



Step Four Be Successful in Class

If you follow the advice in this section, you'll enjoy school more and you'll get better grades.

Be in School, On Time, Every Day. When you miss school, you miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work, you can never make up all of what you miss, even if you're out of school for only one day. *To get good grades, you must be in school every day.* Unless you have an extended illness or a serious health problem, you should miss no more than five or six days of school a year.

Learn How to Adapt to Different Teachers. In the classroom, the teachers are in charge and they make the rules. You might have one teacher who counts you tardy if you're not in your seat when the bell rings, and another teacher who considers you on time if you've got one foot inside the door. It doesn't matter whether or not you agree with the first teacher's rule; it only matters that you are in your seat when the bell rings. Part of your education is to learn how to adapt to different sets of rules, personalities, and teaching styles.

"It's really important to know your teachers and to know what they want. Are they strict about rules? Do they collect and grade homework? Do they give points for participation?" Brad

Be Prepared for Each Class. To be prepared, you need to have books, paper, pencils, etc. with you when you go to class. *You also need to have all of your homework done.* When you've done your homework, you get more out of the class, the lecture makes more sense, and you can participate in discussions. If you haven't done your homework, you may not even understand the lecture or class discussion.

Being prepared also means that you come to class ready to learn. Try taking a couple of seconds as you walk into each class to think about what you're going to be doing that day. This will make it easier for you to focus on the subject when the class starts.

Of course, to be physically and mentally alert, you need to eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep.

Sit in the Front of the Class if Possible. It is easier to pay attention and to stay involved when you sit in the front of the classroom. It's also easier to ask questions and to see the board, overhead, etc. If you have problems paying attention, and you sit in the back of the class, ask your teacher if you can move closer to the front.

Be Aware of Your Body Language. This guidance counselor's story illustrates the importance of body language:

"One day a student named Jason complained to me that his English teacher always picked on him. Jason told me that he never talked out in class, that he always did his homework, and that he did everything his teacher asked him to do.

The following week, I went into Jason's English class to talk about scheduling. Jason, who was sitting in the back row, never spoke out of turn, never talked to his neighbors, and he did everything he was supposed to do. Nevertheless, as my presentation went on, I became more and more infuriated with him. Why? Because of his body language.

Throughout the period, Jason would look at his friends and roll his eyes, or he'd slump his shoulders, let his head drop back, and then he'd sigh. Jason's behavior was clearly saying to me, 'This is stupid and boring, and I don't want to do this.' I found Jason's behavior distracting and irritating. Of course, I also found out why Jason and his English teacher weren't getting along very well.

The next day I called Jason into my office and explained to him what I had observed the previous day. Jason was genuinely surprised that I had even noticed him in the class."

What Jason didn't understand is that when teachers are up in front of a classroom, they see everything. They know who is paying attention, who's taking notes, and who is listening to the class discussion. They also know who's doing homework for another class, writing personal notes, daydreaming, and "napping" (even when students think they've positioned their hands and books to hide it). If you choose to do any of these things, don't kid yourself into thinking that your teachers don't notice, even if they don't say anything. Teachers notice, and they just figure that you don't care about what's going on in their class. It's not enough for you to say that you want to get good grades; your body language has to communicate this also.

Always Do Your Homework. Don't look at homework as something you should do. Think of homework as something you *must* do. Since a significant portion of your grade is usually based on homework, your grade drops every time you miss an assignment. Always complete your homework on time, and whenever possible, do extra credit work.

"If you don't do your homework, it kills your grade." Brad

Participate in Class. Participating in class makes it more interesting, and it helps keep your mind focused. Ask and answer questions, and get involved in class discussions.

Many teachers give participation points, so participating not only makes class more interesting, it can also help you get a better grade.

"If I tune out, the class goes on forever. If I participate, the time goes a lot faster." John

"Teachers like it when you participate and try to answer their questions, even if you're wrong." Sarah

Be a Good Group Member. Knowing how to work well in a group is very important. Whether you're working on a school project, working at a job, or involved in an extra-curricular activity, you need to be able to work and get along with the other members of the group.

Whenever you are involved in a group project, 1) do your share of the work and do it well, 2) try to be open to new ideas, and 3) support the other members of the group.

Treat Others with Courtesy and Respect. Treat your teachers and classmates the same way that you want to be treated. Be polite, look at your teachers when they're speaking, and listen when others are talking. Also, be very aware of your tone of voice. The same words, in a different tone of voice, can communicate a very different message.

Remember that teachers are people too. They enjoy having students say hello to them in the halls, and they appreciate it when students show an interest in them. For example, if a teacher's been out ill, a simple comment like "I hope you're feeling better" can brighten that teacher's day.

"Teachers like it when you talk to them, and it lets them know that you care. Teachers are busy though, so if you have a question or problem, see them before or after class." Maria

Involve Your Parents. When your parents ask you what you did in school, tell them. For example, “*Well, in biology we looked at slides under a microscope. Tomorrow we have a lab...*” Your parents will like the fact that you’re talking to them about what’s going on in school.

A good way to involve your parents is to have them help you with your homework from time to time. Ask a parent to drill you on vocabulary words, read over a paper you’ve written, listen to you practice a speech, or help you study for a test. You’ll get better grades, and your parents will see that you’re really trying to do well in school.

If you ever have a problem with a subject, teacher, class, or fellow student, let your parents know. They can help you deal with whatever the situation is, and if necessary, they can intervene on your behalf.

Take Responsibility for Your Grades. If you get a good grade on a test or paper, be proud of your accomplishment. If you receive a poor grade, don’t make excuses. Take responsibility for your grade, and figure out how you can do better next time.

Always do your own work. You’ll learn more, and your grades will be something that you can really be proud of.



REVIEW

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