



Homework Help For Parents

*Easy-to-Use Tips & Strategies
for Solving Homework Problems
at Home*

Susan Kruger, M.Ed
Brian Woodcock

© 2012, Susan (Woodcock) Kruger

Internet: www.StudySkills.com

Email: info@StudySkills.com

Published by SOAR[®] Learning Inc., Lake Orion, MI

All rights reserved. No part of the material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronically or mechanically, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright owners.

ISBN: 978-0-9774280-1-4

SAN: 257-6570

www.StudySkills.com

© 2012, Susan Kruger & SOAR[®] Learning Inc.

This eBook is a shortened and slightly modified transcript of our audio program, *Homework Help for Parents*. To learn more about this program and other products that SOAR[®] Study Skills has to offer, visit www.StudySkills.com/products.

Table of Contents

Title	Page Number	Audio Program Section
Homework Problems Inventory	6	
Introduction	8	1
How to Use this Resource	10	1
<i>How Are You Smart?</i>	12	2
The Eight Areas of Intelligence	13	2
The First Step in School Success	18	2
<i>How Are You Smart?</i> Summary	20	2
Set Goals (Time Management for Families)	22	3
The Family Meeting	22	3
Benefits of the Family Meeting	24	3
Students Who Live in Two Homes	28	3
Quick Tips for Time Management	29	3
Selecting and Using a Good Student Planner	29	3
Cut Homework Time & Increase Productivity with a Timer	32	3
Set Goals Summary	35	3
Organize	38	4
Organizing for Elementary School Students	38	4
Organizing for Middle & High School Students - The SOAR® Binder System	42	4

Tips for Using the SOAR® Binder	45	4
Quick Tips for Organizing	50	4
The Chip Clip System for Papers that Need Your Attention	51	4
Nifty Tool for Organizing School Papers at Home	53	4
Organize Summary	54	4
Ask Questions	57	5
Reading Textbooks; The Super Study Strategy	58	5
Textbook Reading Activity #1	59	5
Creating Connections	61	5
Textbook Reading Activity #2	63	5
Quick Tips for Ask Questions	64	5
The "Take Ten" Strategy for Organizing & Studying	65	5
The Best (and Easiest) Study Guide for Unit Tests & Final Exams	66	5
Ask Questions Summary	68	5
Reward Progress	71	6
Developing Motivation	71	6
Using Rewards & Incentives	76	6
Quick Tips for Rewarding Progress	78	6
Reward Progress Summary	81	6
Conclusion and Additional Resources	83	7

Homework Problems Inventory

The comments listed below represent the most common homework problems that we hear from parents. Before reading the *Homework Help for Parents* eBook, take a moment to review this list and identify the situations for which you would like solutions. It is best to listen to the full program, but you can also use this guide to find the best starting track for specific solutions.

✓	Homework Problems	Page Number	Audio Program Section
	1. "He struggles with many school tasks."	18	2
	2. "She does not have a lot of confidence."	18	2
	3. "Our schedules are crazy! It is hard to make time for homework."	22	3
	4. "She saves everything for the last minute!"	22	3
	5. "We frequently fight over doing homework."	24	3
	6. "I am tired of always having to be in charge."	24	3
	7. "It takes her longer than it should to do her homework."	32	3
	8. "School papers never make it home."	38	4
	9. "She often brings the wrong folders home for homework."	42	4

	10. "His book bag is a mess!"	42	4
	11. "I saw him do his homework, but his teacher says he did not turn it in!"	42	4
	12. "It is very challenging for me to keep track of all of the school papers, sports schedules, lunch menus, etc."	50	4
	13. "My child does not remember what he reads in a textbook."	58	5
	14. "My child does not pay attention well in class."	58	5
	15. "My child does not take good notes."	58	5
	16. "My child does not know how to study for tests."	58	5
	17. "He's just not motivated!"	71	6

The *Homework Problems Inventory* is part of the *Homework Help for Parents* program by SOAR® Study Skills.

Introduction

Welcome to *Homework Help for Parents!* This program will cover several insights and family-friendly strategies for solving common homework problems. Specifically, we will address solutions for improving time management, students' organization, study efficiency, and motivation.

Before I begin, however, I would like to share a bit about my background and that path that led me to study skills.

Growing up, I was the youngest person in my class and always struggled in school. Homework took me forever to do and caused many arguments and fights between my mom and I. I would spend hours studying for a test and would still get a bad grade. I felt overwhelmed and often felt stupid.

As I started college, I was tired of feeling overwhelmed and figured there had to be a better way to handle all of the reading and homework. Little by little, over the course of my first year, I found resources and learned strategies that made a remarkable difference

in my college experience. I graduated from college with a 3.91 GPA...and it was much *easier* than all of my time in middle school or high school because I had finally learned *how* to learn and study efficiently.

As a college student, I began tutoring my peers and several high school students. Before long, the demand for study skills tutoring was so great that I created the SOAR[®] Study Skills workshop to accommodate more students at one time. That was over fifteen years ago! There have been a few updates to SOAR[®] since, but it remains student-friendly because it was originally created by a student!

Throughout my career as a classroom teacher and learning specialist, I have worked with thousands of students and families and have learned about the most common problems that busy families face in working through homework. The *Homework Help* program is designed to address those problems with simple and manageable strategies to help busy families achieve a greater level of cooperation and school achievement.

How to Use this Resource

Homework Help is a compilation of the SOAR[®] strategies that are best for you, as parents, to implement or easiest for you to share with your children. There are many more specific study and organizational strategies that are beneficial for students, but *Homework Help* is specifically designed to help *parents* manage homework from the home front. Students, however, are encouraged to listen to the program. In fact, many parents tell us that sharing our resources, such as our free newsletter, book, and this audio program with their students has been a great way to initiate discussions and work out homework problems together.

I recommend that you read the full program for helpful insights and strategies, but if you want take the fast track for specific problems, you can use the *Homework Problems Inventory* included on page 6 to identify your greatest homework concerns and quickly locate the sections that best relate to your concerns. The *Homework Problems Inventory* will be referenced through the program to help you identify the best solutions for your homework concerns.

This program also includes a slideshow of resources that are referenced throughout the program. You can view the slideshow at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>.

I hope you enjoy listening to this program and find helpful solutions to your homework frustrations!

How Are You Smart? **Rediscovering Your Student's Talents**

If you highlighted either of the first two items on the *Homework Problems Inventory*,

1. He struggles with many school tasks.
2. She does not have a lot of confidence.

then this section will speak directly to you. However, this section addresses a topic that is important for *all* parents.

The first topic I always address with students *and* parents is a topic I call "*How are you smart?*"

There are many children and adults who go through life feeling *dumb, stupid*, or simply *not smart* typically because of struggles they have had in school. Getting a good education is extremely important, but performance in school is not the only measure of a person's intelligence. You probably know many adults who did not get *good* grades in school, yet are talented artists, businesspeople, tradesmen, etc. Fortunately, some educators are beginning to realize that intelligence is measured by more than students' performance on tests and written assignments.

