
10	Fail to set and stick to your academic goals?	1	2	3	4	5
11	Lose focus and feel overwhelmed by your schoolwork?	1	2	3	4	5
12	Find it difficult to handle multiple tasks without feeling overburdened?	1	2	3	4	5
13	Struggle to manage time or feel homework takes too long?	1	2	3	4	5
14	Have trouble remembering due dates and/or test dates? Often have late/missing work or are unprepared for taking quizzes/tests?	1	2	3	4	5
15	Feel that your parents nag too much or fail to give you advance notice about events and tasks?	1	2	3	4	5
16	Lose your homework before you get home to do it?	1	2	3	4	5
17	Complete your homework but then lose it before you can turn it in?	1	2	3	4	5
18	Bring the wrong folders/notebooks to class or struggle with an overly heavy bookbag?	1	2	3	4	5
19	Have difficulty keeping your digital and paper files organized and easily accessible?	1	2	3	4	5
20	Get distracted by clutter in your personal spaces and waste time searching for items?	1	2	3	4	5
21	Lose things or forget school supplies because of a messy bookbag?	1	2	3	4	5

#	Do you ...	Always	Occasionally				Never
22	Lose items and time due to a disorganized locker?	1	2	3	4	5	
23	Feel rushed and/or stressed getting ready for school in the morning?	1	2	3	4	5	
24	Miss fun activities because homework and school take up too much time?	1	2	3	4	5	
25	Feel stressed or overwhelmed by your daily and school tasks?	1	2	3	4	5	
26	Feel overwhelmed or bored when reading textbooks?	1	2	3	4	5	
27	Need a long time to read nonfiction, particularly textbooks?	1	2	3	4	5	
28	Find it difficult to understand or remember content from textbooks and nonfiction?	1	2	3	4	5	
29	Hesitate to: ask for clarification, help, or contribute to class discussions?	1	2	3	4	5	
30	Find it difficult to manage roles in group work?	1	2	3	4	5	
31	Find it challenging to resolve conflicts with classmates?	1	2	3	4	5	
32	Struggle to pay attention during lectures or instructional videos?	1	2	3	4	5	
33	Have trouble taking good notes?	1	2	3	4	5	
34	Struggle to organize your notes for later study?	1	2	3	4	5	
35	Feel overwhelmed and/or bored by having to study and learn new information?	1	2	3	4	5	
36	Study hard yet still feel disappointed with your grades?	1	2	3	4	5	
37	Struggle to adapt your study strategies for different subjects?	1	2	3	4	5	
38	Dread having to learn the meanings of new terms?	1	2	3	4	5	
39	Experience anxiety or nervousness while taking tests?	1	2	3	4	5	
40	Begin answering test questions immediately, without first reviewing them to plan your strategy?	1	2	3	4	5	
41	Lack confidence in using different strategies for various test types, such as multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay?	1	2	3	4	5	
42	Feel overwhelmed by writing assignments?	1	2	3	4	5	
43	Struggle to organize your thoughts and/or research for a paper?	1	2	3	4	5	
44	Struggle to compose your thoughts and research into clear sentences and paragraphs?	1	2	3	4	5	
45	Feel overwhelmed by the number of grammar and punctuation rules to learn?	1	2	3	4	5	
46	Struggle to remember and correctly apply grammar rules when writing?	1	2	3	4	5	
47	Hesitate to write due to confusion over grammar and punctuation rules?	1	2	3	4	5	
48	Feel fear or anxiety over speaking in front of an audience?	1	2	3	4	5	
49	Feel overwhelmed preparing content for presentations?	1	2	3	4	5	
50	Find it challenging to gather content and coordinate visual aids for a presentation?	1	2	3	4	5	
51	Feel shocked or disappointed by grades on your report card?	1	2	3	4	5	
52	Fail to set and track goals effectively?	1	2	3	4	5	
53	Get discouraged by setbacks and lose focus?	1	2	3	4	5	

Section B

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Survey results of the most
in-demand workplace skills.

Why learn study skills?

This course covers skills known by many names. In school, they are called **study skills**, **learning skills**, or **executive function skills**. At work, they're often referred to as **soft skills** or **employability skills**.

No matter the name, these skills are essential for managing ourselves, our learning, and our success in both school and the real world. They are also the most “in-demand” skills in the workplace. See for yourself ... take a few minutes to search for “most in-demand employability skills.” The wording may vary, but 90% of the results will match the contents of this book/course.

For example, in one significant study, hundreds of employers in growing industries—such as tech and healthcare—were asked about the skills they need most. The top results included:

- Reading comprehension
- Critical thinking
- Active learning
- Writing skills
- Time-management
- Organization
- Paying attention to details
- Learning strategies
- Being independent



SOAR® covers **91%** of the top **47** skills employers want most!

Technology changes rapidly. Competition in the workforce is going global. But the skills to manage these changes remain the same. The time you invest in this program will pay off for a lifetime!

Section C

What we will learn ...

Here's a brief overview of all that we'll be covering:

Section 1: HOW are you smart?

This section and its chapters explain why these strategies matter and how to use them effectively:

- Lesson 1: Why Study Skills?
- Lesson 2: What Are Your Strengths and Superpowers?
- Lesson 3: How Does Our Brain Learn?

Section 2: Set goals

This section prompts us to explore what's important to each of us and how to set ourselves up for success:

- Lesson 4: Identify Your Priorities
- Lesson 5: Create Your Goals
- Lesson 6: Manage Time & Take Action

Section 3: Organize

Organization is a critical foundation for functioning in life and school and a major key to optimizing learning:

- Lesson 7: Organize Your Papers & Digital Files
- Lesson 8: Organize Your Space
- Lesson 9: Organize Your Time & Manage Your Energy

Section 4: Ask questions

All learning strategies are covered in this section. We use one, core strategy to optimize every aspect of learning, “ask questions” to learn:

- Lesson 10: How to Read Textbooks & Nonfiction
- Lesson 11: How to Communicate with Teachers & Peers
- Lesson 12: How to Listen & Take Notes
- Lesson 13: How to Study & Learn New Terms
- Lesson 14: How to Take Tests
- Lesson 15: How to Write Paragraphs & Essays
- Lesson 16: How to Learn Correct Grammar & Punctuation
- Lesson 17: How to Give a Presentation

Section 5: Record your progress

This final section prompts us to synthesize all we’ve learned and use it beyond this course:

- Lesson 18: How to Track Progress & Keep Moving Forward

The 80/20 of school ... *and life!*

I’ve got some bad news and good news.

First, the **bad** news:

- 80% of your efforts result in less than 20% of your joy and success.
- 80% of what you learn will rarely be useful.

But, the “**good**” news is:

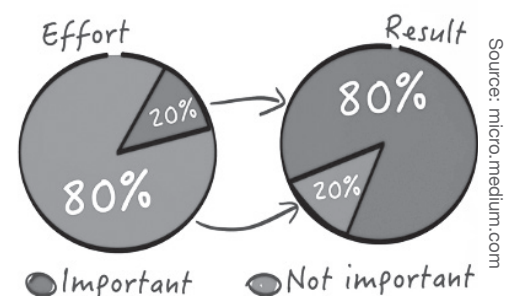
- 20% of your efforts result in more than 80% of your joy and success.
- 20% of what you learn is key to success in school, workplace and in life.

Why does this matter?

This book focuses on the 20% of the efforts and skills that have an 80%+ impact on your joy and success in school, work, and life!

This concept is the **80/20 Principle**. It was first discovered in 1906, by Vilfredo Pareto. He found that a small part of something usually has a bigger impact, like how all businesses find that 20% of customers make 80% of their sales. The exact split sometimes varies (70/30, 90/10), but the **80/20 Principle** is everywhere!

Section D



Discover how 20% of your efforts can lead to 80% of your success in school and life!

For example:

- In our closet, we wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time. (Conversely, we wear the remaining 80% of our clothes only 20% of the time.)
- On social media, 20% of your posts result in 80% of the likes and comments.
- In sports, 20% of the players/positions score 80% of the points.
- On our mobile devices, we use 20% of the apps, 80% of the time.
- We spend 80% of our social time with only 20% of our friends.

Likewise, success in life comes from a small set of strategies for self-management, teamwork, and learning. These essential, “top 20%” skills are the focus of this book/course.

The 80/20 Power Strategies

Inside the “important stuff,” there’s even more important stuff! For example, within the 20% of clothes you wear most often, there’s that one pair of jeans you wear all the time.

While this book/course covers the top 20% “success skills,” in most chapters/lessons, there’s one step/strategy that provides greater gains than all others.

These “80/20 power strategies” are marked with a special icon. Give them your highest attention and you’ll get optimal results!

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



In most lessons, the 80/20 Power Strategy is marked with this icon.

Section E

How does this book/course work?

To ensure a smooth experience, take a few moments to review details about the following:

- Digital downloads
- Recommended supplies
- Getting started
- Three-layered lessons



Downloadable tools can be accessed at: StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

Digital downloads

This course includes several digital downloads, including reference materials and tools to support the strategies. We aim to provide direct links to these files, but you can access all downloads easily at StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

Recommended supplies

This course does not require extra supplies, but some optional, budget-friendly items can enhance a few activities or strategies.

The SOAR® Binder System (Lesson 7)

If/when budget allows, we strongly recommend prioritizing the **SOAR Binder**. It becomes a cornerstone tool that anchors all other strategies.

The **SOAR Binder System** is a favorite of both teachers and students because its benefits are clear and immediate! Many schools report that it drops their rate of missing assignments “to almost zero.”

For “fully digital” or “paperless” schools, we still recommend a tangible binder because there are always some papers that need a home. Plus, our method for organizing digital files mirrors the hard-copy binder, making digital organization more “concrete” to students.

Supplies needed (per student):

- 1 binder (1 or 1.5-inch) with a clear front cover and two inner pockets
- Plastic binder pockets or folders, one/class
- Labels for all folders
- Loose-leaf paper as an alternative to spiral notebooks

Time-management tools (Lessons 4–6)

For managing time, we suggest students use both a *digital* calendar and a *paper* planner or weekly planner layout.

Schools often provide planners, but that’s becoming less common. Alternatively, we provide a customizable planner template, suitable for print (or digital use, with a stylus).



We suggest students use both a *digital* calendar and a *paper* planner or weekly planner layout.

Writing papers & giving presentations (Lessons 15 & 17)

We use a 3D Writing Organizer to prepare papers and presentations. We provide a digital alternative, but strongly encourage students to make a tangible, hard-copy 3D organizer. For that, each student will need:

- Scissors, glue, and markers
- 1 manila file folder
- 4 envelopes
- 24–36 index cards

Getting started

We strongly suggest doing the Scorecard immediately. At the end of this course, you’ll complete the Scorecard again, then compare your before/after progress. Seeing your improvement is not just satisfying but also a big motivator to keep going!

We generally recommend following the chapters in order, as each builds on the last. However, chapters are designed to be self-contained, so you can do them in any order, as needed.

Teachers, please see our *8-Step Getting Started Guide and Pacing Guide* in the “Teacher’s Guide” section of your SOAR account. These guides are made for quick reading and easy start-up!

Source: researchmatters.in/news/weaving-web-wonder



Much like a spider, our brains weave new information into a layered web of understanding.

Three-layered lessons

Our lessons are built in layers because our brain learns in layers (as we'll explore in Chapter 3):

Layer 1: Collect prior knowledge.

We can only learn new information by connecting it to something we already understand. Therefore, in Layer 1, we explore what we currently know about the topic.

Layer 2: Connect new information.

This is the largest layer as it includes all new information presented in the lesson.

Layer 3: Confirm understanding.

Use the new learning in real-life contexts and take some assessments to make sure you've got it.

Section F

helpful tip

During Investigations, avoid frustration by limiting each screen to 5 minutes.

After 5 minutes, advance to the next screen; keep the flow moving.

About each lesson ...

All lessons are structured with the same sections:

LAYER 1: COLLECT PRIOR KNOWLEDGE.

Scorecard Preview

Every lesson begins by highlighting the problems it will solve.

Investigations (App & Teacher Presentation Tool) are a series of questions or simple activities prompting you to engage with the topic and activate your prior knowledge.

At first, it may be frustrating to be asked questions with little context. But the focus is not to be right/wrong, it is to explore possibilities. Be patient! Most students quickly adapt and find this becomes their favorite part.

To give you prompt feedback, an answer key is included. You are free to "cheat" and jump ahead to the answer key ... you'll still be engaging with the topic. ;) So, skipping ahead only shortchanges your experience.

LAYER 2: CONNECT NEW INFORMATION.

Key terms & concepts (App & StudySkills.com/bonus-v3)

Lists the important terms and ideas you'll need to understand for this lesson.

New information

This is the largest section and contains the new content of the lesson.

Making the invisible, visible

At its core, this course is about making "invisible" elements and processes in our lives, visible. In this section, we review how we've accomplished that objective.

The brain on ...

This section explains how the lesson's content functions in the brain, linking to Lesson 3, "How the Brain Works."

LAYER 3: CONFIRM UNDERSTANDING.

Apply + practice (App & StudySkills.com/bonus-v3)

This section prompts us to use what we've learned and improve our life right away!

Scorecard review

We close each lesson by reviewing the solutions learned to solve each problem highlighted from the Scorecard.

Optional activities + assessments (App, Teacher Presentation Tool)

For those looking to dive deeper, we offer additional activities and assessments. Each is designed to support deeper, more meaningful connections with the information and application of the strategies.

Making the invisible, visible

In this lesson, we made the invisible, visible by:

- **Taking the Study Skills Scorecard**, introducing the most common school challenges and set the stage for solutions provided in this course.
- **Highlighting real-world data from employers**, verifying that this course focuses on the "top 20%" of skills that will impact your success in your future career, as well as school.
- **Outlining the course layout to clarify expectations**. Your bandwidth should be free to learn new information, not be distracted or confused about navigating the course or understanding its requirements.

The brain on ... the value of knowing "why"

This lesson answers the core questions we are always asking ourselves:

- Why should I know this? What makes this worth my time?
- How is this important and when will I use it?
- Why is this course structured as it is? Am I wasting my time here?

In Lesson 3, we'll explore that our brains first process everything through the Emotional Center.

The Emotional Center constantly asks, "Why?" because it needs to know if the information is "safe." If it does not understand the purpose for incoming information, it defaults to protection mode, which blocks learning.

After clearing safety concerns, information moves to the Front Brain, which also seeks the "Why?" The Front Brain must determine what background information will help us understand the new information. It must also decide how to categorize the information for later recall.



Source: iStockphoto ID 16855689

When we understand "why" we are learning something, our brains know how to categorize it for later recall.

What Are Your Strengths & Superpowers?

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

1. Feel incapable of being successful in school?
2. Feel “dumb” or less intelligent than others?
3. Feel that you are often slower at learning new things compared to others?

Author's note

Most students *undervalue* their abilities and intelligence. This happens because our society and education system largely focus on “fixing” our weaknesses. However, we all have strengths, too! As humans, we are designed to be social and leverage our strengths to support others. In turn, we are also expected to rely on others to support our weaknesses.

It is important to be *aware* of our weaknesses, but NEVER be *defined* by them! Instead, our attention should be on celebrating and leveraging our individual strengths!

Likewise, to benefit from this course, you must feel you are “worth it.” But nobody can talk you into feeling good about yourself; you have to *believe* it for yourself ... by discovering and embracing your gifts! One way to do this is by exploring our “multiple intelligences” and “superpowers.” I hope this insight will inspire and motivate you to build your best life!

Note to students with “learning differences”

If you've been diagnosed with a learning difference (like me) or feel inadequate due to school struggles, this lesson is particularly for you!

School only measures a small fraction of *potential* intelligence. It's time to focus on your strengths!

I've met thousands of students with learning differences; in all cases, their “struggles in school” were masking some amazing superpowers! Hang in there ... this lesson will change how you view yourself!

Section A

How am I smart?

Did you know there are multiple ways to “be smart?” Many people feel inadequate due to struggles in school, yet school performance isn't the only measure of intelligence. You probably know many adults who did not get good grades in school yet are talented artists, businesspeople, tradesmen, etc.

Before progressing in this book, it's crucial you believe in your abilities and recognize your talents! If you've found school challenging, you've simply not had the right tools to learn; sections two through five of this book provides those tools.

The next two pages will help you begin to identify your natural strengths. (For an online version of these inventories, see the "Multiple Intelligences Inventory" found at [SoarLearning.com/mi-quiz](https://soarlearning.com/mi-quiz).)

Everyone has his or her own special talents ... find yours and develop confidence in your own smart self!

How are you smart?

Do you enjoy, or feel talented in, any of the following activities? Take this quiz and check all that apply.

CHECK	ACTIVITIES	
	Artistic projects such as drawing, painting, crafting, etc.	
	Helping/caring for other people (e.g., children, senior citizens)	
	Singing, composing, or playing a musical instrument	
	Completing math or logic problems	
	Journaling, meditating, or reflecting on thoughts and feelings	
	Building, creating, or fixing things	
	Working or playing outdoors	
	Speaking in front of large groups	
	Sports, dance, or performing arts	
	Daydreaming or picturing possibilities for yourself	
	Figuring out how things work	
	Decorating or arranging rooms	
	Listening to music to adjust your mood	
	Communicating with others or working effectively with a team	
	Setting and accomplishing goals for yourself	
	Working with animals and/or plants	
	Conversing with others, or telling jokes or stories	
	Humming or whistling while you work on other tasks	
	Classifying or organizing objects	
	Hunting, camping, or hiking	
	Completing tasks on the computer or playing video games	
	Making people feel comfortable	
	Reading maps	
	Learning or speaking foreign languages	



















80/20 Power Strategy
Awareness of your strengths boosts confidence, leading to greater happiness and success.



For an online version of these inventories, visit the "Multiple Intelligences Inventory" at [SoarLearning.com/mi-quiz](https://soarlearning.com/mi-quiz).

How Are You Smart? quiz format is adapted from SuperCamp®.


Would you describe yourself as:


CHECK	ACTIVITIES	
	Athletic	
	An enthusiastic reader or writer	
	A problem-solver	
	Musical	
	Visual	
	Friendly or patient with others	
	Nature lover	
	Spiritual, thoughtful, or insightful	
	Good with numbers	
	Having a sense of rhythm	
	Active	
	Sensitive to sounds, tones, or accents	
	Creative	
	Self-disciplined or independent	
	A “referee” with your friends and/or family	
	Animal lover	


Scoring


To identify your strongest “smarts,” match the icon at the end of each checked item (from both pages) with the corresponding columns below. Create a bar graph of your results by shading in one box for every quiz item that has been checked, beginning at the bottom of each column.


HOW ARE YOU SMART?




















What are the multiple intelligences?

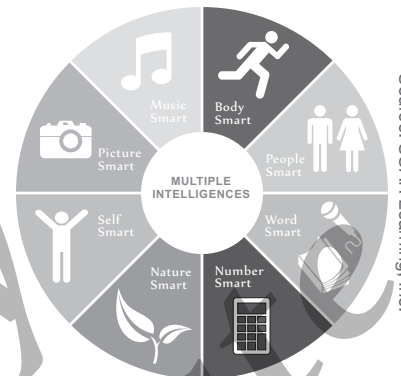
Section B

The inventories you completed are based on the *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, which identifies eight types of intelligence:

- Body smart (kinesthetic intelligence)
- Music smart (musical intelligence)
- Nature smart (naturalist intelligence)
- Number smart (logical-mathematical intelligence)
- Picture smart (visual-spatial visual-spatial intelligence)
- People smart (interpersonal intelligence)
- Self smart (intrapersonal intelligence)
- Word smart (linguistic intelligence)

Each type of multiple intelligence includes a wide range of aptitudes and abilities, which are constantly evolving within us.

Let's look at *each of these intelligences* in more detail.



Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Identify your talents with the Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Body smart (kinesthetic intelligence)

Body smart individuals excel in physical activities such as sports, dance, and other areas of physical fitness. They are often referred to as “active” because they love to move! They learn best through movement and hands-on activities.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Carpenter, fabricator, physical/occupational therapists, surgeons, inventors, professional athletes, actors, farmers, dancers, etc.



Music smart (musical intelligence)

Music smart individuals may not necessarily be skilled singers or musicians but might have a keen enjoyment of music or a strong sense of rhythm. They often learn best through songs, patterns, rhythms, and various musical expressions.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Composers, song-writers, sound technicians, disc jockeys, instrument makers, music teachers, band directors, etc.



Nature smart (natural intelligence)

Nature smart individuals have a strong connection to the outdoors, appreciation for the environment, and respect for the beauty of nature. They are interested in plants, animals, and other natural resources, often engaging in activities like hiking, camping, hunting, stargazing, swimming, and scuba diving as hobbies.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Meteorologists, park rangers, photojournalists, biologists, botanists, zoologists, veterinarians, anthropologists, sailors, astronomers, etc.



**Number smart (logical-mathematical intelligence)**

Number smart people are skilled at analyzing problems and thinking critically. They have skills in reasoning, pattern recognition, and abstract thinking. They may excel in school math, but not necessarily; their strengths may be more evident in real-world scenarios.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Engineers, computer technicians/programmers, accountants, mathematicians, researchers, statisticians, financial analysts, professional organizers, scientists, etc.

**Picture smart (visual-spatial intelligence)**

Picture smart individuals are commonly associated with “creativity.” They are skilled in visual arts, creating or following maps, recognizing patterns, and/or assembling projects or puzzles.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Graphic artists, interior designers, architects, engineers, photographers, videographers, inventors, drafters, builders, surveyors, urban planners, etc.

**People smart (interpersonal intelligence)**

People smart individuals excel in developing relationships and often thrive in team settings. They are adept at making others feel comfortable and can vary in sociability, ranging from outgoing to reserved and shy.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Teachers, nurses, physicians, medical assistants, politicians, sales-people, counselors/psychologists, mediators, consultants, business administrators (management), human resources, etc.

**Self smart (intrapersonal intelligence)**

Self smart individuals possess a deep understanding of themselves, including their values, beliefs, and purposes. They are reflective thinkers and often have a sense of greater purpose, which tends to make them focused, self-disciplined, and independent. This type of intelligence typically develops with age and life experience.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Writers, entrepreneurs/self-employed, spiritual leaders, counselors/therapists, leaders, researchers, etc.

**Word smart (linguistic intelligence)**

Word smart individuals excel in reading, writing, and/or speaking. They often enjoy activities like reading and writing, telling jokes and stories, or public speaking. Additionally, they may have a keen interest in learning foreign languages. Word smart individuals might excel in verbal communication while struggling with reading and writing, or vice versa.

Careers that utilize this intelligence include: Salespeople, journalists/writers, editors, librarians, therapists, speech therapists, lawyers, interpreters, etc.

School only measures (a tiny fraction of) two intelligences

Do you struggle in school? Or, do you get good grades, but at the expense of feeling stressed?

School tends to focus on only two of the eight intelligences: *linguistic* (word smart) and *logical* (number smart). In fact, school usually focuses on only narrow segments of these two intelligences.

Meanwhile, many people judge their own intelligence and abilities based on their performance in school. People with amazing talents often lack confidence because their talents are not valued in school. This lack of confidence can create challenges and conflicts in school/work, relationships, and across their lives.

But human beings are so much more dynamic than what is measured in school!

For example ...

Alex is a student with dyslexia and often struggles with traditional school-work. However, he has an amazing ability to:

- Build objects and machines
- Draw complex diagrams
- Instantly determine how anything mechanical works

Some teachers view him as a “slow learner,” but he simply struggles in one narrow part of one intelligence: word smart. Meanwhile, he excels in at least three other areas of intelligence: picture, logic, and body smarts!

The same is true for each of us. We all have a unique blend of talents; every individual is good at some things and not so good at other things!

In fact, every one of us has at least one *superpower* ...

Section C



School only measures two narrow parts of the eight intelligences, overlooking many strengths and talents.

What is a superpower?

A superpower is something we each do better than 90% of others. It is much more specific than one of the Multiple Intelligences; it's a unique combination of 2–3 of our strongest intelligences.

Have you ever:

- Received a compliment for something you thought was “no big deal”?
- Found yourself getting in trouble for something ... over and over again?

Compliments and “things that get us in trouble” are often clues to our superpowers!

A superpower comes so naturally to us, it requires almost no effort. As a result, superpowers don't feel “super” to us; by default, they feel extremely ordinary.

Section D



Source: Shutterstock ID 105756893

Superpowers feel ordinary to you but are extraordinary to others.

A superpower is something we cannot NOT do! In the wrong environment, it can get us into trouble!

Throughout our lives, we are likely to identify two or three superpowers. It takes time and life experience to recognize them. But once discovered, we can often trace their signs back to early childhood.

Superpowers will generally remain constant throughout our life, but never static; they grow and evolve as we do. We'll continually discover new aspects and ways to use them.

For example ...

Superpowers are best understood through examples. So, I'm sharing examples from my family.

Brian (my husband) — “Make it happen!”

If Brian commits to a project, no matter how challenging or time-consuming, he creatively solves problems, persuades others, and Makes. It. Happen!

For example, one Tuesday, he learned that an education council in South Africa was meeting 48 hours later to consider adopting this curriculum for their entire province. So, three hours before departure, he booked us two plane tickets to South Africa! We landed in South Africa two hours before the meeting (due to layovers and time-changes) and barely cleared customs to arrive on time! But, *he made it happen!*

Mark (my son) — “If I can dream it, I can build it!”

Mark is a gifted welder and carpenter.

For example, at age nine, Mark was inspired by our “pirate” themed New Year’s Eve party to convert his bunk-bed into a pirate ship; he wedged a broken carpet tube between his ceiling and mattress, then rolled 11×17-inch sheets of cardstock into cannons. At age 14, he designed and built a floating, wall-mounted, L-shaped desk for his room. *If he can dream it, he can build it!*

Maddie (my daughter) — “I make everything beautiful!”

Maddie has a natural talent for aesthetics and design.

For example, beginning at 18 months-old, she matched purses with shoes. (I don’t even do that!) Now, she: draws designs for new fashions, paints, crafts, designs invitations and décor for parties, does interior design for both real rooms and rooms built within video games, etc. Maddie *makes everything beautiful!*

Me — “Organize and optimize!”

As my family will tell you, I cannot NOT organize things. I automatically see patterns and how to assemble “random” things into something cohesive.

One example of my superpower is this curriculum. It required my superpowers to create it ... and it is teaching you how to *organize and optimize!*

How can I discover my superpowers?

Section E




The only way to identify your superpower is with help from others.

Since superpowers are so “natural” to us, they feel effortless and like “no big deal.” Therefore, it’s impossible to identify a superpower without outside help.

But, there are three clues to help identify a superpower.

“How can I discover my superpowers?”

The clues that help us discover elements of our superpower(s) include:

 Compliments	 Input from others	 What gets me in trouble?
<p>Have you ever received a compliment for something you did and your immediate thought was, “REALLY?!? That was so simple. It was NOTHING special...”</p> <p>In reality, it’s probably the exact opposite; it’s very likely a clue to your superpower!</p>	<p>Ask family and friends; start a conversation about superpowers over meals.</p> <p>First, explain the concept.</p> <p>Then, help identify each other’s superpowers.</p> <p>These conversations are fun because everyone loves to learn more about themselves! Plus, they help us appreciate each other to a whole new level.</p>	<p>All superpowers have a “kryptonite” because we cannot NOT do them; we will do it, no matter what! So, it can get us into trouble in the wrong environment.</p> <p>For example, a person who loves to talk may get penalized for talking in class... but may someday excel in a career like teaching or sales.</p>

Why are strengths & superpowers important?

Section F

Knowing our strengths and superpowers provides many benefits:

- **Inspires joy.** Engaging in activities, education, and careers aligned with our strengths brings greater happiness, reduces friction, and minimizes frustration.
- **Boosts confidence and motivation.** Focusing on our strengths increases our patience and courage, helping us tackle challenges.
- **Enhances our ability to help others.** Operating in our strength zones gives us extra energy to support others in those areas.
- **Increases patience.** Awareness of our strengths makes us less frustrated with our weaknesses, both in ourselves and in others.
- **Gives us courage to encourage others!** Comfort with our own strengths and abilities reduces jealousy. It even motivates us to uplift and encourage others, which is MUCH more fun than tearing others down!

Conclusion: emphasize your strengths, accept your weaknesses

By design, every individual has weaknesses! We are social beings meant to *complement* each other’s strengths and weaknesses. However, society tends to focus entirely on weaknesses, which can be demotivating and limiting.

It is important to have a solid understanding of our weaknesses, but we must NOT be defined by them; this cycle feels very dark, limiting, and extremely demotivating.

When we focus on our strengths, we discover new ways to “define” ourselves; this cycle feels very “bright,” creates limitless opportunities, and provides motivation to stretch into new adventures.

Making the invisible, visible

Language is everything!

Did you know that human beings CANNOT see colors they can't name?

Head-twisting, isn't it? (Makes you wonder how we ever named colors, in the first place ...)

The same principle applies to our own self-understanding. The more language we have to identify and describe our strengths, and superpowers, the more we can SEE them!

In this lesson, we made the invisible, visible by ...

Identifying various intelligences and uncovering clues to our superpowers. These terms and insights help us better recognize and appreciate our strengths and those of others.

The brain on ... your strengths & superpowers

When we recognize, value, and use our unique strengths and superpowers, we experience JOY!

The emotion of JOY is like a power-plant in our brain! When we experience JOY, the emotional center of our brain manufactures a FLOOD of brain chemicals that power every other part of our brain!

This chemical surge boosts our energy, enhancing our ability to work and learn. This cycle of joy is often called “working in the flow.”

Working with your strengths and superpowers literally creates one of our strongest sources of motivation!

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems?

1. Feeling incapable of being successful in school?
2. Feeling “dumb” or less intelligent than others?
3. Feelings that you are often slower at learning new things compared to others?

Source: Custom generated by Chat GPT



Naming our strengths makes them visible and recognizable.

Source: ID 16855689



When we use our strengths and superpowers, we experience JOY. Joy creates new power in the brain.

How does our brain learn?

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

4. Think your intelligence and abilities cannot change over time?
5. Study just to pass tests rather than to truly learn the information?
6. Give up easily when tasks become difficult instead of trying new strategies to overcome challenges?

Author's note

I find that everyone—children, teens, and adults—loves learning about how our brain works! Understanding how our brain works lets us improve every aspect of our lives.

This lesson is full of important information that is also interesting *and* useful. It sets the stage for understanding the reasons behind the strategies we'll cover in future lessons. As we move forward, we'll dive deeper into how these strategies work in our brain.

In this lesson, I share the insights that have allowed me to discover and develop the most efficient hacks and effective strategies to share with you, and even to use myself!



Take our Mindset Assessment at: SOARLearning.com/mindset-assessment.

What is your mindset ... fixed or growth?

To determine your current mindset, take our Mindset Assessment at SoarLearning.com/mindset-assessment.

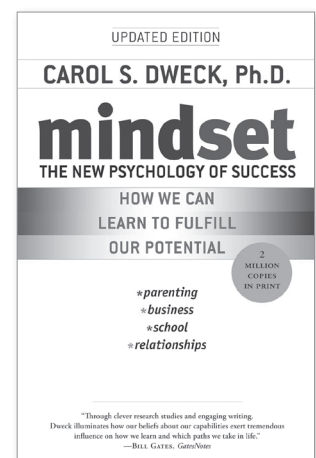
What is mindset?

Our “mindset” is how we think about our abilities and potential. In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck introduces two primary mindsets: “fixed” and “growth.” Each differs in how they perceive challenges, effort, and failure.

People with a fixed mindset believe their intelligence and talents are set at birth and remain unchangeable. They believe failure is a reflection of their worth, so they avoid taking risks. This mindset hinders personal growth, as the fear of failing prevents trying new things.

In contrast, those with a growth mindset believe their skills can improve through effort and perseverance. They embrace challenges and view mistakes as learning opportunities. To them, failure is simply feedback, helping them advance and reach new goals.

Section A



Unlock potential by understanding and developing your mindset.

Having a growth mindset makes life much easier and more enjoyable! But even if you start with a fixed mindset, Dweck's research shows it's possible to develop a growth mindset by understanding and leveraging how the brain functions. This knowledge can transform confusion and despair into hope and confidence through learning.

This chapter shines a light on how our brain works.

The following chapters show how to work with our brain to optimize our life and learning.

Section B

The Brain Circuit™

What does our brain have in common with a toaster?

They both use electricity! Our brains are made of billions of electrical wires called neurons. These neuron wires use electricity from brain chemicals (such as serotonin and dopamine) to *power* our thoughts and actions!

But our brains are more sophisticated than a toaster; they are more like a power plant. A toaster just uses *electricity*. But our brains also *create* and *distribute* power across different brain sections, as needed. Our brains create these powerful chemicals using glucose from the food we eat.

I've developed a model called **The Brain Circuit™** to explain how learning happens in our brains. The brain is an organ filled with billions of electrical circuits. Each circuit works like a string of party lights.

On the string of lights, each bulb is connected by a wire to a plug. When plugged in, electricity flows along the wire, lighting up each bulb. To add more bulbs, we simply connect another string to the first, extending the circuit.

Learning is like these light strings. To learn something new, we have to connect the new information to something we already know.

The “brain on ...” section at the end of each lesson will dive into how the content of each lesson works on The Brain Circuit!

Section C

Learning *is* connecting

All learning happens by connecting new information to prior knowledge.

“Prior knowledge” refers to information we already understand.

- prior = “previous”
- knowledge = “information we know/skills we have developed”

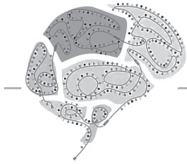
For example, the definition of an unfamiliar word must be described in familiar words and concepts.

Another example of connecting new information to prior knowledge is a memory device, such as the acronym “HOMES” to remember the Great Lakes: **H**uron, **O**ntario, **M**ichigan, **E**rie, and **S**uperior.

Source:
Shutterstock ID 88426033



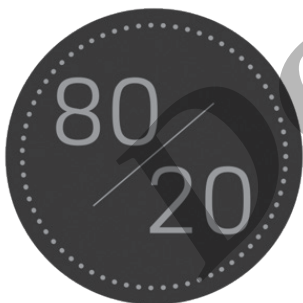
Our brains use electricity and chemicals to power thoughts and actions.



The Brain Circuit™

See our animated video about The Brain Circuit at: StudySkills.com/brain.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



80/20 Power Strategy
Connect new information to prior knowledge.

Think about what happens when we *cannot* make a connection between new information and our prior knowledge.

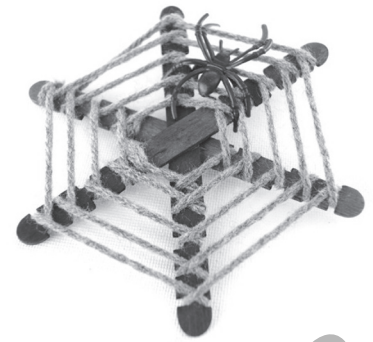
Have you heard an explanation that you could not grasp? Or read something and had no clue what it was about? We often describe these moments as feeling like the information went “over our head.” It means our brain couldn’t make a connection between our prior knowledge and the new information. When there’s no connection, there is no learning.

We can **ONLY** learn new information by connecting it to something we already know!

Similar to adding a string of lights to an existing, illuminated one; the first electrical circuit is required to power the next one.

However, as our knowledge grows, these connections become more complex; rather than a simple, linear string, they look more like a spider web. The analogy of a spider web helps us visualize the brain as a complex network of electrical circuits.

In this course, we will learn strategies that efficiently build learning connections, allowing us to quickly develop a dynamic network of understanding. As you form these connections, picture your brain weaving loops, similar to looping yarn around the sticks of a Halloween spider web.



Source: happyhourprojects.com

As you make learning connections, imagine your brain weaving loops, similar to yarn around sticks on a Halloween spider web.

Learning happens in layers

Our brain only has enough bandwidth—or power—to make a few connections at a time. So, instead of learning something new in one, long session, we learn in several short sessions. These shorter sessions stack on top of each other, creating a network of connections, much like a spider web.

For example, when we learn to read, we start by learning words, their sounds, and meanings. Then we tackle the alphabet and letter sounds, eventually figuring out how to spell words we’ve been saying out loud for years.

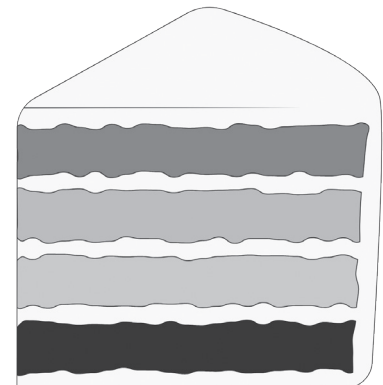
Another example is a hobby you enjoy, such as a sport, video game, art, etc. Were you an expert after your first attempt? Not likely. Your brain learned this hobby in small chunks. With each attempt, you picked up something new. Over time, these chunks layered into a deep understanding.

Learning is all about building connections, but since we can only make a few at a time, those connections happen in layers.

Understanding that learning occurs in layers is crucial because initially, we might grasp only 10–20% of new information. Often, we fixate on the 80–90% we didn’t catch, leading to frustration and overwhelm. This leads many people—especially those with a fixed mindset—to struggle to move beyond these feelings.

However, recognizing that it’s normal for our first layers of understanding to be incomplete can help us be more patient as we learn.

Section D



Source: Canva

Like making a layered cake, learning gradually grows in layers, connecting new information over time.

Meanwhile, the strategies in this course will show us how to make learning connections in QUICK layers that work *with* our brain ... to learn MORE in LESS time!

Layers in this book...

As we dive deeper into this course, we'll explore how to master learning in layers. Meanwhile, this course is designed with multiple layers to enhance your learning:

Layers in each chapter

Every lesson is structured into three parts:

Layer 1: Collect prior knowledge.

Layer 2: Connect new information.

Layer 3: Confirm understanding.

Layers on each page

We've also layered most pages for better comprehension:

- The title of each section (breaking down the topic)
- A visual to illustrate the main point of each section
- A caption explaining the visual and main point
- Key points in bold
- Remaining text, explaining further details

In Chapter 10, we will learn how to use these layers strategically to cut reading time in half while doubling comprehension!

Section E

Three brain sections that drive learning

We tend to think of our brain as a single organ. But in reality, it is a collection of different sections that each serve unique functions.

The brain is like our digestive system. The digestive system is a collection of different organs that work together to process and digest our food.

Likewise, the brain is a collection of different sections that work together to process and respond to information.

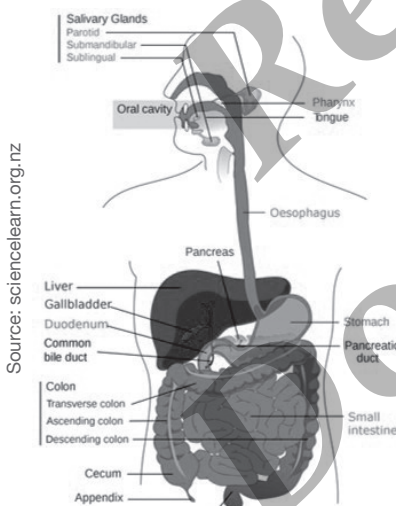
While the brain has many parts, three main areas are crucial for learning:

1. The Emotional Center (known as the “amygdala”)
2. The Front Brain (known as the “prefrontal cortex”)
3. The Back Brain (my term for everything else not covered by the Emotional Center or Front Brain)

The Emotional Center

Reach behind your head and trace your spine into the base of your neck. This is the path by which most information enters your brain.

