

# STUDY SKILLS KICK START

Check your student's notes – they shouldn't be writing too much. We encourage students to write just the 'trigger words' down to avoid filling their page with too many words, which wastes time and can be distracting when they are trying to memorise. Their notes should have a main heading, sub-headings, and bullet points not exceeding a few words on each line.

Make sure your student takes their notes regularly, not just before a test. A good strategy is to check they have a new set of notes each week, and are using trigger words, rather than writing an essay for each page. Also encourage them to use different colours when they compile their notes to aid their recall in tests.

Talk to your student about how they read. We encourage students to skim-read, summarise, and re-read texts to help them prioritise important sections of text and not waste time reading lengthy sections of text which are irrelevant to their study. It's also worth asking them why they are reading certain passages of text, as this encourages them to read with the purpose of extracting information, rather than just because they were told to.

Encourage your student to make 'mind-maps' of their notes once a week at home. This involves drawing visual links between ideas on a page and resembles an 'explosion chart' of words and ideas branching out from a central idea. Our presenters have shown them how to mind map, and the process helps significantly with their ability to see connections between the different things they learn throughout the year.

## Minimising Distractions at Home

1. **Separate study from life:** Help your child find a space in which study will be removed from the hustle and bustle of life at home. This location might be your child's bedroom, a separate study if you have one or simply a room as far away from the TV as possible.
2. **Work at a desk:** Our ability to pay attention is based not only on the disruptions around us, but also on our physical state. Often the environment in which we work has a direct impact on our physical state, the obvious example being students doing homework on their bed or lying down on a couch. Unfortunately, if students are lying down, their bodies will begin to go into sleep mode and their attention levels lower (take reading a book in bed and drifting off mid-page as the best example!). The same thing happens when students are studying in a prone position. As such, maximise attention by ensuring that your child's study location has a desk or table to work at.
3. **Clean the desk:** Study is rarely fun, to the point that any object within easy reach will automatically become worthy of attention and serve as a distraction. Remove these distractions by getting rid of all objects on or near the desk.
4. **Filter distractions:** Be your child's ally and help them filter out distractions. Keep younger siblings away. Monitor TV volume. Take messages if friends call rather than passing on the phone immediately. If your child is working in a shared room near the TV buy them so noise blocking headphones that they can use to block some of the ambient noise out.
5. **Help your children self-select:** Because of the fact that almost everything is more fun than study, the temptation to keep disruptions within easy reach can be too much for most students. Students will study at a desk, but then have Facebook open on the computer in front of them. Some students will attempt to delude themselves by having

an alternate browser page open and Facebook hidden from sight. But sure enough, after 5 or 10 minutes, their self-control collapses and they open the Facebook window to see what's happened in the last few minutes (the answer is normally not a lot!). The same goes for those students who sit with phones on their desk who check the phone immediately as soon as a message is received. If distractions are nearby they will win!

The question is then: how do we get rid of these distractions? The obvious answer is we tell students not to have distractions close at hand. The problem with this advice is that you know it won't be followed. Instead, we have found that if we can't get students to do the right thing all the time, we can at least get them to do the right thing when it really matters. We do this by helping them self-select. We tell students that there are two types of work they have to do: high powered brain work and low-powered brain work. The low-powered brain work consists of homework and repetitive tasks. For this type of work it isn't ideal that they have their computer on, or a phone at hand, but if they do, it isn't going to be the end of the world either; it will simply mean that what would otherwise take an hour to do, takes two hours instead (not an efficient use of time, but hey it's their choice!). On the other hand, students are also going to have high powered brain work. This is the stuff we have discussed above, like memorising notes and practice papers. When doing this type of work students need to remove all distractions. Unfortunately, that means not only is the phone off, but it is in another room. Similarly, the computer will be turned off and preferably in another room. In these moments of high powered brain work, all students will have in their study environment is a desk, a lamp and their notes. As we say, it isn't perfect advice, but by cutting some slack we have found that students tend to do the right thing when it really matters, and in an imperfect world, this is probably what counts.

6. Take regular breaks: Because of the fact attention is tied to our physical condition, it is important that students take regular breaks as well. Don't expect your child to lock themselves in their room for hours on end. Instead, encourage your students to take regular study breaks. But again, in order to ensure that a study break doesn't turn into another set of endless distractions, help your child master the art of the power break. The power break is a 5 to 10 minute time-out in which they might go outside, kick a ball, do some push-ups, make a cup of tea, or anything else which gets them up and about. What a power break does not consist of is sitting down to watch TV or jumping on the computer, because you can guarantee once a student has been disrupted there will be no return to study!

### **When all else fails:**

If all else fails and Facebook and Youtube are winning the battle for attention, here is a handy little trick. In an effort to help the students of the world a number of app makers have developed some handy little programs that temporarily remove distractions from reach of students. For those families using a Microsoft operating system on their computers, download a program called Cold Turkey ([www.getcoldturkey.com](http://www.getcoldturkey.com)) and for those using Apples, try a program called Self control ([www.macupdate.com/app/mac/31289/selfcontrolCached](http://www.macupdate.com/app/mac/31289/selfcontrolCached)). These programs allow you to block certain websites (eg Facebook!) for a specified period of time. In other words, you are not blocking the sites forever, just when you need to.