There is widely accepted research from Dr. Howard Gardner, a professor at Harvard, who says that the human brain has at least eight different areas of intelligence. I will list each of them with a brief description. They are also highlighted on slide #3 of the slide show at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>. Look for characteristics that describe each of your children:

The Eight Areas of Intelligence

1. Body Smart (Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence)

People who are gifted in this area generally enjoy sports, dance, or 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 compliment this intelligence:

Craftspeople, physical/occupational therapists, surgeons, inventors, professional athletes, actors, farmers, dancers

2. Music Smart (Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence)

Gifted singers, composers, or instrument players are not the only people to have talent in this area. People who enjoy music or have a strong sense of rhythm may have some musical intelligence. They learn best through songs, patterns, rhythms, and other forms of musical expression, or find themselves frequently tapping and/or dancing to music.

Careers that compliment this intelligence:

Composers, song-writers, sound technicians, disc jockeys, instrument makers, music teachers, band directors

3. Word Smart (Linguistic Intelligence)

Word Smart people are often good at reading, writing, speaking, or a combination of the three. They may enjoy reading and written expression; find they are good at telling jokes and stories, or speaking in front of others. They may also have an interest in foreign languages. Some people may be very gifted in one area of Linguistic Intelligence, such as conversation skills, but may struggle with another area, such as writing.

Careers that compliment this intelligence:

Salespeople, journalists/writers, editors, librarians, psycho-therapists, speech therapists, lawyers, interpreters, authors

4. Number/Reasoning Smart (Logical/Mathematical Intelligence)

People with talents in this area are generally good math students. They are good at solving problems and puzzles with numbers or logic. Some are excellent at computing numbers in their head, estimating, or making conversions (e.g. in recipes). They may enjoy organizing, budgeting, or creating patterns.

Careers that compliment this intelligence:

Engineers, computer technicians/programmers, accountants, mathematicians, researchers, statisticians, financial analysts, professional organizers, physicians

5. Picture/Visual Smart (Spatial Intelligence)

While one does not have to be gifted in Picture Smarts to be called “creative,” this is the term that is most often associated with individuals talented in Spatial Intelligence. People with strengths

in this area are likely good at following or creating maps, noticing patterns, or assembling projects and puzzles. “Artistic” or “crafty” people are also gifted in Spatial Intelligence.

Careers that compliment this intelligence:

Graphic artists, interior designers, architects, engineers, photographers, videographers, inventors, drafters, builders, surveyors, urban planners

6. People Smart (Interpersonal Intelligence)

People Smart refers to the skills required to develop relationships with others. Individuals gifted in this intelligence usually work very well on teams and are skilled at making people feel comfortable in their presence. They usually enjoy helping others and may be good at resolving conflicts among family members and friends. Some People Smart individuals are very social and outgoing, while others may be reserved and shy. Either way, they are usually regarded as “nice” people.

Careers that compliment this intelligence:

Teachers, nurses, physicians, medical assistants, politicians, sales

people, counselors/psychologists, mediators, consultants, business administrators (management), human resources

7. Self-Smart (Intrapersonal Intelligence)

Intrapersonal Intelligence is about how well a person knows himself. People who are reflective thinkers, have a clear concept of their values and beliefs, or have a sense of spirituality or greater purpose, are probably very Self Smart. Because Self Smart individuals have a strong concept of what they want in life, they are likely to be very focused, self-disciplined, and independent. This intelligence usually develops with age and maturity.

Careers that compliment this intelligence include:

Writers, entrepreneurs/self-employed, spiritual leaders, counselors/therapists, leaders, researchers

8. Nature Smart (Naturalist Intelligence)

“Nature Smart” people are inclined to be outdoors. They usually have a strong appreciation for the environment and respect for the beauty of nature. They typically are interested in plants, animals,

or other natural resources and tend to choose activities such as hiking, camping, hunting, star gazing, swimming, scuba diving, etc. as hobbies.

Careers that compliment this intelligence include:

Meteorologists, park rangers, photo journalists, biologists, botanists, zoologists, veterinarians, anthropologists, astronomers

The First Step in School Success

Most people have skills in several of these intelligences and typically excel in one or two. Traditional school instruction, however, only focuses on TWO of those eight areas of intelligence...Mathematic and Linguistic. While these intelligences are important, they are not the only proof of a child's abilities. For example, I once had a student who struggled with reading, writing, and math assignments (traditional school work). However, he demonstrated an amazing ability to construct objects and machines from scrap materials. He could draw complex diagrams and figure out, with very little effort, how anything mechanical worked. Many teachers viewed him as a “slow learner” when in fact he

simply struggled in two areas of intelligence (Word Smart and Number/Reasoning Smart). This student had the potential to become, among other things, a very successful mechanic or industrial engineer. He needed extra support to develop his reading and math skills, but he had the capacity to learn complex information.

This particular young man illustrates that struggles in school should not be reason for a child to feel "stupid" or hopeless. While math - and particularly language skills - are the gateway to developing other skills and talents, there are tutoring, after-school, and online programs that can help diagnose and remediate specific areas of trouble, especially in math and language. If your child has a diagnosed learning disability, he may qualify for additional support. Of course, strategies for learning *how* to study and learn will be excellent tools, as well.

It is important to emphasize your child's strengths and not be too discouraged if Math or Language Intelligences are NOT his best skill areas. It is also important to emphasize this with your child, help *him* identify his strengths, and learn about careers associated

with them. The purpose of this information is not to lower the expectations for his performance in school, but it is important for developing motivation and helping him make choices about extra-curricular activities, electives, and part-time jobs...all of which are resources for developing the areas of intelligence that are not fully nurtured in traditional school settings.

How Are You Smart? Summary

This summary includes specific solutions to items listed on the *Homework Problems Inventory*:

1. "He struggles with many school tasks."

Traditional school settings place a lot of emphasis on developing the Math and Language Intelligences. If your child is not strong in either area, he is likely to struggle in school. Many of the learning strategies in this program and in the *SOAR® Study Skills Workbook* will be especially useful for him. He should also be encouraged to participate in activities that foster his strengths to help expand potential career opportunities and maintain/develop some level of motivation in school.

2. "She does not have a lot of confidence."

The previous response also applies to the child who does not have much confidence in herself. An additional key to developing her confidence will be to help her understand the *concept* of the different forms of intelligence. You can find an inventory for students in the *SOAR® Study Skills Workbook* (or through an internet search for "Multiple Intelligences") to help your child identify her stronger areas of intelligence.

Building your child's awareness about these different areas of intelligence will increase her confidence and overall sense of motivation. In the meantime, the rest of the *SOAR®* strategies will help your child maximize her performance in school.

Set Goals

Time Management for Families

Can you relate to any of the following comments from the *Homework Problems Inventory*?

3. "Our schedules are crazy! It is hard to make time for homework."
4. "She saves everything for the last minute!"
5. "We frequently fight over doing homework."
6. "I am tired of always having to be in charge."
7. "It takes her longer than it should to do her homework."

You will find that just one or two practical solutions may be all you need to solve these homework problems.

The Family Meeting

When working with students, I believe it is important for them to have clear goals and a *purpose* for learning study strategies. As we work through the process of setting goals, students learn about priorities and establish their most important priorities in life.