Right above where your spine meets your skull sits your Emotional Center, the brain's “first stop” for incoming info. It's sometimes called the “lizard



The brain is like our digestive system, different sections work together to process and respond to information.

brain” because it’s as simple and basic as a lizard’s brain, focusing mainly on our safety.

This part of our brain has two main reactions:

RED: ALERT, DANGER! It can’t tell the difference between ancient threats (like being chased by a tiger) and modern stress (like someone being mean). To this unsophisticated “lizard brain,” all threats are equally serious. Therefore, any threat prompts it to pull chemicals from the rest of the brain so it is ready for further defense.

This process explains why we would never dream of trying to learn geometry theorems while running from a hungry tiger; it is biologically *impossible* to learn when the Emotional Center is upset, for any reason.

YELLOW: NEUTRAL, ON WATCH. This is our brain’s standard mode, where it’s just watching and waiting, not really affecting our learning.

But there’s a special, less common state that’s fantastic for learning ...

GREEN: JOY ZONE. When we’re happy, the Emotional Center creates new chemicals that help us learn better, leading us into a “flow” state. This joyful state is when learning becomes easier and more effective.

It is possible to *intentionally* enter this Green Zone. The strategies in this course reduce common sources of learning frustration, making the Green Zone far more accessible.

The Front Brain

If incoming information makes it past the Emotional Center, it then travels to the Front Brain.

The Front Brain is like a traffic cop or a nagging mother! (No offense to moms; my kids see me as a nagging mother, too!)

This is the part of your brain that does all conscious thinking; it evaluates all incoming information and makes decisions about what to do with it. It manages all planning, organizing, and learning.

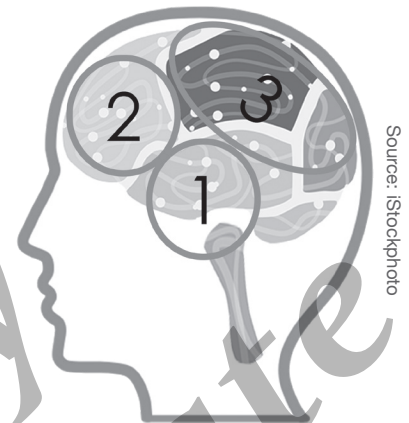
The Front Brain also houses our short-term memory ... which has a very, very small capacity!

The Front Brain is a power user but not a power maker, and it runs out of power several times a day! If it were an appliance, it would get only one star on the 5-star energy rating because it burns through brain power quickly.

The Back Brain

The Back Brain includes everything outside the Emotional Center and Front Brain. The sections of the Back Brain store long-term memories and manage deep, subconscious processing.

It’s highly efficient in energy production and usage, earning a five-star energy rating. The Back Brain only runs low on power in the most extreme physical and/or emotional circumstances.



Source: iStockphoto

There are three key brain sections: (1) Emotional Center (safety), (2) Front Brain (decision-making), and (3) Back Brain (long-term memory).

The key to optimizing learning—and our lives—is knowing how these three brain sections manage power!

“The brain on ...” section at the end of every lesson will explain how the lesson’s strategies optimize the use of brain power across these three parts of the brain.

Making the invisible, visible

In this lesson, we made the invisible, visible by using a model of something familiar, electrical circuits in string lights, to understand the biology of learning. The brain’s circuits are tiny and hidden beneath our skull, yet very real.

The Brain Circuit™ model sheds light on the fundamental ways our brain functions, enabling us to use strategies to optimize how we manage our life and learning.

The brain on ... memorizing vs learning

The difference between memorizing and learning is biological! Memorization happens when information stays only in our short-term memory, which is in our Front Brain.

Learning happens when our Front Brain is able to connect new information to prior knowledge in our Back Brain!

Most popular “study strategies” only support memorizing, not learning.

For example, using flash cards only helps us recite definitions through our short-term memory. But to truly learn new words, we must be able to connect their meaning to information from our long-term memory and use the terms in new contexts.

Another example is studying our notes. “Re-reading” only circulates the information through our short-term memory. To really learn the information, we must be able to connect the concepts to our prior knowledge and to each other.

In this course, our focus will be on strategies that go beyond short-term memorizing and instead, focus on long-term learning.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems?

4. Thinking your intelligence and abilities cannot change over time?
5. Studying just to pass tests rather than to truly learn the information?
6. Giving up easily when tasks become difficult instead of trying new strategies to overcome challenges?

Source: iStockphoto ID 16855689



Memorizing happens in the Front Brain (2); learning happens in the Back Brain (3).

SOAR



Set *goals*

***The second step** to getting better grades in less time is to clearly define what you want to achieve, by setting goals. Much like planning a trip, we each need a destination and a route.*

Setting goals sharpens focus, minimizes distractions, and identifies time-saving strategies.

This book acts as a “map,” guiding us through the goal-setting process and showing us how to achieve anything we want for ourselves!

CHAPTER 4: Identify Your Priorities

CHAPTER 5: Create Your Goals

CHAPTER 6: Schedule Time to Take Action

Identify Your Priorities

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

7. Feel homework and studying take up too much of your free time?
8. Struggle to balance schoolwork with personal time for hobbies and socializing?
9. Often delay starting homework or studying until the last minute?

Author's note

Modern life is overflowing with: inputs (especially from mobile devices), demands on our time, and TONS of distractions! In fact, technology and social media companies intentionally engineer our society to *be* distracting.

It is the same for me as it is for you! I love the utility I get from my digital devices and tools. But I find it extremely challenging to block distractions and focus.

However, I also know that if I don't control distractions from my devices, my devices will control me! What motivates me to actively block distractions is my total clarity about what is important to me ... and what is *not*!

In other words, I know my priorities ...

Section A

What can a jar teach us about priorities?

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



A

This jar represents
1 day, 24 hours —
no more, no less.



B

As you know,
a day fills up fast.
So does the jar.

Is this jar full?

There is no more room for rocks, but ...



C

There is plenty of
room for pebbles.



D

There is, of course,
room for a lot of water.

Is it full yet?

There is not much more room for pebbles, but ...

Is it full now?

Yes, it certainly is!

Rock, pebble, and water analogy adapted from Covey, Sean. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Salt Lake City, UT: Franklin Covey Co., 2000.

What's the point of the jar?

Most students think the purpose of the jar metaphor is to illustrate one of these ideas:

1. We have big and small tasks to do every day.
2. We can fit a lot into one day.

These ideas are partly correct, but there's more to it. By filling a jar with rocks, pebbles, and water we see that the *order* in which we do things matters! If we first put small things in the jar, there's no room for big things. And if we first fill the jar with water, there's no space for big or small things.

The jar represents our time. The rocks, pebbles, and water are different priorities on how we can spend our time and energy.

This jar metaphor demonstrates that the best way to make time for "fun" is by doing our most important tasks first! When we handle the big stuff first, we naturally make space for things we like to do.

For example, if we get home from school and start our homework right after a quick snack, we're dealing with a big task ("rock") first. This means we'll probably have more free time that evening because:

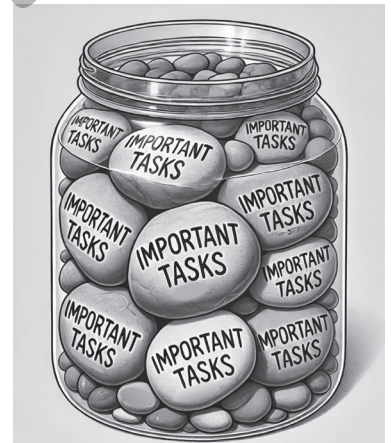
Starting our homework early means we'll have more energy and work more efficiently. With more energy and better efficiency, we'll finish our work quicker.

Starting early and working fast means we'll have more free time. This extra free time is great motivation to stay focused, making us even more efficient. Plus, free time is way more fun when our homework is already done! Worrying about unfinished homework is stressful.

On the other hand, the later it gets:

- We have less energy.
- Distractions become more distracting.
- Tasks take longer.
- Frustration grows!

Section B



The jar shows that prioritizing big tasks first makes room for everything else.

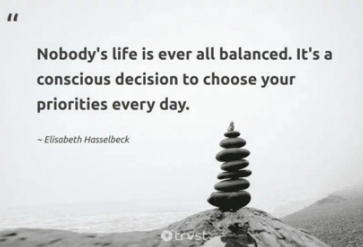
Evenings like this turn into a big mess of worry and stress, with NO joy!

But we NEED joy! We need free time. We need time for “fun stuff.”

The key to balancing “work” and “joy” is to know what’s most important to us, to gain clarity on our *priorities*.

Section C

Source: tryst.world



Priorities guide our time; knowing them helps us make intentional choices and avoid distractions.

What are “priorities”?

Priorities are what matter most to us or have the biggest effect on our lives. We show what’s important to us by how we use our time. The things we care about most should get our best attention.

When we know our priorities ... we use them to *make* choices about how to spend our time.

When we don’t know our priorities ... we simply *react* to whatever happens!

If we “don’t have time” for something, it’s either because:

- A. We don’t think that task or event is important, or
- B. It is important, but we’re *choosing* to do less important things, instead.

For example, if we spent an evening watching videos on our phone, forgetting about homework until bedtime, we chose a less important priority. It might not feel like we *chose* to get distracted, but we did NOT make the choice to avoid the distractions and do our homework.

We all fall into distraction traps, but they happen much less often when we are intentional about our priorities.

Section D

Source: Microsoft



Balance priorities by choosing top tasks and reducing time-wasters. Identify must-do rocks, joy pebbles, and avoidable distractions.

How can I balance my priorities for work and fun?

Most successful and happy people agree that the key to “balance” is making intentional choices about how to use time. We can do this in two ways:

1. Choose to spend time on our top priorities.
2. Put active effort into removing “anti-priorities,” things that waste our time and energy.

To do this, we ask ourselves:

- “What are my top priorities?”
- “What are my anti-priorities (things that waste my time or energy)?”

Your top priorities will include both things you HAVE to do and things you WANT to do. To keep a healthy balance in your life, identify the following three categories:

- Top priorities you HAVE to do.
- Top priorities you WANT to do.
- Anti-priorities, which are time and energy-wasters to reduce, remove, or avoid.

We’ll use rocks, pebbles, and water to represent these categories ...



Rocks

Tasks you **MUST** do

These tasks have bad outcomes if we don't do them. Examples of rocks include: going to school/work, doing homework, doing chores, paying bills, getting enough sleep, and eating healthily.



Pebbles

Tasks you **WANT** to do

These tasks bring JOY to our lives! They are represented by small pebbles only because they lack direct consequences if not done. However, they are critical for a healthy balance. Examples include: hobbies, sports, hanging out with friends, and playing video games.



Water

Time/energy wasters

These distractions automatically flow into our lives. They don't add value and they keep us from our important tasks. Examples include: watching too many videos, spending too much time on social media, mindless eating, etc.

Source: Canva

Zoom in on “anti-priorities”

Focusing on our top priorities is crucial, but it's just as important to be aware of the things that can distract us, our “anti-priorities.”

Anti-priorities are waterfalls; you are the dam.

Think of anti-priorities like a waterfall: they're a constant, powerful flow of distractions. We must each build our own “dam” to hold them back.

However, even strong dams have weak spots. For example ... Recently, a large dam near my office almost failed, despite having 10-foot-thick concrete walls. Following a routine inspection, local authorities called for an emergency repair!

This shows that even the strongest defenses need regular checks to stay strong! Just like that dam, we need to be aware and ready to handle our own points of failure when it comes to managing our time and attention.

How to block anti-priorities

In a future chapter (7), we will dive deep into how to manage our time and energy, including how to block anti-priorities. But a brief list of examples include:

- **Create a dedicated work/study space.** Find or create a space that is free from distractions.
- **Limit digital distractions.** Turn off notifications and/or use apps that block distracting websites/apps during study time. Set specific times to check devices rather than having it as a constant presence.
- **Use a timer.** Set a timer for short sprints; focus on a task for a set amount of time (like 25–35 minutes), followed by a short break. This keeps our attention sharp, while providing short periods to look forward to relaxing or checking notifications. (Use a kitchen timer instead of your phone's timer.)

These are just a few ways to “build a dam” to minimize distractions and focus on top priorities.

Section E



Anti-priorities are constant distractions; we must build and maintain strong defenses to stay focused on top tasks.

Source: Canva



80/20 Power Strategy
Control distractions!

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Two nuances of anti-priorities

..... Any single activity can be both constructive and/or an anti-priority, depending on your *intention*.

1

For example, watching YouTube videos ...

YouTube is invaluable for entertainment or for learning how to do useful things! However, it can also be a major time-waster, enticing us with endless captivating videos! We may learn useful information, but if we did not *intend* to spend that, specific time on YouTube ... it was an anti-priority.

..... The difference between “YouTube as a distracting anti-priority” and “YouTube as a constructive resource” ... lies in our intention when we engage with it.

..... The only purpose for identifying our anti-priorities is to increase our awareness of them; it is NOT to feel guilt or shame.

2

Many distractions, like social media and video platforms, are *designed* to hijack our attention. Our world is bombarded with engineered distractions; we cannot avoid them! So we should avoid holding ourselves—and others—to impossible standards.

..... Instead, our focus should be on becoming *aware* of distractions that snag our attention, then growing our efforts to minimize their impact.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible by ... using tangible items to symbolize intangible—yet very REAL—concepts.

Rocks, pebbles, and water symbolize intangible concepts, helping us visualize and manage time and priorities.

The jar, rocks, pebbles, and water are all objects we have seen and held before; we could easily imagine how they would feel and fit (or not fit) together. These concrete objects help us “see” invisible concepts such as time and priorities, which improves our ability to make decisions on how to best manage them.

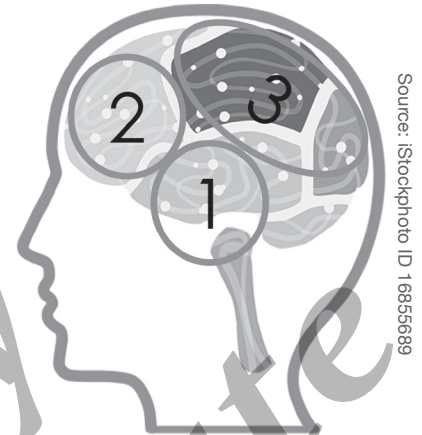


The brain on ... your priorities

Knowing our priorities allows us to make most decisions with far less strain on our brain!

Every day, the Emotional Center and Front Brain make dozens of micro-decisions about how to spend our time. Without clear priorities, every choice is a “brand new” challenge. Even “simple” decisions drain a lot of energy from both brain sections.

However, when we identify our top priorities (and anti-priorities), it’s like making a one-time decision that eases all future choices. This clarity cuts through the complexity of time-related decisions, making them almost automatic. We can quickly assess options based on our priorities, turning the process into a straightforward “yes or no” rather than an exhaustive and emotional analysis.



Source: iStockphoto ID 16855689

Knowing our priorities reduces brain strain by making many choices automatic.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

7. Feeling homework and studying take up too much of your free time?
8. Struggling to balance schoolwork with personal time for hobbies and socializing?
9. Starting homework or studying until the last minute?

Create Your Goals

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

10. Fail to set and stick to your academic goals?
11. Lose focus and feel overwhelmed by your schoolwork?
12. Find it difficult to handle multiple tasks without feeling overburdened?

Author's note

At this very moment, I am writing from a cruise ship docked in Antigua. This is not to boast, but to emphasize the power of goal-setting ...

I learned how to set goals in high school, then learned study skills early in college. They drastically improved my life, igniting my passion to share these skills with as many students as possible! I was only 18 and it seemed that goal would fill my whole career! Yet, by age 30, I wrote the first edition of this book and reached Amazon's best-seller list, where the book stayed for years!

In the midst of "living my life," I failed to notice that I had reached all of my goals, both personal and professional. To my surprise, I felt more depressed than excited. Confused, I hired a life-coach to help me out of my funk.

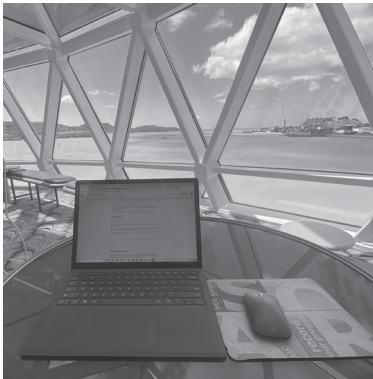
He quickly diagnosed the problem. "SUSAN!" he bellowed, with a firm "fatherly" tone, "You need bigger, and more bad*** goals!" (Apologies to anyone offended by his message, but you deserve to know how it really happened! ;)

Since then, I've had unique opportunities and adventures beyond even my wildest dreams! One example is this moment, working/writing while cruising the Caribbean! I would never have received these blessings if not for setting the goals that guided me to them and them to me.

This chapter covers the process I've used to build a life I love!

Right now, I know the "rest of your life" feels so far away. But imagine your milestone birthdays ... 20, 30, 40, 50+ ... will you feel proud that you made the best of your time? Or, will you regret not being more intentional about your goals?

Start today! Set goals and make action plans knowing each step is towards a life of no regrets.



Setting goals has led me to incredible opportunities, like writing this content from a cruise ship in Antigua.

Why set goals?

A goal is a desired outcome.

Goal-setting is the process of identifying the specific outcomes we wish to achieve.

Goal-setting is a lot like planning a vacation; first, we identify the destination (goal), then we create the travel plan (action plan).

Likewise, goals are destinations in the journey of life. Progress in life isn't accidental; we don't stumble into our dreams. We must intentionally set goals and make action plans to achieve them.

Often, unforeseen challenges may alter our goals or plans and timelines. But creating goals is essential to propel us towards our best life.

Section A



Setting goals is like planning a vacation, guiding us to our desired destinations in life.

Why do some goals fail?

Goals propel us to our best life, but they *must* be realistic and achievable. Setting a goal might seem straightforward: just think forward and make a plan. But our success largely hinges on how goals are defined. Most goals fail for one or more of the following reasons:

1. **Too vague.** Goals like “improve grades” lack specific targets.
2. **Not measurable.** Without clear start and end points, it's hard to recognize achievement.
3. **Unrealistic.** Aiming too high, like “earning a million in a month,” isn't realistic.
4. **Lacks personal significance.** Motivation requires a meaningful connection to the goal.
5. **Time underestimation.** People often misjudge the time needed to reach a goal.

The goal-setting prompts in this chapter are designed to minimize these failure points.

Section B



Goals miss their target when they are: vague, not measurable, unrealistic, and/or lacking meaning or time.

How to set goals

To set ourselves up for success, we follow three simple—yet *very specific*—steps:

1. Identify your priorities.
2. Determine what to improve.
3. Create an action plan.

Let's look at each step, in detail ...

Section C

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



80/20 Power Strategy
Avoid common pitfalls by following the prompts in this chart, right.

The first column of this chart was completed in Chapter 4. For details on columns A–C, see the right margin on page 43.

Step 1: Identify your priorities.


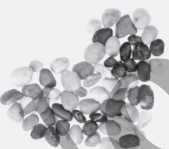
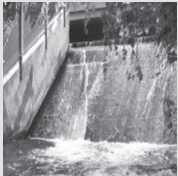
This process was completed in Chapter 4. We are about to craft goals based on our top priorities.

Goals must align with our top priorities. We will only be motivated to invest time and energy into achieving goals if they truly matter to us.

Step 2: Determine what to improve.

Look at your list of priorities ...

- In what areas would you most like to improve?
- What would you like to accomplish?

	THE PRIORITY Describe the priority.
Rock Priority 	
Pebble Priority 	
Water Anti-Priority 	

Then, follow the prompts in this chart (below) to guide you through the process of setting goals; the chart was specifically designed to avoid common goal blockers.

For a balanced approach, the chart prompts you to create goals in the following categories:

1. **Rock Priority.** Challenge yourself in an area of obligation.
2. **Pebble Priority.** Connect with what brings you joy.
3. **Water Anti-Priority.** Eliminate time and energy drains.

These prompts are specifically designed to set goals that avoid the most common failure-points in achieving them.

A. Potential actions What are 2–3 actions that could lead to this outcome?	B. How will you know you've met this goal? What outcomes can you measure?	C. Target date What is the deadline?	PROMPTS A. This prompt is only to ensure your goal is “actionable;” it is NOT a complete action plan! If you cannot think of actions to help you achieve your goal, revise it. B. How will you measure progress? How can you compare the difference between where you “started” and “ended”? For example, for this book, we use the Scorecard—taken at the beginning and end—to measure progress. C. What is your target date? Aim for the end of this semester or a max of four months. Longer-term goals are difficult to plan because too much changes over time. If you have a longer-term goal, break it down into a smaller goal that can be achieved in 3–4 month “chunks.”

Step 3: Create an action plan.

An action plan identifies steps toward achieving a goal. Goals are not achieved in a single leap! Much like climbing a ladder, we must go one “rung” at a time.

To create your action plan, use the template provided (right):

1. **At the top, summarize your goals.** These are the final destinations you are aiming to reach.
2. **On the rungs, list every necessary action.** Consider every small step required to reach “the top.”

For more clarity, see the example provided.

To maintain a healthy balance, we set a goal for each type of priority: rock, pebble, and water.

Rock Goal goal for something you HAVE to do	Pebble Goal goal for something you WANT to do	Water Goal goal to remove drains on time/energy
Raise every grade by one letter this quarter.	Stay in shape so I can make the varsity basketball team.	Spend more time with friends instead of on social media.
Plan my week on Sundays. <small>action step</small>	Shoot hoops for 20 minutes, 3 days a week. <small>action step</small>	Download a screen time monitoring App. <small>action step</small>
Use my planner every day. <small>action step</small>	Join a recreational league over the summer. <small>action step</small>	Limit social media use to 30 minutes per day. <small>action step</small>
Spend 10 min. at the end of each day reviewing notes. <small>action step</small>	Run for 20 minutes, 2-3 times per week. <small>action step</small>	Create a list of activities I'd like to do with my friends. <small>action step</small>
Keep all of my papers organized in a SOAR® Binder. <small>action step</small>	Lift weights at the gym after school. <small>action step</small>	Get homework done right after school to free up evenings. <small>action step</small>
Go to math tutoring during lunch once a week. <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>	Join an after school club to attend once per week. <small>action step</small>
Turn in all of my homework. <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>	Schedule 2 fun activities with friends per week. <small>action step</small>
 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>
 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>
 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>	 <small>action step</small>

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Tips for creating action plans

Creating actionable and efficient plans involves a few key strategies:

1. **Be specific.** To ensure each task is doable, visualize yourself doing it. For example, avoid writing something vague like “get good grades.” Instead, specify actions, such as “review notes every night for 20 minutes.”

2. **Be flexible.** Let ideas flow naturally; they will not come out in order. Rank them in order later. Or, capture tasks on index cards and organize them chronologically.
3. **Collaborate.** If possible, partner with another person. A conversation will help create more accurate and practical plans.

In the next chapter, we'll learn how to schedule time to follow your action plan.

About SMART Goals

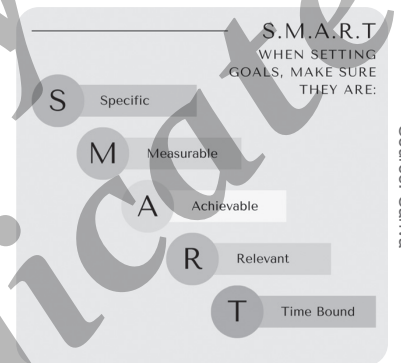
The most common advice about goal-setting is the acronym, SMART, which stands for the five essential qualities of an effective goal: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ctionable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

However, SMART is confusing (*vs* helpful) because:

1. **It describes the outcomes, NOT the actions.** While SMART outlines what good goals *should* be, it doesn't describe the questions or thought-process needed to *create* them.
2. **It is a complex process!** Without tools like the provided chart, crafting a SMART goal from scratch is daunting.

For these reasons, SOAR does not teach SMART as a goal-setting strategy. However, the SOAR process does lead to SMART outcomes.

Section D



One of (literally) millions of images for "SMART" goals.

Prepare for the paradox of goal-setting

A paradox is when something may seem to contradict or oppose the truth, yet is still true.

Goal-setting embodies a paradox; while we carefully set goals and make action plans, we also know that they are likely to change over time, because:

- Things change.
- New information is learned.
- People change.
- Feelings evolve.
- Unexpected events occur.
- Motivations shift.

Things are so likely to change, we should expect change! If we know everything will change, *why bother setting goals and creating action plans?!?*

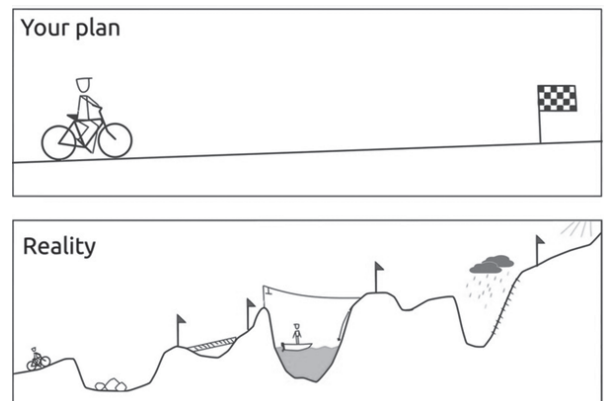
Because the planning process activates our power to shape our lives and propel forward! Goals provide us with a starting point, encouraging detailed attention and execution.

But goal-setting also requires flexibility. When unexpected changes arise, those changes may make our previous goals and plans less relevant. Therefore, we should expect to regularly reflect on our goals/action plans and modify them accordingly.

This paradox does not reduce the value of goal-setting; rather, it reinforces the importance of engaging our power to build a more meaningful and enriched life!

Section E

Embrace the paradox: Goals guide us, but plans change. Flexibility is key.



Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible with:

Tools

	The Priority describe the priority	What Would You Like to Accomplish (or Remove)? provide details	Potential Actions (what are 2-3 actions that could lead to this outcome?)	How Will You Know You've Met This Goal? What outcomes can you measure?	Target Date What is the deadline?
rock priority					
pebble priority					
Water anti- priority					

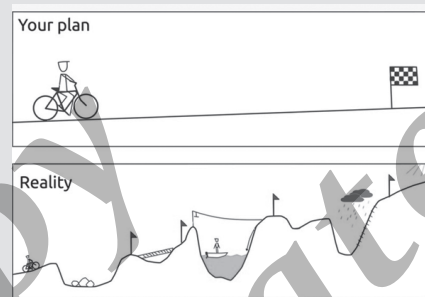
We use charts with prompts, like this one, to make all elements of “effective goal-setting” visible.

Metaphors



The metaphor of a ladder helps us see that goals are accomplished in small steps.

Memes



To understand the paradox of goal-setting, we use memes to illustrate the universal experience of pursuing goals!

The brain on ... our goals

When creating goals and action plans, our Front Brain leads the process. But as it “sifts” through details, it engages all other sections of the brain, including: the Emotional Center and most of the Back Brain, such as: personal memories, information-recall centers, and more.

As this “sifting” process engages our “whole brain,” it activates our subconscious mind. The subconscious mind handles 95% of our brain activity, with no drain on our conscious mind! It resides mostly in our Back Brain, which is the most stable, energy-efficient section of our brain.

Ultimately, the process of setting goals activates the most powerful sections of our brain, allowing us to recognize action steps and achieve them as efficiently as possible!



“Setting goals” starts in the Front Brain, but soon activates the whole brain ... preparing it to take action!

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

10. Failing to set and stick to your academic goals?
11. Losing focus and feeling overwhelmed by your schoolwork?
12. Finding it difficult to handle multiple tasks without feeling overburdened?

Schedule Time To Take Action

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

13. Struggle to manage time or feel homework takes too long?
14. Have trouble remembering due dates and/or test dates? Do you often have late/missing work or are unprepared for taking quizzes/tests?
15. Feel that your parents nag too much or fail to give you advance notice about events and tasks?

What is time-management?

Time-management is a process of “thinking forward.” It is when we look ahead and plan how to fit future events and tasks into our available time.

In Chapter 4, the jar activity showed that we can fit A LOT into our life ... *if* we plan our time to align with our priorities.

Why manage time? Planning prevents wasting time and energy. There’s a simple equation to remember: $1m=2x$, “last-minute equals twice the time.” This means tasks done at the last minute often take twice as long as those planned in advance.

Time-management is complex because all elements of the process, including time itself, are invisible! So we are about to simplify the process by making it all visible. To start, we must answer the following key questions:

- What’s my *schedule*? (When am I busy? When am I free?)
- What do I need to *do*?
- *When* can I do it all?

We get answers to these questions from a variety of time-management tools.

Section A



Source: Canva

$1m=2x$
Tasks done at the last minute take twice as long as those planned in advance.

Section B

Optimal time-management tools

The three tools below answer our key time-management questions. Each tool serves a different function and has various pros and cons:

	Monthly Calendar	To-Do List	Weekly Schedule
USE:	Tracks special events, meetings, and appointments	Tracks tasks and assignments	Displays all hours in a week.
PRO:	4–5 weeks are visible at one time	Serves as a reminder	Supports weekly planning.
CON:	No room for details	Lists dates work is due, not when we should do it, sources of tasks are varied.	Excludes a to-do list.

To effectively manage our time, we must coordinate information from many different tools and sources.

Many school software programs incorporate a monthly calendar and to-do list. However, these tools have drawbacks:

- They often miss some tasks and events.
- Coordinating information is difficult because the calendars, to-do lists, and other details cannot be viewed at the same time.

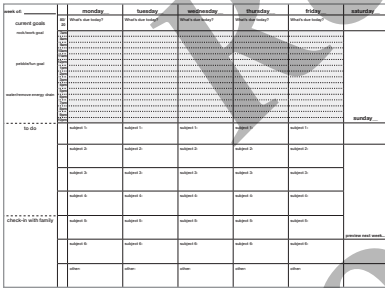
Therefore, we need a tool that can coordinate all this information in one place ... a planner.

The weekly planner

The layout to the left is a weekly planner; it coordinates all information needed to manage our time. The layout allows us to:

- See all waking hours of the week.
- Record all scheduled events, meetings, and appointments (in hourly grid) to see what remaining time is available to do tasks.
- Track schoolwork, goals, other projects, and personal needs.

Before we can make optimal use of the weekly planner, it's important to understand the invisible blockers that often complicate time-management ...



The weekly planner is available for download at StudySkills.com/weeklyplanner.

What are time-management blockers?

There are six invisible barriers that block time-management or add friction to the process. These blockers work like Russian nesting dolls, each including elements of the previous:

1. Time is invisible.
2. “Online information” is (practically) invisible.
3. The information needed to manage our time comes from multiple sources.
4. Calendars and to-do lists are NOT planners.
5. Software confuses “DUE” and “TO DO.”
6. Technology makes us reactive, not proactive.

Let’s look at each of these barriers in a little more detail ...

1. Time is invisible.

In some ways, trying to manage time is like trying to manage air; it seems absurd to “manage” something we can’t see or touch.

Yet, this unique human ability lets us build and nurture relationships by planning and coordinating future activities. We’ve mastered time-management by converting the rhythms of years, months, weeks, and hours into visible symbols like calendars and schedules.

But it is helpful to acknowledge that time, itself, is not visible.

2. “Online information” is (practically) invisible.

We think we have “easy” access to the information we need to manage our time, such as: school events, homework assignments, test dates, sports schedules, etc.

We think this because “everything is online,” instantly accessible from any device.

But think about how often you pick up a device to look up something, only to get distracted and derailed from your original goal?

Plus, the layers of usernames, passwords, and authentication are an overwhelming deterrent. The distractions and layers of logins make “online information” practically invisible!

3. Information comes from multiple sources.

Logging into the LMS (learning management system) is only the start. The information needed is spread out in different areas of the software: calendars, to-do lists, and assignment pages.

PLUS, students must often access more than one LMS, which means having to find multiple pages across multiple platforms!

Section C



Source: Canva

These time-management blockers are like Russian nesting dolls; every new blocker is an extension of the previous one.

PLUS, information comes from other sources, such as:

- Directly from teachers, in class.
- Communications via email and text from various contacts.
- Details about extracurricular activities, sports, part-time jobs, etc.
- Personal goals and life-management aspects.

Most of us grossly underestimate the vast quantity of information—sources required to effectively manage time!

4. Calendars and to-do lists are not planners!

In the years B.C. (Before COVID), most schools provided students with paper planners, which included monthly calendars and weekly layouts for the school year.

These tools played a vital role in helping students track and plan their schedules and assignments! However, as COVID pushed schools to embrace technology, schools STOPPED providing paper planners.

“It’s all online,” they tell me.

But we’ve already covered the pitfalls in that argument!

And even if students could easily access their “online” calendars and to-do lists, they no longer have the tools to PLAN their time.

5. Software confuses “DUE” and “TO DO.”

Even if you could EASILY get to information online, ... and it was all collected neatly in ONE place, ... and you had the proper tools to PLAN your time, ... the LMS likely muddles “DUE dates” and the dates we should DO something! In LMS “To Do Lists,” assignments are usually posted by DUE date.

Yet, most often, the date we should DO an assignment is before the assignment is DUE. Is your head hurting yet?

6. Technology makes us reactive, not proactive.

The constant stream of notifications and reminders from our devices has conditioned us to *react* to them.

But managing time requires us to be *proactive*, pausing to: think forward, evaluate information, and coordinate it into our schedule.

These two mindsets are fundamentally opposed; we cannot proactively PLAN from a mental state of reacting.

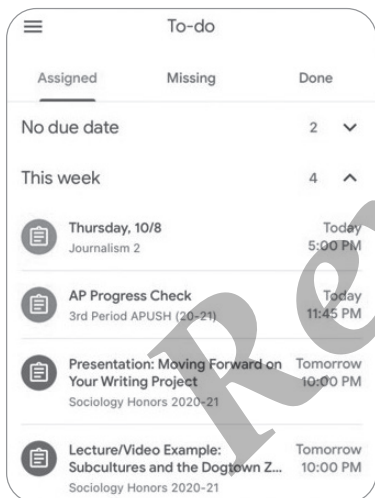
A note about technology ...

Technology should be embraced for all the ways it can enhance our lives! So, it is important to note that these blockers are NOT caused by technology; they are caused by our *failure to see gaps in how we manage our time*.

Now that we’ve made these gaps visible, we’ll better understand how to optimize both digital and paper tools to manage our time.



Schools claim everything is “online,” but students now lack tools to effectively plan their time.



Many LMS software calls them “To-DO Lists”... while organizing assignments by their DUE date!

Time-management tools: digital vs paper

Section D

A paper-based time-management system may seem old-fashioned. But it has advantages over some limitations of digital tools.

So, which is better, *digital* or *paper*?

There is not a one-size-fits-all answer to this question; it varies based on individual needs and circumstances.

The key is to evaluate the differences between the two, then determine an optimal system for yourself.

Digital Calendar + Task-Manager	VS	Paper Calendar + Planner
Very accessible; mobile devices are rarely out of reach.		Less accessible but usually kept with school/homework supplies.
Poor visibility; a full week is not visible on a mobile device.		Great visibility; a full week can be seen at one time.
Many apps are available with a variety of functions and features.		Easy to make/print custom formats.
Apps often integrate with each other, such as the school's LMS software with Google calendar. But these integrations are clunky and do not capture all necessary information.		The student integrates all information manually, choosing what is relevant to avoid cluttering their calendar and to-do lists with irrelevant information.
Links and attachments can be posted to events and tasks.		Hyperlinks and attachments are not possible. Space for details is limited.
Reminders can be set/programmed.		No auto-reminders, but our brain better remembers handwriting over typing.
Most ideal for storing information.		Most ideal for coordinating multiple sources of information and planning.

To **STORE** information, digital calendars and task-managers are most ideal.

To **PLAN** time, paper planners are most ideal because they help coordinate information from multiple sources.

For this reason, I generally recommend a hybrid approach:

Use a digital calendar to store all information for dates beyond the current week.

Use a paper planner to: 1) coordinate all information from your digital calendar, LMS, and other sources, and 2) Plan the week ahead. Throughout the week, use the paper planner as a daily guide.

What tools will YOU use?


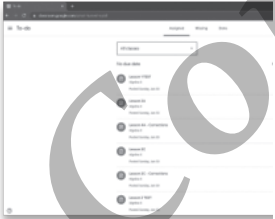

Your time-management tools must serve as a:

- calendar
- task-manager, and
- planner.

Ask a parent or teacher to help you determine your best options.

On the next screen, I outline my *general* recommendations (which are also the tools I personally use to manage my time).

Notice that I use TWO tools to serve THREE functions; the planner layout works as a task-manager *and* planner.

Optimal Time-Management Tools			
Calendar		Task-Manager	Planner
Tool	Digital Calendar	Paper Planner	Paper Planner
Pictures			
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrates with email Often Integrates with LMS software Syncs across all devices; can be used on mobile and desktop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can add information from unlimited sources. Can track <i>all</i> tasks (assignments, goals, etc.) in the same place. Can see all tasks AND weekly schedule at once. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A full week is visible at one time! Handwriting is optimal for planning; activates <i>problem-solving</i> regions of the brain. (Typing only activates the <i>language</i> regions of the brain.)
Limitations	Digital task-managers are clunky, especially on mobile devices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is only good for one week. Small writing space; must use keywords and abbreviations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small writing space; must use keywords and abbreviations. Not as accessible as mobile.
How to Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up; pay careful attention to settings! Enter all events, activities, due dates, test dates, etc. for dates beyond the current week. 	<p>At the beginning of each week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check the digital calendar; transfer all events and due dates to the weekly schedule. Check last week's planner page; add unfinished items to this week. Check to-do lists in all software. 	<p>At the beginning of the week, after all information (left) is added, plan when you will do specific tasks. (More details in the next section.)</p>

We recommend students use a digital calendar **AND** a paper planner.
 The digital calendar tracks events and due dates *beyond* the current week.
 The weekly planer tracks tasks and aids planning for the current week.

“Optimal” time-management tools do not exist.

An ideal planner layout should include:

- Space to see all hours of the week, showing scheduled events and “open” hours.
- Space to list tasks planned for specific days.
- Space for tasks not yet assigned a specific day.
- Daily assignments from each class.
- Plans for achieving goals.
- A section for notes for the next week’s plan.

Despite extensive searching, no existing tool or template fully meets these criteria. Therefore, we provide a custom “optimal layout” for download at *[StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.study-skills.com/bonus-v3)*.

However, this layout has a significant limitation: limited writing space!

This constraint is caused by having to fit a LOT of information onto ONE 8.5×11" paper.*

Options to work around this limitation include:

- Print and use the layout as is; write concisely, use keywords and abbreviations.
- Print on larger paper, if available.
- Use a digital note-taking app like Goodnotes or Notability; create a notebook in a larger format like A3 or tabloid size, then import the layout as a PDF. This allows for zooming in to write and zooming out to read.

* Ideally, this layout would be printed across a two-page spread in a 7×10" spiral notebook, expanding the functional space to 10×14". However, we are currently limited by the constraints of standard printers.

[illegible]

Download our weekly planner layout
at **StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.**

How & when to manage your time

Now that we've identified the best tools to use, it's time to set them up and manage our time:

Step 1: Get an optimal calendar and planner.

Step 2: Identify “information sources” for all due dates and commitments.

For example: school calendars, activity schedules, to-do lists, teachers and parents/guardians (in person), personal action plans, etc.

Step 3: At routine anchor points, think forward to check and/or update our calendar and planner. An anchor point is a strategic checkpoint in your day, week, semester, or year when we pause to consult and update our time-management tools.

**Download our printable reference guide,
“How to Manage Time for Students”
at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).**

Section E

How to Manage Time – for Students

[illegible]

Anchor points ... routine times to pause and plan

Anchor points are key to managing time! These are points to reflect and plan, allowing us to stay organized and on top of our schedule.

There are two main types:

- **Transition times, such as the start of a new:** school year, term, or activity, and
- **Regular weekly and daily intervals,** such as: Sundays, during each class, at the end of the school day, and before bedtime

Visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3) to download our printable guide, How to Manage Time for Students; use it as a reference guide until the anchor points become “automatic” routines.

Section F

What is the most critical anchor point?

The most powerful strategy for managing time is to plan your week.

Planning one day at a time does not prompt us to look further ahead, allowing events and deadlines to sneak up on us. Planning *beyond* one week allows too much time for things to change.

Weekly planning strikes the ideal balance! It provides proper notice of due dates, test dates, and other obligations, allowing us to prepare and optimize our time.

We call this anchor point the “7-Minute Sunday Sessions.”

The “Seven-Minute” Sunday Sessions

On Sunday evenings, set aside two, seven-minute blocks of time ...

For the first seven minutes:

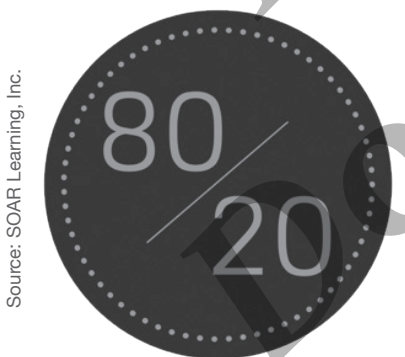
- **Review your calendar;** transfer all details for the upcoming week to your weekly planner.
- **Revisit last week’s planner;** transfer “undone” tasks to the current week.
- **Check additional sources** that impact your schedule, for example: the To-Do list in your school’s LMS software, schedules for extracurriculars, work, etc.

For the next seven minutes:

- **Check in with your parent(s) or guardian(s);** ask what they have planned for the coming week.
- **Record events that may impact you** in your weekly planner, such as: family events, doctor appointments, etc. If you need special transportation, this is a good time to coordinate.



Two 7-minute sessions on Sunday will give your week ahead a MASSIVE boost!



80/20 Power Strategy
Seven-Minute Sunday Sessions

The Sunday Session ... for students who live in two homes

If you call two places “home,” the Sunday Session is a key tool for reducing stress! Students report that sense of control (and relief) is life-changing!

- **Communicate with both parents/guardians.** If possible, hold a joint conversation with both parents/guardians through group chat or a phone/video conference. Otherwise, talk to each one separately.
- **Discuss the forthcoming week.** Inform them of special events like sports practices, job schedules, major projects, or social plans. Ask both parents/guardians about each of their schedules.
- **Clarify when you’ll be staying** with each parent/guardian.
- **Coordinate transportation.** Confirm who will be responsible for transportation to various activities such as: school, sports practices, doctor appointments, etc.



Source: Karl Mayr

Sunday Sessions help students in two homes gain control, prevent last-minute crises, and enhance overall well-being.

Benefits of the Seven-Minute Sunday Sessions

This small investment of time provides many benefits, including:

- **Boosts confidence!** Gaining control over our time provides a major boost in confidence.
- **Saves time.** Planning prevents last-minute crises!
- **Improves grades.** Turning in all homework on time and attempting all quizzes and tests (regardless of score) can secure at least a “C” in most classes.
- **Increases free time.** Planning prevents wasted time.
- **Improves relationships.** Students and parents/guardians who regularly hold “Sunday Sessions” report that the improved coordination DRAMATICALLY improves relationships! Also, this coordination eliminates most “parental nagging.”

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible with the following tools:

Monthly calendar

The monthly calendar is essential for tracking events and due dates beyond the current week.

Weekly planner

The weekly planner makes two things visible: the tasks we must do and the hours in which we can do them.

Anchor points

Anchor points “anchor” time-management practices into our routine; they make visible the recurring times we should use our calendar and planner.



The brain on ... time-management

People often joke that calendars and planners are their “second brain,” but that’s not far from the truth! They act as a second *Front Brain*.

To manage time, the Front Brain must hold and process a LOT of information ... all of which is *invisible*! The Front Brain has a limited supply of power and quickly becomes overloaded by the heavy amount of invisible information. As a result, we forget tasks, miss due dates, etc.

Calendars and planners remove a VERY heavy burden from the Front Brain by making all elements of time and task-management visible. With this information “outside of our head,” the Front Brain can coordinate and plan with greater accuracy, using less brain power.



Calendars and planners serve as a second Front Brain.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

13. Struggling to manage time or feel homework takes too long?
14. Having trouble remembering due dates and/or test dates? Often having late/missing work or being unprepared for taking quizzes/tests?
15. Feeling that your parents nag too much or fail to give you advance notice about events and tasks?

SOAR



Organize

***The third step** to getting “better grades in less time” is to get organized. Disorganization creates confusion and chaos, making it biologically impossible for our brain to learn new information! Even if you’re not naturally organized, you can learn how to organize. Anyone can learn how to build order into their life!*

As always, SOAR strategies are simple, yet effective! For example, we will see a great system for organizing all papers and notebooks for school. It is inexpensive and instantly simplifies life. We will also learn some tips for keeping your room, bookbag, and locker in neat, functional order. Finally, we’ll review many different ways to organize our time through simple routines.

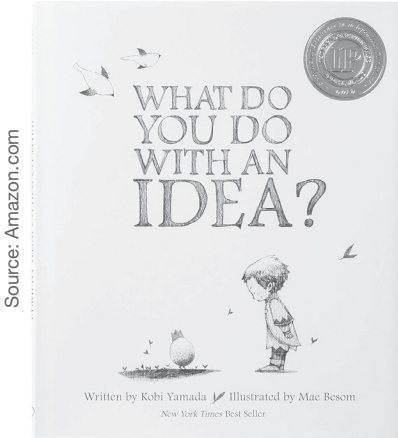
Organization creates efficiency. Efficiency creates simplification. Simplification creates more time for fun!

CHAPTER 7: Organize Your Papers & Digital Files

CHAPTER 8: Organize Your Space

CHAPTER 9: Organize Your Time & Manage Your Energy

Organize Your Papers & Digital Files



The success of our company largely stems from positive word-of-mouth about the SOAR Binder. Decades later, I am *making a living* out of something I developed in MIDDLE school! So, keep your brilliant ideas—they might be valuable in the future! Document them well; memory fades over time.

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

16. Lose your homework before you get home to do it?
17. Complete your homework but then lose it before you can turn it in?
18. Bring the wrong folders/notebooks to class or struggle with an overly heavy bookbag?
19. Have difficulty keeping your digital and paper files organized and easily accessible?

Author's note

The main strategy in this chapter, the SOAR Binder, has become the most popular of this book! Students instantly see how the binder simplifies their life and teachers report their rate of missing assignments drops to “almost zero.”

Today, it serves as a cornerstone tool, freeing students from the chaos of missing papers and giving them bandwidth to embrace all other SOAR strategies. But I was in middle school when I first developed this system for myself! It continued to serve me through high school, college, and graduate school. Now, my children and students continue to use it.

Decades later, it is still the most efficient way to organize school papers!

Section A

Why is organization so difficult?

Organizing school papers and files can be challenging for several reasons:

1. You go to multiple locations every day.
2. You are required to manage a LOT of supplies.
3. You are always rushed!
4. Papers VANISH in a bookbag.
5. All folders and notebooks look alike when stacked in your locker or bookbag.
6. Digital files are invisible.

The best way to simplify organization is to use *fewer* supplies.

For example, instead of having a separate folder and notebook for each class (for a total of 12–18 different folders and notebooks), use just ONE binder ... the SOAR Binder.

Reducing 12–18 folders/notebooks down to ONE binder significantly simplifies organization! Here’s how the SOAR Binder resolves the most common blockers:

1	2	3	4	5	6
You go to multiple locations every day.	You are required to manage a LOT of supplies.	You are always rushed!	Papers VANISH in a bookbag.	All folders and notebooks look alike when stacked in lockers and bookbags.	Digital files are invisible.
No need to switch between various folders and notebooks for each class or homework; the single binder accompanies you everywhere.	One binder replaces 12–18 folders and notebooks!	When you are in a hurry, papers quickly slide into the binder.	The binder’s easy access prevents shoving loose papers into your bookbag.	Having one binder eliminates the need to select different folders or notebooks during transitions.	The binder’s structure is replicated in digital form, simplifying the organization of digital files and enhancing their manageability.

How to organize “current” school papers

The SOAR® Binder System is a simple binder (max 1.5-inch rings) that holds everything for all your classes. It solves many organizing problems. With a SOAR Binder, you have only ONE item to carry everywhere; it’s easy to remember and use!

You might think, “How can I fit all my notebooks and folders into a 1.5-inch binder?”

It may seem unlikely, but it’s possible! Thousands of students, from grade-school to grad-school have used it; once they do, they never go back!

Instead of regular folders and notebooks, the SOAR Binder uses plastic binder-pockets and loose-leaf paper. The binder-pockets do two things:

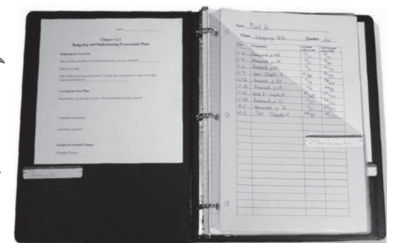
1. They hold papers for each class (one pocket for each class).
2. They act as dividers for your notes, which you place behind each pocket.

You take the binder to every class and back home each day. You don’t have to worry about forgetting the right folder or notebook because everything is in one binder.

This system is especially helpful if you live in two homes. You won’t leave anything behind at the other house because all your papers and notes are always with you, in the binder.

Section B

Transform this,
into this ...



The SOAR Binder organizes all school papers into ONE, easy-to-carry binder.



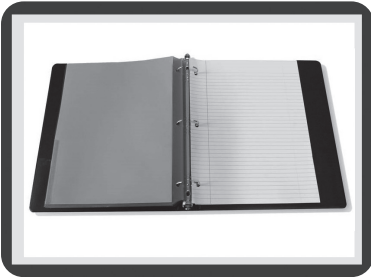
80/20 Power Strategy
The SOAR Binder

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



Step 1: Gather supplies.



Step 2: Put the pieces together.



Step 3: Label the folders.

Creating a SOAR Binder is easy. Just:

1. Gather supplies.
2. Put the pieces together.
3. Label the folders.

1. Gather supplies.

- One binder with: 1–1½-inch rings*, clear cover, and inside pockets
- One plastic folder/subject
- Labels for folders and binder pockets
- Looseleaf notebook paper

If you can't carry a bag at school, choose a 1.5-inch binder and add a zipper case for pens and pencils. Don't use a binder larger than 1.5 inches; it won't fit in your bag!

Visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3) to see a list of recommended supplies.

2. Put the pieces together.

Place the plastic folders in the rings.

- Place 20–30 sheets of notebook paper in the rings, behind the last folder.
- NOTE: If you are using the planner layout from Chapter 6, place the current page in the front pocket and extras in the back pocket of the binder.

3. Label the folders.

- Label the plastic folders with the name of each hour or subject.
- Label the front pocket: "To Do"
- Label the back pocket: "Miscellaneous"

How to use the binder at school

Never put loose papers in your bag! Your books will crush them into pulp! Instead, slide all papers between the binder's cover and first folder. Organize them later, when you are not rushed.

- **Keep your binder accessible, where you can easily reach it**, such as on your desktop or use it as a lap desk.
- **To take notes, grab a blank sheet of notebook paper from behind your folders.** After you've taken notes, pop the paper into the binder, behind the subject folder.
- **Use the "To Do" pocket** to place papers that need your attention.
- **Use the back pocket for "miscellaneous" items** that aren't for a specific class, like planner forms, permission slips, and other papers.

How to use the binder at home

"Take two." When you start your homework, take the first two minutes to sort and organize any papers you slide into your binder earlier.

- **Keep your binder accessible.** Use it as a lap desk so—when you are done—you can quickly put papers away.
- **Pack your binder every evening.** Don't wait until morning when you're tired, groggy, and rushed!



Slide loose papers in your binder, *not* your bag!

How to organize “old” school papers

When your binder gets too full:

1. **Clean it out.** Remove papers from completed chapters but do NOT throw them away ...
2. **Create a home “paper station” for binder overflow.** Papers from completed chapters are your best study guide for big exams such as: unit tests, midterms, and final exams. Also, keep papers in case you need to politely dispute a grade.

How to create a home paper station

1. **Gather supplies:**
 - File folders (one for each class)
 - One container: file bin, shoe box, or hanging file (as pictured)
2. **Assemble:**
 - Label one file folder for each class: YYYY-YY SUBJECT. For example, “2052-53 MATH.”
 - Place them in your container.
 - Pick a specific place at home to keep these folders.

How to use a home paper station

- **Clean out your binder 1–2 times per quarter.**
- **Put “old” papers in your “paper station.”** Save all notes, handouts, and graded assignments in your Paper Station ...
- **Use graded assignments as “study guides”** for unit tests, mid-terms, or final exams. Where do you think teachers get the questions for these big exams?
- **Monitor your LMS gradebook; keep graded work in case you need to dispute a grade.** Gradebook errors are very common for a wide variety of reasons. Hold on to “old” work in case you need to politely dispute a grade.

Section C



Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Keep graded work and notes as study guides for exams and for potential grade disputes.

FAQs about organizing papers

Q: “My teacher requires a separate folder/binder for his class; he won’t let me use the SOAR Binder System.”

A: Most teachers just want you to be organized. Show your SOAR Binder to your teacher and ask if it’s okay to use. In over 20 years of teaching this method, only a few teachers have insisted on a separate binder.

If your teacher insists on a separate folder/binder, respect their wishes but continue using the SOAR Binder for your other classes. You are still far better off with only two items to manage versus the traditional stack of 12–18 folders and notebooks!

Q: “What if all my papers don’t fit in a 1.5-inch binder?”

A: Clean out your binder 1–2 times per quarter and move extra papers to your home paper station. Be sure to use loose-leaf paper, not spiral notebooks, in your binder. Following these tips should help everything fit in one binder.

Section D

Q: “My teacher prefers spiral notebooks and often collects them. What should I do?”

A: Ask your teacher if you can staple your notebook pages together and hand in the stack when notebooks are collected. Ultimately, a few stapled pages are much less bulk for your teacher to manage.

Section E

How to organize digital files

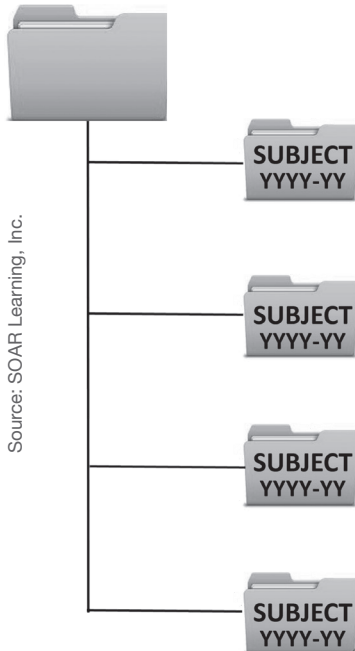
Create a file-structure

To organize digital files, create a file-structure that “matches” the binder:

1. **Create a master folder for the school year.** This folder is like a binder ... it holds folders for all of your classes.
 - Label this folder with the dates of the school year: YYYY–YY. For example: “2052–53.”
2. **Create one folder for each subject/class.** These folders are like the plastic binder pockets that hold files for each class.
 - Label these folders with the name of the subject/class and school year: subject YYYY–YY. For example, “Math 2052–53.”



Remember, over time, you'll have multiple folders for subjects like math, science, or English. Always include the school-year in the filenames (as pictured at left) so you can tell them apart when you have to search for files.



Match digital files to your binder. Create a school year master folder with class subfolders. Keep it simple to find files easily.



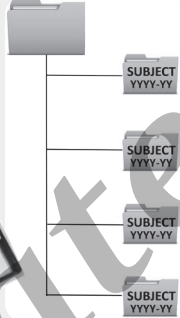
Avoid OVER-organizing!

Be careful not to over-organize your digital files:

- **Too many folders causes confusion.** It's easy to make lots of digital folders within folders. But doing this too much creates more places for files to hide, making it more difficult to find them!
- **Think of the binder;** just like you have one folder for each subject in your binder, try to do the same on your computer. Avoid making too many subfolders.
- **Add extra sub-folders only when really needed.** Sometimes you might need an extra layer of folders for a specific reason, such as a big project. That's okay, but only do this when it's really necessary.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible by ...

Identifying organizing blockers						Simplifying supplies	Matching our digital file-structure to our tangible binder
<p>1</p> <p>You go to multiple locations every day.</p> <p>No need to switch between various folders and notebooks for each class or homework; the single binder accompanies you everywhere.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>You are required to manage a LOT of supplies.</p> <p>One binder replaces 12-18 folders and notebooks!</p>	<p>3</p> <p>You are always rushed!</p> <p>When you are in a hurry, papers quickly slide into the binder.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Papers VANISH in a bookbag.</p> <p>The binder's easy access prevents shoving loose papers into your bookbag.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>All folders and notebooks look alike when stacked in lockers and bookbags.</p> <p>Having one binder eliminates the need to select different folders or notebooks during transitions.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Digital files are invisible.</p> <p>The binder's structure is replicated in digital form, simplifying the organization of digital files and enhancing their manageability.</p>	 <p>-VS-</p> 	
<p>Organization blockers are all invisible! But when we identify them (like being in a hurry or papers getting lost) we are better able to prevent and avoid them.</p>						<p>Reducing 12-16 folders and notebooks down to ONE binder allows us to SEE all our papers in one place, at one time.</p>	<p>This allows us to organize both analog papers and digital files in the same way.</p>

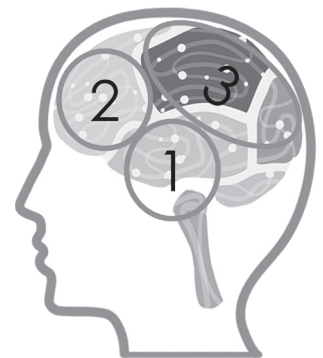
The brain on ... the SOAR Binder

The SOAR Binder system eases the load on the front brain by minimizing the steps for storing and accessing papers.

For instance, in class, filing a homework assignment in a traditional system involves about 22 actions to access the folder and store the paper.

The SOAR Binder reduces this process to five steps!

This means the SOAR Binder is 440% more efficient, or 440% less taxing on the front brain!



Source: iStockphoto ID 16855689

The SOAR Binder is 440% less taxing on the front brain than traditional organization systems.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

16. Losing your homework before you get home to do it?
17. Completing your homework but then lose it before you can turn it in?
18. Bringing the wrong folders/notebooks to class or struggling with an overly heavy bookbag?
19. Having difficulty keeping your digital and paper files organized and easily accessible?

Organize Your Space

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

20. Get distracted by clutter in your personal spaces and waste time searching for items?
21. Lose things or forget school supplies because of a messy bookbag?
22. Lose items and time due to a disorganized locker?

Section A

Source: Walmart



The silverware sorter illustrates two key principles of organization; everything needs a designated place, and it should be easy to access.

The basics of organizing: 2 principles & 4 steps

Cluttered spaces = cluttered minds

Having a tidy space helps you think clearly and perform better in school. If your bookbag, locker, bedroom, and study space are messy, it's:

1. Distracting, making it hard to focus, and
2. Easy to lose important stuff.

This guide will show you two main ideas and four steps to organize any space.

The two principles: The “silverware-sorter theory” of organization

Think about how a silverware-sorter in a kitchen drawer keeps forks, spoons, and knives in order.

This tool demonstrates two important rules of organizing:

1. Everything must have a designated place...
2. That place should be easy to reach.

In most homes, you can find the silverware quickly because it meets these two principles.

Even in messy places, the sorter makes it simple to keep silverware neat.

The four steps to organize any space

No matter what you're organizing, these four steps will help:

1. **Remove:** Get rid of things you don't use or need.
2. **Group:** Put similar things together. Our brains like categories, so it's easier to organize this way.
3. **Arrange:** Make sure everything has a spot and is easy to get to. If you have too much stuff, go back to step one.
4. **Maintain:** Keep things tidy by throwing away trash and putting things back where they belong.

This chapter will demonstrate how to use these steps for your personal area, study space, backpack, and locker.

How to Organize Your Space • A Step-by-Step Guide

personal space*	study space	bookbag	locker
Remove 1. Gather 4 large boxes or bins and label: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trash • Give Away • Somewhere Else • Not Sure 2. Do a “2-minute sweep” for trash. 3. Do a “2-minute sweep” for clothes; sort. 4. Start at left of doorway, work your way around the room, in small sections.	Remove 1. Remove everything from your study space, then add only what you want to display/use in your space. 2. Re-home, throw away, or give away items you did not put back in your study space.	Remove 1. Empty the bag. 2. Throw away all trash.	Remove 1. Empty the locker. 2. Throw away all trash.
Group/Categorize Group like items together, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes • Shoes • Bedding • School supplies/ papers • Computer, mouse, etc. • Electronic accessories • Stuffed animals • Trophies/awards • Oversized items Unsure about something? Place it the “Not Sure” box.	Group/Categorize Group like items according to function, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer • Charging station • Pens/pencils, etc. 	Group/Categorize Group like items together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Papers + binder • Pens/pencils • Books 	Group/Categorize Group books according to your schedule: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Morning” books • “Afternoon” books
Arrange Find a place for each group/category: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep “most used” items most accessible. • Revisit “Not Sure” box to put more away, then ... • Create a home for remaining “Not Sure” items. 	Arrange Find a place for the items you need in this space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep items accessible. • Make the space aesthetic and comfortable with organizational accessories, décor, lighting, etc. 	Arrange 1. Organize papers in your binder. 2. Place pens/pencils in a case or pocket of your bag. 3. Place remaining items in bag.	Arrange Place books by category, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Morning” books stacked on spine • “Afternoon” books lying flat
Maintain “Take Two!” — Every evening, take 2 minutes to tidy your space. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of trash; it is the #1 enemy of organization! 	Maintain “Take Two!” — Just before you start homework every day, take 2 minutes to tidy your study space.	Maintain “Take Two!” — As you start your daily homework, take 2 minutes to clean out trash and file papers in your binder.	Maintain “Take Two!” — Before you go home each day, take 2 minutes to clean out trash from your locker.

* Bedroom

For your convenience, this chapter is summarized in a printable Reference Guide, found at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

Section B

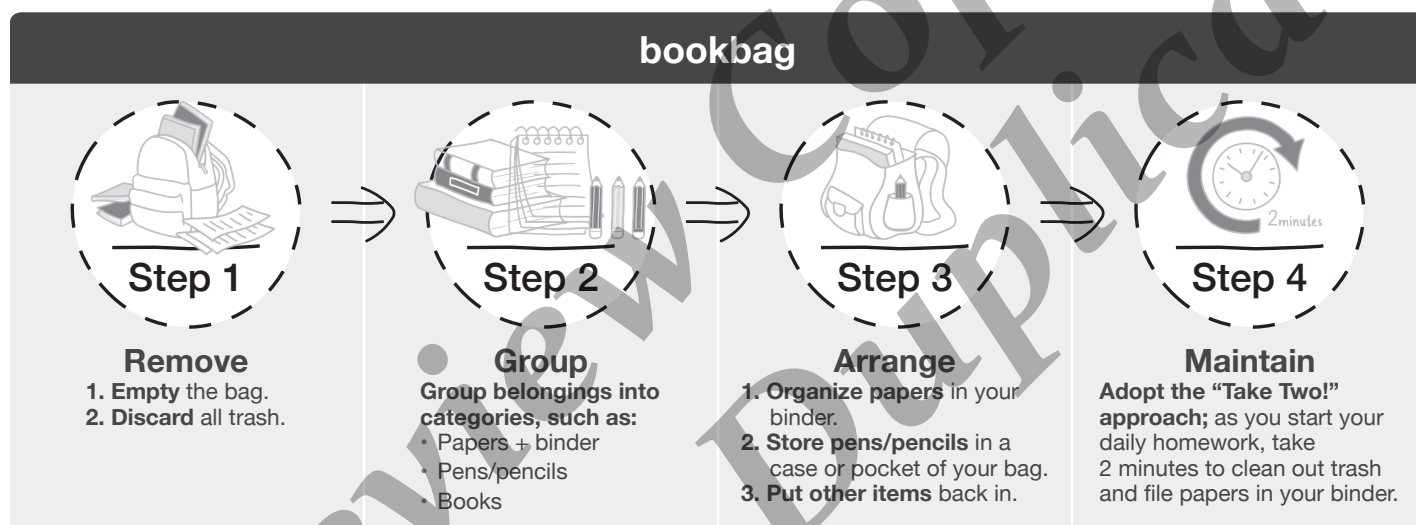
How to organize your bookbag

As a student, any time you are managing papers, you are in a HURRY! When you're rushing, it's easy to just throw papers into your backpack.

While this situation is understandable, it's also the primary reason why papers get lost. As you carry your bag from place to place, your binder and books bounce around, slowly crushing loose papers into pulp!

I've helped lots of students clean their backpacks and often find sections of crumpled worksheets stuck in the corners. Those worksheets were never turned in and have a "zero" in the gradebook.

The best way to avoid this problem is by using the SOAR Binder. When hurried, slide papers in your binder, between the cover and first folder. Organize them in the right folders, later!



Section C

How to organize your locker

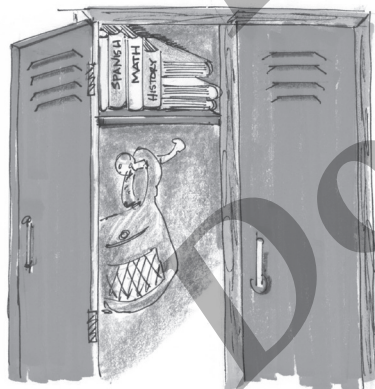
When you go to your locker, you're usually in a hurry to get somewhere else: your next class, lunch, home, etc.

However, at your locker, you must make important decisions about what to take and what to leave behind. Therefore, it's essential to keep it organized to quickly find what you need.

The most effective way to keep your locker organized is to avoid putting trash inside! Use the many trash bins around the school to throw away garbage. (Even better ... toss trash *before* you get to your locker!)

Next, place morning books upright, and afternoon books flat, with spines facing you. This placement helps you find/remove books faster because they're not in one big, heavy stack.

If your books have covers, label the spines and fronts so you don't pick the wrong ones.



The best way to organize your locker is to toss trash *before* you get to it!

locker



Step 1

Remove

1. Empty the locker.
2. Throw away all trash.



Step 2

Group

- Sort books according to your schedule, for example:
- “Morning” books
 - “Afternoon” books



Step 3

Arrange

- Stack “Morning” books upright.
- Lay “Afternoon” books flat.



Step 4

Maintain

- “Take Two!” Every day, before you go home, take 2 SECONDS to clear trash from your locker.

How to organize your personal space (bedroom)

Our bedroom is our personal “Mission Control,” and it’s key for organizing our life. A tidy room boosts confidence and efficiency, aiding in tasks like homework and getting ready for school.

In this section, we’ll cover a brief overview of how to organize your bedroom. Visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3) for a more comprehensive guide on How to Clean Your Bedroom.

Section D

To prepare ...

1. Consider finding a helper to keep you focused and assist in decisions about belongings and their disposal.
2. Gather four boxes to sort items. Label them:
 - Trash
 - Somewhere Else
 - Give Away
 - Not Sure

personal space (bedroom)



Step 1

Remove

1. Conduct two “2-minute sweeps” for visible clothes and trash. This quick process makes most rooms 50% cleaner.
2. Declutter section by section. Start at your door and go counterclockwise, working in small sections around your room.



Step 2

Group

Group belongings into categories, such as:

- Clothes
- Computer/tablet, mouse, mouse pad, headset, etc.
- Additional electronic accessories (cords, chargers, adapters, etc.)
- Stuffed animals
- Blankets and bedding
- Awards/trophies
- Notes and pictures of friends
- Sports equipment
- Music instruments and accessories
- School supplies (including your Home Paper Station)
- Books
- Supplies/materials for a special hobby



Step 3

Arrange

Everything should have an accessible “home.” Highly accessible storage includes hooks and open bins, while less accessible areas are used for infrequently used items. Utilize vertical and wall space for better organization.

- Establish a “Not Sure” basket for undecided items, clearing it monthly. This helps contain clutter.
- Create Spaces for the “Three Stages of Clothes:”
 - » **Dirty clothes:** Designate a spot for washing.
 - » **Clean clothes:** Identify a temporary holding space.
 - » **Clothes in limbo:** Set up hooks or a chair for worn but not dirty clothes.



Step 4

Maintain

Every day, “Take Two” minutes to do a daily sweep of your room. Develop a routine, ideally before bed, to maintain organization. This step is easier with accessible storage solutions.

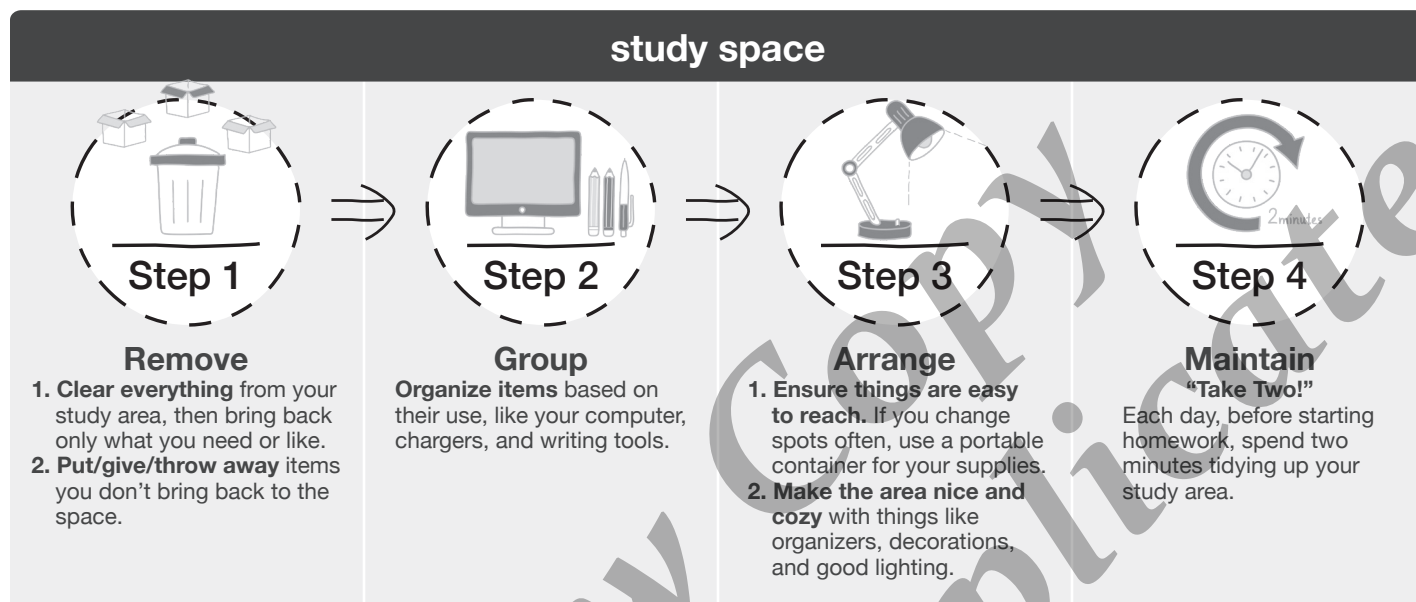
* See the Ease-of-Access Scale at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3) for guidance.

Section E

How to organize your study space

Having a specific spot for homework, away from distractions, is really helpful. You can even change this place occasionally for a fresh feel and new motivation.

To set up your study space effectively, follow these steps:



Section F

The 80/20 of organizing your spaces

The 80/20 Power Strategy of organizing is so important that it deserves its own section ...

Manage trash!

Usually, the main clutter in spaces like bedrooms, study areas, and lockers is simply *trash*. Once trash begins to accumulate, other clutter quickly follows! (This is a scientific phenomenon known as "chaos theory.")

Items enter our lives easily but are more difficult to remove. The main way homes and schools regularly get rid of things is through trash removal. Take advantage of this "automatic" system and make it a daily habit to collect and discard trash from your spaces.

At each anchor point, trash removal will take no more than two minutes!



Once trash begins to accumulate, other clutter quickly follows!

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible visible with ...

A metaphor

The silverware-sorter metaphor shows the two core principles of organizing: everything must have a home and be easily accessible.



A pattern

On one hand, this chapter lists dozens of “steps.” However, it’s only FOUR steps, repeated across different contexts. The chart makes this pattern visible.

Personal Space	Study Space	Tidy Space	Tidy Space
Personalize 1. Create a space for you. 2. Make it your own. 3. Keep it clean. 4. Make it a place you want to be. 5. Make it a place you can work in. 6. Make it a place you can study in. 7. Make it a place you can relax in. 8. Make it a place you can sleep in. 9. Make it a place you can live in. 10. Make it a place you can love in.	Study 1. Create a space for you. 2. Make it your own. 3. Keep it clean. 4. Make it a place you want to be. 5. Make it a place you can work in. 6. Make it a place you can study in. 7. Make it a place you can relax in. 8. Make it a place you can sleep in. 9. Make it a place you can live in. 10. Make it a place you can love in.	Tidy 1. Create a space for you. 2. Make it your own. 3. Keep it clean. 4. Make it a place you want to be. 5. Make it a place you can work in. 6. Make it a place you can study in. 7. Make it a place you can relax in. 8. Make it a place you can sleep in. 9. Make it a place you can live in. 10. Make it a place you can love in.	Tidy 1. Create a space for you. 2. Make it your own. 3. Keep it clean. 4. Make it a place you want to be. 5. Make it a place you can work in. 6. Make it a place you can study in. 7. Make it a place you can relax in. 8. Make it a place you can sleep in. 9. Make it a place you can live in. 10. Make it a place you can love in.

The brain on ... an organized space

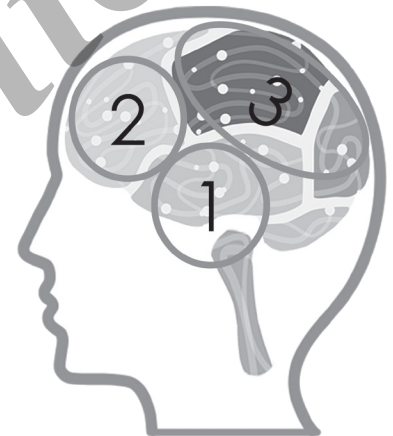
Pause and look around your current environment:

- What type of flooring is in the room?
- What color is the lighting?
- What color are the walls?
- What is hanging on the walls?
- What other objects are in the room?
- Is there background noise?
- What is the temperature?
- Is there a window? What is happening outside?

Before these prompts, you were probably not fully aware of these details. That is because our brains avoid overwhelm by ignoring unneeded input. This process of tuning things out is called “dampening.”

Even when we are not focused on something, our brain is still working—or using power—to ignore it, or dampen our awareness of it. When our environment is cluttered, our brain uses power to dampen everything that doesn’t require our focus.

Organized, pleasant environments reduce this response, freeing up mental resources for learning.



Source: iStockphoto ID 16856689

“Dampening” helps our brain ignore unnecessary input to avoid overwhelm. Organized spaces reduces the brain power needed for dampening.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

20. Getting distracted by clutter in your personal spaces and wasting time searching for items?
21. Losing things or forgetting school supplies because of a messy bookbag?
22. Losing items and time due to a disorganized locker?

Organize Your Time & Manage Stress

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

- 23. Feel rushed and/or stressed getting ready for school in the morning?
- 24. Miss fun activities because homework and school take up too much time?
- 25. Feel stressed or overwhelmed by your daily and school tasks?

Author's note

When I was in 3rd grade, I must have been a disaster! I don't remember why, but something prompted my teacher, Mrs. Turner, to pull me aside for a one-on-one chat. She suggested that I prepare for the next day (pack my bookbag, make my lunch, and set out my clothes) before going to bed that night.

It was such a simple tip, it's hard to believe how much it revolutionized my life! That small strategy transformed my mornings, making them easier and less stressful. In turn, my days were smoother and more productive. I got more work done in school, so I had less homework and more free time!

This discovery of life "hacks" sparked my lifelong search for efficiencies and inspired me to create this book. Thanks to Mrs. Turner, this tip—and many more—are shared in this chapter ...

Section A



Source: theapollobox.com

If a jar represents 24 hours, this chapter is about how to design it to fit all you need and want to do.

Seek efficiency

In a previous chapter, "Schedule Time to Take Action," we learned how to plan events and tasks within our available time. We compared this to filling a jar with rocks, pebbles, and water, where the jar is our 24-hour day, and the rocks, pebbles, and water are our daily activities.

This chapter is not about what fills our day. It's about planning our days to fit everything with ease. In other words, if a jar represents 24 hours to fill with events and tasks ... this chapter is about how to design our "jar" so that it can comfortably accommodate everything we want to do.

The key here isn't just to do more. It's about doing more *with ease*. Our goal is "Better grades in less time." We'll achieve this by seeking efficiency ...

What is efficiency?

Efficiency means achieving the best results with minimal time, effort, and resources. It's about removing unhelpful steps in a process.

Efficiency is the focus of “life-hacks” (tips to boost productivity) shared on social media. Sites like LifeHack.org offer many such tricks.

Efficiency is about working smart, not hard. By definition, it’s about making things easier. Yet we often overlook it, assuming better results requires more effort.

The main point of this chapter is to recognize efficiency and seek ways to be more efficient. More effort never guarantees better results. This chapter shares small life-hacks to help you design your days more efficiently.

Efficiency means achieving the best results with minimal effort.



Source: LifeHack.org

Reduce distractions

Efficiency means cutting out waste in a process, like distractions that use up time and energy without helping us achieve our goals. Imagine your day as a jar; distractions are what you should keep out. However, distractions often flood into our lives, as mentioned in Chapter 6 about anti-priorities.

To stop these distractions, build a “dam” to keep them at bay. Here are some ways to keep distractions out:

- Avoid multitasking
- Set your environment
- Use music & sounds that promote focus
- Power down

Avoid Multitasking

In today’s world, where distractions are constant, focusing on a single task like schoolwork can feel strange and even uncomfortably “empty.” To fill this void, we attempt to multitask, like watch videos or listen to music while studying.

But in reality, our brain can only concentrate on one thinking task at a time. What looks like multitasking is actually our brain rapidly switching between tasks, like rapid-fire ping-pong! It may seem to make studying less boring but it actually slows us down and decreases work quality.

Multitasking is fine for simple routines, such as listening to music while getting ready for school. However, it’s a problem for tasks requiring thought. Research shows that multitasking:

1. Drains extra brain energy, causing fatigue.
2. Increases task time by 40–500%.
3. Leads to twice as many mistakes.
4. Blocks the “flow state” of deep engagement and energy, preventing optimal performance.

Use music & sounds that promote focus

When we remove all distractions, the silence often feels uneasy. Ever been in a quiet place and felt something was missing, or heard a “buzzing” due to the *lack* of noise? If complete silence throws you off, try listening to something *specifically made* to boost focus and concentration. You can easily find these



Source: Canva

Multitasking is NOT doing multiple things at one time, it is mental ping-pong, constantly shifting attention. This drains energy and reduces efficiency.

Section B



To boost focus, use sounds specifically made to boost concentration. Search “music for concentration” or “binaural beats” to find options.

tracks on most media platforms by searching “music for concentration” or “binaural beats for concentration.”