Using those priorities, they set specific goals: one related to homework/school, one related to their health (which often includes sports), and one related to something "fun." Finally, we discuss how to schedule time to take action. A goal without a plan for action is like having a car with no gas...it is essentially useless.

The cornerstone FAMILY activity for setting and achieving goals is a short, 5-10 minute weekly planning meeting. This “meeting” does not have to be anything formal, but it will do wonders for making your week run more smoothly than you ever thought possible.

Before I explain *how* the meeting works, let me explain *why* it works. There used to be a time when teachers, psychologists, pediatricians, and time-management experts would have recommended establishing a routine time for doing homework *every* night. On one hand, it is a great idea because humans are creatures of habit. But if you are like most modern families, you likely have several different things happening every night of the week, making a “routine” impossible. If that is the case, then a

weekly meeting is a more flexible option to help everyone in your family become more proactive about reducing evening chaos.

So, *how* does this meeting work? Simply gather every member of your family together for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the week. Children should have their homework planners, you should have your planner AND the family calendar. During this meeting, each person tells about their plans for the up-coming week, such as sports practices, test dates, due dates, etc. You tell your children what you have planned for them (such as dentist appointments) as well as for yourself (such as a late night at the office). Everyone should make notes in their planners about anything that may affect them. (i.e. Tuesday: “Mom not home to help with homework until 7 PM.”) During this time, you can also work out who will be picking up your daughter from dance class while you are picking up your son from soccer practice.

Benefits of the Family Meeting

There are at least five benefits to spending these few minutes together at the beginning of the week.

1) You can stay on top of what is happening with each of your children without resistance. Children hate to be nagged, but most of the time, as parents, we do not have any other way to get information out of them than to poke and prod with dozens of questions. We have good intentions, but our kids hate it. Honestly, we would not like being peppered with a lot of questions, either.

In fact, one of the most common causes of homework fights and arguments stems from children's desire for control. From the day our children are born, they are on a mission to become independent. Being nagged with questions, however, violates their growing desire for control and leads to homework becoming a lever for them to get control; they know you place a lot of value on homework, yet it is primarily their responsibility. So, they can "fight back" by giving you a hard time over doing homework.

During a weekly meeting, however, EVERYONE, including you, shares their plans and schedules, so it becomes more of a reciprocal conversation than a poke-and-prod fest for your children. This gives them a greater sense of control and WILL improve communication for school-related issues. Many parents say it improves *overall* communication between them and their children, especially adolescents.

- 2) **You can be prepared for projects and tests that your child may *not* have otherwise thought to tell you about *before* the last minute.** Learning about the science materials your son needs for tomorrow - at 10 p.m. - is more than a little inconvenient and frustrating! The weekly meeting prompts children to tell you about things they otherwise may not have thought to tell you about *before* the last minute. With a little more notice, you can plan accordingly and save a lot of time.

- 3) **Your children will be more cooperative when they know what to expect each evening.** You don't like to

learn about things at the last minute - like those science materials - and neither do children. They will respond more favorably to you when they are informed. Also, if they are regularly kept in the loop, they will be more understanding when there are last-minute changes to the plan.

4) Your evenings will be less chaotic. We've all had those instances when we've lost 2 hours because we've had to backtrack to pick someone up, drop them off, pick up something from the store, etc. However, when you have taken a few moments to plan your week, you have taken the time to be proactive about most situations and you have also ensured that every member of the family is on the same page. Both factors will contribute to more relaxing evenings *most* of the time.

5) Perhaps most important, the family meeting TEACHES your student, through example, how to plan ahead. I can remember my dad getting frustrated, "Why can't you kids plan ahead!?" As an adult, I feel

his pain. But, I now realize that, at the time, we did not truly understand the concept of planning ahead.

Planning ahead is a skill that must be learned, however most teachers and parents expect that students should automatically know how to do it. The process of coordinating schedules during this meeting teaches your children to think and plan ahead.

Students Who Live in Two Homes

For students who have parents/guardians who live in two different homes, a Family Meeting is a critical strategy for them to use with both parents. All they need to do is take a few minutes at the beginning of each week to speak with each parent. If possible, they can have both parents on the same phone line with them as they talk about their schedule for the week. Otherwise, they can have two short conversations with each parent to cover this same information. They can double-check when they will be visiting each parent, who will be picking them up from basketball practice on Wednesday, etc. This process really gives children a sense of

empowerment and is one of the best things a student can do for himself when he calls two places 'home.'

Quick Tips for Time Management

The following quick tips address two different problems. The first is how to select a good planner and make sure your students use it regularly. Second, how to use an electronic timer to more effectively manage homework; whether students take too much time to do their homework or race through to get it done without giving homework their best effort.

Selecting and Using a Good Student Planner

One of the best tools you can give students to help ensure school success is an academic planner. One of the best skills you can teach them is how to use that planner effectively. Using the planner not only helps students remember assignments every evening, it helps them organize and manage several tasks at a time; that's an essential skill they will eventually need for managing a career and a home. Now, some students are more inclined to use a planner than others, but even those who claim, "Planners do not

work for me!" still need to use one. The following four tips can improve their usability and help reluctant students more likely to use one.

1. Make sure your child has a *good* planner or agenda book.

Most of the planners provided through schools are appropriate, but many planners sold in stores are not. Planners should be thin like a notebook, not bulky like a binder, and include a layout of a whole week on each 2-page spread. See slide #s 4 & 5 at

<http://studyskills.com/hh4p/> for pictures of good and "bad"

planners, including page layouts. On our website we offer our SOAR[®] Planner Supplies kit that include a planner with space for weekly goals and after-school planning and are an especially excellent tool for the weekly meeting. The kit also includes some additional supplies that we will discuss next. Visit

www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=207 to learn more.

2. Insist that your children bring their planners to your weekly meeting and hold them accountable for the information

discussed. Do not let them use excuses like, "I forgot you were not going to be home to help me Tuesday night," when they should

have made a note about it on Sunday. This may sound harsh, but soon, your children will appreciate the greater sense of awareness and control that they have by being informed of the family's schedule.

3. Encourage them to keep their planner easily accessible throughout the day. If possible, they should keep it on top of their desk so it is in easy reach every time they are given a homework assignment. Otherwise, they should keep their planner on top of all of their books so they can grab it quickly.

4. Invest in a 10-cent binder clip. The small black binder clips, as featured in slide 6 (found at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>), make a world of difference in making a planner "user friendly." The clip securely marks the page for the current week so students can find their page with one quick flip. If students have to flip through dozens of pages every time they need to reference their planner, they will stop using it because it will become too much of a hassle. Our SOAR[®] Planner Supplies kit includes a binder clip in addition to an agenda and a timer. Visit

www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=207 to learn more.

Cut Homework Time & Increase Productivity with a Timer

I don't know about you, but I remember how difficult it was to focus on my homework to get it done. I would barely write my name on a paper before I was climbing all over my chair, discovering the dust on the windowsill, and then suddenly realizing that I was hungry or thirsty. So, I would head to the kitchen to get a snack and get caught up in the TV show my brothers were watching or get a phone call from a friend. It wasn't unusual for me to take 1 or 2 hours just to get started on my homework. Chances are good that you have witnessed your children having similar struggles with getting (and staying) focused on their homework. An electronic timer, however, is a great tool to help your children harness that energy into doing their homework and simply getting it done!