ONLY use tracks designed for this purpose; all others are distracting!

These soundtracks do more than just fill the silence; they can significantly boost your focus. There’s scientific reasoning behind how certain sounds enhance concentration, but it’s a bit complex for the scope of this book. (If you are curious, ask a search engine, “How do binaural beats help me focus?”) In short, these sounds can be a great tool when you need quiet time to concentrate.

Set your environment

Distractions can come from many places: our devices, family members, or others’ devices like the TV. While we can’t eliminate them entirely, we can create an environment that minimizes distractions:

1. **Pick a study area.** Choose a private and comfortable spot for studying.
2. **Notify your family.** Tell and text your family when you’re studying. Hang a sign on your door.
1. **Use a headset.** Even without playing anything, a headset reduces background noise, helps you focus, and shows others you don’t want to be disturbed.
2. **Focus with “concentration” music** or sounds, as noted.
3. **Power down,** as discussed in the next section.

Power down

If we do not control our devices, they control us!

“Power down” means deliberately reducing electronic distractions when we need to concentrate.

It’s tough because our devices are useful and engaging, but they can also be big distractions. They offer endless interesting things that can seem more appealing than homework and send constant notifications that chip away at our focus.

So, turning off or limiting these devices during study times can really help.

Effective power-down strategies

1. **Turn off devices.** Ideally, switch off all devices or leave them in another room while studying.
2. **Stay proactive!** If you need your computer for homework, close irrelevant apps, programs, and browser tabs.
3. **Use airplane mode.** Put your mobile devices in airplane mode to avoid interruptions.
4. **Disable notifications** on all devices to maintain focus.
5. **Block distractions.** Consider using blocker apps to avoid accidental browsing or app usage.

..... ○
INTENTIONALLY CREATE
a space that minimizes
distractions.



If we do not control our devices,
our devices will control us!

Source: Unknown

Benefits of powering down

At first, powering-down feels very “unfun.” But it has a dramatic impact! Powering down:

1. **Boosts productivity.** Without distractions, you will get more done in less time!
2. **Enhances focus.** It can lead to a state of ‘flow’, where you’re deeply engaged and more efficient.
3. **Reduces dread.** Homework becomes less daunting without constant distractions.
4. **Frees up time.** More efficiency means more time for personal interests and relaxation.



Powering down helps us enter a productive “Flow State,” where time flies and work gets done quickly!

Optimize your time

“Optimize” means to get the greatest possible value out of our time.

We can optimize our time by:

- Making use of time that is otherwise wasted, and by
- Doing tasks more efficiently

The four areas of optimization we will focus on are:

- Use down-time
- Do homework early
- Layer learning
- Use a timer



Source: Canva

Use down-time in school to optimize productivity!

Use down-time

In a typical school day, only about 50–60% of time is spent productively. The rest is often “down-time,” such as waiting for attendance, interruptions, or other students. Rather than defaulting to mobile devices during these lulls, use down-time to significantly boost productivity!

Examples of down-time:

- Waiting for class to start or end.
- During attendance or teacher interruptions.
- While others catch up or settle down.
- En route to/from school or waiting for after-school activities.

Effective use of down-time

Some examples of how to effectively use down-time include:

- Organize papers or review class notes.
- Preview upcoming sections in textbooks, especially visuals.
- Tackle a few problems from math homework.
- Research and record a few definitions from English class.

Future chapters in this book will introduce efficient learning strategies, perfect for maximizing these small chunks of time.



NOTE: Balance down-time between productivity and socializing; both are important.

Do homework early

The earlier you start and complete your homework, the faster it will go! Procrastinating can lead to fatigue, making tasks take longer.

Though beginning immediately after school might seem tough, upcoming strategies will ease the process. Plus, using just a bit of down-time at school means less work at home!

Layer learning

As introduced in Chapter 3, learning is most efficiently done in layers; that is, when done in smaller sections rather than in one extensive session.

Two effective strategies for “layering learning” are:

1. **“Read the visuals”** (coming up in Chapter 10)—Maximizes time efficiency, particularly when done *before* class discussions.
2. **“Jeopardy notes”** (coming up in Chapter 12)—A quick method to understand and review class notes. Ideally, review within 24 hours to avoid cramming and minimize study time.



IMPORTANT: To prevent distractions, avoid timers on mobile devices. Instead, use a kitchen timer, available for a few dollars from retailers such as Amazon.

Use a timer

Boost productivity by setting a timer for homework tasks. Break larger assignments into 30-minute segments, then set a timer and try to complete each segment before time runs out. This method boosts efficiency as:

1. **It keeps you focused** and less prone to distractions.
2. **It reduces anxiety** by focusing on 30-minute chunks.
3. **It energizes your brain**, as the challenge of beating the timer stimulates the production of brain-boosting chemicals!

Section D

Develop routines

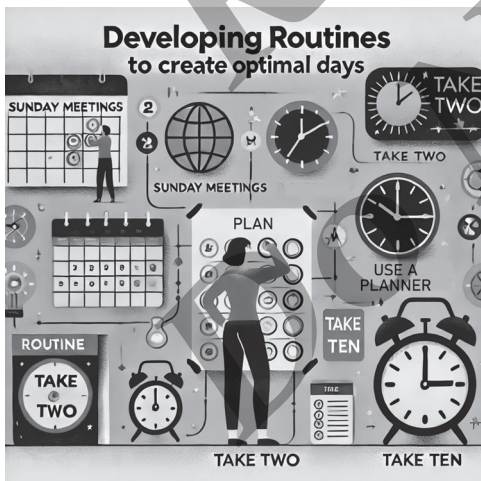
To create optimal days, establish routines.

Routines are repetitive tasks, often done at the same time, which eventually evolve into habits.

A habit is a task so frequently performed that it requires minimal mental effort. When practiced regularly, routines *can* become habits.

The routines most useful to students include:

- Initiate Sunday meetings
- Use a planner
- Prep “the night before”
- “Take Two”
- “Take Ten”



Source: ChatGPT

Initiate Sunday meetings

As noted in Chapter 6, weekly planning is the most important “time-management” hack because it prompts us to notice and PREVENT problems before they catch us off-guard.

By avoiding problems, we save time, reduce stress, and make life easier ... ultimately leading to more joy.

Most importantly, these meetings foster proactive and healthy communication within families!



80/20 Power Strategy
Initiate Sunday meetings

Use a planner

Highlighted in Chapter 6, using a planner daily is key for time-and-stress management. At “anchor points” throughout your day, take a few seconds to jot down tasks or check details.



Prep “the night before”

Mornings are difficult and unpredictable. We are often groggy and rushed. Plus, we never know when we might wake up late or have something unexpected happen, like our dog running away. (True story!)

This chaos leads to common excuses like “I couldn’t find my homework” or “I forgot my gym shoes.”

But the solution is simple ... prepare the night before!

1. **Check your binder** to ensure all papers are correctly filed.
2. **Review your planner** for completed tasks.
3. **Pack your bag** with all necessary supplies, including books, binders, and any gear for extracurricular activities.
4. **Place supplies by the exit door:** your bag, coat, shoes, and any additional gear.
5. **Select your clothes for the next day**, resolving any issues like missing items or laundry needs in the evening.

This simple preparation reduces morning stress and potential mishaps.

Take Two™

“Take Two” means taking just two minutes for quick, impactful tasks.

Everyday, take two minutes (or less) to:

- **Record homework** in your planner at the end of each class.
- **Clear trash** from your locker.
- **Organize your bookbag and binder** before starting homework.
- **Tidy your study area** after homework, readying it for tomorrow.
- **Prepare for the next school day** before bedtime.
- **Tidy your bedroom** each night.

The combined total of these two-minute (or less!) tasks is around 20 minutes. This is just 1.4% of your day, yet this time significantly boosts your organization, productivity, and energy. That’s a small investment for a great return!



NOTE: It takes time for daily checks to become habits, but soon this routine will ease your brain’s burden of remembering details and deadlines.

Take Ten™

“Take Ten” is a ten-minute daily routine for homework. Start by spending two minutes to tidy your bookbag and organize your binder. Then, add eight more minutes (often less) for two key tasks:

1. **Review the notes** you took in class that day.
2. **Preview the visuals** from the textbook sections your teachers might discuss the next day, if possible.

If you use some down-time in school and strategies in the following chapters of this book, “Take Ten” may often be your only homework!

Section E

Manage stress & energy

Stress is our body’s reaction to past, present, or future events. Stress has multiple layers; it is usually triggered when we feel several negative emotions and fueled by a sense of pressure to do something or avoid something.

When we are stressed, the Emotional Center feels threatened and pulls chemicals from all other parts of the brain to alert for more threats. When that happens, learning becomes biologically *impossible*!

Therefore, we must get our emotions/Emotional Center out of the “red alert” zone into the “green zone.” While this program offers strategies to lessen school-related stress, it’s impossible to eliminate all stress. Therefore, this section provides techniques to effectively *manage* stress:

- Tame it.
- Name it.
- Claim it.

Tame it.

To reduce stress, we must interrupt its cycle by calming our body and brain.

The most effective way is through movement that elevates our heart-rate (aerobic movement). Examples include: walking, running, or jumping jacks.

Aerobic movement causes our brain to create new chemicals that counteract stress and boost happiness. Any aerobic exercise, from a quick 30-second burst to a 30-minute session, can disrupt the stress cycle.

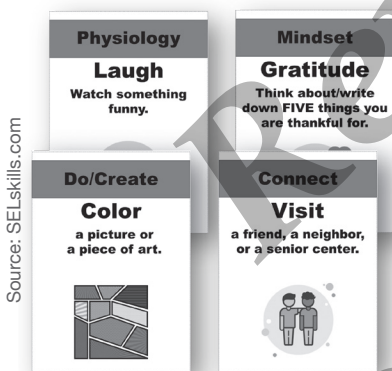
In the heat of stress, remembering management techniques can be challenging. For this reason, we provide printable “coping cards” that provide suggestions on actions you can take to minimize your stress. Print and cut these coping cards so you have them ready to reference the next time you feel stressed.

To download the Coping Cards, visit StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

Name it.

Next, we need to identify the specific emotions we are feeling.

Recognizing these emotions is essential to determine their triggers and ultimately resolve the root cause of stress.

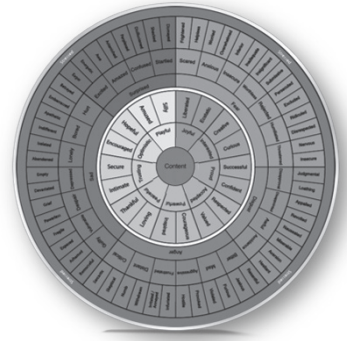


Tame it. For quick stress-management tips, print our “coping cards” from StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

This process requires some space and time to reflect. It also requires words to describe our specific emotions. To assist with this process, we have created a printable “Feelings Wheel.”

Print this tool and use it to help you NAME the specific emotions layered under your anxiety and stress.

To download the Feelings Wheel, visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).



Source: SELskills.com



Source: SELskills.com

Claim it.

To manage stress, “claim it” by taking ownership and acting to alter both your feelings and the situation. Actions can include adjusting expectations, changing processes, shifting your attitude, or using stress positively. Included with the Coping Cards are “Claim it” cards, identifiable by a yellow band, offering various actions to help reframe and tackle your stress.

Name it. Use our printable Feelings Wheel to identify emotions and resolve stress. Download at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

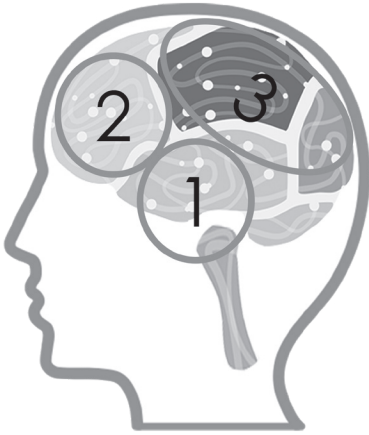
Claim it: Use the yellow “Claim it” cards to take ownership and reframe your stress.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible with:

a jar	a word	tools
 <p>The jar metaphor from Chapter 6 represents the 24 hours in a day. This chapter's puzzle jar represents how various “pieces” can be arranged to design our day.</p>	<p>Efficiency</p> <p>The concept of “efficiency” reminds us that better results don’t always require more work. It is possible to work smarter, not harder.</p>	 <p>Our Coping Cards are tangible tools that help us control our emotions and handle stress effectively.</p>

Source: iStockphoto ID 16855689



Interruption tax: Distractions drain brain energy by forcing it to repeatedly rebuild neuron connections.

The brain on ... distractions

When we are focused on a task, millions of our brain neurons connect in a constant flow, allowing us to do the task.

When we are distracted, those connections are all broken!

Then, to process and respond to the distraction, our brain forms a whole new set of neuron connections!

Then, to return to the original task, our brain must REbuild all neuron connections needed for the original task.

These hidden costs of brain energy are an “interruption tax,” because interruptions are 10x more taxing on our brain than what we see or hear!

For example, we often think “notifications” on electronic devices are just a “quick interruption.” Instead, the multiple transitions from our work, to notifications, then back to work each drain a LOT of power from our brain!

The brain on ... efficiency

This one is very simple...

The more efficient a task is, the less power our brain needs to do the task.

Enough said.

The brain on ... routines & habits

Our Front Brain handles decisions, but runs out of power quickly!

Routines are repeated actions that require fewer and fewer decisions each time. With every repetition, the Front Brain uses less power. Eventually, the Front Brain delegates these actions to the more stable Back Brain; it is when the Back Brain takes over that a routine has become a habit.

The brain on ... stress

As noted earlier, stress triggers our Emotional Center to perceive threats. The Emotional Center then redirects energy from cognitive functions to survival instincts, making it biologically impossible to learn.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

23. Feeling rushed and/or stressed getting ready for school in the morning?
24. Missing fun activities because homework and school take up too much time?
25. Feeling stressed or overwhelmed by your daily and school tasks?

SOAR

Ask
*questions***Low-Gear *vs* High-Gear Learning**

I live in Detroit. If I want to drive to Chicago (300 miles away), I can take one of two routes: an old country road or the interstate freeway. The country road has speed limits from 25–55 mph. It also has several intersections and stops, making the journey slow and inefficient.

In contrast, the interstate freeway has a steady speed limit of 75 mph, with no stops. Clearly, this option is faster and more efficient. It's also cheaper and less taxing on my vehicle.

When it comes to studying, most would prefer the “interstate freeway” option—what I call “high-gear” learning. This approach is faster, uses less brain power, and causes less wear-and-tear on your energy, attitude, and emotions! In fact, when we shift into high-gear learning, we will actually feel more energetic! Unfortunately, traditional schooling emphasizes “low-gear” learning, like memorization, which is slow, boring, and inefficient.



Q: How do we shift into high-gear learning?

A: We *ask questions*.

Questions automatically connect new information to our prior knowledge, making learning “instant” and energizing!

*In this unit, we learn **how** to learn with efficient strategies ...*

CHAPTER 10: How to Read Textbooks & Nonfiction

CHAPTER 11: How to Communicate with Teachers & Peers

CHAPTER 12: How to Listen & Take Notes

CHAPTER 13: How to Study & Learn New Terms

CHAPTER 14: How to Take Tests

CHAPTER 15: How to Write Papers

CHAPTER 16: How to Learn Grammar & Punctuation

CHAPTER 17: How to Give Presentations

How to Read Textbooks & Nonfiction



NOTE: Nonfiction is about real information. I remember it as “**N**ot **F**alse” or “**N**ot **F**antasy.”

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

26. Feel overwhelmed or bored when reading textbooks?
27. Need a long time to read nonfiction, particularly textbooks?
28. Find it difficult to understand or remember content from textbooks and nonfiction?

Author’s note

When I learned “study skills” in college, it was the strategies in this chapter that I learned first. They were quick and easy to do, yet they instantly doubled my reading speed *and* comprehension!

In other words, my total reading time was cut in half, while my understanding skyrocketed!

For me, “cracking the code” on how to read text that is challenging (and boring) made everything about managing school and learning so much easier, it was like gaining an extra superpower!

Over time, I hope you find these strategies as life-changing as I did.

Section A

What is it REALLY like to read a textbook?

1. Turn to page 160; look at the picture on that page. In only five seconds, make as many observations as you can.
2. Now, answer as many questions as you can on page 77, in the sidebar.
3. Check your answers at the bottom of page 160.

What’s the point?

The five questions on the following page are very simple. But most people struggle to get just one or two correct.

Why the challenge?

The photo has a lot going on! It’s hard to answer questions because there are so many details and you don’t know WHAT to focus on. It would be much easier if you first knew where to focus your attention.



Like a busy photo, textbooks can overwhelm us if we don’t know where to focus.

This busy photo represents how we usually read textbooks—without knowing what is important. Textbooks feel just as overwhelming as this photo! We get so overwhelmed because we don't know where to focus our attention.

As a result, we don't understand anything! For this reason, many students don't bother even bother to read their textbooks.

Three points of *friction* in nonfiction reading

When reading nonfiction, three factors work against us:

- **The “readability level” of the text is often 1–2 grades higher than its target level** because of technical terms. For example, a text for a 9th-grade class usually has a readability level of 10–11th grade.
- **We don't KNOW much about the topic.** Learning new things requires connecting to what we already know. If we lack prior knowledge, it's hard to make these connections.
- **We don't CARE much about the topic.** Our interest activates the emotional center of our brain, which provides fuel to power connections. Without this extra boost, our brains may not have enough power to forge connections with new information.

These factors create friction in understanding nonfiction. This chapter shows how “asking questions” helps us overcome these challenges!

Questions

For Step 2 (from the previous page), answer the following questions:

1. What is centered directly above the man's head?
2. What toy is directly above his left shoulder (on the right side of the photo)?
3. Was the snake hanging over his head striped or spotted?
4. How many times is the word “light” visible in this photo?
5. How many fish are in the package on the right side of the picture?

Why “ask questions” to improve reading comprehension and speed?

Section B

The **PROCESS** of creating questions improves reading speed and comprehension in several ways:

1. **Questions connect new information to our prior knowledge**, which is how we learn. Questions naturally bridge known to new stuff, while activating neurons that are thirsty to find answers.
2. **It is the fastest and most consistent way for our brains to make learning connections.** The strategy works quickly, with any text, and is easy to remember.
3. **It engages our brain and helps us focus.** The process instantly shifts our brain into “high gear.” Instead of just passively looking at information, it turns reading into a dialogue with the text, where we actively create questions, then seek answers.

Section C

Step 1: (Before reading) Read the visuals.

Leverage the visuals! Text requires layers of decoding, but our brains *instantly* understand visuals. Plus, visuals usually contain 40–60% of the information in a textbook.

This three-step process, called *visual networking*, is done BEFORE reading:

1. **Look at each visual**, including: photos, illustrations, diagrams, graphs, charts, etc. Each visual is specifically selected to improve understanding of the text.
2. **Read the caption** for details linking the visual to the text.
3. **Connect the visual to the topic**. Ask yourself, “Why is this visual here? How does it relate to the chapter’s title?” As you answer your own questions, you are making the vital connections between the new information and your prior knowledge.

For example ...

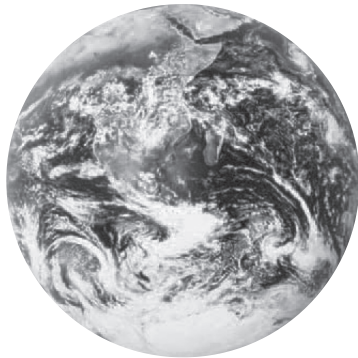
- A. **Look at each visual**. In our example, start by looking at the first visual in the section; it is an image of a globe.
- B. **Read the caption**. In our example, the caption reads, “_____.”
- C. **Connect the visual to the chapter’s topic** by asking *and* answering, “Why is this visual here? How does it relate to the chapter’s title?” For example, in a chapter titled “The Earth System,” you might note, “This image shows the Earth, and the chapter is about ‘The Earth’s System.’”

This step may seem overly simple, but this is when your brain makes the critical connections. Don’t skip it!

Complete these three steps in under 30 seconds per image.

For example, the chapter pictured includes five images; that’s a total of 2.5 minutes to preview this chapter.

After using this strategy 2–3×, your reading speed and comprehension will skyrocket ... all from taking just 2–3 minutes to read the visuals!



This image is from a section titled, “The Earth’s System.” The caption says, “The view from space shows that water covers most of the Earth’s surface.”

How could this image be connected to the main topic of this section?



80/20 Power Strategy
Read the visuals

In most textbooks, visuals occupy 40–60% of the space, highlighting their significant role in enhancing comprehension.



Step 2: (Before reading) ... Read the summary questions.

In most cases, the summary questions won't even make sense to us ... until *after* we've read the visuals!

But, in just 2–3 minutes of “reading visuals,” we can usually answer about 50% of the summary questions, in full! Stop and appreciate what a dynamic boost this, alone, already is to our comprehension!

For the other 50%, we typically have *partial* answers; which now gives us major insights on where to focus our attention when reading the text.

Next, review summary questions to identify key points. You can answer about 50% just from reading the visuals!

Section D

Energy and Matter Flow in the Biosphere

Energy enters the biosphere as sunlight. Plants change this energy into chemical energy through the process of photosynthesis. Then, the energy is passed to organisms that eat the plants. Energy and matter is also passed between organisms when they eat one another. The transfer of energy and matter does not stop when a living thing dies. Dead organisms are consumed by decomposers, such as bacteria and fungi. The decomposers break down the remains into simple materials. These materials, such as carbon dioxide, are used by plants to make food during photosynthesis.

Section Review

Summary

- The four divisions of Earth are the hydrosphere, atmosphere, geosphere, and biosphere.
- The geosphere is divided into layers based on composition and physical properties.
- Convection moves energy through the atmosphere and through the hydrosphere.
- Energy in the biosphere is transferred from the sun to plants and then from one organism to another.

Using Vocabulary

- Write an original definition for each word and its meaning.
- Identifying: Identify the layers of Earth by their composition and physical properties.
- Describing: Describe how energy is transferred in the ocean and in the atmosphere.
- Identifying: Identify the layer of the atmosphere in which we live.
- Analyzing: Explain how energy from the sun supports life on Earth.
- Listing: List two factors that are needed to support life.
- Summarizing: Describe the energy flow in the biosphere.

Analyzing Ideas How might Earth be different if the surface were heated evenly?

Evaluating Sources From what source do most organisms on Earth get their energy?

Making Calculations If Earth's atmosphere is 100 km thick and life is found up to 10 km, what percentage of the atmosphere contains life?

Evaluating Conclusions The uneven heating of Earth's surface causes convection currents in the ocean and in the atmosphere. Explain why Earth's surface is heated unevenly even though the sun's energy output is mostly constant.

Critical Thinking

Applying Concepts What is the main reason of energy that powers the convection currents in the atmosphere and oceans?

Section Review

For a sample of this section see the chapter 10 review on page 100.

Source: Holt Publishing Company

Step 3: Turn headings and subheadings into questions, then read to find the answers.

Transform each heading or subheading into a question, then read the text to answer it. The following chart illustrates examples of questions made from the headings pictured, right.

Heading/subheading	Possible Questions
The Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the atmosphere? • Why is the atmosphere important?
Layers in the Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are layers in the atmosphere? • Why are layers in the atmosphere important?
Energy Flow in the Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How/why does energy flow in the atmosphere?

This strategy focuses our attention like a “heat-seeking missile” because it gives our brain a purpose for reading. It turns a “boring chore” into an “active conversation” with the text and is a very effective shortcut!

Once a heading question can be answered, move on to the next heading/subheading. (You don't have to read every word ... unless you want to!)

Section E

Figure 3 Clouds, such as these over the Sierra Nevada range, are usually found in the lowest atmospheric layer, the troposphere.

The Atmosphere

The atmosphere is a mixture of invisible gases that surround Earth. The atmosphere extends outward to about 100 km from the surface of Earth. But most of the atmosphere gases lie within 8 to 12 km of Earth's surface. Earth's atmosphere is made up of four layers.

Quick Lab

Rising Heat

- Turn on a hot plate.
- While wearing heat-resistant gloves, hold a feather 5 cm above the hot plate. Hold another feather 5 cm above and 10 cm to the left of the hot plate.
- Do you notice a difference between the two feathers? Record your observations.
- Write an explanation of your observations. How might this lab relate to the flow of energy in the atmosphere?

Layers in the Atmosphere

The troposphere is the atmospheric layer in which we live. It extends outward to about 12 km from Earth's surface. Weather phenomena, such as the clouds shown in Figure 3, usually occur in the troposphere. The stratosphere is the layer directly above the troposphere. Temperatures in the stratosphere increase with altitude. Above the stratosphere is the mesosphere, which is the coldest layer of the atmosphere. Above the mesosphere is the thermosphere, which is the uppermost layer of the atmosphere. Like temperatures in the stratosphere, temperatures in the thermosphere increase with altitude.

Energy Flow in the Atmosphere

The sun transfers the main source of energy that reaches Earth's surface. Solar radiation heats Earth's surface unevenly. This uneven heating causes the air in the atmosphere to move. For example, cold air is denser than warm air. So, cold air in the atmosphere sinks. As the cold air sinks, it forces warm, less-dense air out of the way. This movement of air distributes energy throughout the atmosphere. The transfer of energy, especially heat, due to the movement of matter, such as air, is called convection.

Section Review

Explain how energy is distributed in the atmosphere.

Source: Holt Publishing Company

Step 3 gives our brain a purpose for reading.

Section F

How to read “other” nonfiction: online text, non-illustrated nonfiction, etc.

How to read online text

Online texts differ from traditional textbooks, but we can adapt these strategies for the digital landscape:

A. Before reading

1. **Read the visuals.** Scroll through the FULL screen to locate all visuals, then use the same three-step process:
 - a. Look at each visual.
 - b. Read its caption.
 - c. Connect each visual to the chapter’s title/topic.

For videos:

- Watch videos shorter than 2 minutes at a faster speed (1.25x–1.5x).
 - For longer videos, read the title, caption, or description, and relate it to the chapter’s main topic.
2. **Read the summary questions** ... *only* if they are accessible in two clicks or less. If not, proceed to the next step.

B. While reading

3. **Change headings and subheadings into questions, then read to find the answers.** Apply this “ask question-answer question” method for active reading throughout the text.

How to read non-illustrated nonfiction

Reading nonfiction with little or no visuals is a bit more challenging, but not by much. Remember, the key is to “ask questions.” So, here’s how to adapt this strategy:

A. Before reading

Choose 2–3 of the following “before reading” strategies that best suit your material. Limit this prep to 10 minutes.

- **Read the front and back book cover, if applicable.** If it’s a digital book, check online descriptions.
- **Find images for yourself.** Do an online search of images for the topic or book-title. Scan through the results, asking yourself questions about how various images may connect to the topic.

For example, I recently did a quick image search for a book my friend suggested. Most images were NOT useful; 90% were repetitive cover photos and 5% were irrelevant. However, the remaining 5%—memes with book quotes and images of the author’s other works—offered very insightful clues! In just two minutes, these visuals boosted my understanding.

- **Read reviews.** The “top ranked” reviews on sites such as Amazon, GoodReads, etc. provide useful summaries and insights.

- **Brainstorm questions you expect the book to answer.** You will be amazed how powerful this simple task is for boosting reading speed and understanding!

B. While reading ...

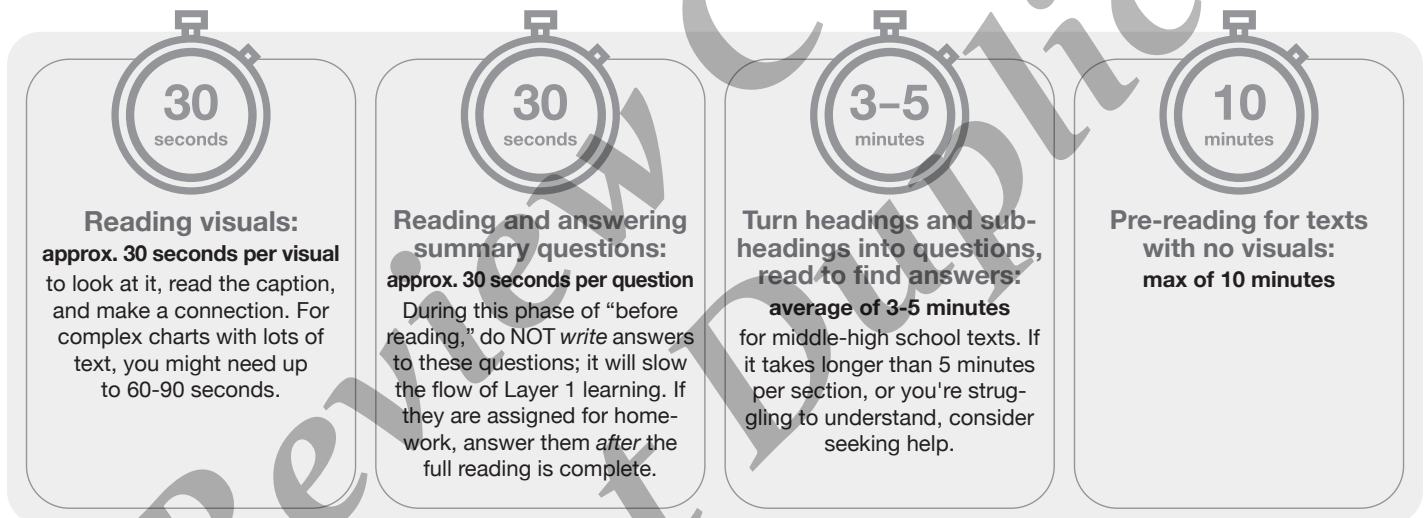
As you read, turn *text elements* into questions. Text elements include: chapter titles, call-outs, words in italics, etc. In a text without visuals, this step is *critical* for building comprehension!

Optimal time-limits for each strategy

Section G

The strategies in this chapter help us learn new information in small, manageable layers. But spending too much time on any layer can overload the brain and become counterproductive.

The optimal time limits are gathered below to emphasize the *optimal*, “just-right” timing of learning in small chunks:



Conclusion

At the top of this chapter, we introduced three common challenges faced when reading textbooks. Now, let's review their solutions:

Higher readability level.	We don't know much about the topic.	We don't CARE much about the topic.
Due to technical terms, textbooks usually have a readability 1-2 grade-level above the current grade. The solution is to read the visuals, which typically illustrate and explain these terms, making the reading easier to understand.	Asking questions and “reading the visuals” activates prior knowledge, allowing the new information to connect.	Asking questions triggers our Emotional Center, igniting curiosity! Even the smallest sliver of curiosity provides a big boost of brain chemicals to power connections.

The core strategy is to “ask questions.” Creating questions identifies the important information and instantly forges connections between known and new information. This process: removes the most common reading blockers, boosts speed and comprehension, *and* makes reading more enjoyable!

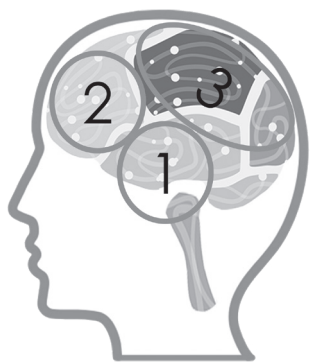


Make the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible by ... revealing a “hidden map” within nonfiction text, the visuals and text elements.

Every title, visual, and italicized phrase is a signpost that can be turned into a guiding question. Converting these elements into questions builds our personal network of understanding.

Source: iStockphoto



Making connections through questions and images helps transfer new information to long-term memory.

The brain on ... reading textbooks and nonfiction

As we covered in Chapter 3, “making connections” is a strategy *and* a biological process! When we learn something new, neuron wires in our brain extend from our existing knowledge to connect with the new information. As our brain learns something new, it literally forms a network of neuron connections.

Asking questions transfers information from our Front Brain to our Back Brain, moving it from short-term to long-term memory.

Images instantly activate and engage prior knowledge creating faster and stronger connections than text alone.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

26. Feeling overwhelmed or bored when reading textbooks?
27. Needing a long time to read nonfiction, particularly textbooks?
28. Finding it difficult to understand or remember content from textbooks and nonfiction?

How to Communicate with Teachers & Peers

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

29. Hesitate to: ask for clarification, help, or contribute to class discussions?
30. Find it difficult to manage roles in group work?
31. Find it challenging to resolve conflicts with classmates?

Why are communication skills important in school?

Section A

Communication skills are very important in school for several reasons:

- **They help you stand out!** Most 6–12th-grade teachers work with over 100 different students every single day! They need your help to know what you need. By asking questions, you help them help you most effectively.
- **They provide feedback.** Questions lead to answers that help us learn better and faster.
- **They can improve grades.** As students, we EARN our grades, but teachers still have some flexibility in assigning scores. For example, if a teacher has seen evidence of effort, they may be willing to give half-credit for an incorrect math problem or overlook a few spelling errors on an essay. At the end of the term, they may add a few “participation points” to bump a final point-total up to the next letter grade, etc.
- **They build opportunities.** Making sincere connections with your teachers opens doors to many future opportunities. When applying for college, scholarships, and jobs, they will provide strong letters of recommendation. Also, teachers are often asked by local business owners to recommend “responsible and reliable” students for hire.
- **They build connections.** Most importantly, human beings are social creatures and we learn best in an environment with strong social connections!

Now that we know why communication skills are important, let’s look at how the strategy of “asking questions” helps to improve communication ...



Source: Canva

Communication skills help you stand out, get feedback, improve grades, build opportunities, and foster connections.

Section B



80/20 Power Strategy
Know the “why” of any communication to clarify the purpose of speaking and to understand others better.

How do questions improve communication?

All communication hinges on one question: *Why?*

- *Why* are you speaking?
- *Why* is our friend telling us something?
- *Why* did the author write?
- *Why* do we need to email our teacher?

The question, “Why?” brings clarity to communication. It clarifies our purpose in expressing ourselves and aids in understanding others.

Knowing the *purpose* and *intention* in communication is crucial! For example, if we don’t understand the purpose of a report, we will struggle to write it.

The question “Why?” helps us focus. If we don’t understand the purpose of a lecture, we will struggle to pay attention. Similarly, if we don’t understand why a friend is sharing a story, we might miss important emotional cues or messages.

The *purpose* of communication anchors all other details.

Section C

“
If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from that angle, as well as your own.

—HENRY FORD

How do I communicate with teachers and peers?

Build rapport ... *with* questions!

“Rapport” means to have trust and a clear understanding with someone; successful communication does not happen without it. Rapport is about understanding and reflecting on others’ perspectives. It is best explained by its acronym:

- Really
- All
- People
- Prefer
- Others
- Reflecting
- Themselves

To build rapport, we must meet others “where they are.” This requires ASKING QUESTIONS to understand their point-of-view:

- *What is their situation?*
- *What pressures are they under?*
- *What are they seeing?*
- *How are they feeling?*
- *What is important to them?*
- *What past experiences may be influencing their response?*
- *How would I feel/act/respond if I were in their shoes?*

This understanding is also called *empathy*. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.

Empathy builds rapport.

True rapport requires *sincere* care for others. People can sense insincere—or fake—attempts to build rapport, which instantly erodes trust.



- Really
- All
- People
- Prefer
- Others
- Reflecting
- Themselves

Ask ... then (actively) listen!

Nothing is more powerful to a person than feeling truly heard. We can truly hear someone through a process called *active* listening.

Active listening is listening with FULL attention. It is not just listening to the words another person says, but actively reading and connecting with their thoughts and feelings.

First and foremost, active listening is a MINDSET, a *decision* to CARE about the other person. It is communicated by responding to their nonverbal signals, such as:

- **SHOW the person you're listening to them.** Lean forward and make eye contact.
- **Keep arms relaxed and open.** Crossing arms closes others out.
- **Observe their body language and tone-of-voice.** 93% of a message comes through these nonverbal signals.
- **Mirror the other person's emotions.** Your face and body should reflect their emotions. For example, it is not appropriate to smile while they tell you something sad.
- **Avoid interrupting.** When the other person is speaking, avoid planning what to say next. Instead, LISTEN to what they are *currently* saying.
- **Ask, "Is there more?"** Avoid jumping in before the other person has finished their point.
- **Respond with sincerity.** Confirm your understanding by repeating what they said in your own words or ask a clarifying question.

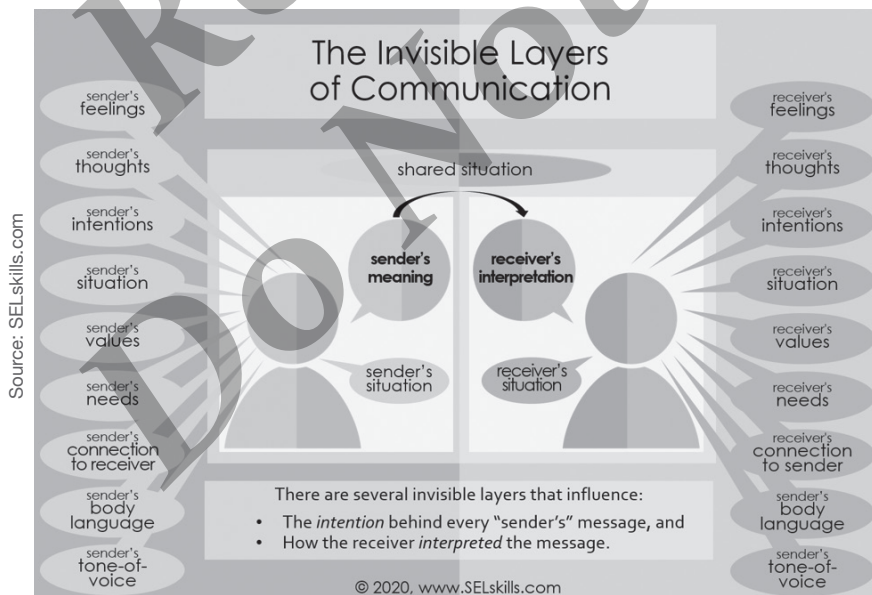


Source: Canva

Active listening means *showing* you sincerely care about the other person and what they are saying.

Invisible layers of communication

Every communication involves a “sender” and a “receiver.” Invisible elements impact how both sides say OR receive messages, including: feelings, thoughts, intentions, values, needs, situations, past experiences, word-choice, interpretations of words, tone, and body language.



There are over
20
invisible factors

that influence any communication between two or more people!

These layers are illustrated in the model on the left.

It is vital that we know these layers exist! While it's impractical to analyze them all in every interaction, *awareness* of these invisible layers is critical to understanding the perspective of others. Also, if a communication breakdown occurs, evaluating these invisible layers often identifies the problem for resolution.

Communication don'ts ...

“Good” communication is best understood by clarifying what to *avoid*:

1. **Don't criticize or complain.** Criticizing and complaining both express disapproval. If you have a problem, you have three options:
 - **Politely talk to the person involved.**
 - **Be willing to fix the problem, yourself.**
 - **Deal with it ... quietly!**
2. **Don't condemn.** Condemning is finding fault with someone, holding a judgment over them. Remember that no one is perfect! Everyone has a reason for doing what they do.
3. **Don't gossip.** Gossip is saying something unkind about someone behind their back. If you would not say it to the person's face, don't say it at all!
4. **Don't give advice.** Advice is a form of judgment. When people share problems, they want someone to listen, *not* judge.

Section D

How do I work with a group?

Humans are naturally social and learn best by working with others, but group-work can be challenging due to:

1. **Unclear purpose and objectives.** Often, we're unsure about starting points, tasks, or how to divide tasks. Teachers can prevent some confusion by putting the purpose and objectives (aka “the assignment”) in writing. But they often need your **QUESTIONS** to identify areas that need further clarification.
2. **Lack of emotional safety.** “Emotional safety” means feeling safe to share ideas without judgment or ridicule. Studies have shown that it is the single most important factor over how a group functions. To avoid this problem, group members must consistently be kind and respectful; just one “snicker,” snide comment, or sigh instantly destroys the emotional safety for *everyone*!
3. **Poor communication.** Lack of regular interaction among group members can lead to breakdowns in collaboration.

To prevent these problems, there are ten tips to manage group work ...

Ten ways to manage group work

1. **Have a clear purpose or objective.** A crystal-clear purpose or objective *prevents* many problems!
2. **Listen actively.** Be intentional with kindness and respect.
3. **Assign roles and deadlines:**
 - a. Break the project into steps.
 - b. Set deadlines for each step.
 - c. Assign steps to members.
4. **Decide on collaboration methods** (meetings, LMS, social media).
5. **Document and share steps 3 and 4 with the group**, both digitally and in print.
6. **Record deadlines and responsibilities in your calendar.**
7. **Watch deadlines;** if you think you will miss one, give your group the courtesy of notifying them as soon as possible.
8. **BEWARE OF GROUP-THINK!** People often agree with ideas simply because others appear to agree. But if you have concerns, chances are good that others do, too. Be brave and respectfully speak up.
9. **Resolve conflicts immediately.** Don't ignore them, hoping things will get better. (They won't!) Use the Conflict Map (next section) to guide your responses.
10. **Reflect.** Once the project is done, reflect on what went well and what could be improved "next time." This reflection provides feedback that will help everyone improve and grow.



Source: Shutterstock ID 73536601

Avoid criticizing, condemning, gossiping, and giving advice!

helpful tip

Remember, fostering a culture of kind respect and open communication is key to effective group work!

How do I resolve conflicts with others?

Conflict usually stems from communication gaps ... but shrinks—or disappears—as both parties work to understand each other's point of view.

Steps to win-win solutions

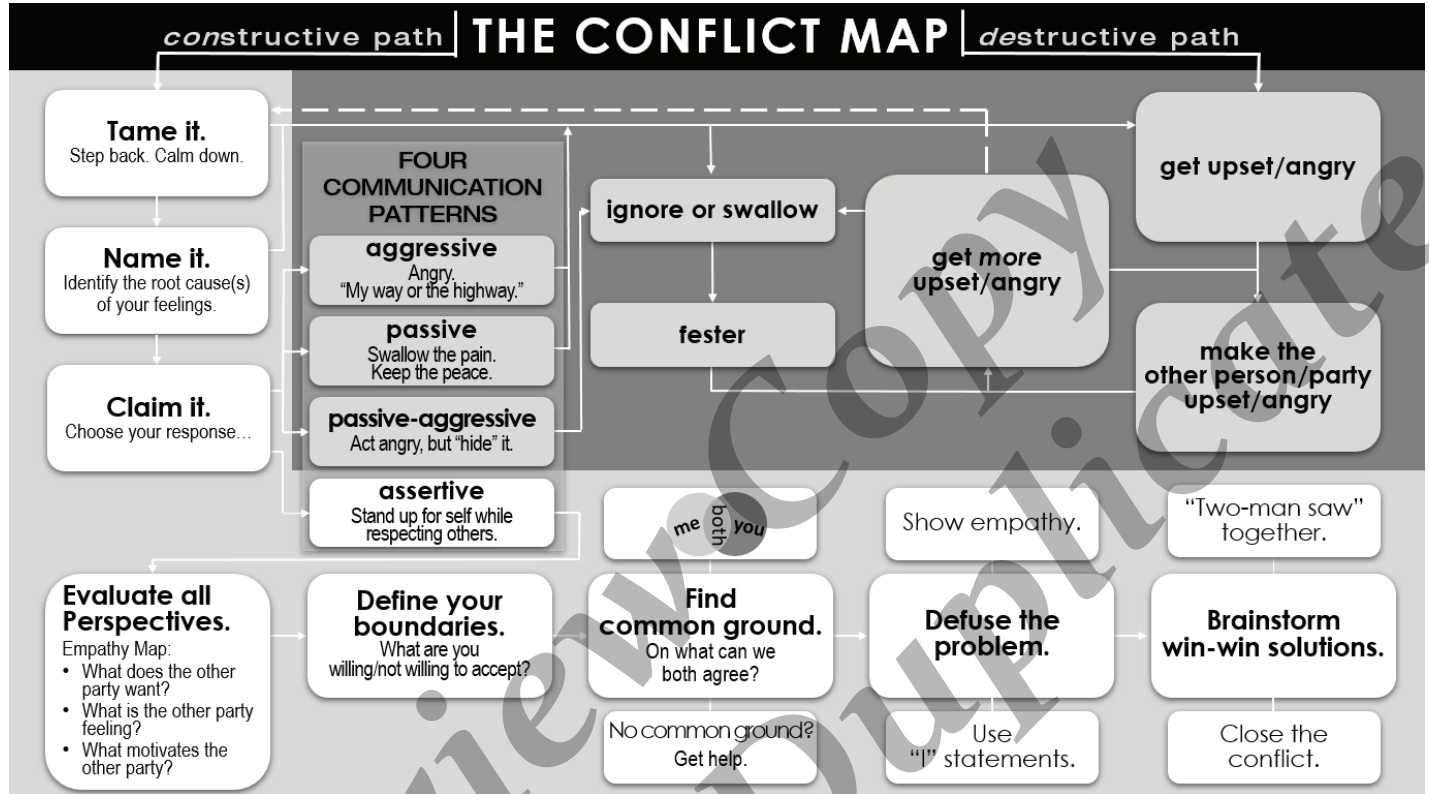
1. **"Tame it."** Don't react; take time to choose your response. Take a break, go for a walk, or wait a day.
2. **"Name it."** Identify the root cause of your feelings.
3. **"Claim it."** Choose your response; the only constructive way to respond is "assertively," which means to stand up for yourself, while also respecting others.
4. **Evaluate all perspectives.** Ask yourself questions from the other person's point-of-view: What does the other person want? What are they feeling? What is motivating them? How would I feel?
5. **Define your boundaries.** What are you willing/not willing to accept?
6. **Find common ground.** Start with what you both agree on. Agree to discuss calmly, using active listening and a neutral tone.
7. **Clarify the problem.** Clearly state the issue, which often helps resolve it.
8. **Defuse the problem.** Show empathy; use phrases like, "I may be wrong, let's look at the facts," or "I understand your feelings; if I were you, I'd feel the same way."

Section E

What is a "win-win" solution?

A "win-win" solution meets the needs of both sides, making everyone happy. Unlike sports—where there is always a winner and loser—conflict resolution allows both sides to be winners.

9. **Brainstorm win-win solutions with the “two-man saw.”** Look for a solution that benefits both sides.
10. **Close the conflict.** Confirm resolution, ask for forgiveness if needed, and thank the other person for cooperating. Ensure conflicts are fully resolved to prevent future issues.



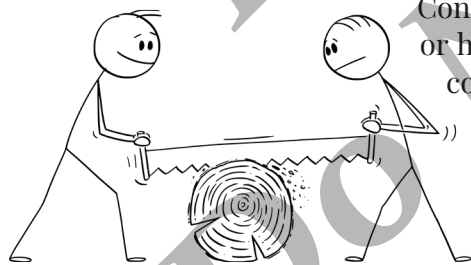
The Conflict Map guides how to respond to conflicts, with the goal of finding “win-win” solutions.

The two-man saw

The “two-man saw” is a MINDSET for managing conflicts. It is named after the old-fashioned saw used by two people that push-and-pull through a large log.

Conflict happens when two or more people see parts of a problem differently or have different values about the situation. This conflict creates a very uncomfortable feeling of tension!

BUT, if everyone is willing to hold that tension long enough to consider each person’s concerns ... they will discover creative, win-win solutions! Like the real two-man saw, this tension powers through tough problems and leads to better solutions than what individuals could find alone!



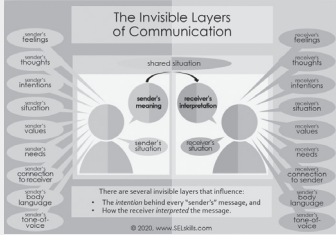
The two-man saw mindset uses tension *constructively* to resolve conflicts.

When working with a group, introduce this concept at the start. When conflict arises, someone can say, “Let’s ‘two-man saw’ this!” signaling the group to use the tension constructively for solutions.

Making the invisible, visible

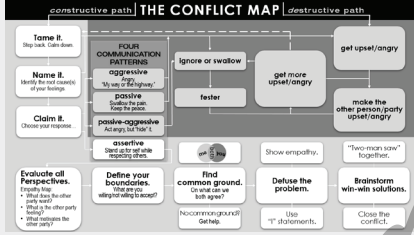
In this lesson, we made the invisible visible with the following ...

Visual:
Invisible Layers of Communication



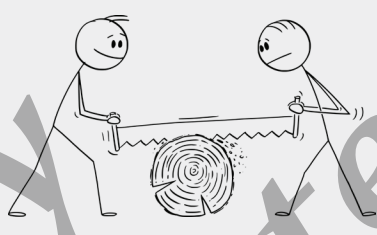
This illustration helps us understand how many potential points of misunderstanding exist in communication.

Visual:
Conflict Map



This map illustrates the simple path for resolving any conflict.

Metaphor:
Two-Man Saw



This metaphor reminds us that the “tension” of different perspectives can be used constructively.

The brain on ... communicating with teachers and peers

Effective (and emotionally safe) communication acts as a “miracle-grow” for our brains because our brains are wired to be social!

Communication with others enriches our brains by:

1. **Activating every part of the brain.** When we interact with others, one might say that our brain is “firing on all cylinders.”
2. **Creating a surge of brain chemicals!** Social connections trigger the Emotional Center to *create* new brain chemicals and distribute them throughout our brain, giving us a lot of extra brain power to think, create, and solve problems.



Source: Shutterstock

Communication with teachers and peers is like Miracle-Gro for the brain; it boosts brain chemicals that promote thinking and creativity.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

29. Hesitate to: ask for clarification, help, or contribute to class discussions?
30. Find it difficult to manage roles in group work?
31. Find it challenging to resolve conflicts with classmates?

How to Listen & Take Notes

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

1. 32. Struggle to pay attention during lectures or instructional videos?
1. 33. Have trouble taking good notes?
1. 34. Struggle to organize your notes for later study?

Author's note

Note-taking is a very complex process! It requires the ability to do all of the following:

- Identify the most important point,
- Convert those point into short phrases,
- Write those short phrases quickly, and
- Continue to listen to a lecture ...

... all at the same time.

Note-taking is so advanced that the brain usually does not master doing all of these skills at the *same time* until late high school or early college.

However, *all* strategies—from all chapters in this book—help the brain grow and develop faster. So it may be possible to master every step of note-taking earlier. In the meantime, the strategies in this chapter provide a helpful boost!

Section A

Why is note-taking important?

Note-taking provides many benefits for learning, helping us:

- **Improve our listening comprehension.** To take notes, we naturally shift into our body's "learning posture" of sitting up and leaning forward; this activates our vagus nerve (the largest nerve in our body) and signals our brain to focus.
- **Gain a better grasp of new information.** When we take notes, we're actively: listening, rephrasing, and writing. These tasks help us: stay focused, understand, and remember information.
- **Blend information from several different sources.** We must often learn from several materials, such as: lectures, videos, and texts.
- **Create powerful study tools.** Our notes are shorter than textbooks and capture key points highlighted by our teachers, which is usually what is on tests.



Source: Canva

Taking notes helps us focus, understand, and remember key information.

But as noted earlier, note-taking is a very complex process! When we take notes, we must make quick, smart decisions as we:

- Process and understand the new information.
- Quickly evaluate what is important to write down.
- Analyze what words to use to express those ideas.
- Transcribe those words with a pen or keyboard.
- Continue to listen to the lecture or video.

These skills take time to develop, but there is a simple trick to develop them faster ...

How does “asking questions” help us listen and take notes?

Section B

“Asking questions” while listening and taking notes instantly connects the new information to things we already know!

As we know, the only way to learn from what we hear is to connect new information to what we already understand. When we fail to make connections, our attention breaks and is snagged by distractions.

The primary strategy is to ask *ourselves* questions to keep us focused, as we will explore further in this chapter.

However, it is also crucial to ask questions of teachers when clarification is needed. If you’re unsure about something, you can trust that many classmates are, too! Teachers NEED you to ask questions to help them understand where you and others are struggling... and they appreciate them as a sign that you care about learning. So be BOLD and ask your questions!

Ever felt confused in a lecture but were afraid to ask for clarification because you may have missed the explanation? This is a common experience.

Teachers are likely to feel irritated by repeating something they just said ... *unless you acknowledge it!*

After being called on, start your question by saying, “I may have missed this, but could you clarify _____?” This respectful approach will transform potential irritation into appreciation for your engagement.



How do I listen most effectively (and painlessly)?

Section C

Just like the process for reading textbooks, “asking questions” is beneficial to do both *before* the lecture or video and *while* listening ...

BEFORE the lecture or video ...

When we listen to learn, we MUST have some prior knowledge about the topic so the new information can connect to something we already understand.

Source: Fotosearch



Collect prior knowledge by previewing related information for 2–5 minutes.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



80/20 Power Strategy
Read or preview information before a lecture or video.

Source: Canva



Activate your brain by sitting upright, leaning forward, and holding a pen during lectures.

Source: Sony Pictures Television



Play Jeopardy!™ while listening to lectures by turning information into questions.

To build this prior knowledge, spend 2–5 minutes (max) previewing related information and asking questions about the topic. Effective “preview” sources include:

- **Your textbook***. Before a lecture, read the visuals + captions of the correlating chapter in your textbook. During the lecture, seek connections to the visuals.
- **Additional reading materials**. If there is not a traditional textbook, preview any additional materials provided, focusing on: visuals, captions, and headings.
- **Video descriptions**. Always read the accompanying text for videos before viewing.
- **Short videos**. Videos under five minutes are excellent previews for lectures or longer videos.
- **Internet search about the topic**. A quick online overview of the topic will dramatically improve your listening comprehension.

*80/20 Power Strategy for note-taking.

DURING the lecture or video

Flip your brain’s “learning switch” to “ON” ...

... by sitting in a “learning position,” sit up, lean forward, hold a pen/pencil.

This position activates the vagus nerve—the nerve that connects your brain and body—and flips your brain into active attention.

Holding a pen/pencil in hand (ideally, with paper, to take notes) activates more sections of the brain, giving us more brain chemicals to power listening.

Listen for connections ...

While listening to a lecture or video; link what you’re hearing to the text and your own experiences. Ask yourself questions like, “How does this relate to what I already know?” Or, “Can I visualize or sketch what the teacher is explaining?”

Make connections to anything! For example, if the teacher mentions the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, and you think of cream cheese—that’s perfect! Imagine John Hancock signing the document with one hand and a bagel with cream cheese in the other.

These links are quirky, but they’re fantastic for your brain! They spark new neurons and create vibrant connections!

And listen for questions ...

Turn listening into a game of *Jeopardy!*™ As you listen to the lecture or video, convert the information into potential questions. Use the six question words as prompts: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

For example, if the lecture is on how to listen effectively, challenge yourself by asking 1–2 questions, such as:

- WHO’s good at this?
- WHAT’s the goal of this talk?
- WHEN is it crucial to listen?
- WHERE am I likely to do this?
- WHY does this matter?
- HOW can listening be more engaging?

This mental gymnastics of flipping information into questions sharpens our focus! It pushes us to make connections with the information.

This internal Q&A might seem distracting, but it's far better than missing key information. It turns your brain into an active "information catcher," while training it to be more alert.

The power strategy for listening to lectures

The 80/20 Power Strategy for note-taking is ... read your textbook before class! (Or, at least, "read the visuals!") This quick preparation helps connect the lecture content to the reading material, supercharging your focus.

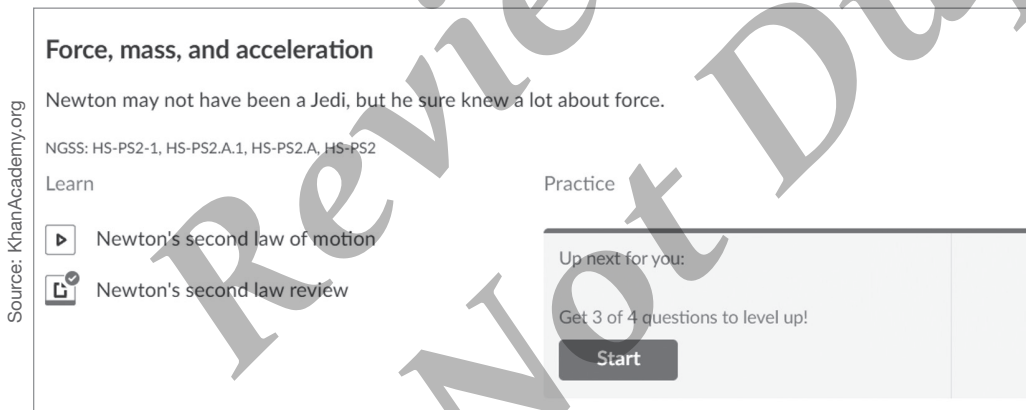
Can't read in advance? Simply have your textbook open to relevant sections during class. Glance at the visuals and make connections between them and the lecture content.

Tips for listening to videos WITH text summaries

Listening to videos is different from listening to lectures. Lectures are usually based on information in a textbook. But, with videos, a corresponding text is not always available for pre-listening prep.

So when video descriptions or summaries are provided, use them for a quick "preview."

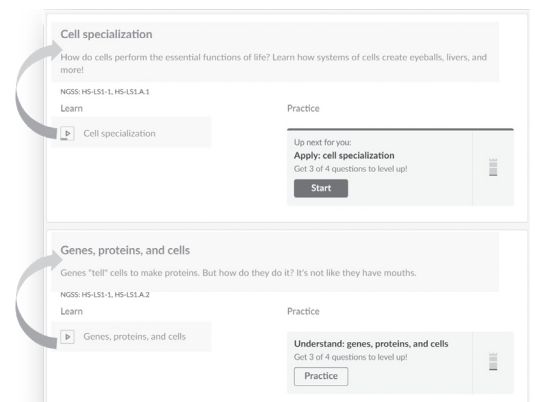
For example, the screenshot below is from Khan Academy and shows a text summary provided for each video. These summaries feature clear headings and key terms, making them perfect for a quick "preview" of the video.



This screenshot displays information from Khan Academy. In the lower left are two links; the top is to a video, the bottom is to a text summary of that video.

Videos withOUT text summaries

Many videos don't include text summaries. For example, the screenshot (right) shows MORE videos from Khan Academy, but these do NOT have a text summary.



These videos, also from Khan Academy, only have two text elements to help us preview the video: the title and a one-sentence introduction.

So, how do you preview these videos?

1. **Turn the title into a question;** this will guide your focus.
2. **Read the one-sentence introduction;** link it to the title. This builds context before you even see the content.
3. **Watch the video, seeking answers to your title question.**
4. **During the video, form new questions from sub-headings or displayed text,** and find answers as you watch.

Videos may not have a text summary to preview, but their short length is a bonus. Simply converting the title into a question provides a lot of benefit!

Section D

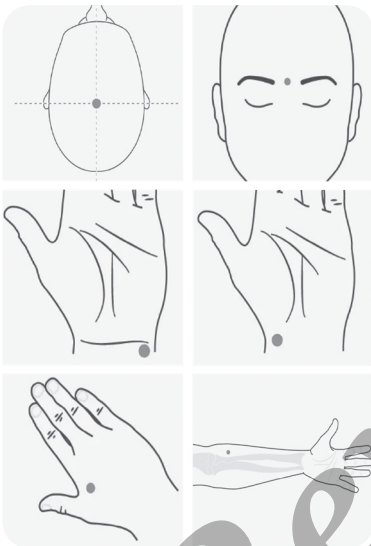
How do I pay attention to lectures or videos?

As we've covered, the most effective way to stay engaged in lectures or videos is to *preview* the topic and *listen for connections and questions*. The better we understand the topic beforehand, the easier it is to stay focused. And actively asking questions keeps our mind engaged.

But if we start to feel sleepy or find our mind is wandering, we can try any combination of the following:

- **Breathe deeply.** Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, hold for a few seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat 3–5 times. This increases oxygen-flow to your brain.
- **Sip water.** Drink water at regular intervals. Staying hydrated helps to keep you alert.
- **Relieve eye fatigue:**
 - » Close your eyes and gently massage your eyelids for 10–20 seconds.
 - » With eyes closed, roll your eyeballs upwards, then downwards, holding each for 10 seconds.
 - » Finally, roll your eyes to a forward-facing position and slowly open them. Repeat as needed.
- **Rotate your ankles.** It's a quiet way to keep blood flowing without drawing attention.
- **Massage pressure points.** Gently press any of the pressure points pictured (left) to trigger alertness.
- **Boost circulation:**
 - » **Move:** If possible, take a brief walk or do some light exercises, like jumping jacks.
 - » **Adjust posture:** Avoid slouching or crossing legs, as these positions can block circulation. Sit up straight, uncross your legs, lean slightly forward, and smile. This can instantly refresh you.
 - » **Stretch:** Adjust your posture, then stretch your arms and legs as much as possible without causing disruption.

Source: medicalnewstoday.com



Discreetly massaging pressure points helps you stay awake and focused in class.

Section E

1 How do I take notes?

- ⋮ Taking notes is a skill that takes time and practice to develop. However,
 ⌵ the following tips will help you shorten the learning curve:

The format.

The following format has some critical benefits, it:

- **Provides space** for additional details and connections from various sources.
- **Helps us study our notes** quickly and effortlessly.
- **Creates an instant study guide** for quizzes and tests!

These benefits will be explained in greater detail, after the format is explained.

Create a left margin.

Fold the left 1/3 of your notebook page.

- Take notes on the right 2/3 of the page.
- Use the left margin:
 - » **For additional points:** If the lecture/video changes topics abruptly, use this margin to add new notes without disrupting the main content flow.
 - » **To note connections:** When you make a connection with something you already know, post it here.
 - » **For review and study:** As we will see in a moment, this margin will soon become a handy study guide!

Write only on one side of the paper.

* Keep the reverse side blank for extra details, diagrams, or charts.

Use a lot of space!

* Avoid cramming; spacious notes are more legible and easier to study. Plus, it leaves room for additional insights.

Don't skimp on paper!

* Having enough space for clear, organized notes is critical. Paper can be recycled later.

Focus on main ideas and themes.

2 What to write?

- ⋮ Knowing what to write in your notes is a skill that takes time and practice to develop. But the following tips will help:
 ⌵

The easiest way to identify this information is by “reading the visuals” of a related textbook or doing previews of videos.

Note the teacher's cues.

Pay attention to what the instructor emphasizes or repeats, and any time the teacher says, “This will be on the test!”

October 18	
	How to Write Notes
Why date your notes?	<p>Date every page</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps determine what information will be on specific tests/quizzes. • Keeps papers in order in the event your binder “pops” open.
Why fold the left 1/3 of the paper?	<p>Fold the left 1/3 of the paper.</p> <p>Write notes on right 2/3 of the paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create summary questions on the left side, as demonstrated on this page. (Max: 5 questions per page.)
Why turn notes into questions?	<p>Turning notes into questions helps you learn information at a higher level and remember it better. The questions become an instant study guide!</p>

* This note-taking format allows space for extra details, simplifies studying, and creates instant study guides.

October 18	
	How to Write Notes
Why date your notes?	<p>Date every page</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps determine what information will be on specific tests/quizzes. Keeps papers in order in the event your binder "pops" open.
Why fold the left 1/3 of the paper?	<p>Fold the left 1/3 of the paper.</p> <p>Write notes on right 2/3 of the paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create summary questions on the left side, as demonstrated on this page. (Max: 5 questions per page.)
Why turn notes into questions?	<p>Turning notes into questions helps you learn information at a higher level and remember it better. The questions become an instant study guide!</p>

In the next lesson, we'll learn how to use the right margin to quickly and easily learn our notes.

Note examples and explanations.

Capture examples that clarify complex ideas.

Capture unfamiliar words and try to capture their meaning.

In the next chapter, we will learn how to easily learn the meanings of all key terms from a chapter or unit.

Listen for lists or sequences.

If the teacher lists items or steps in a process, these are often significant.

Capture questions.

Note any questions raised during the class and the answers provided. Sometimes, discussions can bring out important points not covered in the lecture notes or readings.

Summaries at the end of class.

Record questions and answers from class discussions; they often highlight the most important details.

Review and reflect.

Quickly review notes to identify gaps or unclear areas; note questions to ask your teacher.

3 Writing too much ... a note-taking blocker!

Once you know what to write, the next challenge is to avoid **overwriting**. It's unrealistic to capture every word in a lecture or video. Here's how to capture the essence efficiently:

Use text-like abbreviations.

To improve speed, use abbreviations as if you were texting.

Write short phrases; no complete sentences.

Aim for a max of 5 words per point.

Listen actively, then summarize.

- Focus on understanding first, then briefly summarize in your own words.
- Use bullets and lists to organize notes efficiently.

Sketch visuals.

Diagrams, flowcharts, and mind maps can effectively summarize information more compactly than text-heavy notes.

Leave a placeholder for missed information.

Leave blank lines for missed details, and ask your teacher for clarification later. While you fill important gaps, teachers appreciate your initiative!

Note-taking FAQs

Section F

FAQ #1: “Should I record my teacher’s lecture and take notes later?”

A: You *could* record a lecture and you *could* take notes later. But *will* you? Will you ever want to spend time listening to the lecture again??

Also, do you have your teacher’s consent to record? Recording laws differ from state to state, so be sure to get permission if you do record a lecture.

FAQ #2: “Should I color-code my notes?”

A: The effectiveness of color-coding notes is severely overrated! The process is time-consuming and does nothing to improve learning, other than to make notes look prettier.

There is one exception ... when making a concept map (next chapter), color-coding has some value. Otherwise, focus your energy on formatting your notes as described here.

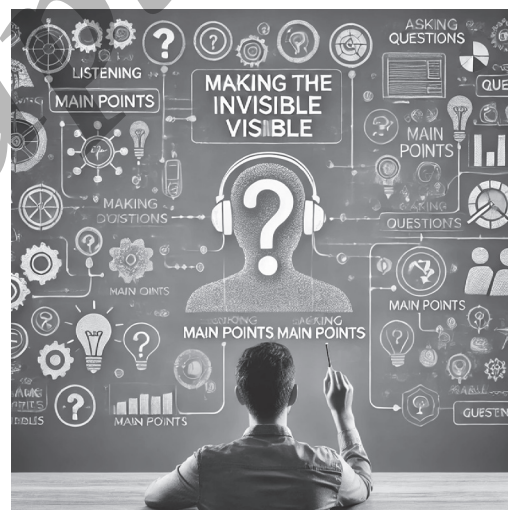


A MUCH better use of your time is to do some pre-lecture previewing. A brief preview of a related textbook or additional material will 10x your listening comprehension and learning speed!

Making the invisible, visible

Listening is challenging because it is an INVISIBLE process! And if we miss something said, we can’t easily revisit it!

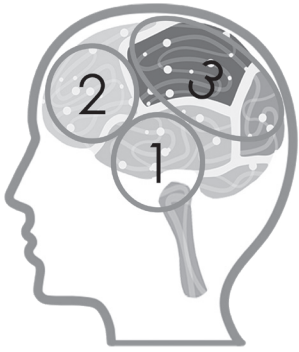
Asking questions—both before and during a lecture or video—helps us SEE the main points and build our own mental web of the content, from which we continue to make the connections necessary to understand and remember the information we hear.



Source: ChatGPT

Asking questions during a lecture or video helps visualize main points and build a mental web of interconnected ideas.

Source: iStockphoto



Creating questions invites the Back Brain to share the heavy power load required to listen and take notes.

The brain on ... listening & taking notes

If we attempt to listen and take notes *without* creating questions about the information ... our Front Brain does ALL of the work, but does NOT learn/remember anything, and quickly runs out of power! However, the process of creating questions automatically activates the Back Brain, especially sections such as processing and long-term memory.

The Back Brain is an extremely stable source of power, so it takes a huge burden off of the Front Brain, with limited capacity. In other words, creating questions invites the Back Brain to share the heavy power load required to listen and take notes. The Back Brain is then able to connect the information to our long-term memory so that we can *learn* while listening and note-taking.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

- 32. Struggling to pay attention during lectures or instructional videos?
- 33. Having trouble taking good notes?
- 34. Struggling to organize your notes for later study?

How to Study & Learn New Terms

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

35. Feel overwhelmed and/or bored by having to study and learn new information?
36. Study hard yet still feel disappointed with your grades?
37. Struggle to adapt your study strategies for different subjects?
38. Dread having to learn the meanings of new terms?

Author's note

I love this chapter because it transforms some of the most daunting parts of school learning into simple tasks. Some tasks are still challenging, but in an energizing way!

For example, in 6th grade, my daughter failed her first two chemistry tests. When she asked for help, we made a Concept Map of her next chapter ... and she scored 100% on the next test!

Her friends wanted to know the secret. So, we hosted “popcorn parties” prior to their chemistry tests. They created Concept Maps together, boosting everyone’s test grades to B+ or higher. One friend, earning her first “A,” said, “I used to feel so dumb. But now, I know HOW to be smart!”

Concept Maps are *not* easy! But, like my daughter and her friends, most students enjoy the challenge because they gain instant clarity! Plus, our popcorn parties demonstrate how they can leverage the fun and effectiveness of social learning.

“How will ‘asking questions’ help me study and learn new terms?”

The process of asking questions instantly links new information to our prior knowledge. In this chapter, we’ll see how this strategy can be used to study and learn new terms quickly, effectively, and painlessly!

However, let’s first think about how we’ve studied in the past ... Most likely, it’s been some form of reading notes and definitions over-and-over again, hoping the information will stick for the test, then poof ... the information is gone!

Sound familiar?

This process takes a lot of time AND is dull and boring! Most importantly, it does not even work! At best, it is *memorizing*, not *learning*.

Section A



Source: Canva

Asking questions naturally links new information to prior knowledge.

Section B

Source:
Sony Picture Television

Read notes once, then create Jeopardy!™-style questions in the margins to enhance learning and retention.

“How do I study quickly and efficiently?”

Flip the script! Instead of rereading notes multiple times, read them ONCE, then flip the information into questions ... like playing Jeopardy™!

Create questions

After class (ideally, on the same day the notes were taken), reread your notes and:

1. **Capture any missed details.** You'll often remember bits of information you didn't have time to capture earlier.
2. **Play Jeopardy!™.** Create questions that would be answered by the information in your notes.
3. **Write your questions in the left margin.** 3–5 questions per page. (To keep the process quick and motivating, limit to a max of 5 questions per page!)

By flipping the information into questions, your brain makes the connections needed to learn the information ... and does so, instantly! A full day's worth of notes can usually be reviewed—and learned—in under ten minutes!

As a bonus, these questions double as a ready-made study guide for quizzes and tests.

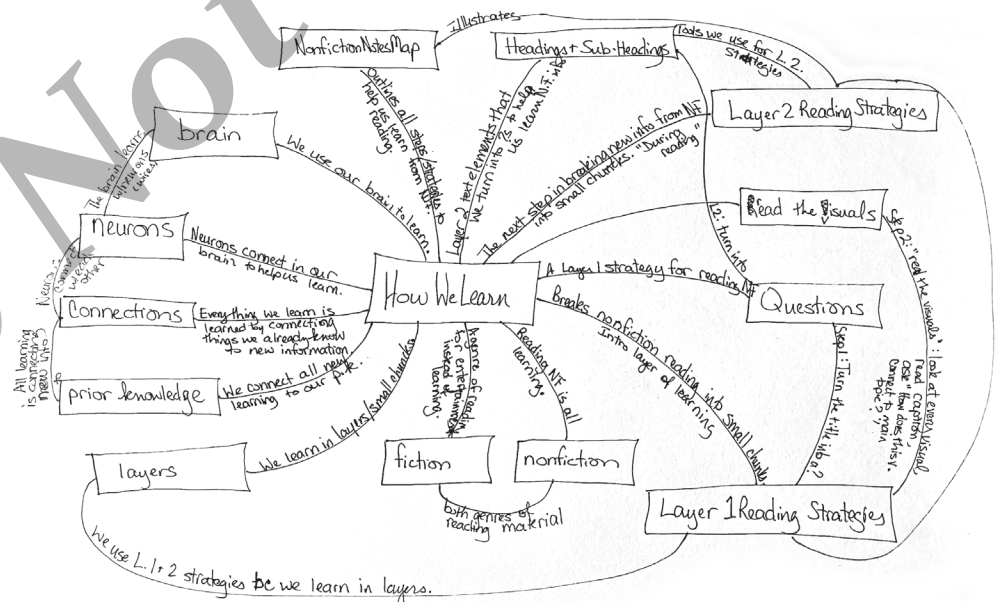
Section C



Concept maps revolve around the key question: “How is *this* concept connected to *that* concept?” Let's see how it works ...

“How do I learn new terms painlessly?”

The fastest way to learn new terms (or concepts) is to make a concept map. Concept maps mimic the way that neurons in our brain connect new information. We do NOT make concept maps to “study later.” Instead, we *learn* the information while making the map. You may wish to review a map before a quiz/test, but it rarely needs to be studied later because the learning is instant and permanent!



How to make a concept map:

1. **Start with a large paper (11"×17") or file-folder;** smaller paper works but requires tiny writing.
2. **Place the central concept in the middle and draw a box around it.** Most often, this is the title of the unit or chapter in the text.
3. **Write a concept/key-term and draw a box around it.** It is helpful (but optional) to include a short definition in the box.
4. **Draw a line connecting each term to the central concept.** This is a "primary connection."
5. **Write a connecting phrase.** On each line, write a phrase explaining how the key term is related to the central concept; this is where the learning happens! (Every term should have a connection drawn to the central concept.)
6. **Continue adding terms from the unit and connecting them to the central topic.** Once all key terms have a primary connection ...
7. **Make secondary connections,** which are connections between the key terms, themselves.
8. **Write connecting phrases** for each secondary connection.
9. **Check for completeness.** Ensure that all terms have a primary connection and at least one secondary connection. Add more connections as you find relevant associations.
10. **Optionally, use two different ink colors to distinguish between primary and secondary connections;** this makes it easier to verify that each term has both a primary and secondary connection.

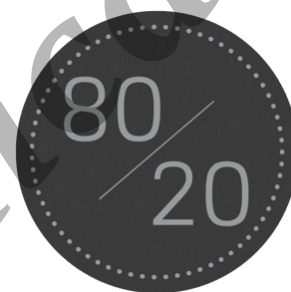
There's ONLY ONE objective of the Concept Map ... to make CONNECTIONS! Do NOT focus on spelling/grammar/punctuation *except* to capture the correct spelling of the central topic and key-terms. Focus on connecting ideas, *not* on perfect language!

For example ...

In the following video segments, I show you how to create a concept map. The concepts/terms are from a unit titled "How We Learn."



See how to create a concept map with short video segments available in the Teacher Presentation Tool and at StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.



80/20 Power Strategy
Make connections on a Concept Map.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

“How do I study for different subjects?”

The strategies we've learned thus far can be used for all subjects:

- **Preview information** by: reading the visuals of a text, turning heading/subheadings into questions, previewing videos, etc.
- **Actively listen and take notes** during class and/or videos.
- **Create Jeopardy!™ questions and Concept Maps** to learn information in notes and meanings of key terms.

However, each subject has additional considerations ...

Section D



80/20 Power Strategy
Make connections on a
Concept or Event Map.

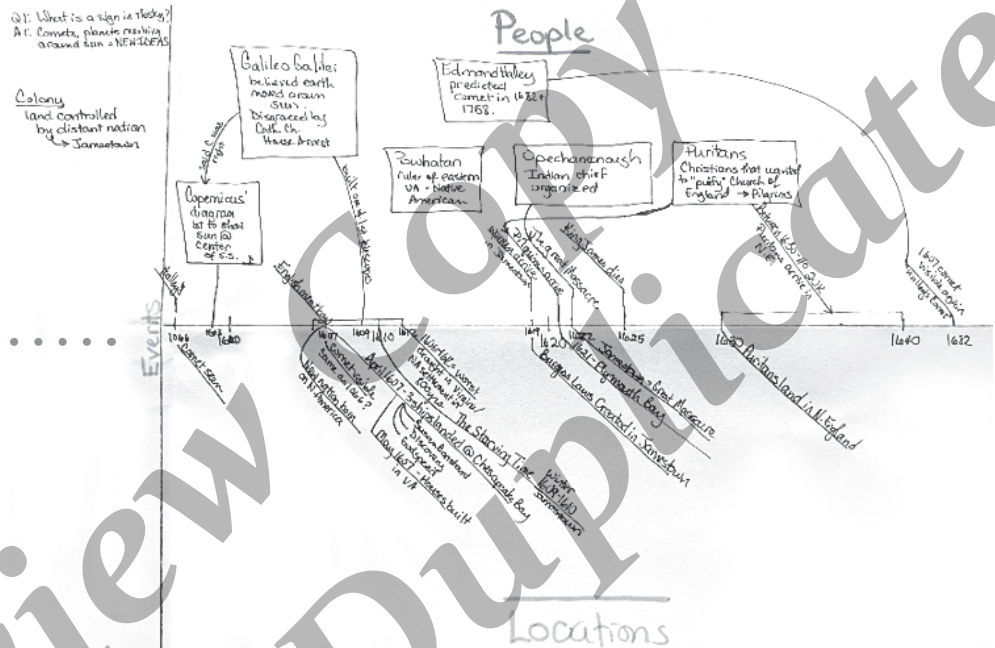
Event Map

Plot events on a timeline,
add names and places,
and draw connections
to show relationships.

How to study history and biographies

History and biographies include many proper nouns (names of specific people, places, and events). To best learn proper nouns, we must understand how they are connected. Instead of a Concept Map, we need an Event Map.

To create an Event Map, plot all events on a timeline to see the sequence of events. Add the names of people and places associated with these events, then draw connections between people/places/events/dates to show relationships between them.



How to study English language arts (ELA)

Most SOAR strategies directly address ELA standards for: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Future chapters, such as “How to Write Papers” and “How to Give Presentations,” provide further ELA support.

To understand literature, we must make connections to the conflicts and emotions of the characters in the story. But the challenge lies in:

- Tracking proper nouns
- Understanding “old” language or different dialects
- Understanding historical settings

To overcome these challenges:

- **Preview stories by searching online** for summaries and related images.
- **Make a “proper noun map.”** While reading, write down the names of characters and places; draw connections to show how each is related to another.
- **For unfamiliar words, link their meaning to the story’s context, then replace them with an appropriate synonym.** Note that Concept Maps are less effective for literature because the words are *not* usually connected by a central concept.

How to study foreign languages

Strategies to help learn a foreign language include:

1. **Understand the grammar of English (or your native language)** to “connect” grammar concepts of the new language to your most familiar understanding. (See Chapter 16.)
2. **Learn in context.** Instead of memorizing lists of vocabulary, learn new words and phrases in the *context* of sentences or stories. Context = connections!
3. **Listen to videos, podcasts, etc. in the new language, even if you are not actively listening!** Your subconscious mind will continue learning. (NOTE: There are many videos on YouTube designed to help you learn foreign languages while you sleep!)
4. **Get frequent feedback.** Feedback is another strong gateway to learning; the quicker/more frequent the feedback, the faster the learning! Software apps like Duolingo, Babbel, or Rosetta Stone are very effective because they provide frequent—and immediate—feedback.