Set the timer for the amount of time you think will be needed for an assignment and challenge your child to beat the timer! This little race is remarkable for improving focus and motivation. It

also helps the child gain a more tangible appreciation for the time that whittles away when they are goofing around.

Timers, specifically electronic timers, are excellent tools to help children learn how to manage time for a variety of tasks. Children may argue with you, but nobody argues with a timer. In my classroom, for example, I would let my students work in learning centers for about 50 minutes every day. When ever I announced that it was time to clean up, they would argue with me because they wanted more time or did not want to clean up. However, when the timer went off, they would instantly stop what they were doing and put their stuff away. They obeyed the timer better than they obeyed me!

The timer is a great tool for teaching time-management. Whether you use it for homework, play time, TV time, or bed time, the timer is a neutral third party that announces time is up *for* you, rather than you being the bad guy!

A timer is also a great tool to use for those students who "fly" through their homework haphazardly, without putting their best

effort into assignments. Often, they just want to finish their homework as soon as possible so they can run outside and play. We certainly do not want to discourage their ability to work quickly, but we do want to establish an expectation for quality work, too. In these instances, use the timer to provide more concrete expectations for your child. You can say something like,

"I expect you to do your best work on your homework. In order to do that, I think you should spend at least twenty minutes on this assignment. So, I will set the timer for 20 minutes and you must sit here for the entire time. If you finish in less time, then you must sit here and read. You will not be allowed to leave before the time is up. When the timer goes off, I will look over your work and determine if I think it is the best quality work that you can do. If it is not, you will have to sit here for another 20 minutes to improve your work or read your book."

You typically will only have to use this strategy two or three times before students learn to put better effort into their assignments the first time around!

Visit www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=207 to learn more about our SOAR[®] Planner Supplies kit which includes a timer, a planner, and a binder clip.

Set Goals Summary

This summary includes specific solutions to items listed on the *Homework Problems Inventory*:

3. "Our schedules are crazy. It is hard to make time for homework!"

Taking a few minutes at the beginning of the week to coordinate schedules with every member of your family will encourage everyone to plan ahead a bit, helping everyone make better use of their time. This process will reduce much of the evening chaos that happens when families have not taken the time to be proactive.

Students who live in two homes can reap the same benefits of a Family Meeting by coordinating their schedule with both parents over the phone.

4. "She saves everything for the last minute."

The process of meeting with the family every week to coordinate schedules will remind your child to tell you about things beforehand. Most of the time, students do not intend to cause problems by telling you about things at the last minute, they simply have not learned how to think and plan ahead properly.

5. "We frequently fight over doing homework."

The Family Meeting dramatically reduces homework fights because it helps increase cooperation and reduces the "nagging" effect that we can have on our children. You will find additional information about this homework problem in the "Reward Progress" section.

6. "I am tired of always having to be in charge!"

Once again, the Family Meeting comes to the rescue! As you develop the routine of having weekly meetings, use that time to gradually release some responsibilities to your children. Let them be responsible for staying on top of their sports' schedules and coordinating rides to/from games and practices. Let them fill out their own lunch order forms and calculate how much money it will cost. There are dozens of ways you can pass responsibilities on to them and there is no need to worry if they make a mistake. What is the worst that can happen if they forget about a soccer practice or miscalculate the lunch order? In most cases, the "worst" that can happen is that they will experience a small consequence and learn from their mistake. Otherwise, they will appreciate the trust you have placed in them to take more responsibility for themselves and you will breathe a little easier.

7. "It takes her longer than it should to do her homework."

An electronic timer is a great tool for students who are taking too much time to do their homework *or* not taking enough time.

Using the timer as the time-keeper will provide an incentive for them to work more efficiently and will prevent them from arguing with you over time limits.

Organize

If there is one complaint I hear from parents more than anything else, it is that their students are not organized. Do any of these comments, from the *Homework Problem Inventory*, ring true in your household?

8. "School papers never make it home."
9. "She often brings the wrong folders home for homework."
10. "His book bag is a mess!"
11. "I saw him do his homework, but his teacher says he did not turn it in."
12. "It is very challenging for me to keep track of so many school papers, sports schedules, lunch menus, etc."

Organizing for Elementary School

Students

The following section assumes that your elementary student sees only one or two teachers during the school day (NOT including P.E., Music, or similar specials). If your child changes classes/teachers more than once a day, the system described in "Organizing for Middle & High School Students" may be more appropriate.

The greatest organizational problem for most elementary students stems from their book bag. With a small amount of effort, you can help your child develop routines that will keep her book bag in order and her papers organized.

It is essential that elementary students have one two-pocket folder to use as their "Back and Forth" Folder. It should be a sturdy, plastic folder that will be easy to get out of their book bag and desk without it tearing and falling apart.

As the name suggests, this Back-and-Forth Folder should be the one item that comes out of their desk to go home every night. In the morning, it will be the one item that comes out of their book

bag and is carried into class. The left-hand pocket should be labeled "Take Home" and the right-hand pocket should be labeled "Take to School." Again, as those labels suggest, every paper that needs to come home for homework or that needs your attention will go on the left-hand side and papers that must be returned to school will go on the right-hand side.

Depending on your child's age and/or ability level, you may have to provide some rewards and incentives for using their folder properly as they first develop the habit. In the classroom, I always told my students that the Back-and-Forth Folder was their ticket into my classroom at the beginning of the day and their ticket out at the end of the day. As they developed the habit of transporting their folder "back and forth," they began to notice when their hands were empty and the folder quickly became routine for most students.

It is essential that loose papers NEVER be allowed into the book bag. Just like we cannot explain what happens to missing socks after being washed, we cannot explain what happens to papers that enter the book bag without protection...most end up permanently

lost! To prevent the book bag from becoming a trash dump, insist that all papers go inside their folder (for moments when they are in a rush, show your child how to slide papers inside the folder without taking the folder out of the bag). You should regularly check your child's book bag to make sure papers have not wandered to the bottom.

The final routine to develop with your child is what I call "Take Two." Every night, as they sit down to start their homework, they should take two minutes to sort through their folder and book bag to put all papers and other items away in the proper place. During these two minutes, they can clean out trash and set aside papers that need your attention. (Stay tuned for more on that with the upcoming Chip Clip Strategy). As the children finish their homework, they should "Take Two" again. This time, they take two minutes to make sure all of their completed homework is in their Back-and-Forth Folder, their folder and books are all in their book bag, and anything else they may need -such as shoes, their jacket, and library books- are all by the door and ready to go. (See <http://soarss.com/NightBeforeSchoolTool> for a "Night Before School Tool". It is a customizable FREE tool that you can post by

the door to help your child remember everything they need and help them get organized for the next day.

Organizing for Middle & High School Students - The SOAR[®] Binder System

For many students, it may seem like their organizational problems "popped up" overnight when they make the transition from one or two teachers in elementary school to several different teachers and increased responsibility in middle school. Whether your student is new to middle school or is about to start college, this next tool is a simple way to streamline folders, notebooks, and papers. It eliminates the "I Brought the Wrong Folder Home! Syndrome," keeps the book bag clean, and significantly reduces (even eliminates) lost assignments.