Source: Canva

Learn a new language by connecting it to words and grammar in your native language.

How to study math

When we think of “studying,” we picture tasks like reading and rehearsing. But these actions are not practical for math. To study math effectively, we should:

- **Learn math vocabulary with concept maps!** We often do not realize how understanding the language of math can help or hinder our progress in math.
- **Complete daily homework.** Homework is our top study tool!
- **Note and learn from homework challenges,** as described below.

How to use homework as a study tool

The following list correlates with the math homework sample illustrated on the next page:

1. **Label each assignment** with the page/section and problem numbers.
2. **Use a fresh page** for each assignment.
3. **Stay calm.** If there’s a problem you don’t know how to solve, try to troubleshoot on your own by reviewing the chapter. If you can’t figure it out after three minutes, circle the problem number, record it at the top of the page, and move on.
4. **Attempt all problems.** Repeat Step 3 for all problems that you cannot solve.
5. **Seek extra help, as needed.** If you did not understand 50% or more of the assignment, ask a parent or teacher for additional help, outside of class. If you only need help with a few problems, proceed to the next step.
6. **Pay attention to homework corrections.** When your teacher asks, “Are there any questions from yesterday’s homework?” raise your hand and share the problem #s listed at the top of your homework. (This helps build rapport with your teacher, too!)
7. **Use these problems as study guides for tests.** To prepare for a test, review homework; redo problems you highlighted “for help.”

For math, last-minute “cramming” to study is practically impossible. By doing daily homework—and ensuring our questions are answered each day—we can improve test scores while reducing study time and stress!



This sample assignment may not reflect your current level of math, but these concepts will apply to most math assignments.

#13, 17, 19
 3 5 6
 9-24-04
 Pg. 26 #1-21 odd

1.
$$\begin{array}{r} 261 \\ + 33 \\ \hline 294 \end{array}$$

3.
$$\begin{array}{r} 427 \\ + 56 \\ \hline 483 \end{array}$$

5.
$$\begin{array}{r} 624 \\ + 39 \\ \hline 663 \end{array}$$

7.
$$\begin{array}{r} 878 \\ - 86 \\ \hline 892 \end{array}$$

9.
$$\begin{array}{r} 1752 \\ - 40 \\ \hline 1712 \end{array}$$

11.
$$\begin{array}{r} 2043 \\ - 38 \\ \hline 2005 \end{array}$$

13.
$$\begin{array}{r} 3082 \\ - 654 \\ \hline 8 \end{array}$$

15.
$$\begin{array}{r} 3402 \\ \times 9 \\ \hline 30618 \end{array}$$

17.
$$\begin{array}{r} 3965 \\ \times 27 \\ \hline 27755 \\ 0 \end{array}$$

19.
$$\begin{array}{r} 4861 \\ \times 25 \\ \hline 24305 \\ 20 \end{array}$$

“When should I study?”

There are two times to study: every day and before a quiz or test.

However, studying should not feel tough or dull; the strategies in this book make studying feel light and easy.

So, let's explore how to be sure these two study times remain lightweight, yet effective ...

Study every day: Take Ten™

As introduced in Chapter 9, Take Ten is a daily routine that consolidates organizing and studying into ten effective minutes.

Begin by taking 1–2 minutes to organize papers in your binder and remove trash from your bookbag.

Then spend 8–9 minutes reviewing notes; this includes writing *Jeopardy!*™ questions and adding connections to concept maps. Often, you can complete a Take Ten review during down-time in school, such as when waiting for a class to start/end, etc.

With Take Ten reviews, we learn the content in small layers. With cramming, we must learn several days' and weeks' worth of information all at once ... which is boring, painful, and not effective!

So, even if you don't use down-time in school, do a Take Ten review every evening as part of your homework routine. It's a quick and painless way to keep the process of studying ... *quick* and *painless*!

When “Take Ten” takes MORE than ten minutes

If you find this review takes more than ten minutes ... it means you are doing something with more detail than necessary. (Most likely, you are writing too many *Jeopardy!*™ questions with your notes!)

This review needs to feel *FAST*; if it takes too long, you'll begin to feel friction and resistance. If you feel friction and resistance, you won't continue to do it.

So, it is vital that the daily review is less than ten minutes!

Review before a quiz or a test

If you've been using these strategies from this book and doing daily Take Ten reviews, studying for a quiz or test should take roughly 30 minutes to review:

- A study guide, if your teacher provided one.
- Your *Jeopardy!*™ questions from your notes.
- Visuals in your text.
- Any errors on related work that have been corrected.

Section E



10
min

Source: Canva

Spend 1–2 minutes organizing your binder and removing trash, then 8–9 minutes studying by: reviewing notes, writing *Jeopardy!*™ questions, and updating concept maps.

Section F

“What are common mistakes to avoid?”**Cramming**

We best retain information by studying in short, frequent sessions rather than longer and fewer sessions. For this reason, daily Take Ten™ reviews save much time and stress!

Multitasking

We can multitask ... but only for “automatic” tasks, such as walking and talking.

When concentration is required, “multi-tasking” is really our attention playing ping-pong between multiple activities.

For example:

Homework. Texting. Homework. TV. Homework. Music. Texting. Homework.

Avoid multitasking while doing homework or studying. Turn off electronics long enough to finish tasks; the interruption tax of every distraction from notifications, pings, etc. makes homework take 2–10× longer than necessary!

Concentration and recall drop in a 1-hour study session. Use 20-minute intervals to boost focus and retention.



From “Where’s There’s A Will There’s an A”
by Professor Claude W. Olney

“Wandering” with no study plan

Having no study plan wastes time and yields poor results.

During our 7-Minute Sunday Sessions, we should plan times to study during the forthcoming week. We should also determine the best strategies to use during those times.

By doing most of our planning during this single “planning session,” we optimize our time and energy in two ways. First, we coordinate a “master plan” to leverage our efforts across the whole week. Second, we consolidate the heaviest “Front Brain work” into one session, rather than across several disjointed sessions.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible in two ways, with:

<i>Jeopardy!</i>TM questions	Concept/Event Maps
By translating our notes into questions, we see what we <i>should</i> learn from our notes ... and INSTANTLY learn that information!	The connections on Concept/Event Maps literally make our thinking—and neuron connections—visible!

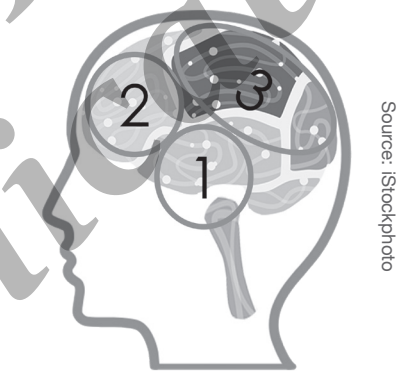
The brain on ... making *Jeopardy!*TM questions and concept maps

The processes of:

- Flipping our notes into questions, and
- Actively drawing connections between concepts

... prompts the Front Brain to connect with our Back Brain as the Back Brain searches for answers. This connection instantly transfers information out of short-term and into long-term memory.

The Back Brain then activates connections from other parts of our memory to deepen our understanding of the new information.



Source: iStockphoto

Creating questions and concept maps prompts the Front Brain to connect with the Back Brain.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

35. Feeling overwhelmed and/or bored by having to study and learn new information?
36. Studying hard yet still feel disappointed with your grades?
37. Struggling to adapt your study strategies for different subjects?
38. Dreading having to learn the meanings of new terms?

How to Take Tests

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

- 39. Experience anxiety or nervousness while taking tests?
- 40. Begin answering test questions immediately, without first reviewing them to plan your strategy?
- 41. Lack confidence in using different strategies for various test types, such as multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay?

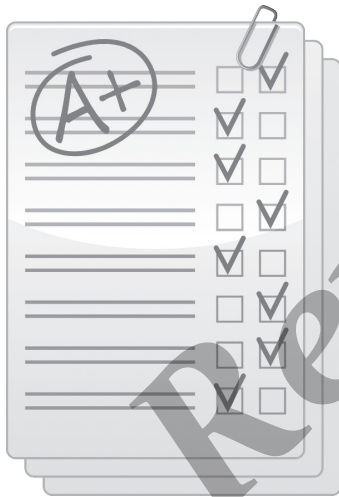
Section A

“How will ‘asking questions’ help me take tests?”

A test is nothing more than a set of questions. So, naturally, the strategy of “asking questions” is perfect preparation!

When taking a test, we often find that questions can often have multiple valid answers beyond the answer key. In this case, “asking questions” helps clarify the teacher’s intent or identify when to (respectfully) ask for clarification.

After a test, we should continue to ask questions like, “What did I do well? What could I improve?” Reviewing graded tests offers valuable feedback to improve future test-performance!



Source: Canva

Use test-taking tips only when unsure of an answer; prioritize your knowledge of the content.

The Test Test

Directions: At the end of each statement, write True or False on the blank line. Ignore the "correct statement" line until after you have read the answer key.

- ① Most of your test-preparation is done when you take notes, read the text, and develop questions about both. _____

Correct statement:

- ② You should throw away all of your work as soon as it is checked or graded because it will only clutter up your folders. _____

Correct statement:

- ③ Getting a good night's sleep and eating a healthy breakfast are more beneficial than cramming all night the night before a test. _____

Correct statement:

- ④ When you are undecided about a test answer, your first hunch is usually right. _____

Correct statement:

- ⑤ It is important to be the first person done with the test because that means that you aced the test. _____

Correct statement:

Continue ➔

The Test Test

■ continued ■

Multiple choice: Underline the best answer for each question.

- ⑥ The best way to study for a test is:
- A. Spend a few solid hours of non-stop studying the night before a test.
 - B. Do your reading and homework on time and review your notes for a few minutes every day.
 - C. Highlight any questions that you have on any of your work or notes so that you remember to ask them in class.
 - D. Both B and C.
- ⑦ Preparing a study guide...
- A. Should be based only on what the teacher tells you about the test.
 - B. Is automatically done for you when you use the questioning technique for taking notes and reading.
 - C. Means spending many hours, the night before the test, rewriting all of your notes.
 - D. Only needs to be done for big tests, such as final exams.
- ⑧ When your teacher gives you a study guide, you should:
- A. Ignore it because you have already made your own study guide from your notes.
 - B. Use it to help you decipher what to focus on the night or two before the test.
 - C. Toss your notes and textbook aside; the study guide is all you need.
 - D. Stop paying attention in class. The study guide has all the answers you will need for the test.
- ⑨ The night before a test, you should:
- A. Look over your work for a minute. You don't need to spend any more time on it because you've taken notes and done your homework.
 - B. Spend a few solid hours studying, non-stop.
 - C. Spend 30-60 minutes reviewing your notes, homework, and text, and quizzing yourself by talking out loud.
 - D. None of the above.
- ⑩ To study for a final exam or unit test, your best option is to:
- A. Study corrected tests from the semester.
 - B. Reread every chapter covered since the beginning of the semester.
 - C. Forget studying. You either know it or you don't.
 - D. None of the above.

STOP ●

What are some tips for taking tests?

Section B

Many hints and hacks for taking tests are embedded in The TEST Test. Let's evaluate each question to find them...

Review: The TEST Test

Directions: True/False

At the end of each statement, write True or False on the blank line. Ignore the "correct statement" line until after you have read the answer key.



DID YOU NOTICE TO SKIP the "correct statement" line until *after* checking the answer key?

Students often overlook directions, leading to lost points.

ALWAYS read the directions!

- 1** Most of your test-preparation is done when you: take notes, read the text, and develop questions about both.

• **TRUE**

• **HINT**

- In true/false questions, words like "most," "some," or "few" are likely to be true. Conversely, absolute terms like "all" or "none" are more likely to be false.

- 2** You should throw away all your work as soon as it is checked or graded because it will only clutter up your folders.

• **FALSE**

• **CORRECT STATEMENT**

- Old tests and quizzes are crucial study guides for major exams like unit tests, midterms, and finals, because questions often come directly from previous assessments.

- 3** Getting a good night's sleep and eating a healthy breakfast are more beneficial than cramming all night, the night before a test.

• **TRUE**

• **HINT**

- Proper sleep and nutrition keep us alert, reducing simple mistakes.
• Tiredness impairs thinking and reasoning, similar to the effects of alcohol on drivers.

- 4** When you are undecided about a test answer, your first hunch is usually right.

• **TRUE**

• **HINT**

- If unsure of an answer, trust your first instinct; your subconscious memory is likely guiding you.



HINT

DID YOU NOTICE
the directions to underline
the best answer? ;)

- 5** It is important to be the first person done with the test; that means that you aced the test.

•
•
•

FALSE**CORRECT STATEMENT**

• Every point counts! So, avoid simple mistakes and “I knew that!”
• moments by using extra time to review your answers.

Directions: Multiple Choice

Underline the best answer to each question.

- 6** The best way to study for a test is:
- Spend a few solid hours of non-stop studying the night before a test.
 - Do your reading and homework on time and review your notes for a few minutes every day.
 - Highlight any questions that you have on any of your work or notes so that you remember to ask them in class.
 - Both B and C.**

HINT

Options combining answers like “Both B & C” or “All of the above” are often correct because it is challenging for teachers/test-writers to write “wrong” options.

- 7** Preparing a study guide ...
- Should be based only on what the teacher tells you about the test.
 - Is automatically done for you when you use questions to read nonfiction and to study your notes, as outlined in Layers 2 and 3.**
 - Means spending many hours, the night before the test, rewriting all of your notes.
 - Only needs to be done for big tests, such as final exams.

HINT

Statistics show that the longest option is most often the correct answer.

- 8** When your teacher gives you a study guide, you should ...
- Ignore it because you have already made your own study guide from your notes.
 - Use it to help you decipher what to focus on the night or two before the test.**
 - Toss your notes and textbook aside; the study guide is all you need.
 - Stop paying attention in class. The study guide has all the answers you will need for the test.

HINT

Important test details are often shared beforehand. If you miss this information, get a peer's notes.

- 9** The night before a test, you should ...
- Look over your work for a minute. You don't need to spend any more time on it because you've: read the text, taken notes, and made a concept map.
 - Spend a few solid hours studying non-stop.
 - Spend 30-60 minutes reviewing your: homework and text, and quizzing yourself with your *Jeopardy!*[™] questions.**
 - None of the above.

HINT

If you're up-to-date with your homework and notes, a 30-60 minute review the night before a test is ideal; it enhances learning connections and boosts confidence!

- 10** To study for a unit test, midterm, or final exam, your best option is to:
- Study corrected tests from the semester.**
 - Reread every chapter covered since the beginning of the semester.
 - Forget studying. You either know it or you don't.
 - None of the above.

HINT

Who has time for "B"?! The answer is "A;" teachers often use questions from past assessments on midterms and finals.

The TEST Test provides many hints and tips, but there are more considerations, too ...

More test-taking tips**Before test day, plan your time.**

Before a test, ask for details like: time allotted, quantity, and types of questions. Then, make a plan. Like American football, clock-management is crucial for a successful test!

For example, if we have 50 minutes for 30 multiple-choice and 2 essay questions, our plan might look like this:

- 5 minutes: Preview test
- 20 minutes: 30 MC (40 sec/question)
- 20 minutes: 2 Essays(10 min/essay)
- 5 minutes: Review test

Immediately write down memorized information.

As soon as you get the test, jot down details like formulas or dates. This frees up brain energy to focus on the test.

Read instructions carefully.

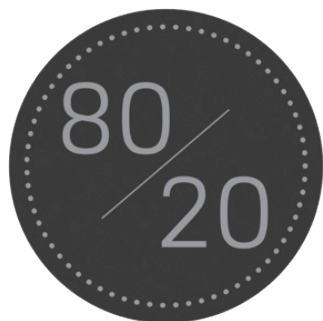
This point was mentioned earlier, but its importance cannot be overstated!



Source: Canva

Just like in sports, effective test-taking requires good clock management.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



80/20 Power Strategy
Monitor and manage your
time during the test.

Manage your time.

Proper pacing is crucial! If no clock is visible, bring an analog watch (smart devices are often not allowed in test areas).

First, preview the whole test.

Quickly read every question to:

- Further refine your time-management plan.
- Discover clues to some answers embedded in other questions.

Unsure? Make an educated guess and move on!

Don't let one question drain your time, momentum, and focus! If you are unsure about an answer, use clues or instinct to make an educated guess. Then, circle the question and move on. Return to it after finishing the remaining questions.

Review graded tests.

Tests are excellent learning tools! While the current test grade won't change, understanding your mistakes will boost *future* scores.

Section C

What are some tips for taking specific types of tests?

There are special tips for each type of test-question, including:

- True/false
- Fill-in-the-blank
- Multiple choice
- Essay-style

NOTE: Give top priority to your knowledge of the content; only rely on the following tips when unsure of an answer.

True/false

Read each statement carefully.

Misinterpreting even a single word can alter its meaning.

Consider each part of a statement.

For multi-part statements, all parts must be true for the whole to be true. If any part is false, the answer is false.

Notice absolute and conditional terms.

Absolute terms like "always" or "never" are likely to be false. Conditional terms like "usually" or "often" are likely to be true.

Be cautious of tricky wording and double negatives.

They can be very misleading.

Multiple choice

Before reading the options, pause to think of the correct answer on your own.

This provides clarity when more than one option seems possible.

Before selecting an option, read them all.

For example, option "A" may sound correct, but item "C" may be *more* correct.

Source: Canva



Use test-taking tips only when
unsure of an answer; prioritize
your knowledge of the content.

Cross-out options you know are wrong.

Choose from the remaining options.

“Most words” = most likely to be correct.

Options with the most words or most options (such as “all of the above” or “both A & B”) are more likely to be correct.

Fill-in-the-blank**Look for context clues.**

The surrounding words and sentences may hold clues to the answer.

Use grammar clues.

For example, the word “an” would indicate the missing word begins with a vowel. Other hints may be the use of a plural word, past tense verb, etc.

Reread the full statement.

After you have filled in the blank, reread the statement to ensure it makes sense.

Essay questions**Before writing, sketch a brief outline of key points in the margin.**

This strategy:

- Helps your answer be: organized, logical, and concise.
- May earn partial credit, if time runs out.
- Is “teacher-friendly.” Essay questions take a long time to grade! An outline helps teachers grade faster. (Frankly, they may only read your outline.)

Reread your composition.

If time allows, reread your answer to ensure clarity.

Tests delivered via software

Software changes the test-taking experience. So, when taking tests via software:

1. **Know—and accept—any limitations beforehand.** For example, if you can’t preview questions or review answers, knowing this in advance reduces test-time anxiety and frustration.

My Courses > SOAR Learning & Soft Skills App > Final Exam > Quiz

Quiz: SOAR Learning & Soft Skills App

Final Exam

Question 1 of 50

What do employers say is the most important skills their workers should have to be successful on the job?

☐ A) creative and technical skills

☐ B) technical and communication skills

☐ C) positive attitude and basic computer skills

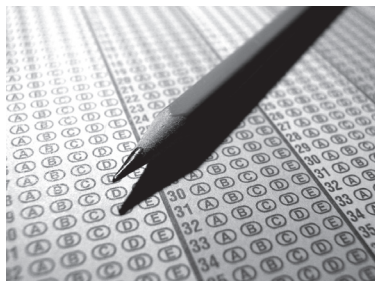
☐ D) learning and soft skills

NEXT

Software changes the test-taking experience. These tips will help you adjust.

2. **Prepare the technology.** Try to prevent technical disruptions by connecting and logging in early.
3. **Manage your time, if you know the number of questions.** However, this may not be possible; sometimes, the quantity adjusts based on real-time performance.
4. **Take notes.** If allowed, have a pen/pencil and paper available to jot down memorized information and work through complex questions.
5. **Practice with similar formats, if possible.** Knowing the test format reduces anxiety and improves performance.

Section D



Source: Canva

Start preparing for major tests on day one: save notes, review mistakes, and use SOAR strategies.

“How do I prepare for major tests, such as midterms and final exams?”

Success on big tests starts from the first day of the course! This does not mean we must study intensely every night; it simply means being mindful of the final goal, from the beginning ...

1. **Save all notes, papers, and graded work!** These are your best study tools because teachers often reuse questions from past quizzes and assignments on major tests. Tools like the SOAR Binder and a home paper station help keep them organized and accessible.
2. **Review—and understand—every mistake on previous work,** especially quizzes and tests.
3. **Use SOAR strategies throughout the semester!** They ensure long-term retention and reduce the need for extensive test preparation.
4. **Just before a major test, prioritize your review** as follows:
 - The test’s study guide, if provided.
 - Past quizzes and tests, focusing on your mistakes.
 - Review all textbook visuals to reinforce and learning connections.

Section E

“How do I manage test anxiety?”

There are three elements to managing test anxiety:

- Prepare for the test.
- Identify the root cause of the anxiety.
- Break the anxiety loop: breathe, move, tap.

Step 1: Prepare for the test.

Most test anxiety stems from feeling unprepared, so proper preparation eliminates most of the issue. The SOAR strategies ensure you’re fully prepared, which greatly reduces anxiety! Any remaining anxiety might be lingering from past experiences.

Step 2: Identify the root cause of the anxiety.

When/where did these feelings begin? Follow them “back to their cave!” Anxiety stems from emotions, which are triggered by thoughts and beliefs ... and you may need to adjust your beliefs.

For example, I first learned how to study in college and immediately earned all A's that semester. But a few weeks later, a school project triggered an anxiety attack! Eventually, I pulled myself out of it when I reminded myself, “Wait ... things are different now ... you KNOW how to do this!” It turns out, my new-found success had not yet changed my core beliefs about performance on schoolwork. I've since learned this misalignment is normal and can easily be adjusted.

To identify the root cause of your anxiety and update your core beliefs, simply ask yourself the following questions:

- “Why am I feeling anxious?”
- “What could happen?”
- “If that happens, what might happen next?”
- “What's the worst that could happen? ... is that really so bad?”
- “How likely is the worst-case scenario?”
- “What's different now compared to previous tests?”
- “Am I more prepared now than before?”

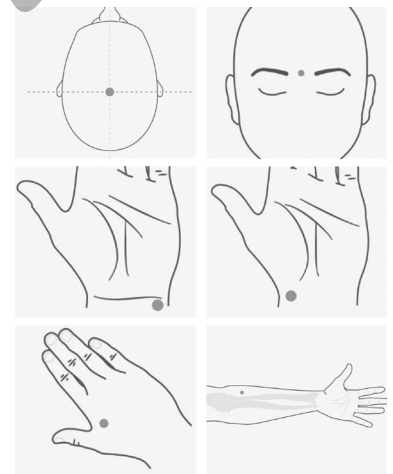
Step 3: Break the anxiety loop: breathe, move, and tap.

When our brain releases anxiety chemicals, we can break and stop the resulting neuron-loop. To do that:

- **Breathe in 3-4-5 cycles.** Inhale for three seconds. Hold for four. Exhale for five. Repeat 3-5 times. When the conscious mind takes control of breathing, it also controls our response to emotions.
- **Move!** Any movement helps, but activities that elevate our heart-rate are ideal. An elevated heart-rate prompts the body to manufacture loads of “happy” chemicals that literally wash anxiety away!
- **Tap pressure points.** Use inconspicuous points: at the base of the wrist, between eyebrows, or the top, middle of the head.

Conclusion

With these layered strategies, your confidence and upgraded beliefs will soon erase all test anxiety!



Source: medicalnewstoday.com

Take control and break the cycle of anxiety!

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible by illustrating a wide variety of patterns hiding in plain sight within tests.

The brain on ... taking tests

During a test, our Front Brain and Back Brain engage in an elegant game of “information ping-pong”:

- First, the Front Brain decodes and interprets the question.
- It then decides how to signal the Back Brain to retrieve relevant information.
- The Back Brain searches and sends a COPY of the information to short-term memory.
- The Front Brain checks if the information fits the question;
- If it does, it decides how to craft or select the answer.
- If it does not, it looks for more clues to signal the Back Brain.
- This process continues until the test ends.

This biological process explains why learning through questioning is so powerful; it strengthens the channels between our Front and Back Brain, improving the accuracy and speed of retrieving information during a test.

The brain on ... test anxiety

Test anxiety originates in the Emotional Center of the brain. When activated, the Emotional Center draws chemicals away from all other brain sections, disrupting neuron pathways that allow us to think and answer questions on a test.

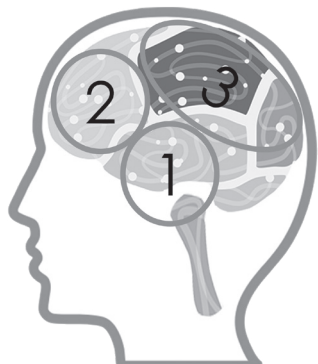
Conversely, feelings of confidence and joy trigger the Emotional Center to MAKE more chemicals that fuel brain connections, which optimizes our ability to think clearly and perform best on tests.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

39. Experiencing anxiety or nervousness while taking tests?
40. Answering test questions immediately, without first reviewing them to plan your strategy?
41. Lacking confidence in using different strategies for various test types, such as multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay?

Source: iStockphoto



During tests, our Front and Back Brain play “information ping-pong.”

How to Write Paragraphs & Essays

Scorecard preview

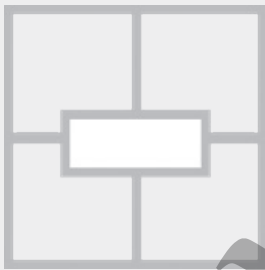
This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

- 42. Feel overwhelmed by writing assignments?
- 43. Struggle to organize your thoughts and/or research for a paper?
- 44. Struggle to compose your thoughts and research into clear sentences and paragraphs?

Supplies needed

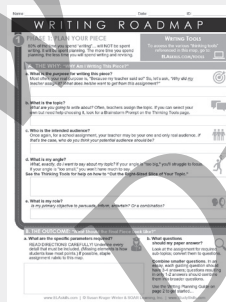
Download printable tools to use for any/all writing projects at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3):

Four-Square



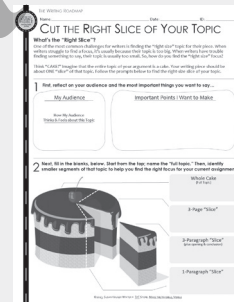
This writing structure is used to build paragraphs, essays, and other writings.

Writing Roadmap



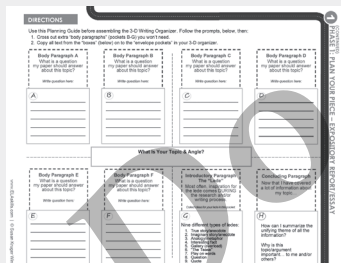
This 4-page map guides any/all writing projects, walking writers through the complete writing process.

Cut the Right Slice of Your Topic



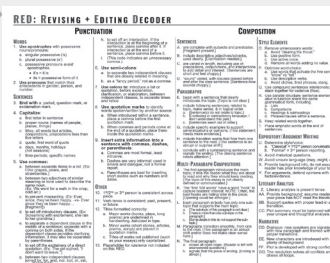
This tool helps us determine an angle for the topic to match the scope of the assignment.

Writing Planning Guide



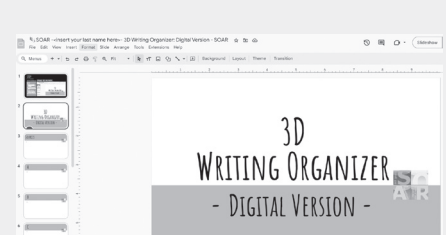
This tool provides prompts to create and organize the questions an essay or report should answer. Use it alone or to prepare a 3D Writing Organizer.

Revising & Editing Decoder (RED)



This tool guides the revising and editing process; it is covered in more detail in the next chapter.

3D Writing Organizer (digital version)



While not as ideal as tangible folders, pockets, and index cards, this Google Slides file can be used as a digital alternative.

Author's note

I discovered the tools featured in this chapter while teaching 3rd graders; they instantly and dramatically improved their writing! Soon afterward, my husband shared them with his 9th-graders ... and the quality of their career research papers also skyrocketed!

Eventually, I used them to write my master's thesis ... and then several books and courses, including this one.

I was even invited to share them at a writing retreat for top business executives. Guests paid over \$10,000 to attend that event ... and I had them using scissors, glue, and markers to make 3D writing organizers! They joked they paid \$10K to go back to kindergarten, but they weren't complaining; they were having fun! Many of those attendees went on to use these tools to write several books.

So don't let the "kindergarten" supplies fool you; these tools are powerful and will serve you for life!

Section A



Source: Canva

Questions are a universal writing hack: identify the questions your writing should answer, then answer them!

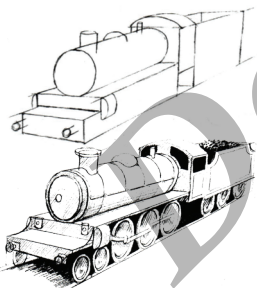
“How will ‘asking questions’ help me write paragraphs & essays?”

“Writing a paper” can feel daunting, but “answering a question” seems manageable.

As we learned with note-taking, all information is an answer to some question. Likewise, all informational writing is ultimately answering questions! We simply need to identify the questions our writing should answer, then focus on answering one question at a time.

What was once an overwhelming experience flips into a very simple process! Questions are the universal hack for all writing, from texts and emails to resumes and research papers. Simply make those “invisible” questions visible, then answer them!

Section B



Source: Unknown

A framework (above) makes drawing this train easier. Similarly, a writing structure simplifies the writing process!

“Why has writing been so challenging?”

Writing has been challenging because there are several blockers that make it far more complex than necessary. These blockers are rarely addressed in school because they are hiding in plain sight!

But once we become aware of them, we can easily navigate around them ...

Blocker #1: We are not taught the STRUCTURE of writing.

When writing, thoughts don't roll out of our head in perfect order! We need a framework, or structure, to help us organize our ideas, yet the structure of writing is rarely taught.

Solution

There's a simple structure to organize all writing: sentences, paragraphs, essays, and even books! It's the foundation of this chapter. It's so powerful, most students find it eliminates most writing challenges! (It is baffling why this structure is not taught as naturally as the alphabet!)

Blocker #2: Writing creates conflict in the brain.

Writing requires us to think both creatively (to generate ideas) *and* critically (to refine how we express those ideas in words and sentences). These two different thought-processes are managed by two different parts of the brain that CANNOT work at the same time! This conflict creates severe frustration for the writer!

Solution

Modify your mindset! Imagine the Muppets, Animal, and Ms. Piggy. *Animal* is our creative, idea-generating mind! *Ms. Piggy* is our picky and critical mind. During brainstorming or writing first drafts, activate your Animal Brain and silence your Ms. Piggy Brain. When revising or editing, do the opposite.

Blocker #3: Writing is two parts: “WHAT” then “HOW”

Writing is two distinct tasks:

- Deciding WHAT to write (solving problems), and
- Determining HOW to express it (composing language).

If we don't separate these tasks, the different brain sections compete for resources. Ultimately, they cause a “traffic jam” of brain neurons we experience as “writer's block.”

Solution

The writing structures in this chapter helps us organize ideas *before* writing them. While planning WHAT to say, jot keywords in this framework. Afterwards, the structure guides us on HOW to say it!

Blocker #4: 80% of writing is NOT writing!

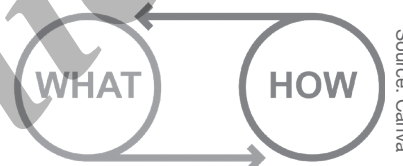
80% of a “writing assignment” should be spent *planning* the writing. Since we don't call it a “plan-to-write + writing assignment,” this preparation feels like “stalling!” This disconnect makes us feel impatient and frustrated by the very steps that ultimately make everything easier!

Solution

The greatest solution to this problem is simply awareness! Awareness that “planning” is the majority of the process settles the frustration, allows us to lean into it, and discover the many time-saving benefits of planning.

Blocker #5: There are waaaaaaay more than “five” steps in the writing process!

The traditional “five-step” writing process is misleading; in reality, the process involves at least 35 distinct steps! This failure to acknowledge the true



Source: Canva

Writing requires two opposing processes: first deciding WHAT to say, then determining HOW to say it.

number of steps involved creates a gap between expectation and actual experience, resulting in confusion and overwhelm.

Solution

While there are at least 35 distinct steps in the writing process, they do fall into five general categories. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to call it a “five-phase” process. This is only a subtle shift in language, but it’s a giant shift in managing our expectations!

Blocker #6: All writing is NOT equal!

It’s important to acknowledge when the “five-phase” writing process is necessary ... and when it is not. Different types of writing require different levels of attention.

For example, a casual text to a friend needs little accuracy but a formal resume will be rejected for just one error. The difference is in the stakes involved; friends forgive “errors” but a potential employer judges us by them.

Solution

Once again, the primary solution for this blocker is simply *awareness*. As we learn the Five-Phase Writing Process, it’s helpful to know that all five phases are only needed in limited situations. Meanwhile, taking an occasional piece of writing through the full process strengthens our writing skills for *all* purposes.

Blocker #7: School writing has an ARTIFICIAL audience and purpose.

In real-world writing, the audience and purpose are obvious and drive the writing. However, in school, the audience is usually just the teacher and the purpose is unclear. Yet, students are often instructed to identify the audience and purpose for the writing ... which causes confusion and frustration.

Solution

In this situation, the best we can do is accept that we have TWO audiences and purposes. The first audience is the teacher and the purpose is to demonstrate our skills and knowledge to him/her. The second audience and purpose will be “imaginary” and be determined by the context of each assignment.

Blocker #8: Writing and speaking are very different languages.

The assumption that writing is simply “capturing speech in the form of text” triggers confusion and poor writing! Writing communicates only through words, while speech also uses tone and body language. Learning to write in appropriate “written language” requires recognizing these differences.

Solution

Observe the “sound and rhythm” of good writing ... and imagine what that writing would sound like as the dialogue of a conversation or monologue of a speech. This heightened awareness will sharpen your skills as a writer!

Source: Microsoft



Not all writing is the same.
Only writing with a lot at
stake requires the full,
five-phase process.

Section C

“How do I write paragraphs?”

As noted, all writing has structure; knowing that structure dramatically simplifies writing!

The *Four-Square*, created by Judith and Evan Gould, is an elegantly simple, yet robust structure for writing ...

What is the Four-Square?

As the name suggests, this structure is composed of four squares; a central rectangle stretches across the middle, connecting all four squares. Inside each box is a question:

- **Central rectangle:** “What is the topic of this paragraph?”
- **Box 1:** “What is one fact about this topic?”
- **Box 2:** “What is another fact about this topic?”
- **Box 3:** “What is a third fact to support this topic?”
- **Box 4** (lower, right corner): We create a “concluding” statement by answering one of the following questions:
 - » “How do I feel about this topic and details?”
 - » “How can I restate the topic in different words?”
 - » “How can I summarize this information?”

How to use the Four-Square

We answer each question ... and have instantly written our paragraph!

Well, almost ... we simply need to add a few connecting or “transition” words to create a flow from answer to answer. But that’s all there is to it!

What is one fact about this topic? 	What is another fact about this topic?
What is the topic of this paragraph? 	
What is a third fact to support this topic? 	What is the main point?

What is one fact about this topic? It makes the organization of related ideas visible.	What is another fact about this topic? It accommodates the question/answer rhythm of writing.
What is the topic of this paragraph? The Four-Square model is an ideal structure for writers of all ages.	
What is a third fact to support this topic? It scales up or down, to all levels of writing.	What is the main point? I like the Four-Square model because it is easy to teach, learn, and use.

Section D

“How do I write an essay or report?”

Essays and reports follow the Four-Square structure, but they have larger scope, with more questions to ask and answers to gather.

So, we expand the Four-Square with the 3D Writing Organizer. This tool continues to provide a structure that simplifies the writing process to “answering one question at a time.” It also gives us a way to organize the growing amount of content.

We will be prompted to create a 3D Writing Organizer in the steps that follow ...

This 3D Writing Organizer simplifies collecting, organizing, and composing ideas.



The five-PHASE writing process

As the scope of writing expands, so does the need for more “steps” in the process. To write an effective essay or report, we must take it through the five PHASES of the writing process.

Phase 1: Plan your piece.

For the most efficient writing experience, expect to spend most time in Phase 1. Every minute of planning saves much more time and reduces frustration later!

A. Determine the why; “Why am I writing this piece?”

- A. **What is the purpose for writing this piece?** Most often the purpose is, “Because my teacher said so!” So, let’s ask, “Why did my teacher assign this? What does he/she want me to learn from this assignment?”
- B. **What is the topic?** “What am I going to write about?”
- C. **Who is the intended audience?** Once again, for a school assignment, your teacher may be the only person to read your work. In that case, ask “Who is the *potential* audience?”
- D. **What is a good angle?** “What do I want to say about my topic?” An angle that is too big lacks focus, too small lacks content. (See our writing tool, Cut the Right Slice of Your Topic at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).)
- E. **What is the author’s role?** “Is my primary objective to: *persuade, inform, or entertain*? Or a *combination*?”

The Writing Roadmap is a reference tool to guide you through all writing projects.

B. Determine the outcome; “What should the final piece look like?”

- F. **What are the specific parameters required?** READ ASSIGNMENT DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY! Underline every detail that the paper must include. (Missing details is a common way for students to lose points!) Ask your teacher for the rubric that will be used to grade your work; review it carefully.
- G. **What questions should my paper answer?** Look at the assignment for required sub-topics you are expected to cover; convert those sub-topics into questions. COMBINE SMALLER QUESTIONS: In an essay, each guiding question should have 3–4 answers; questions resulting in only 1–2 answers should be combined into broader questions.
- H. **Use the Writing Planning Guide** to prepare questions to be answered in the writing and to prep your 3D Writing Organizer.

DISCUSSION

Use the Planning Guide before assessing the 3-D Thinking Organizer. Follow the prompts below, then:

1. Circle one early **topic** paragraph (problem D) you want most.
2. Copy each fact from the **topic** (topic) in the **formative** process. Explain to organizer.

FORMATIVE

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

A

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

B

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

C

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

D

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

What Is Your Topic & Angle?

E

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

F

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

G

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

H

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

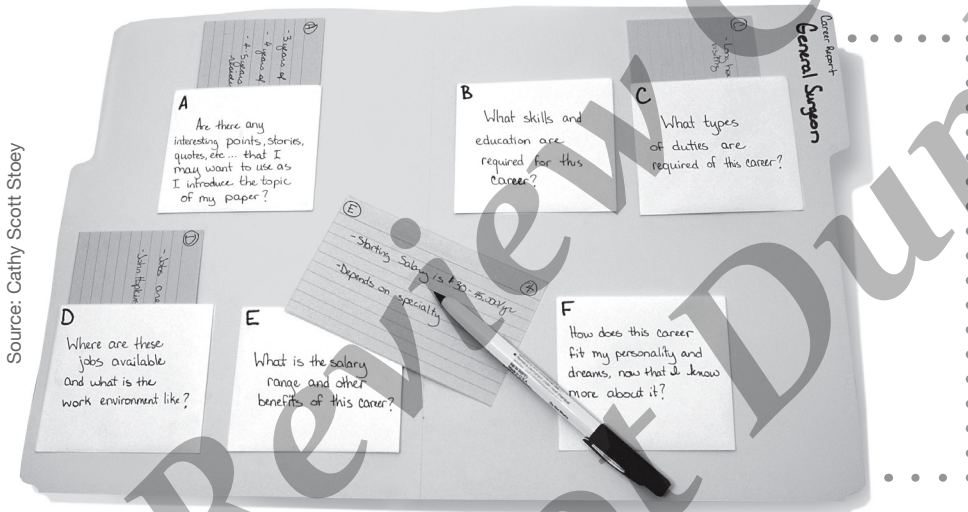
Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Write your topic paragraph here:

Use the Writing Planning Guide (found on page 2 of the Writing Roadmap) to prepare questions for your writing and set up your 3D Writing Organizer.

C. Assemble your 3D Writing Organizer



The 3D Writing Organizer is a tool that organizes all research notes and thoughts in a logical order.



80/20 Power Strategy

The 3D Writing Organizer

Gather materials



- 1 file folder
- 3–4 envelopes #6¾ (3⅝×6½")
- 12–30 index cards (3×5")
- Glue
- Pen or marker
- Scissors
- Writing Planning Guide (downloadable, also found on page 2 of the Writing Roadmap)

1



Seal and cut envelopes. Seal the envelopes closed, then cut them in half to form pockets. Each pocket represents one paragraph.

2



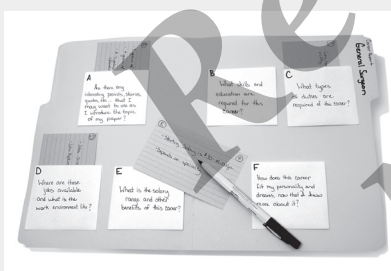
Glue the halved envelopes into the folder. Ensure the TOP of each pocket is facing the top of the folder; leave room at the top for index cards.

3



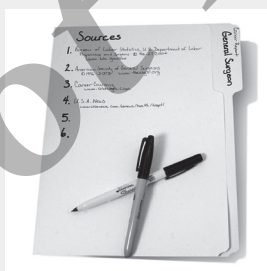
Label the pockets with letters. Write the letter in the upper, left corner of the pocket.

4



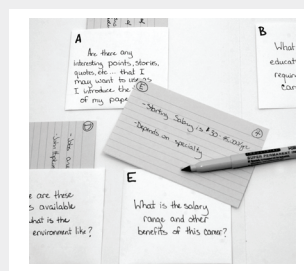
Write questions on pockets. Use the Writing Planning Guide to identify the questions.

5



Label the front cover, "Sources." List all sources you will use for research; number each source.

6



Record the pocket letter and source number in the the upper corners of each card.



Once your research is complete, it's time to start writing. See the next page for more details on creating your paper.

D. Collect thoughts and/or research.

- **Answer your questions.** Record answers on index cards, one answer per card. Avoid plagiarism; write answers in your own words. If using a direct quote is best, mark it with quotation marks. If applicable, record the page number where each answer was found.
- **Label each index card.** In the upper, left corner of the card, record the LETTER of the question the card is answering. In the opposite corner, record the source number.
- **Slide cards** into their corresponding pockets, as you complete them.
- **Continue until all questions have 3–4 answers.**

Phase 2: Write

In Phase 1, you determined WHAT to say. It's now time to determine HOW to say it. Use the 3D Writing Organizer as your guide:

- In Pocket A, confirm all cards answer question A.**
- Arrange the cards in the most logical order.** Imagine explaining the information to someone in conversation; what would “sound” best?
- Write paragraph A.** If you wrote answers in your own words, simply copy them in the order determined in Step #2.
- Add “connecting words” to transition between answers.** A helpful way to identify transition words/phrases is to imagine explaining the information in conversation.
- Repeat Steps 1–3 for all remaining paragraphs.**
- Write the opening paragraph.** The opening is much easier to write after “warming up” with the main content.
- Writing the closing paragraph.**

About the opening paragraph

The opening paragraph should:

- Capture the reader's interest with a compelling “hook,” and
- Tell the reader what they are about to read.

In journalism, the opening “hook” is called a lede. Daphne Gray, author of *8.5 Steps to Writing Better, Faster*, identified nine different types of ledes:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. True story/anecdote | 6. “The tease” |
| 2. Imaginary story/anecdote | 7. Play on words |
| 3. Analogy/metaphor | 8. Question |
| 4. Interesting fact | 9. Quote |
| 5. Gallery (series of interesting facts) | |

This list is very helpful for inspiring potential ledes!

Introductory Paragraph The “Lede”

Most often, inspiration for the lede comes DURING the research and/or writing process.

Collect ideas for your lede in this pocket.

G

Nine different types of ledes:

1. True story/anecdote
2. Imaginary story/anecdote
3. Analogy/metaphor
4. Interesting fact
5. Gallery (overload)
6. “The Tease”
7. Play on words
8. Question
9. Quote

Pocket “G” on the Writing Planning Guide provides prompts for the opening paragraph.

Concluding Paragraph

Now that I have covered a lot of information about my topic...

H

How can I summarize the unifying theme of all the information?

Why is this topic/argument important... to me and/or others?

Pocket “H” on the Writing Planning Guide provides prompts for the closing paragraph.

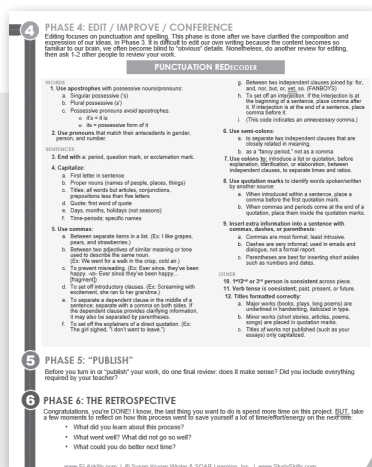
About the closing paragraph

The closing paragraph signals the end of the piece, summarizes key ideas, and may include the author's reflections. It often links back to an element from the opening.



Stuck? Got “writer’s block?”

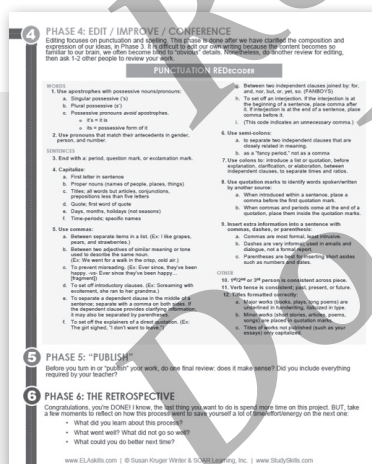
Imagine you are writing a text, DM, or email to a friend. As novelist Stephen King said, “All novels are really letters aimed at one person.” This approach applies to all writing—including formal writing—as it is the most clear and easy style to understand.



Page 3 of the Writing Roadmap will guide you through the revising phase.



To download, visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).



Page 4 of the Writing Roadmap will guide you through the editing phase.

Phase 3: Revise

Revising involves reviewing your draft to improve clarity and completeness. It is best done with “fresh eyes,” after a 24–48 hour break after the initial writing. Our downloadable **Revising & Editing Decoder** supports this phase; it will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

Phase 4: Edit

Editing focuses on grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This phase is done after we have clarified the composition and expression of our ideas, in Phase 3.

It is difficult to edit our own writing because the content becomes so familiar to our brain, we often become blind to “obvious” details. Nonetheless, do another review for editing, then ask 1–2 other people to review your work. The **Revising & Editing Decoder**, detailed in the next chapter, supports this process.

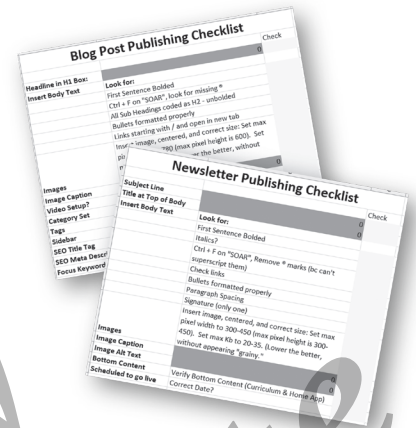
Phase 5: Publish

This phase is about getting your final draft to your audience.

In real life, “publishing” happens in a variety of contexts, each with different needs. For example, at SOAR, we publish every article we write, twice:

- **To our blog:** this version is posted to our web editor and formatted for online reading. It needs a headline optimized for the search-engine “bots” and a call-to-action, such as “sign up for our email newsletter.”
- **To subscribers of our email newsletter:** this version is posted in—and formatted for—our email-delivery software. It needs a subject line that captures *human* attention in a crowded inbox, VERY different from the blog’s headline! It also needs a new call-to-action because this audience has already subscribed to the newsletter.

However, for school assignments, this phase usually means “print your final draft and turn it in to your teacher.”



IRL, “publishing” is often a detailed process, as illustrated in our company checklists, above. However, in school, “publishing” usually means “print and turn it in.”

The 3D Writing Organizer: digital version

The digital organizer is a natural progression from the tangible file-folder, pockets, and index cards, especially as writing needs grow beyond eight paragraphs.

But the tangible folder is a critical precursor to the digital experience! By creating *real* pockets and sorting *real* cards with our hands, our body and brain deeply internalize the structure of writing. Use the paper supplies for a minimum of two–three writing assignments before converting to the digital tool.

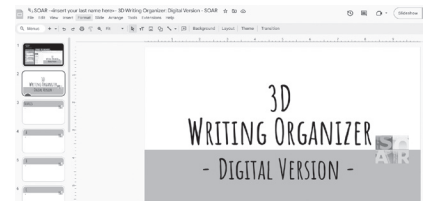
How to set up and use a digital “3D” Writing Organizer

Use slide-based software, such as PowerPoint or Google Slides. In this format, one slide = one pocket. To set it up:

1. **Open a new file.** Create a layout with two text boxes, one for title and one for numbered lists.
2. **Create several duplicates of the original slide.** Post one slide for each of the following: sources, each guiding question/paragraph, the opening paragraph, and the closing paragraph.
3. **Format the “Sources” slide.** Title the first slide, “Sources,” then list all sources you plan to use for research (if applicable). Assign a number to each source with “1–2–3” formatting. Add more sources as needed.
4. **Format remaining slides with guiding questions, one per slide.** Use the Writing Planning Guide (on Page 2 of the Writing Roadmap) to plan and create the questions.

To download the Writing Roadmap, visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

Section E



A digital 3D Writing Organizer is available at:
[StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

5. **Answer questions.** As you find/think of answers, click on the slide with the corresponding question; type the answer in a bullet-point list; record the source number in parenthesis (#) after each number. Type answers in your own words! Continue until each question has 3–4 answers.

Compose the first draft from the digital organizer

6. **Click on the first question; organize answers in a logical order.** Rearrange answers (via copy/paste) into a logical order.
7. **Remove the bullet-points.** If you typed answers in your own words, most of your first draft is now written!
8. **Modify transitions.** Polish your first draft by combining a few sentences and applying transition words.
9. **Paste paragraphs into a word processor.** Pull all of your content into a traditional document. Proceed through the remaining steps of the writing process.

Section F

How to write an email

3Qs + 1 Thank You

1. Every email should answer three questions and conclude with a “thank you:”
2. Why am I writing this email?
3. What are additional details this person should know?
4. What do I need this person to do?
5. Thank the person for their time.

Sentence Starters

The following sentence starters correspond with the three key questions and concluding “thank you:”

1. I am writing to _____
2. I have tried/included/etc _____
3. Please _____
4. Thank you for _____

Subject-Line

Compose the subject-line LAST; this is much easier to write *after* writing the full message.

Use keywords from the starter sentence. What is most important/relevant for the recipient to see in their inbox?

For a template and more tips, visit [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

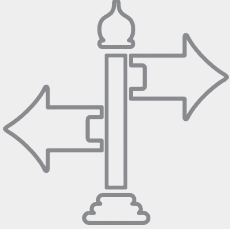
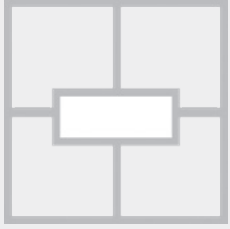
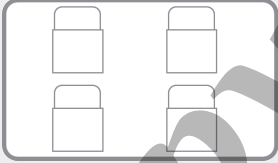



Source: Canva

Write the subject-line LAST!
Use keywords from the starter sentence.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible with the following insights and tools:

Writing blockers	Four square structure	3D Writing Organizer	Writing Roadmap
			
Exposing eight common writing blockers, allowing us to navigate around them.	Introducing the Four-Square structure, making the process of generating and organizing ideas visible.	Creating a 3D Writing Organizer, giving us a tool to collect and organize the many details needed for essays and reports.	Providing the Writing Roadmap, a downloadable tool to guide us through all phases and steps of the writing process.

The brain on ... writing paragraphs and essays

Different phases of the writing process are managed by different sections of the brain.

Phases 1 & 2 happen in *separate areas* within the Back Brain:

- In Phase 1, we generate and organize ideas, which is handled by the brain's "concept" and "problem-solving" areas.
- In Phase 2, the "language" sections of our brain activate to select the words to express our thoughts and ideas.

Phases 3–5 are managed by the Front Brain. When we shift from "generating" ideas and words to "critiquing" those ideas, words, and their presentation.



Source: iStockphoto

Different writing phases engage different brain areas; phases 1–2 = Back Brain phases 3–5 = Front Brain

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

42. Feeling overwhelmed by writing assignments?
43. Struggling to organize your thoughts and/or research for a paper?
44. Struggling to compose your thoughts and research into clear sentences and paragraphs?

How to Learn Grammar & Punctuation

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

45. Feel overwhelmed by the number of grammar and punctuation rules to learn?
46. Struggle to remember and correctly apply grammar rules when writing?
47. Hesitate to write due to confusion over grammar and punctuation rules?

Author's note

I have miserable school memories of doing endless grammar/punctuation worksheets, yet never understanding how the rules fit into my own writing!

Even after two decades of writing books and articles, I still found some elements confusing; online research only led to explanations in complex jargon.

But a few years ago, a local 6–12th-grade school asked for my help to develop “a student-friendly” (as they said) ELA curriculum. Refusing to inflict the same misery on students, I thought, “There must be a better way to teach grammar!”

Research confirmed my suspicion. For one, there is overwhelming proof that traditional methods, like worksheets, are grossly ineffective, even harmful! I also discovered tools that make grammar and punctuation “visible” and understandable.

This chapter is what I wish I had in school! I can't change my past frustrations, but I can prevent the same frustrations for YOU! 😊❤️

Supplies needed

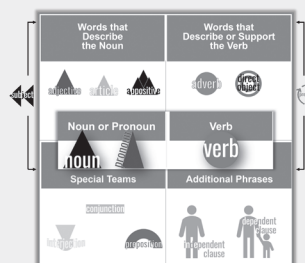
Download printable tools to use for any/all writing projects:

Revising & Editing Decoder (RED)



This tool guides the revising and editing process. The RED is also available on pages 3 and 4 of the Writing Roadmap.

Four-Square Sentence



This model illustrates the positions words play in sentences.

“How will ‘asking questions’ help me learn grammar and punctuation?”

Mastering writing is an ever-evolving process for two reasons:

First, to quote Jack Sparrow, writing “rules” are more like *guidelines*. Rules are often debated and broken for various reasons.

Second, writers are too close to their own thoughts to review their work objectively. Prior knowledge and context shape understanding more than visual cues. As a result, the more we know about a topic, the less we notice finer details. Ironically, the more skilled we become, the less likely we are to spot our mistakes.

ALL writers need external, objective feedback!

For example, I still hire editors to review and refine my work, even after two decades of professional writing. A “good writer” must hold this paradox, confidence in their ability with humility to accept imperfection and the need for continuous improvement.

What does *not* work?

The best ways to teach grammar have been debated for centuries and studied extensively over the last 100 years. In 1963, scholars reviewed the abundance of studies available at that time and reported:

“*The conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms that the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible ... even a harmful effect on the improvements of writing!*”¹

In other words, the evidence overwhelmingly shows that rule-focused worksheets do NOT help. In fact, they *hinder* our ability to learn these skills. The report went on to add, “Surely there is no justification ... for the great expenditure of time and effort still being devoted to formal grammar in American schools.”

But now, over 60 years later, traditional grammar instruction persists in schools!

What does work?

We’ve learned the only way to learn is to connect new information to our prior knowledge. Research confirms that, to learn grammar and punctuation rules, we must connect them to our own writing.

To facilitate these connections, we must get feedback on our writing ... and use that feedback to refine and improve our writing.

What is the SOAR approach?

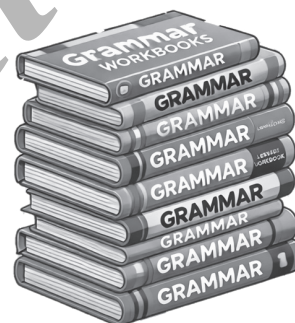
First, we make the grammar and punctuation rules *visible*. It often feels like the rules are endless and mysterious! But we put all rules needed for school

Section A



The key question to learning grammar and punctuation is really a mindset ...

“How can I improve?”



Source: ChatGPT

Studies show formal grammar instruction and worksheets hinder, rather than help students learn how to write properly.

1. Braddock, R., Lloyd-Jones, R., & Schoer, L. (1963). Research in written composition. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

(and beyond) on ONE page to show that there are only a *finite* number.* This makes it far less daunting and more manageable to learn them! This tool is called the Revising & Editing Decoder (RED).

Secondly, we connect the rules to our prior knowledge by getting feedback on our writing. Other people (peers, mentors, parents, teachers) read our writing and give feedback using codes from the RED.

Finally, we “ask questions” to decode the feedback: “What is this code? How does it apply to my writing?” If teachers simply write comments on our paper, we make corrections without learning the rules. By *decoding* feedback, our brain makes the connections needed to learn the rules.

* In the Writing Roadmap, we split these rules across two half-pages, but all together, they all fit on one page.

Section B

“Why are grammar and punctuation important?”

Grammar and punctuation are critical elements of communication, but we don’t notice them until they are missing or used incorrectly. Without them, we only have piles of words with no way to make sense of them!

Grammar is ...

the order of words, which gives them meaning; it is the position words play in a sentence. For example:

*and go friends to I the friday every movies my like best
suspenseful we dramas the*

This example is a meaningless string of words. However, when we apply the structure of grammar, these words begin to make more sense ...

*my friends and I go to the movies every friday we like
suspenseful dramas the best*

Now, the words make sense ... but they are lifeless! Also, they are difficult to read; it is not obvious where one thought ends and another begins. Imagine if more details were added and this string of words became 4x longer ... the passage would grow far more challenging—and boring—to read!

Punctuation is ...

the use of space and symbols to clarify and enhance meaning. The previous example illustrates that grammar adds meaning to words, but it only goes so far. Grammar needs a boost from punctuation to inject some clarity—and life—into words! For example:

*My friends and I go to the movies every Friday. We like
suspenseful movies the best!*

Now, it is clear where one thought ends and another begins. Also, the words now have a little more zest!

Source: Canva



Grammar and punctuation make language clear and engaging.

Punctuation serves many roles, it:

- Clarifies meaning
- Aids pronunciation of words/sentences
- Conveys the tone (formal, casual, dialogue, etc.)
- Improves readability through visual formatting
- Reflects the author's style and personality

Emotional ties and turmoil of grammar: the invisible battle

On the surface, grammar and punctuation appear to be basic, academic tools. But they are the subjects of deep controversy, dating back to the earliest printed words!

At some time or another, we all receive criticism over our use of grammar; if we are not aware of it, it may feel personal.

For example, some readers who have called out typos in my writing add wild judgments about my character as a person and professional! There is a perfectly reasonable explanation for why writers miss their own typos. Plus, I hire several editors to review my work, so those typos slipped by *all* of us!

These irrational reactions happen because people are deeply, emotionally attached to our language! It is this subconscious attachment that can trigger unreasonable responses over language use, such as anger and moral judgment.

In school, some educators judge grammar and punctuation so strongly that students internalize their criticism as a hit to their value as a person! It's crucial for educators to ensure their passion for language accuracy *supports* rather than *judges* students.

People often view language rules as “definitive,” but no two grammar guides are identical! Grammar and punctuation are influenced by many factors: geographic region, culture, theory, and personal experiences. The myriad of language influences results in diverse opinions.

“What positions do words play in a sentence?”

Section C

A sentence is often defined as being “a complete thought.”

But how do we know what makes a thought complete?



And what about the “complete thoughts” that are clearly *more* than one sentence?

It's challenging to determine the “completeness” of a thought, especially when it spans multiple sentences. It's not always clear when a thought is too brief to be a sentence or too extensive to be just one. For this reason, it is best to revise and edit sentences after drafting larger text segments, like paragraphs or essays.

In most cases, “we just know” when a sentence is complete. But technically, a sentence is defined by the roles played by the words. Every sentence has a noun (representing a person, place, thing, or idea) and a verb (an action). All other words in a sentence must be about the central noun and verb.

If sentences were sports ...

Just like every sport has different positions for players (like a pitcher or catcher in baseball), sentences have different roles for words.

In sports, the positions stay the same, but the players may change positions. Likewise, the roles in a sentence stay the same, but the words change positions.

The positions that words play in a sentence are known as the “parts of speech.”

“What positions do words play in a sentence?”

The “nine” parts of speech & more

They are commonly known as the “nine” parts of speech, but there are more terms associated with the roles words play in sentences.

While nouns and verbs are easy to identify, others are more abstract. To make them more concrete, Dr. Maria Montessori created Grammar Symbols for the nine parts of speech; we added symbols for the additional terms.

Each symbol is intentionally chosen to represent features or functions of each part of speech, making invisible grammar concepts visible and easier to grasp.

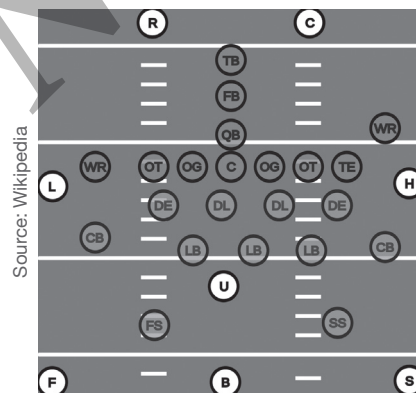
Our downloadable grammar reference tools offer detailed explanations; these resources will also help you decode “rules” on the RED.

In addition, the Four-Square sentence model helps us better understand the roles and functions of each part of speech ...

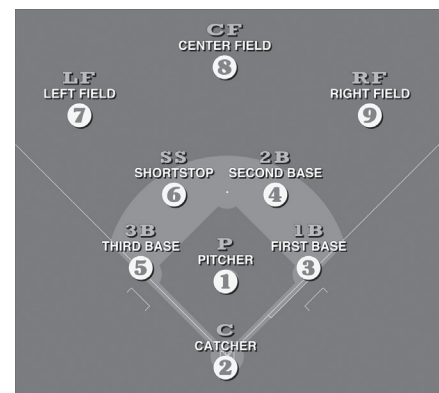
“What positions do words play in a sentence?”

The Four-Square Sentence

In sports, diagrams show player positions and their relationships, like on a football field or baseball diamond.



Source: Wikipedia



In sports, diagrams show player positions, like on a football field or baseball diamond.

Source: ELASkills.com

Grammar Symbols - The Nine Parts of Speech			
	Definition	Symbol	Symbol Significance
noun	Names a person, place, or thing		This symbol has three sides, like the three types of words it describes. Its color is like "fashion," the most common element in matter.
adjective	Describes a noun		This word depends on the noun, so its symbol is the same shape, but smaller. The smaller size illustrates its dependency on the noun.
article	Identifies a noun as being specific or unspecific: a, an, the		This word depends on the noun, so its symbol is the same shape, but the smallest pyramid because only 3 words in English can be this part of speech.
pronoun	Substitutes a noun: I, he, she, you, it, we, they, them, etc.		This word replaces the noun and carries its meaning, so its symbol is a smaller version of the noun. It is the narrowest pyramid because most of these words are short.
verb	Names an action		If you set this symbol down, it will roll. It has action, like the word it describes. It is the color of our blood, to suggest energy.
adverb	Describes a verb		This word depends on the verb, so it is the same shape, but smaller to illustrate its dependency on the verb.
preposition	Shows relationships between other words in a sentence.		This symbol is shaped like a bridge because this word acts like a bridge in a sentence. It explains how two other words are related to each other.
conjunction	Links other words, phrases, or clauses together		This symbol is the silhouette of a line in a chain because this word connects two other words, phrases, or clauses together.
interjection	Expression of strong emotion or feeling, often followed by an exclamation point.		This symbol is a combination of the symbols for nouns and verbs and resembles the punctuation that most often follows it, the exclamation point.

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Grammar Symbols make abstract grammar concepts clear and easy to understand. Download our reference charts at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).

Similarly, the Four-Square Sentence illustrates the relationships between the parts of speech, or the positions words play in a sentence.

This model helps us understand their functions by comparing them to each other, much like Concept Maps help us learn new terms by comparing them. (This process is called “comparative analysis.”)

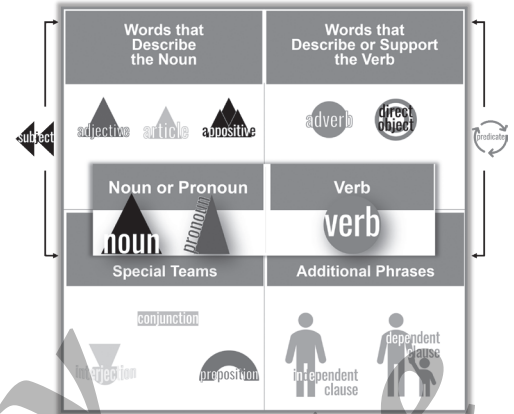
“What positions do words play in a sentence?”

The Four-Square Sentence: how it works

- **In the center:** the noun and verb (left and right, respectively), as every sentence revolves around them.
- **Upper-left:** positions that describe the noun.
- **Upper-right:** positions that describe or support the verb.
- **Lower-left:** “special teams” parts of speech that add detail and style when used.
- **Lower-right:** additional phrases to extend the sentence.

The sentence’s **subject** includes the noun and its descriptors (middle + upper-left).

The **predicate** includes the verb and its related words (middle + upper-right).



The Four Square Sentence shows the positions words play in a sentence. Download a full-color model—and other grammar tools for reference—at: StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

What is the Revising & Editing Decoder?

Revising is reviewing the composition (grammar) of writing: does it make sense? Is everything in a logical order? Is the word-choice clear?

Editing is reviewing the presentation ... primarily the use of proper spelling and grammar.

Section D



(RED)

Visit StudySkills.com/bonus-v3 to access a downloadable version of the Revising & Editing Decoder (RED).

RED: REVISING + EDITING DECODER	
PUNCTUATION	COMPOSITION
<p>WORDS</p> <p>1. Use apostrophes with possessive nouns/pronouns:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> singular possessive ('s) plural possessive ('s) possessive pronouns avoid apostrophes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> it's = it is its = possessive form of it <p>2. Use pronouns that match their antecedents in gender, person, and number.</p> <p>SENTENCES</p> <p>3. End with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark.</p> <p>4. Capitalize:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> first letter in sentence proper nouns (names of people, places, things) titles; all words but articles, conjunctions, prepositions less than five letters quote; first word of quote days, months, holidays (not seasons) time-periods; specific names <p>5. Use commas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> between separate items in a list. (Ex: I like grapes, pears, and strawberries.) to separate two adjectives of similar meaning or tone used to describe the same noun. (Ex: We went for a walk in the crisp, cold air.) to prevent misreading. (Ex: Ever since, they've been happy. -vs- Ever since they've been happy... [fragment]) to set off introductory clauses. (Ex: Screaming with excitement, she ran to her grandma.) to separate a dependent clause in the middle of a sentence; separate with a comma on both sides. If the dependent clause provides clarifying information, it may also be separated by parentheses. to set off the explainers of a direct quotation. (Ex: "I don't want to leave," I said.) between two independent clauses joined by: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. (FANBOYS) <p>6. Use semi-colons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> to separate two independent clauses that are closely related in meaning. as a "fancy period," not as a comma. <p>7. Use colons to: introduce a list or quotation, before explanation, clarification, or elaboration, between independent clauses, to separate times and ratios</p> <p>8. Use quotation marks to identify words spoken/written by another source:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> When introduced within a sentence, place a comma before the first quotation mark. When commas and periods come at the end of a quotation, place them inside the quotation marks. <p>9. Insert extra information into a sentence with commas, dashes, or parentheses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Commas are most formal, least intrusive. Dashes are very informal; used in emails and dialogue, not a formal report. Parentheses are best for inserting short asides such as numbers and dates. <p>OTHER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1st/2nd or 3rd person is consistent across piece. Verb tense is consistent; past, present, or future. Titles formatted correctly: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Major works (books, plays, long poems) are underlined in handwriting, italicized in type. Minor works (short stories, articles, poems, songs) are placed in quotation marks. Titles of works not published (such as your essays) only capitalized. Placeholder for rule/error not included on this RED. 	<p>SENTENCES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> are complete with subjects and predicates. [Fragment present.] include descriptive adjectives/adverbs, used clearly. [Clarification needed.] are varied in length, including use of prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections to add detail and interest. [Sentences are short and feel choppy.] "sound" varied, with clauses placed before and after the core sentence. [Sentence-flow sounds choppy.] <p>PARAGRAPHS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> begin with a sentence that clearly introduces the topic. [Topic is not clear.] include following sentences: related to topic, make sense, & in logical order. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> [Sentence(s) do not relate to topic.] [Confusing or contradictory language; I don't understand this part.] [Sentences seem out of order.] include specific examples to support generalizations or opinions. [This statement needs more evidence.] include transition words that flow from one sentence to the next. [This sentence is an abrupt or surprise shift.] conclude with a summarizing sentence and signals the ending. [The closing sentence needs attention.] <p>MULTI-PARAGRAPH COMPOSITIONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The first paragraph introduces the main topic; it tells the reader what they are about to read and why they should keep reading. [The topic of this essay is not clearly defined or communicated.] The "first 100 words" have a good "hook" to capture readers' interest. NOTE: Often, the best hooks are hiding later in the piece. [Opening could be stronger.] Each paragraph in body has only one sub-topic that supports the main topic. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The sub-topic of this paragraph is not clear. There is more than one sub-topic in this paragraph. Some details in this do not support the sub-topic. Paragraphs transition smoothly, from one to the next. [This paragraph is an abrupt shift and/or does not make clear sense here.] The final paragraph: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> closes all open loops. [Reader is left with unanswered questions.] signals that the piece is ending. [Ending is abrupt.]

The Revising & Editing Decoder (RED) is a one-page tool that captures all grammar (composition) and punctuation rules needed for academic and professional writing. Each rule is assigned a numerical or alphabetical code.

When someone reviews our writing and identifies areas for improvement, they mark these sections with a code to indicate which rule is not applied properly. We then use the RED to decode their feedback.

The decoding process prompts us to *ask questions* about how the rules apply to our writing; these questions forge the connections needed for our brain to understand the rules.

The RED provides many benefits ...

The RED makes all grammar and punctuation rules visible, consolidating them into a single page. And, it also:

- Helps us review/edit our own writing.
- Provides an efficient method for others to give feedback.
- Ensures consistency across all parties: students, parents, mentors, and educators.
- Prompts learning through *decoding*, allowing our brain to make meaningful connections to the rules.

NOTE: The concept of “coding” was inspired by Laura Randazzo’s Grading Hacks on YouTube. The rules are sourced from the renowned *Elements of Style* by Strunk & White.

Section E

“How do I use the RED?”

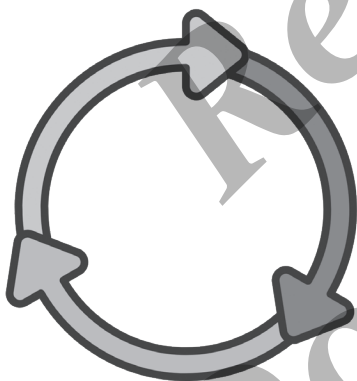
First and foremost ... use with emotional safety!

The Revising & Editing Decoder (RED) will only promote learning if used in an environment of emotional safety! Students must feel comfortable to share “imperfect” writing. “Helpers” providing feedback must have a mindset of “kind assistance and encouragement” rather than critical judgment. Without a safe environment, students will retreat to a state of caution and fear that shuts learning down.

The cycles of the revising & editing process

After finishing the first draft, we must take a break. Writing and revising/editing are two phases that require opposing mindsets, so we should ideally get a full night’s sleep to help our brain transition most effectively.

The revising and editing stages usually require several rounds of feedback-and-refinement. However, the Revising & Editing Decoder (RED) can improve the efficiency of this process.



Revising and editing often requires several rounds of feedback.

Round 1: Do a self-evaluation.

First, revise your writing. Ask yourself, “Is my message clear and logical?” Check for completeness, order, and unnecessary or missing words. You will always find improvements!

Next, read again to review punctuation. Ensure sentences start with capital letters and end with the correct punctuation. Also, check your use of commas. If you made notes on paper, update your digital file.

Round 2: Get feedback from a “helper.”

Before presenting your work to a teacher, get feedback from someone else, such as a: parent, older sibling, or mentor. This frees up teachers to focus on more specialized feedback.

Provide your helper with (1) your latest draft and (2) a copy of the Revising & Editing Decoder (RED). Ask them to underline any issues and use the RED codes to provide feedback. If they identify a problem that doesn’t have a specific code, they should underline it and explain verbally.

Once you receive their feedback, use the RED to decode and apply the necessary changes. Ask for clarification, as needed.

Round 3+: Get feedback from your teacher.

Submit your updated draft to your teacher. After receiving his/her feedback, decode it and make appropriate modifications. If you have questions, ask for clarification. Repeat as needed.

Note to teachers about how to use the RED

The emotional safety of students is paramount! Use the Revising & Editing Decoder (RED) to assist and encourage, *not* judge.

Depending on students’ age/experience, consider introducing the RED gradually; start with a few codes and add more over time. This approach reinforces the RED as a developmental tool rather than one for critique and punishment.

Another way to support positive growth is to ensure that students go through at least one feedback cycle with you before final grading. Or, consider adopting a “no final grade” policy, allowing students to make improvements, even after receiving graded feedback.

Finally, the most powerful way to reinforce a positive experience and correct usage is to highlight three codes students are “getting right!” To differentiate from corrections, draw a unique symbol around “celebration codes,” such as an exaggerated exclamation mark.



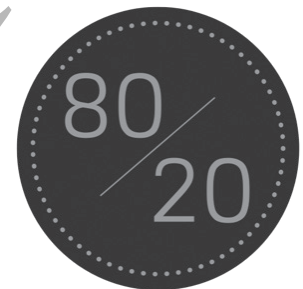
HELPFUL TIPS

1

Read out loud to notice more details.

2

Read the piece one sentence at a time, beginning with the last sentence and working backwards. This approach reduces the influence of context, helping us better spot punctuation errors.



80/20 Power Strategy
Get feedback on your writing ...
in codes.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.

Section F

“How do I NOT use the RED?”

Using the RED effectively means understanding how and when *not* to use it:

- **Don't get overwhelmed.** The RED lists *all* rules needed for school and career, but you already know many of them instinctively! Focus only on learning the rules you don't know; these are the errors that naturally surface in your own writing. Never waste time memorizing them.
- **Don't use it for “writing to THINK” activities.** For example: journaling, taking notes, brainstorming, filling out graphic organizers, drawing/ explaining connections on a concept map, etc. are activities focused on *generating* ideas, NOT refining them.
- **Don't use it for informal writing.** Obviously, the RED is overkill for a quick text or a joke! Primarily use the RED to support formal writing.
- **Don't let it crimp your style.** The RED is a baseline, not a constraint on your writing style. Understand the rules, but feel free to break them when it enhances your message. Just be consistent with your style choices. Experts may differ on rules, but they agree on consistency.

A note to teachers about how to NOT use the RED

Throughout history, in all grammar and punctuation guides, there is a pattern of presenting a set of rules, followed by a disclaimer that the rules are NOT absolute! Scholars rarely reach consensus, reflecting the flexibility of “proper” writing. Therefore, avoid being too strict with its application and make adjustments to the RED as you deem appropriate. If something in a student's writing is on the edge of “incorrect,” let it go. Persistent issues will resurface over time.

Making the invisible, visible

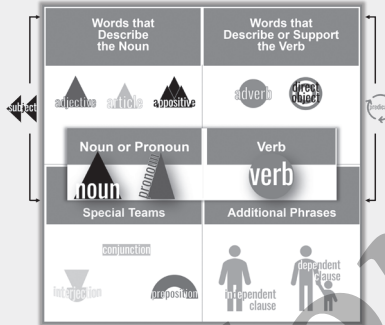
In this chapter, we made the invisible, visible with:

Grammar Symbols

Symbol	Definition	Symbol Significance
	Noun: a person, place, or thing	This symbol identifies the noun in the sentence. It is the subject or object of the sentence.
	Verb: an action	This symbol identifies the verb in the sentence. It is the action or state of being.
	Adjective: describes a noun	This symbol identifies the adjective in the sentence. It describes the noun.
	Adverb: describes a verb	This symbol identifies the adverb in the sentence. It describes the verb.
	Preposition: shows the relationship between a noun and another word	This symbol identifies the preposition in the sentence. It shows the relationship between a noun and another word.
	Conjunction: joins two words or phrases	This symbol identifies the conjunction in the sentence. It joins two words or phrases.
	Interjection: expresses a feeling or emotion	This symbol identifies the interjection in the sentence. It expresses a feeling or emotion.

Grammar Symbols make the parts-of-speech, and their functions, visible and tangible.

The Four-Square Sentence



The Four-Square Sentence plots “word positions” in a diagram, showing the relationships between parts-of-speech.

THE RED

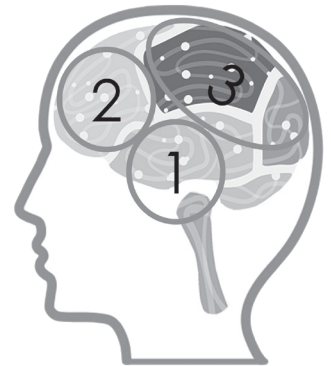
RED: REVISING + EDITING DECODER	COMPOSITION
<p>REVISIONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 2. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 3. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 4. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 5. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 6. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 7. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 8. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 9. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 10. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 11. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 12. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 13. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 14. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 15. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 16. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 17. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 18. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 19. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 20. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. <p>EDITING</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 2. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 3. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 4. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 5. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 6. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 7. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 8. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 9. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 10. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 11. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 12. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 13. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 14. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 15. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 16. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 17. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 18. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 19. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 20. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 	<p>COMPOSITION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 2. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 3. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 4. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 5. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 6. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 7. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 8. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 9. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 10. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 11. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 12. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 13. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 14. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 15. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 16. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 17. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 18. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 19. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence. 20. Use appropriate words and phrases to revise the sentence.

The RED compiles all revising and editing rules onto one page, making them clear and attainable, and reducing ambiguity between writers and reviewers.

The brain on ... learning punctuation and grammar

The writing process involves multiple phases due to the need for mental shifts across various regions of the brain. The creativity of generating ideas and words engages the “Back Brain.”

In contrast, the Front Brain is activated to critically analyze writing during revising and editing.



Source: iStockphoto

The Front Brain handles the critical analysis of revising and editing.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

45. Feeling overwhelmed by the number of grammar and punctuation rules to learn?
46. Struggling to remember and correctly apply grammar rules when writing?
47. Hesitating to write due to confusion over grammar and punctuation rules?

How to Give Presentations

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

- 48. Feel fear or anxiety over speaking in front of an audience?
- 49. Feel overwhelmed preparing content for presentations?
- 50. Find it challenging to gather content and coordinate visual aids for a presentation?

Supplies needed

Download printable tools to use for any/all writing projects:

Writing Roadmap

Name: _____ Date: _____ ID: _____

WRITING ROADMAP

1 PHASE 1: PLAN YOUR PIECE

80% of the time you spend "writing"... will NOT be spent writing. It will be spent planning. The more time you spend planning, the less time you will spend writing and revising.