Before I explain exactly what this system is, let me start by asking you a question. How many classes does a typical middle school or high school student have at one time?

The typical 6th-12th grader has between 6 & 8 classes at a time. Most teachers require *at least* one folder and one notebook for each class....that is between 12 and 16 different folders and notebooks. Stacked on top of one another, they typically have about 6-8 inches of "stuff." With all of those different items, it is very difficult for students to keep everything in order. For one, it is difficult to *identify* correct folders and notebooks. Second, it takes a lot of time to dig through all of those folders and pull out the correct ones to put homework away. When students are working on homework, they often are not concerned about putting their homework *away*. When they are done, they are just happy to finish it and anxious to get on with the rest of their evening. It takes too much time to rifle through their bag, pull out the right folder, slide their homework in, and put the folder back in their bag. It is the sheer volume of "stuff" that students have to organize that keeps them from keeping track of their papers. Instead, it is much easier for them to simply stash their papers in the black hole of their book bag where they get lost, crumpled, and often pulverized.

A solution to this problem is what I call the SOAR[®] Binder System (Slide 8 includes pictures of the materials for this binder and slide 9 includes a picture of an assembled binder. Find the slideshow at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>). This simple system requires a 1 ½ - inch binder, one plastic folder per class, and some loose-leaf notebook paper. The 6-8 inches of bulk from folders and notebooks can easily be condensed down to this simple, efficient binder system. Our SOAR[®] Binder System Supplies kit includes all the supplies you need to implement the SOAR[®] Binder System in one convenient package. More information can be found at www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=105.

Students use one folder for each class and take notes on the loose-leaf notebook paper, instead of in a spiral-bound notebook. They simply keep their notes in the binder, behind the folder for the corresponding class. This system allows students to keep folders and notebooks for all of their classes in one place, which reduces the bulk of "stuff" they have to organize and helps insure that students have the correct folders and notebooks at all times because everything goes with them to each of their classes and home for homework.

Most people are surprised to find that 12-16 different folders and notebooks can fit into a 1-inch binder. Obviously, the binder should be regularly cleaned out, but most students will not need to clean it out more than once a month. When they do, they should have a designated space at home to store "old" papers...a special drawer, section of their parent's file cabinet, even a shoe box will work. As long as they have a DESIGNATED place to keep those papers because old quizzes, assignments, and tests are the best possible study guide! Also, just in case a teacher makes an error in her grade book, your child will have proof to fix the mistake.

Tips for Using the SOAR[®] Binder System

Setting up the binder and reducing the sheer volume of "stuff" that a student has to manage is half of the organizational battle.

However, there are five simple, yet effective tips to help students maximize their use of the binder.

1. As mentioned earlier, students should take their binder with them to each class and always take it home. This

way, they do not have to worry about taking the wrong folder or notebook home for homework.

2. They should use the front, left pocket inside the binder, as pictured in slide 9 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>, for all items that need their attention when they get home. This includes homework, notes that need to be signed by you, fundraiser forms...anything that needs their attention at home. That way, everything will be easy to find when they get home and it will help them get their homework done faster.
3. Students should carry their binder from class to class in their arms and always carry it on top of other books. At first, this may seem like an odd tip, but there is a very good reason for it. It is quite common for teachers to encounter delays in class or loose track of time and suddenly realize, as the bell rings, that they forgot to pass out homework. So, they meet students at the door and pass out the homework as the students are trying to rush out to their next class. What do you think typically happens to that homework?

Most students do not have time to stop, dig through their folders, find the folder for that class, and slide their homework inside. Instead, they shove the paper inside a book, their book bag, or their pocket. Many students lose their papers in the hallway as they run to their locker or get bumped in the crowded halls.

However, when students have their binder in their arms and have it quickly accessible, they can open the binder with one hand and slide the homework in the front pocket without even having to stop. It's simple, slick, and only takes 1.4 seconds to put the homework in a secure place.

4. It's very important to emphasize with your child that papers should never be allowed in the book bag loosely because they will soon get crunched, forgotten, and ultimately lost. There are many times, however, when students don't have time to stop, pull out their binder, and put papers away. When they are in a rush, they can simply slide papers into the top of their binder, as pictured in slide 10 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>.

5. Students can use the binder as a "lap desk" and do their homework right on top of their binder. As soon as they finish an assignment, they can take 2 seconds to flip to the folder for that class and put their assignment away in the correct folder....no digging through 14 different folders and notebooks, no lost papers!

There are two questions that are commonly asked about using the SOAR[®] Binder System:

Q: What if my teacher requires something different for his class?

A: Students should simply show their binder to their teacher, briefly explain the system, and ask if they can use the binder for class. (For younger students, it may be helpful for you to write a note and inform the teacher that you are trying a new organizing system from a study skills program.) Most teachers simply want to see that students have some type of system for organizing themselves and are willing to accommodate modifications. After sharing this strategy with hundreds of students, I have only heard

of a few teachers who were not willing to accommodate the SOAR® Binder.

Q: My child gets a LOT of papers from school. What do we do if everything does not fit into a 1 ½-inch binder?

A: Once you weed out the spiral notebooks and graded assignments from folders, you will be surprised at how well everything will fit into a small binder. If the binder does fill up quickly, however, it is better to clean it out more often than to get a larger binder or to use two binders. When students have a larger binder or have more than one binder to keep track of, things become bulky and difficult to manage. If it is difficult to manage, students won't use it!

Also, please make sure that your student is not trying to insert spiral notebooks inside the binder. They simply do not fit very well!

Quick Tips for Organizing

Before I share the two "quick tips" for organizing, I would like to share the basic organization principle that the two strategies have

in common. It is what I call the 'Silverware Sorter' Theory. In most homes, you can walk into a perfect stranger's house and identify where the silverware goes because of the sorting tray; it creates a clear and designated spot for the silverware. Even "messy" houses are usually good about putting silverware away in the correct place.

The silverware sorter illustrates a critical tip for organizing, which is that creating clear, designated places for things and keeping those spaces easily accessible, will ensure that most people -even those who are not born with an innate inclination to be organized- can keep belongings in order. The following two tips work well because they are good examples of "Silverware Sorter Strategies." That means that they work well, even for people who are chronically disorganized.

The Chip Clip System for Papers that Need Your Attention

Between the Silverware Sorter Theory and the Chip Clip System, you are probably detecting a theme... Well, it is true that a lot of

good organizing ideas are embedded in the kitchen. The Chip Clip System is about creating a system, place, and routine for dealing with papers that come home from school with your child and need YOUR attention.

From my days as a classroom teacher, I cannot tell you how many parents would contact me in frustration over not being notified about various events at school or kept up to date on our topics in school, when in fact, the notes were sent home but had never surfaced to the top of the book bag and brought to parents' attention. This is a common problem, but if we apply the principles of the Silverware Sorter Theory, we can identify a solution. For me, the solution is in the form of Chip Clips.