A. THE WHY: "WHY Am I Writing This Piece?"

a. What is the purpose for writing this piece?
Most often, your real purpose is, "Because my teacher said so!" So, let's ask, "Why did my teacher assign it? What does he/she want to get from this assignment?"

b. What is the topic?
What are you going to write about? Often, teachers assign the topic. If you can select your own but need help choosing it, look for a Brainstorm Prompt on the Thinking Tools page.

c. Who is the intended audience?
Once again, for a school assignment, your teacher may be your one and only real audience. If that's the case, who do you think your potential audience should be?

d. What is my angle?
What, exactly, do I want to say about my topic? If your angle is "too big," you'll struggle to focus. If your angle is "too small," you won't have much to say. See the Thinking Tools for help on how to "Cut the Right-Sized Slice of Your Topic."

e. What is my role?
Is my primary objective to persuade, inform, entertain? Or a combination?

B. THE OUTCOME: "What Should the Final Piece Look Like?"

a. What are the specific parameters required?
READ DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY! Underline every detail that must be included. (Missing elements is how students lose most points.) If possible, staple assignment rubric to this map.

b. What questions should my paper answer?
Look at the assignment for required sub-topics; convert them to questions. Combine smaller questions. In an essay, each guiding question should have 3-4 answers; questions resulting in only 1-2 answers should combine them into broader questions. Use the Writing Planning Guide on page 2 to get started...

www.ELASkills.com | © Susan Kruger Winter & SOAR Learning, Inc. | www.StudySkills.com

Cut the Right Slice of Your Topic

Name: _____ Date: _____ ID: _____

CUT THE RIGHT SLICE OF YOUR TOPIC

What's the "Right Slice"?

One of the most common challenges for writers is finding the "right size" topic for their piece. When writers struggle to find a focus, it's usually because their topic is too big. When writers have trouble finding something to say, their topic is usually too small. So, how do you find the "right size" focus?

Think "CAKE!" Imagine that the entire topic of your argument is a cake. Your writing piece should be about ONE "slice" of that topic. Follow the prompts below to find the right-size slice of your topic.

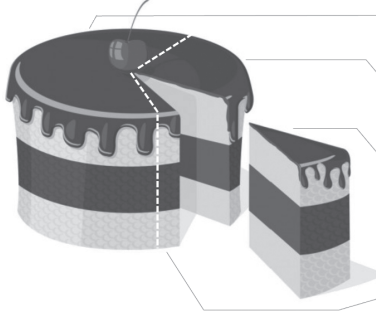
1 First, reflect on your audience and the most important things you want to say...

My Audience

Important Points I Want to Make

How My Audience
Thinks & Feels about this Topic

2 Next, fill in the blanks, below. Start from the top; name the "full topic." Then, identify smaller segments of that topic to help you find the right focus for your current assignment.



Whole Cake (Full Topic)

3-Page "Slice"

3-Paragraph "Slice" (plus opening & conclusion)

1-Paragraph "Slice"

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Author's note

Public speaking is often ranked as people's top fear ... and it used to be mine! I was an extraordinarily shy child and teen. But when I had to give a speech in 8th grade, my dad—a gifted speaker and presenter—was determined that I would conquer my fear!

His method? E.N.D.L.E.S.S. practice!

Just when I thought I could take no more, he pushed me way out of my comfort zone! He had me stand on the front room table, while he ran to the back of the house. With several walls between us, he continued to coach me.

"Do it again!" "Louder!" "One more time."

Standing on the table, I felt ridiculous! We lived on a busy street and I was lit up like a fishbowl! But Dad pressed on ...

"I can't hear you!" "Again ..."

When I finally "passed his test," he gave me a hug and sent me off to bed. I doubt I returned the favor; I was *not* happy.

I gave my speech the next day. To my surprise, I was not remotely nervous! After awkwardly standing on a table the night before, standing at a podium wasn't so bad.

An even greater surprise was the number of compliments I received! Throughout the day, almost everyone in class offered kind words, even the "cool" kids! That *never* happened!

Since then, I've never been afraid to speak in public. Standing on that table in the living room, I could never have imagined what a gift my dad was giving me; today, professional speaking is a big part of my career.

My dad's lesson? Confidence is built through preparation!



Source: Helene Anderson

Always my greatest cheerleader, my dad *shoved* me out of my comfort zone ... and gave me a great gift!

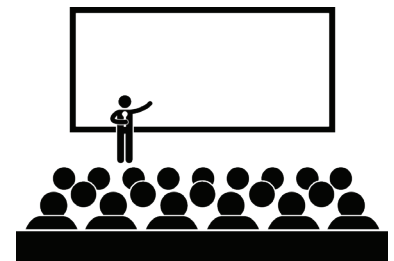
"How will 'asking questions' help me give presentations?"

Preparing a presentation is the same as preparing a piece of writing. In fact, our go-to tool for preparing presentations is Phase 1 on the Writing Roadmap.

Just as we do with writing a paper, we begin by asking ourselves a variety of questions to identify the purpose, audience, and angle of our topic. Finally, we ask, "What questions should my presentation answer?"

These questions shape the structure and content of our presentation! We will even use the 3D Writing Organizer (from Chapter 15) to collect thoughts and information for our presentations.

Section A



Source: Microsoft

Asking questions determines your presentation's content and structure.

Section B

“Why is public speaking so intimidating?”

Public speaking is intimidating because we don't understand the difference between spoken and written language. Knowing this difference is the key to giving an engaging presentation ...

Spoken vs. written language: how are they different?

Written language is more than just “printed speech.” Spoken language mainly communicates through tone and body language, with only 7% of the message in the words themselves. In contrast, written language depends 100% on words.

In spoken language, the speaker sets the pace, and listeners can seek clarification. In writing, however, the reader sets the pace and can revisit the text, but can't ask for immediate clarification.

The biggest difference is in *planning*. Spoken language is often spontaneous, molded by the immediate environment. It requires little planning and uses informal words and grammar. Precise accuracy is less of an issue since listeners can ask questions to clarify meaning, as needed.

In contrast, written language requires careful selection of words, correct grammar, and precision resulting in a more formal tone.

	Spoken Language	Written Language
How is communication conveyed?	Mostly via tone-of-voice and body language	Entirely via words
What percent of the message is conveyed through words?	7%	100%
How precisely accurate does the message need to be?	Minimal precision needed; receiver can ask for clarification.	Requires optimal accuracy; reader cannot ask for clarification.
Who controls the speed of information?	The speaker, but listeners can ask for clarification.	The reader controls the speed of uptake. The reader can reread, but no immediate clarification is available.
How much planning is required?	Little to no planning; usually casual and responding to immediate context.	Much planning required due to lack of interaction and permanence.
What is the style of language?	Uses simple words, inconsistent grammar is ok, accuracy less critical	Formal style: requires organized flow of information, correct: word-choice, grammar, and punctuation.
Permanence	Evaporates once spoken	Indefinitely permanent

What are the two greatest challenges of public speaking?

The differences between spoken and written language lead us to the main challenges of public speaking ...

1. **Delivering a clear message to an audience that can't ask for clarifications**, unlike in a conversation.
2. **Delivering a presentation that sounds and “feels” like natural speech**, despite being well-planned and often supported by written notes.



Source: Canva

Confidence in public speaking comes from understanding the difference between spoken and written language.

How do we overcome each of these challenges?

1. **To deliver a clear message to our audience ...** The solution is to carefully organize all content—spoken and visual—with the 3D Writing Organizer.
2. **To give a confident presentation that feels like natural speech ...** The solution is to practice the presentation multiple times ... until it *feels* natural! *Standing on tables is optional.* ;)

“How do I prepare the content of a presentation?”

The following prompts are from Phase 1 of the Writing Roadmap ...

A. Determine the why; “Why am I giving this presentation?”

- What is the purpose for this presentation?** Most often the purpose is, “Because my teacher said so!” So, let's ask, “Why did my teacher assign this? What does he/she want me to learn from this process?”
- What is the topic?** “What will my presentation be about?”
- Who is the intended audience?** Often, the default audience is your teacher and classmates ... Are they the *true* audience? Or is there another, “potential-yet-imaginary audience” for whom you could give this presentation?
- What is a good angle?** “What do I want to say about my topic?” An angle that is too big lacks focus. An angle too small lacks content. (See “Cut the Right Slice of Your Topic” at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3).)
- What is the presenter's role?** “Is my primary objective to: *persuade*, *inform*, or *entertain*? Or a *combination*?”

Section C

WRITING ROADMAP

1 PHASE 1: PLAN YOUR PIECE

80% of the time you spend “writing”... will NOT be spent writing. It will be spent planning. The more time you spend planning, the less time you will spend writing and revising.

WRITING TOOLS

To access the various “thinking tools” referenced in this map, go to: [ELASkills.com/Tools](https://www.ELASkills.com/Tools)

A. THE WHY: “Why Am I Writing This Piece?”

a. What is the purpose for writing this piece?
Most often, your real purpose is, “Because my teacher said so!” So, let's ask, “Why did my teacher assign it? What does he/she want to get from this assignment?”

b. What is the topic?
What are you going to write about? Often, teachers assign the topic. If you can select your own but need help choosing it, look for a Brainstorm Prompt on the Thinking Tools page.

c. Who is the intended audience?
Once again, for a school assignment, your teacher may be your one and only real audience. If that's the case, who do you think your potential audience should be?

d. What is my angle?
What, exactly, do I want to say about my topic? If your angle is “too big,” you'll struggle to focus. If your angle is “too small,” you won't have much to say. See the Thinking Tools for help on how to “Cut the Right-Sized Slice of Your Topic.”

e. What is my role?
Is my primary objective to persuade, inform, entertain? Or a combination?

B. THE OUTCOME: “What Should the Final Piece Look Like?”

a. What are the specific parameters required?
READ DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY! Underline every detail that must be included. (Missing elements to how students lose most points.) If possible, staple assignment rubric to this map.

b. What questions should my paper answer?
Look at the assignment for required sub-topics; convert them to questions. Combine smaller questions. In an essay, each guiding question should have 3-4 answers, questions resulting in only 1-2 answers should combine them into broader questions. Use the Writing Planning Guide on page 2 to get started...

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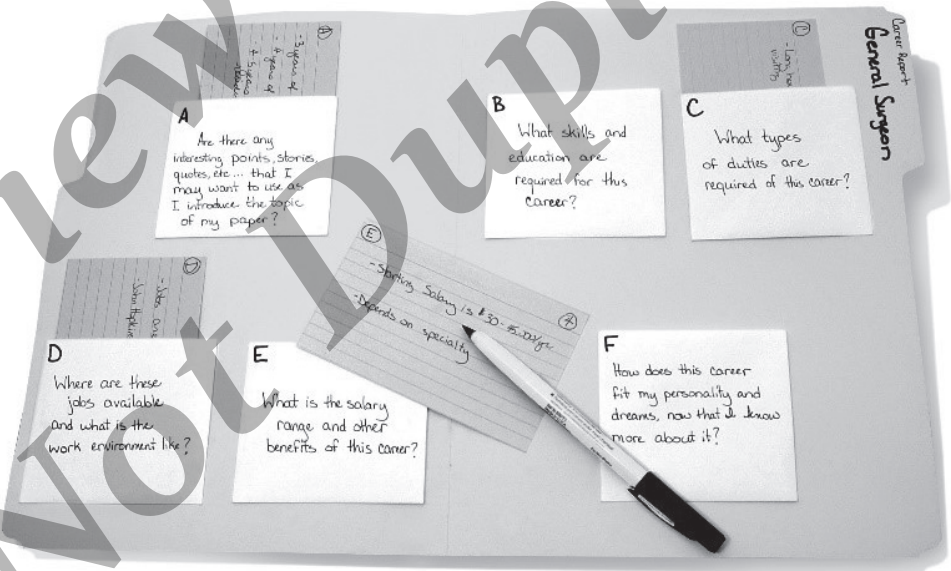
Use pages 1–2 of the Writing Roadmap to prepare your presentation.

B. Determine the outcome; “What should the presentation ‘look like’?”

- f. **What are the specific parameters required?** READ ASSIGNMENT DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY! Underline every detail that the presentation must address/include. (Missing details is a common way for students to lose points!) Ask your teacher for the rubric that will be used to grade your presentation; review it carefully.
- g. **What questions should my presentation answer?** Look at the assignment for required sub-topics you are expected to cover; convert those sub-topics into questions. COMBINE SMALLER QUESTIONS: Like an essay, each guiding question should have 3–4 answers; questions resulting in only 1–2 answers should be combined into broader questions.
- h. **Use the Writing Planning Guide** to prepare questions to be answered in the presentation and to prep your 3D organizer.

C. Assemble a 3D Writing Organizer.

See Chapter 15 for details on how to create a 3D Writing Organizer; it is an ideal tool to guide the structure and content of your presentation!



The 3D Writing Organizer helps you identify key questions and organize ideas, making it perfect for preparing presentations.

D. Collect thoughts and/or research.

- **Answer your questions.** For presentations, simply write phrases and keywords on cards (vs full sentences, as you would do for writing), one answer per card.
- **Label each index card.** In the upper, left corner of the card, record the LETTER of the question the card is answering. In the opposite corner, record the source number.
- **Slide cards** into their corresponding pockets, as you complete them.
- **Continue until all questions have 3–4 answers.** Check all pockets; ensure that all responses properly answer each question.
- **Within each pocket, arrange cards in the most logical order.** To determine the best order, imagine you are explaining the information to someone in a conversation.
- **Number cards in order for quick and easy reference.** Apply the order number right next to the pocket letter. For example: “A-1,” “A-2,” “A-3,” “A-4,” etc.

E. Consider your opening and closing.

The opening “lede” is even more vital in a presentation than it is for writing! The audience should be “hooked” within the first 30 seconds and feel a “relatable bond” with the presenter. The best way to accomplish this objective is to share a personal story, related to the topic. Personal stories forge “emotional bonds” that can make even the most technical topics interesting!

Your closing usually circles back to the story from the beginning.

“How do I manage visuals and props?”

Section D

It is believed that we only remember 20% of what we hear, 30% of what they see, and 50% of what we see *and* hear! Therefore, we can 2× audience retention with visuals and props! Use the following guidelines to appropriately find and organize visual resources:

1. Select a slide template.

- The background should be subtle, with high contrast (light background with dark text or dark background with light text).
- Fonts should be simple and easy to read. Helvetica or Arial are most readable. For presentations, optimal font size ranges from 24- to 48-point.

2. Create your title slide, include:

- The title of your presentation and
- Your name, as the presenter.

3. Create your slides: minimum of one slide per pocket.

- The slide headline should be some form of the question on the corresponding pocket.

- Maximum of six words per line, after the headline. The audience should be *listening* to you, not *reading* your slide.
- Maximum of two visuals per slide. If you need more visuals to “answer this question,” use additional slides with the same headline. Empty space enhances readability.
- No fancy transitions! They are distracting.

4. Collect visuals, including: photos/illustrations, props, or multimedia resources.

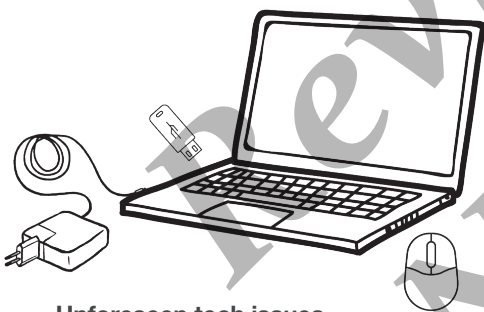
- To select visuals, focus on “visually” answering each “guiding” question, on the pockets of your 3D organizer.
- At a minimum, display one visual per pocket of the 3D organizer. A good rule-of-thumb is to change visuals every 20 to 40 seconds. Add more visuals as necessary, but only if the visuals directly add to the impact of your message.
- Consider displaying a “blank” slide when talking about a 3D prop. Coming to a blank slide in your slide deck is a helpful cue to remind you when to address the prop. Likewise, it signals your audience to shift their attention to the prop, too.

5. Test your slide presentation.

- Do the slides match the order of your pockets and note cards?
- Does everything advance and “show up,” as you expect?
- If using videos or other dynamic media, is everything “playing” correctly?
- Did you check grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

6. Confirm technology logistics.

- How will you display your presentation? Do you need to:
 - » Email a link to someone?
 - » Save it to a flash drive?
 - » Have a special cable to connect to your own device?
- Did you pack all accessories you may need, such as a:
 - » Presentation device?
 - » Mouse?
 - » Pointer?
 - » Power cord?
 - » Adapter?



Unforeseen tech issues are common; always test everything in advance.

“How do I practice ‘presenting’ a presentation?”

Effective public speakers do NOT memorize their speeches; they know their topic so well, they can speak about it naturally. Therefore, our goal in practicing presentations is to master the: content, timing, visuals, and technology so well that we can engage with our audience during the actual presentation.

The “practice guide” that follows is from Toastmasters, a global organization that has been the leading authority in public speaking for over 100 years! They advise several practice sessions, each time focusing on a different aspect of the presentation. This was the same approach my father (who was an award-winning Toastmasters’ speaker) used to coach me ...

1. **Practice out loud, standing up, with visuals and props.** You’re just getting warmed up! Next ...
2. **Practice with variety!** With each practice, use different words. Share your message like you are talking to a friend. Now, it’s time to ...
3. **Practice your “non-verbals:”** confident posture, relaxed hands, smile, make eye-contact with a stuffed animal or spot on the wall. Next,
4. **Practice for timing.** Insert planned pauses to emphasize a point, or when you expect a reaction from the audience. From the front of the room, “pauses” feel like an eternity, so be extra careful to avoid rushing them!

The next step is one of the most important ...

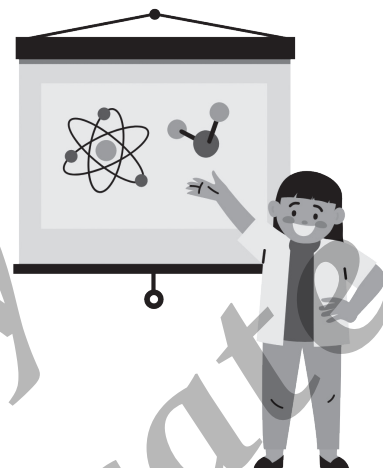
5. **Master your opening!** The “launch” is the most challenging part of the whole presentation. Once you’re off to a good start, the rest will flow. Next ...
6. **Practice in front of a real audience.** Grab your mom, kid brother, and the family dog. It is more uncomfortable practicing in front of the people you know best than it is to give a public speech. Like standing on a table in the middle of a room, it pushes you out of your comfort zone! Finally,
7. **Record your presentation.** Nothing is more objective than seeing your own performance. Watch for each of the elements above; pick two things to improve and do it again!

You’re all set! You’re poised for success with a well-organized presentation and lots of practice under your belt.

But what if things don’t go as planned? What if you say the wrong thing or forget a word?

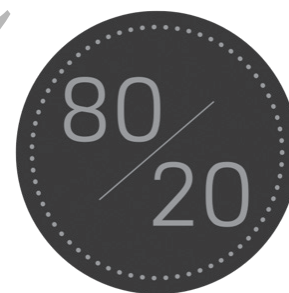
Just go with it! Smoothly correct yourself, “Excuse me, I misspoke. What I meant to say was ...” If nervousness strikes, admit it to your audience. This transparency will drain away most anxiety and build a connection with your audience ... They are rooting for your success!

Section E



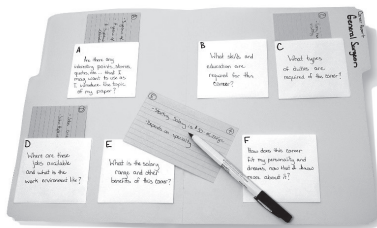
Source: Canva

To speak naturally and engage your audience, practice: delivering content, timing, visuals, and use of technology.



80/20 Power Strategy
Practice.
Practice.
Practice.

Source: SOAR Learning, Inc.



The 3D Writing Organizer makes all elements of preparing presentations clear and visible.

Making the invisible, visible

In this chapter, we make the invisible, visible with the 3D Writing Organizer. This tool guides and anchors every element of the presentation, including the:

- *Organization* of content.
- Content, itself.
- Slide layout and pacing.
- Selection and pacing of visuals and props.

Source: iStockphoto



Public speaking triggers fear and anxiety, activating the Emotional Center.

The brain on ... giving presentations

Public speaking commonly triggers fear and anxiety; many people feel extraordinarily uncomfortable being in the spotlight!

Our brain perceives this fear the same as a physical danger. Fear triggers the Emotional Center, releasing hormones like adrenaline and cortisol! Our body prepares to respond to this threat, resulting in: a racing heart rate, sweating, and nervousness.

The more we practice a presentation, the more familiar we become with the process, conditioning our brain to avoid a “fear” response.

However, when an anxiety response is triggered, we must first acknowledge it! This conscious awareness invites the Front and Back Brains to override our “unpredictable” Emotional Center. From there, we can take a few slow and controlled breaths to further override—and calm—the erratic Emotional Center.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

48. Feeling fear or anxiety over speaking in front of an audience?
49. Feeling overwhelmed preparing content for presentations?
50. Finding it challenging to gather content and coordinate visual aids for a presentation?

SOAR

Record *progress*

In this unit, we'll reflect on the past to propel ourselves into the future!

CHAPTER 18: How to Track Progress & Keep Moving Forward

How to Track Progress & Keep Moving Forward

Scorecard preview

This chapter provides solutions to the following problems. Do you ...

51. Feel shocked or disappointed by grades on your report card?
52. Fail to set and track goals effectively?
53. Get discouraged by setbacks and lose focus?

Author's note



Paradoxically, today, my students and kids find errors in LMS gradebooks 2–10× more often than I ever did, highlighting this chapter's importance!

As a student, I carefully tracked my grades, long before “Learning Management Systems” (LMS) automated the process. I often found errors and they were never in my favor! In all cases, I politely approached my teachers and had them corrected.

Tracking my grades also helped me plan for tests. For example, in 10th grade, I realized that my grade for the French final wouldn't affect my overall “B” grade in the class. So, I focused on studying for other exams instead. As it turns out, I failed that test; later that night, my teacher called to reassure me that I would still get a “B” on my report card.

I felt a bit guilty that she went to the extra effort to comfort me when it was a strategic move from the start! But it was a smart choice because it let me focus on things that would impact my grade.

This kind of judgment is key in real life, where we often have more tasks than time to complete them. It's no different for students.

This approach to tracking and strategizing continues to help me monitor progress towards my goals and make necessary adjustments. It's these foundational skills that inspired me to create this program; I hope it gives you the tools to create the life of your dreams, exactly as they have done for me!

In this final chapter, we'll first look back to, ultimately, launch forward!

Section A

Why track progress, in general?

Imagine that you touched a hot stove. What would happen?

Your skin would immediately burn.

Then, your brain would feel that burn and think, “HOT!”

After thinking “HOT!” your brain would immediately move your body away from the source of heat!

This cycle of:

- action (touching the stove)
- analysis (thinking “HOT!”)
- result (feeling a burn)
- response (getting away from the stove)

... forms a *feedback loop*.

Feedback is *information* about the impact of a specific action or situation. In this example, the action is touching the hot stove, the “feedback” is pain from the burn.

A feedback *loop* is when that information is *analyzed*. In this example, the “loop” happened when your brain thought, “HOT!” and quickly moved.

Another example ...

Imagine playing your favorite video game. You learn how to win each level by trying different things to see what succeeds and what fails; that information is *feedback*.

You then use that feedback to adjust your strategy for future attempts; this reflection and adjustment is a feedback *loop*.

Unfortunately, video games get a bad rap in our society. But, when played safely, they are powerful skill-building tools because ... they provide FEED-BACK LOOPS!

And feedback loops are mega-amplifiers for learning!

Tracking progress generates feedback. When we use this information to improve future efforts, we create a feedback loop.

Feedback loops link cause and effect. Because they are tied to personal experiences, they make potent learning tools! Scientific evidence shows feedback loops significantly improve outcomes.

For example, a weight-loss camp documented that students who consistently kept a food journal were over twice as likely to achieve their target weight compared to those who didn't.

Another example ...

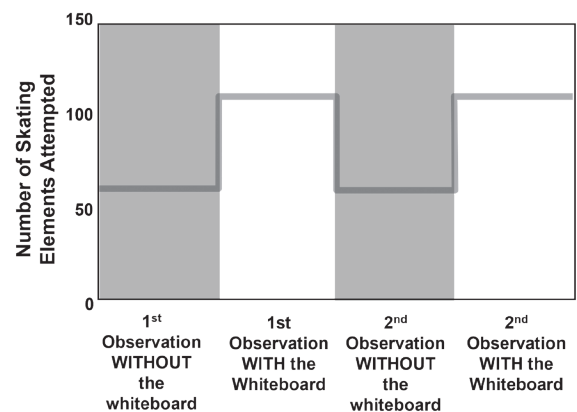
In a study of Olympic-level figure skaters (see graph, right), tracking progress significantly increased the intensity of their training.

First, skaters were watched secretly; their practice moves (jumps and spins) were counted. In this first round, they averaged sixty elements per hour.

Next, a whiteboard was placed within the skaters' view and their coaches tallied the number of practice elements they completed. Instantly, the average number of elements *doubled*!

Removing the whiteboard saw attempts return to the original count. But, when it was replaced a second time, efforts doubled again.

If tracking progress has such a profound impact on helping people lose weight and doubling athletic training efforts, imagine the impact that feedback loops can have on your grades and goals!



When their progress was visibly tracked, Olympic figure skaters doubled their efforts!

Section B

Why track progress in your LM gradebook?

Tracking your grades provides many benefits by:

- **Empowering you** to see exactly how every point impacts your final grade.
- **Providing motivation** to submit work on time and review tests carefully, before turning them in.

LESSON				L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6
QUIZ POINT VALUE ?				10	10	10	10	10	10
STUDENT'S NAME ?	COURSE GRADE	PRE TEST	POST TEST						
S, Jessie	81%	✓		80%	90%	80%	70%	90%	70%

- **Helping you set strategic goals.** Exactly how hard do you need to study for that test, anyway?
- **Identifying missed assignments.** Whether due to your own oversight or system errors, these errors are critical to find before the grading-period closes!
- **Verifying your teacher's records for accuracy.** You are the **ONLY** person who will ever audit your grades!

This is not about distrusting the teacher, it is about the sheer number of ways that things can go wrong, as we will cover in a moment!

- **Avoiding surprises on your report card.**

Ultimately, *tracking* grades *improves* grades!

What is the impact of a zero?

A single zero on an assignment can lower your grade much more dramatically than just a “low score.”

Student	A 10 pts.	B 10 pts.	C 10 pts.	D 10 pts.	E 10 pts.	F 10 pts.	G 10 pts.	H 10 pts.	I 10 pts.	J 10 pts.	Avg.	Final Grade
Joe Average	8	9	8	5	7	8	5	8	9	7	64% 74%	D C
Alex Allstar	10	10	10	9	5	8	9	5	10	10	78% 86%	C B

For example, missing just two assignments dropped Joe’s grade from a B- to a D and Alex’s from an A to a C.

However, as pictured above, if the zeros were simply low scores, like 5 out of 10, their grades would be much higher. This shows how much zeros can lower grades.

Oh, the things that can go wrong ...

As a student, I noticed grading errors, on average, 1–2 times per semester.

Surprisingly, with digital gradebooks, errors have increased 4–10×! Now, as a parent and academic coach, errors are a common finding in my kids’ and students’ LMS gradebooks.

How is this possible? Technology adds more layers to the process ... and many of those layers are invisible to both students and teachers!

A notable example is my son’s 10th-grade LMS, summarized below and in a video at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3). We discovered over 20 mistakes during a challenging time with: new teachers, technical issues, and missed school for his grandfather’s funeral.

Checking our gradebook helps identify missing work to avoid the impact of a zero; better to submit assignments late than not at all!

Individually, each issue is common, but it's so outlandish for one student to face so many at once. You might think I staged it for this chapter, but no, the video shows his real gradebook. Clearing it up was a nightmare, but this “perfect storm” is a cautionary tale.

Common LMS issues:

1. **Unexpected challenges will happen** and can have an unexpected impact on your gradebook!
2. **In LMS programs, the teacher and student dashboards look very different.** As a result, things that are obvious to a student may be hidden from teachers and vice versa!
3. **Communication gaps happen or people may forget to follow through on corrections.** Misunderstandings and “forgotten details” are very common in any situation; they are only amplified by technology.
4. **Technological malfunctions can prevent proper grade-recording.** Technology provides wonderful efficiencies ... *until it breaks down!*
5. **Perhaps you completed an assignment or two, but forgot to turn them in?** This is the most common oversight students find when checking their gradebook.
6. **Assignments may appear in the gradebook that did not appear in the to-do list.** *For real.*
7. **Missing assignments do not hurt your grade until the grading-period closes.** Often, missing assignments are not calculated into grades until the end of a grading-period; at that time, they convert to “zeros,” dramatically dropping a course grade, with no warning!
8. **Nobody else (but you) will monitor these details.** If you do not catch these issues and advocate for yourself, no one else will. Also, you may find issues impacting all of your peers, too.
9. **If you don't download your records at the end of a term, you won't have proof to fight errors.** Another true story we battled, resulting in eight months of struggles and a phone call to a lawyer. Learn from our mistakes!

These real-life problems emphasize how critically important it is for you to monitor your gradebook!



Note: The video is a bit long but watch at 1.25x speed to see the story and examples; they'll empower you for the rest of your academic career!

Why track your grades?



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The video at [StudySkills.com/bonus-v3](https://www.studyskills.com/bonus-v3) highlights a real example of every LMS issue listed!

How to track grades

Tracking your grades is primarily two-steps:

1. **Open your gradebook regularly ... and look!** (This can be part of your 7-Minute Sunday Session.)
2. **Advocate for yourself, *politely*.**

Let's look at a few more details about each step ...

1. Check your gradebook weekly.

The very best lesson about what to look for in your gradebook is the video referenced in the previous section! To summarize:

Section C



start of week:
"7-Minute Sunday
Sessions"

The 7-Minute Sunday Session
is an ideal time to check
your LMS.

A. Look at missing grades. Evaluate:

- Did I forget to turn this in?
- Did I turn it in, but it hasn't been graded? (After a week, politely ask about it.)
- Do I recognize this item? (If you don't think it was there before, ask about it.)
- When the class closes, will there be any "zeros" that are not included in my current grade?

B. Look at all other grades:

- Do they each look accurate?
- If the grade is unexpectedly low, is it calculating zeros for work that is not yet due?

C. Use the "What if" feature in your LMS to determine:

- What score will I have after I turn in my missing work?
- What score do I need on my next test?
- Do I HAVE to do a dreaded project?

D. Download and/or print your grades before your grading-period closes, to:

- Prompt you to do a final audit of your work and records.
- Provide proof if your report card grade does not match your expectations.

2. Advocate ... politely!

If you find an error, you **MUST** bring it to your teacher's attention! If you don't, no one else will speak for you.

Remember to stay polite because, as noted, mistakes can happen for many harmless reasons.

If you say something like, "Mrs. Smith, **YOU** made a mistake!" Mrs. Smith will feel attacked, triggered, and not eager to help you.

However, if you approach it more gently, such as, "Mrs. Smith, I think there may be a problem with my grade," Mrs. Smith will feel respected and much more inclined to investigate the issue fairly.

Section D

How to track goals

Pause & reflect

The key to reaching goals is to regularly pause and reflect on your progress, asking yourself three specific questions:

1. **What went well ... today/last week/last semester?** Start with the positives!
2. **What are my blockers?** This specific question quickly helps us see what is getting in our way!
3. **How can I improve?** This is where the magic happens! Turn challenges into actionable steps for improvement. For example, address procrastination by dividing work into smaller tasks, or adjust study times to more productive hours.

Together, these three questions are formally known as a “retrospective.” The term comes from business and project-management but is widely used in personal development because of its impact!

A retrospective is an *intentional* feedback loop. Answering these questions honestly—then adjusting your approach accordingly—significantly amplifies your efforts!

The time needed to do a retrospective depends on the period under review: daily retrospectives might take a minute or two, weekly ones will take a few minutes (as part of a 7-Minute Sunday Session). A semester retrospective will be part of a larger goal-setting session.

The beauty of a retrospective is that it empowers YOU to turn challenges into stepping stones.

Pause & reflect ... at anchor points!

Anchor points are prime times for retrospectives! As you answer the three “magic” questions, you collect feedback about what is impacting your ability to execute your action plans and reach your goals.

If the feedback suggests a need for change, don’t delay—adjust immediately! *Expect* goals and plans to evolve with ongoing feedback. Frequent retrospectives (ideally, weekly) are crucial for identifying course-corrections before you go too far down a wrong path.

We set new goals at major transition times, such as: moving, starting a new school year/semester, sport/activity, job, etc. A retrospective should be the first step in the process; it will inform and guide your new goals.

Celebrate accomplishments!

There is nothing like the satisfaction of accomplishing something you worked hard to achieve! But our tendency to dwell on negatives means we must *intentionally* notice—and celebrate—both our “small wins” and “big accomplishments.”

How to handle setbacks

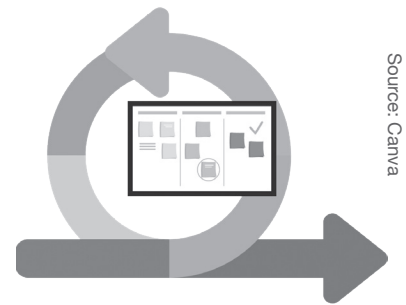
The strategies in this book have been presented without distractions from the real-world. However, life is unpredictable and will throw you curveballs!

Even with the best intentions, unexpected events can derail your plans. When this happens, it’s crucial to have a Plan B.

Plan B: Choose your response; actions change feelings.

When faced with setbacks, consider a powerful insight from Japan’s Morita Therapy, explained in the book, *Constructive Living*, by David K. Reynolds.

Reynolds makes an “invisible” truth visible; feelings are fleeting and beyond our control! No one can ever talk us into feeling better or feeling good about ourselves.



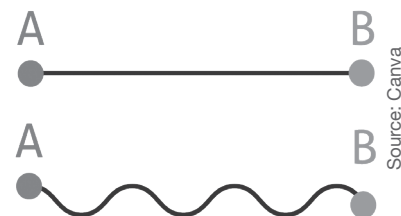
Source: Canva

A retrospective is an intentional feedback loop that amplifies your efforts quickly!



Recognizing every achievement and treating ourselves—whether through breaks, treats, purchases, creative projects, or fun activities—fuels motivation and wards off burnout and discouragement.

Section E



Source: Canva

Expectations vs Reality. We always expect things to go smoothly, but setbacks are the norm!

* **WARNING**

If positive actions leave you more discouraged, it may indicate clinical depression or another medical condition needing immediate attention.

The only things that shift feelings ... *are actions!* So when you face a setback, feel down, or discouraged, focus on the one-and-only thing you can control ... your actions!

- *Taking action is the only way to challenge negative feelings.*
- *Taking action is the only way to develop a positive feeling about oneself and a positive attitude towards life.*

The fastest, most consistent “action” to shift negative feelings is movement that raises your heart rate. But many other actions will improve mood and outlook: engaging in a creative project, connecting with a pet, helping someone else, etc.

Is it failure ... or feedback? The choice is yours.

We judge everything that happens to us by the story we wrap around it.

Thomas Edison famously said that he did NOT have 10,000 failures before inventing the light bulb; he simply found 9,999 ways that did not work.

Viewing setbacks as feedback—not failure—helps us bounce back faster! Choosing this mindset flips obstacles into opportunities for growth.

Section F

KAI ZEN
改 + 善 =
“change” “good”
“good change”
aka
“continuous improvement”

Embrace the mantra, “1% better!” from another Japanese concept, “kaizen.” It means “small, continuous improvement,” suggesting “small” changes are much more manageable and sustainable than big and daunting changes.

Kaizen: 1% better!

As we close this book, I encourage you to keep revisiting and integrating these strategies into your life. Find the joy in making school work—and life—easier for yourself! If you fall off-course, remember Plan B and choose to take action—any small action will propel you forward!

Kaizen is not ignorant of setbacks. We all have days—or even seasons—when we feel knocked back not just 1%, but 5%, 10%, or even 50%! This is normal ... *expect the setbacks!*

However, kaizen is a mindset that views “setbacks” simply as *feedback*, ever pushing us to be 1% better. With this mindset, you will soon spring back to—and SOAR beyond—where you started!

Section G



Keep moving forward

After you hit the home run, you still have to run the bases!

Congratulations! You’ve hit a “home run” by completing this course. But a home run does not count until after the batter runs the bases.

Likewise, the strategies in this program won’t do anything for you if you don’t continue to use them. You still have to “run the bases!”

Pick the three strategies you will do in the next 2–4 weeks to help you get better grades in less time. Meanwhile, commit to 1% better every day! Soon, you will SOAR! (Pun intended! :)

Write down your three “kaizen” strategies for the next 2–4 weeks, one on each base.

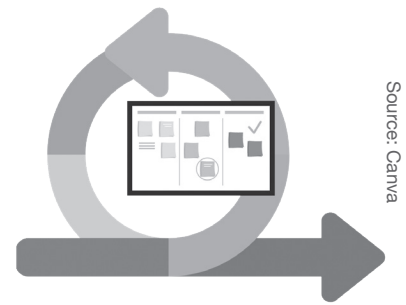
Making the invisible, visible

A retrospective makes feedback visible! It turns the constant stream of information we usually overlook into visible insights. By asking three critical questions:

1. What went well?
2. What are my blockers?
3. How can I improve?

... we actively engage with this feedback, creating a feedback loop!

Anchor points make visible the best times to do retrospectives! As highlighted in Chapter 6, they encourage us to pause at strategic points to assess our progress ... which is, of course, the defining nature of a retrospective!



Source: Canva

A retrospective makes feedback visible, turning overlooked information into insights.

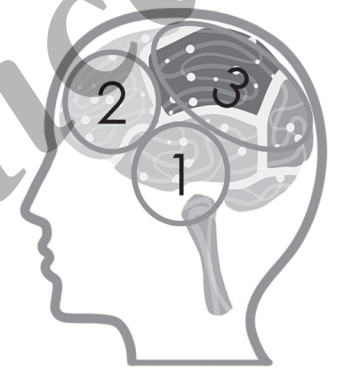
The brain on ... tracking progress

Tracking progress generates feedback loops. In our brain, feedback loops are supercharged learning connections because they connect (“loop”) feedback to our prior actions.

However, these loops do not make just one connection; they involve *thousands* of neuron connections across:

- Past decisions about the actions,
- sensory input, and
- emotions from *experiencing* those actions.

For example, this process is why video games are so captivating: the continuous feedback loops create strong neuron connections.



Source: iStockphoto

In our brain, feedback loops are supercharged learning connections.

Scorecard review

What solutions have you learned for the following problems ...

51. Feeling shocked or disappointed by grades on your report card?
52. Failing to set and track goals effectively?
53. Getting discouraged by setbacks and losing focus?

Post-scorecard analysis

Congratulations on completing the course! Be sure to take the full Post-Scorecard and compare your progress from the Pre-Scorecard in Chapter 1. Download the Post-Scorecard at StudySkills.com/bonus-v3.

Appendix

Directions

This photo is for use with the activity in Chapter 10.

Look at it for no more than 5 seconds!



Source: Dan Kruger

- Answers**
1. slingshot
 2. Pirate Collection
 3. spotted
 4. three
 5. four