As seen on slide 11 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/>, you can purchase magnetic chip clips from dollar stores or super centers at a very low cost. Purchase one for each of your children, including high school students. I recommend that you color-code the clips and designate one color for each child. The clips can be stored on your refrigerator. When your children come home from school and have notes, permission slips, lunch menus, progress reports, or

emergency cards that need your attention, they can simply pull the notes out of that front pocket of their binder or their back-and-forth folder and clip them together with their Chip Clip. They then put them in a pre-determined location for you to see. For example, they might put their notes back up on the fridge, on the kitchen table...somewhere where you will be sure to see them right away. In my house, I have my son put his Chip-Clipped papers on the corner of our kitchen counter. This particular corner is a location that I cannot miss, but is out of my way while I prepare dinner.

This simple little system dramatically increases the likelihood that you will receive papers from school because it creates a designated place and it is accessible. As it becomes part of your children's routine, they will automatically check and see if they have any papers for your attention, which also reduces the amount of "nagging" you have to do!

Nifty Tool for Organizing School Papers at Home

I have recently discovered a clever tool that creates a designated space for school-related papers, and it is very accessible. The organizer is called a Pendaflex Mobile File and is made by Pendaflex. It is pictured on slide 11 and works very well as the home filing station for binder overflow. This colorful accordion-style file has 6 folders and opens so the folders can hang vertically or it can be kept as an accordion style case. The advantage for students is that it can be stored on a hook on their wall or the back of their door, and in less than 12 seconds, they can slide extra papers from their binder into the colorful folders. -They don't even have to open a drawer or flip through file folders. The folders remain open and accessible, which means they are MUCH more likely to be used.

The Pendaflex is also a great tool for you to use to organize YOUR papers for your children...lunch menus, sports schedules, school calendars, etc. can all be stored in this easy-to-access file holder. Simply hang it inside your pantry or on the back of the garage door. When you have your weekly planning meeting with the family, you can easily grab it, condense it down so it is easy to

carry, and you will have all of your resources handy for double-checking events and schedules for the week.

The Pendaflex Mobile File is not available in most retail locations, but can be purchased through the internet. The Pendaflex Mobile File is included with our SOAR[®] Binder System Supplies kit.

More information can be found at

www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=105.

Organize Summary

The following information includes a summary of specific solutions to items # 8-12 on the *Homework Problems Inventory*:

8. "School papers never make it home."

The Back-and-Forth Folder and SOAR[®] Binder System help students keep their papers organized between home and school.

The Chip Clip Strategy creates a specific place and routine for them to share papers with you that need your attention.

www.StudySkills.com

9. "She often brings the wrong folders home for homework."

Middle and high school students can use the SOAR[®] Binder System to condense their many folders and notebooks down to one, easy-to-manage place for organizing papers. With only one binder to manage, students can take it home with them everyday and always have the folder or notebook that they need. Our SOAR[®] Binder System Supplies kit includes all the supplies you need to implement the SOAR[®] Binder System in one convenient package. More information can be found at www.StudySkills.com/products/?product=105.

10. "His book bag is a mess!"

The binder and back-and-forth folders are solutions for this problem. With simple, streamlined ways to manage papers, students will be much more inclined to put papers away, rather than stashed in their bag.

11. "I saw him do his homework, but his teacher says he did not turn it in."

This is one of the biggest mysteries for parents...how homework can disappear before it can be returned to school. The *reason* homework typically disappears is two-fold: a messy book bag and having too many folders to make it worth a student's time to put their homework away in the proper place. Once again, the Back-and-Forth Folder and the SOAR[®] Binder are the solutions to the "lost assignment" problem.

12. "It is very challenging for me to keep track of so many school papers, sports schedules, lunch menus, etc."

The Pendaflex folder organizer is a great tool to help you keep papers sorted, yet easily accessible. It is also a great tool to help students organize their "binder overflow."

Ask Questions

We are now heading into the section of SOAR[®] that deals with the nitty-gritty strategies students can do to maximize their study time.

The statements from the *Homework Problems Inventory* that are covered in this section include:

13. "My child does not remember much of what he reads in a textbook."
14. "My child does not pay attention well in class."
15. "She does not take good notes."
16. " He does not know how to study for tests."

You might be wondering how "asking questions" can be a solution to each of those problems. The process of creating questions automatically kicks the brain into higher gear and forces it to work more efficiently. Therefore, learning how to ask appropriate questions is a great strategy for interacting with teachers, reading text books, taking notes, writing papers, and studying for tests. For this program, I will focus on one specific strategy that is so simple

- yet so powerful - you will wish you knew about it when you were in school!

Reading Textbooks

The Super Study Strategy

This strategy is for reading textbooks more efficiently and can be used by any student who uses a textbook, from grade-schoolers to college students. Being able to read a textbook is essential for maximizing performance in school. Reading textbooks helps students fill in gaps from information covered in class and understand the material at a greater depth than most class lectures can cover. Simply being familiar with information in the textbook increases students' focus and dramatically increases their listening comprehension in class. By reading a chapter of a textbook, students take time to LEARN the information, rather than memorize it rapidly and haphazardly just before a test. Ultimately, that time becomes a great investment because it saves them a lot of study time and frustration later. It will also result in much better grades!

You may recall your own experiences of reading textbooks and feel some trepidation. I, myself, have vivid memories of sludging through pages of text, then getting to the end with no recollection of what I had just read. But, that was before I learned a valuable trick. The SOAR[®] Strategy for reading textbooks is so simple, it will remove textbook reading frustration! Before I show you *how* it works, however, try the following activity to discover *why* it works.

You will need to view slides 12-13 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/> in order to do the following activity.

Textbook Reading Activity #1

Please pause this recording to look at slide 12 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/> for *only* 5 seconds.

Welcome back!

After looking at the picture on slide 12, see if you can answer the following five questions. Please don't cheat and look back at the slide! 😊 Just see what you can answer from memory.

1. What is centered directly above the man's head?
2. What 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 the photo?
5. How many fish are in the package on the right side of the photo?

Were you able to answer any of these questions? Let's review the answers quickly now.

1. Sling Shot
2. A toy called *Pirate Collection*
3. Spotted
4. Three
5. Four

How many correct answers did you have? The average person who does this activity gets 1-2 questions correct.

Why is that?

They were simple questions, were they not?

Of course they were, but it would have been much easier if I had given you the questions *before* you looked at the picture.

Students approach reading a textbook in the same way that I just asked you to look at the picture...with no idea what they are looking for...what the important ideas are. The key is to have them identify those key ideas and questions before they read.

Creating Connections

Everything we have ever learned in our lives has only been learned because new information has been connected to something we already knew. Connections are the life-blood of learning. When reading a textbook, however, most students are reading about topics that they do not know much -if anything- about, nor do they have much -if any- interest about the topic. It is the lack of

connections that causes us to read a whole page, yet have no idea what we just read.

Obviously, then, students need to develop connections. They can develop these connections by doing a very simple strategy before they read a section of their textbook. I call it "Read the Pictures."

Reading the Pictures is a short, three-step process:

- 1) Look at each picture (this includes graphs, and charts).
- 2) Read the corresponding caption.
- 3) Ask yourself, "Why is this picture in this chapter?"

That's it. That is all there is to it. This works so well because publishing companies have to pay a lot of money to print in color and must pay a lot of money for the photographs, illustrations, graphs, and charts that they include in their material. As a result, editors are under heavy pressure to identify visuals that best represent the main ideas for each section of text. Editors try to get the most "bang for their buck" by selecting visuals that represent the most amount of information for each section.

Another benefit to reading the pictures first is that our brains can instantly identify with visuals and they remember visuals better than the "ideas" conveyed in black-and-white text. That means that when you read the black-and-white text, your brain will automatically be able to make CONNECTIONS to the visuals.

From my informal evaluation of several middle-school and high-school books, I have found that 30-80% of the information expressed in textbooks is actually communicated through the visuals and their captions. That means that even if students do not read the black-and-white text, they still have a major advantage from reading the pictures than if they never looked at their textbook at all.

Textbook Reading Activity #2

To really understand the impact of this strategy, try it yourself! YOU will be amazed at what a difference it will make. Slides 16-23 at <http://studyskills.com/hh4p/> are from an eighth grade science textbook. The captions were re-typed in larger textboxes to improve readability. Take a few moments to look at these slides, and follow the three-step "Read the Pictures" routines:

www.StudySkills.com

- 1) Look at each picture/visual.
- 2) Read the caption.
- 3) Ask yourself, "Why do I think this picture is here?"

Then, try to answer the summary/review questions at the bottom of slide 23.

Using this strategy, your child's reading comprehension will instantly skyrocket! If your child continues to practice this strategy regularly, she can dramatically improve her reading speed, too.

Quick Tips for Ask Questions

The following tips come from the "Ask Questions" section of *SOAR® Study Skills* and originated from broader strategies that utilize questions as an efficient learning technique:

The "Take Ten" Strategy for Organizing & Studying

Our brains learn new information most efficiently if we can review that new information within 24 hours of first learning it. For students, that means they should review their notes for each class at least once before returning to class. The "Take Ten" Strategy encourages students to build this review right into their daily homework routine. When they sit down to do their homework each night, they should "Take Ten"....ten minutes that is to organize their papers and review their notes. The first two minutes are to sort loose papers into the proper folders or clip papers that need your attention to their "chip clip." The next eight minutes should then be spent reviewing their notes from all of their classes.

To make these eight minutes even more productive, they should play Jeopardy® with their notes and create potential quiz questions out of them. The practice of creating questions helps the brain process that information at a much higher level of thinking, which helps students *learn* the information MUCH more quickly. This

step will save a lot of study time later and increase their scores on tests and quizzes.

Developing a daily routine "Taking Ten" to organize papers and review notes will help homework time go much more smoothly. Papers will be organized so students can find them and because students have learned the information covered in class by creating sample test questions, they will fly through their nightly homework with confidence!

The Best (and Easiest) Study Guide for Unit Tests & Final Exams

The following strategy was briefly mentioned during the SOAR[®] Binder section, but it is a very powerful tip to help students study for large tests, so it deserves a little more attention.

I often received requests from panicked parents, towards the end of a semester, to help their child study for final exams. The problem

is, by that time, those students have already lost their most valuable study guides.

Most students feel overwhelmed when they think about studying for large tests such as a final exam or a unit test. However, as long as they remember these major tests in the back of their mind from the first day of school, they will do just fine. I certainly am not suggesting that they go home and study every night like they are going to have a final exam the next day, but as long as they remember -from the first day of class- to keep graded assignments, quizzes, and tests as study guides, they will be all set for final exams or unit tests. There is no better way to study for these big tests than to review key assignments from throughout the semester.

Where do you think teachers get their questions for final exams, anyway? As a former classroom teacher, I can assure you I did not have time to reinvent the wheel and create new test questions for major exams. Most teachers are like me...they "steal" questions from their previous quizzes, tests, and homework. Students should

pay extra close attention to the answers they originally had wrong, because those questions will likely be difficult again, unless they took careful note to make sure they understood the correct answers.

As mentioned, the Pendaflex Mobile File, described in the "Organize" section, is a helpful tool for managing these papers at home and making sure they are accessible when needed as a study guide.

Ask Questions Summary

The following information includes a summary of specific solutions to item #s 13-16 listed on the *Homework Problems Inventory*:

13. "My child does not remember much of what he reads in a textbook."

The simple, three-step process of "Reading Pictures" will greatly improve his comprehension. Simply by taking two or three

minutes to read the pictures he will have instantly learned 30-80% of the information in that chapter. The main ideas are captured in the visuals; the black-and-white text simply provides additional details. He should typically be able to answer 50-75% of the summary questions at the end of the chapter or section.

14. "My child does not pay attention well in class."

There are many reasons why students do not pay attention in class, but one strategy to help *improve* attention is to have your child read sections of her textbook before they are covered in class, or to have her book open while her teacher is talking about a topic. In just a few minutes, she can "read the pictures" in class, which will improve her attention because her brain will be able to make connections between the visuals and the information being discussed in class. This process slows down the tendency to "tune out" because the brain has become familiar with the topic.

15. "My child does not take good notes."

Once again, "reading the pictures" helps improve note-taking skills because the process helps students identify the more important

ideas for a topic. There are more tips and tricks for taking notes in class, but "reading pictures" is a great place for them to start.

16. " My child does not know how to study for tests."

The "Take Ten" strategy encourages students to take ten minutes at the beginning of their homework time; two minutes to put loose papers in their proper folders and eight minutes reviewing notes taken during the day. This daily organizational routine will help them keep track of important papers that can serve as a study guide and the daily review will help them learn information as it is taught, rather than trying to cram just before a test.

Reviewing graded assignments, quizzes, and tests is an excellent way for students to study for a unit test or final exam. Most teachers create these exams by copying questions directly from previous work.

Reward progress

The "R" in SOAR[®] stands for "Record your progress." However, for parents, I switch that around to REWARD progress.

Rewards...whether they are actual incentives or simply recognition, can go a long way in developing motivation if they are handled correctly. I will first specifically address motivation, and then I will cover the use of incentives and recognition. Obviously, this section will address the final statement on the *Homework Problems Inventory*, "He's just not motivated!"

Developing Motivation

Your child is the *only* person who can motivate himself, but there are some things you can do to help your child be more proactive in school, which may inspire him to get motivated.

First, you must make sure that his school-work is not too difficult. If two or more classes are excessively challenging, he is likely to

shut down and become apathetic towards school. Motivation will be impossible until your child can get support to succeed or have his coursework adjusted.

Assuming that your child is capable of doing fairly well in his classes but is *choosing* not to, consider his goals. What is he interested in? Are there specific intelligences covered in the "How are You Smart" section that your child has not yet developed? Children of all ages must be encouraged to develop a wide range of interests. Out of these interests, long-term career goals emerge.

For example, I was recently at a library doing some work and could not help but overhear a loud conversation between a tutor and her student at the table next to me. It was obvious that this was their first meeting and the tutor was attempting to learn more about her student who was a ninth grader. The tutor asked her student, "So, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

The boy sat there, slumped back in his chair, and mumbled, "A professional football player."

The tutor very appropriately said, "Well, I am glad you are a great athlete and I do not want to discourage you, but you have to have a back-up plan."

So, the boy replied apathetically, "Professional wrestling."

The tutor continued to spend several minutes trying to convince this young man that he should have a back-up plan, just in case he got injured or was not selected in the highly competitive field of professional sports. He clearly did not want to hear anything she had to say. Finally, he sat up with conviction and said, "I don't want to do this homework because I don't care about it! I will never need to use this stuff! I just want to play football!"

As this student illustrated, if your child does not have long-term goals or interests, he will not see any purpose in school. If he does not see a purpose, he will not be motivated. However, if he understands specific ways that his current studies can impact his life, he is likely to care a little more. Encourage him to talk to people in careers that *he* is interested in (not *just* that you are interested in for him) and allow him to job-shadow some

professionals. For teens, a part-time job is another good way to help inspire long-term and short-term motivation. Just be sure that the part-time job does not trump school responsibilities.

It probably goes without saying, but in case your child is also interested in sports, follow the tutor's example. Encourage your child to pursue his interest in sports, but always insist on a back-up plan.

Another important consideration for fostering motivation is your day-to-day interactions with your child. Do you pay him compliments and thank him when he has done something to help you? Or, are you more often yelling or nagging at him?

Think about what an effective -and motivating- boss or manager might say to his employees. Imagine you are one of the employees...what would you like to hear that would motivate you? What would definitely NOT motivate you? A compliment or acknowledgement of something you had done for your boss would probably make you much more willing to give your best effort than if you heard yelling or criticism. Children's reactions to criticism,

yelling, and nagging are no different than our reactions would be; we would quickly become resentful, disrespectful, and rebellious.

It is our human nature to notice and emphasize negative things first. However, if you can take a moment to put yourself in your child's shoes and think about something positive you can say, you might be surprised at the response. For example, instead of criticizing your child for taking too much time on his homework, encourage him by saying, "You are halfway there. Good job! Keep going." He may surprise you!

I always remember one powerful example of how much more effective the "positive angle" can be. As a classroom teacher, I would frequently get frustrated by the constant chatter among my students, especially as I was trying to give directions for a new activity or get the class organized for their next class. Standing there and feeling impatient, I would say things like, "Patrick, stop talking. Jonathan, turn around. Brittany, I am waiting..." The students barely blinked at me and would keep right on talking. However, when I finally remembered to be positive, all I would need to do is dole out one compliment like, "Sarah, thank you for

waiting patiently," and the whole class would start hushing each other in the hopes of being the next person to get a compliment. After two compliments, the class was quiet and I could proceed.

It may not always be possible to emphasize the positive, but nearly every parent -myself included- can improve the ratio of positive to negative comments we make towards our children. We will have greater cooperation from our children and eventually inspire motivation.

Using Rewards and Incentives

I've addressed some ideas for inspiring motivation, but it is also important to consider what you can do next to *insist* that your child improve performance in school. We are parents and it is our job to apply some pressure. The most effective way to put this pressure on is to offer reasonable incentives! Of course, the other way to provide pressure is through punishment. Punishment has its place and can be an important part of molding and managing behavior, however rewards and incentives are infinitely more effective and should be offered *first*.

So, what are some benefits to using rewards and incentives when dealing with homework?

For starters, positive consequences cultivate positive attitudes...and you need as much of that as you can get when it comes to dealing with homework!

Secondly, they allow you to be much more specific about your expectations, which makes your children more likely to meet them. For example, “Stop fooling around and get your homework done,” is not as specific as, “If you can stay focused and finish your homework in 20 minutes, I will let you watch an extra TV show tonight.” The latter statement tells children specifically what they SHOULD do and this will always result in a better response.

Finally, punishment is often NOT motivating, especially for children who have fallen into complacency. Before long, there will be nothing left for you to “take away.”

As a parent, if your homework management strategy relies strictly on punishment, you're likely wearing away motivation and fighting a losing battle. Turn the tides by rewarding progress and reap the benefits of happier and more successful children! The next section includes specific tips for developing rewards.

Quick Tips for Rewarding Progress

The following five tips are important considerations for developing effective incentives:

1. **Determine realistic, yet motivating rewards.** When you first start this process, you may need to provide rewards immediately. After a short while, start extending the time. For example, you might first offer stickers, extra time on the computer, or a small treat each evening.

After a couple of weeks, change the parameters and offer weekly rewards, such as taking your daughter out to lunch on the weekend if she does her homework, tear-free, for four nights in one week.

Gradually, increase the time-span and slightly increase the value of each reward. You can *guarantee* motivation if you ask your children for reward ideas. You may be surprised at how candid -and reasonable- they will be with you.

2. **Back up your positive consequences with negative ones.**

This creates a choice for your child. “If I do my homework on time tonight, I can go to a movie with dad this weekend. If I don’t, I will lose my video games for the night.”

Which would you choose?

3. **Be firm and ALWAYS follow through.** The moment you

do not enforce your expectations, you lose the game!

Your children know if you do not always mean what you say and they will test you to the end of time. There are no shortcuts; only offer consequences that you are willing to enforce, and then ENFORCE them!

4. **On a similar note, be aware of the “Four Factor.”** The

first few times you introduce a new routine or expectation

with children, they are likely to fight it. The first time may be bad. The second time may be awful. The third time may be unbelievably awful. But, by the fourth time, they will have learned that you are serious about your expectations and will drop their resistance.

If you've ever learned about Pavlov's dogs, well...this is the same thing...basic behavioral psychology to recondition a response. If you think about it, we all have a built-in "Four Factor." For example, after the third time a friend cancels plans on you, you are likely to avoid making plans a fourth time. Applying this concept toward your children takes some determination and will power, but it will pay off...for all of you!

5. And finally, rewards of your time are most motivating!

This often surprises parents, especially parents of middle and high school students, but the opportunity to spend 'special time' with Mom or Dad is very attractive to students of all ages. Seize the opportunity while you have it.

Reward Progress Summary

The following information includes a summary of solutions for the last item on the Homework Problem Inventory, **“He's just not motivated!”**

1. Developing motivation is a combination of providing encouragement in all areas of a child's strengths, promoting outside interests, encouraging him to think about his future, and communicating to him with respect.
2. Offering rewards and incentives will inspire greater cooperation, better attitudes, and better productivity than punishment.
3. Always follow through on any rewards, promises, or threats. The only way your children will respect that your words mean something is if you back up your expectations with actions.

4. Rewards of your time are most meaningful to students of all ages!

Homework Help Conclusion & Additional Resources

I hope you have found this *Homework Help* program to be useful and informative. I am always working to identify simple, user-friendly strategies to help students, parents, and teachers manage school and homework more efficiently. If you have a great strategy you have developed, please share it with us through the "contact us" link at our website...I may use include it in future resources.

If you liked the strategies in *Homework Help* there are at least 103 more simple, efficient strategies in our *SOAR*[®] *Study Skills Workbook*. To learn more, visit:

<http://studyskills.com/products/?product=40>.

In the meantime, I wish you and your family peaceful homework evenings and a successful experience in school!

www.StudySkills.com