

Parent Resources



About Elevate Education

Elevate Education is a study skills company that works with over 2,500 schools and 500,000 students every year across the US, Australia, the UK and South Africa. Founded in 2001, Elevate has spent more than 15 years benchmarking the habits of the world's top students. This research has identified 13 areas where the habits and study processes of the top students differ from middle and lower performing students. Elevate's workshops introduce students to these 13 skills and show them how to practically adopt them.

How we work

Elevate uses college-age presenters who have recently faced and aced the final years of school themselves. By using younger presenters that students can relate to, schools have found the impact of the study skills message is increased. Young presenters are perceived as being credible as they have only just gone through the experience themselves.

Most study skills programs fail because they are dense on theory but lack the kind of practical skills that students can use straight away. All of Elevate's material focuses on practical study skills modelled from the top students.

In addition, research shows that as the length of a study skills program increases, student implementation tends to decrease. Students are left with an overwhelming list of '52 skills' which is so long that students don't know where to begin. Instead short, sharp sessions maximize student retention rates and isolate a handful of skills that students can implement immediately, encouraging students to form lasting habits around the skills.

The role of parental follow-up

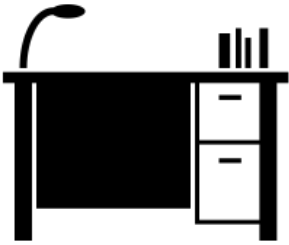
As a parent you have a critical role to play in ensuring your child develops and uses effective study techniques. Study skills, like any skill, are developed through repetition, practice and review. This parent resource kit is designed to be used in conjunction with the Elevate program to help you reinforce the skills covered in the student workshops at home.

1. Study Environment

One of the most interesting findings in our research into the habits and study techniques of top-performing students is the environment in which they study. While most students pay little attention to their physical surroundings when studying at home, top students were found to have a unique study environment that supported concentration and productivity.

What should my child's study environment look like?

Work Surface



If your child has a subject that they don't enjoy studying, literally every item in their field of view becomes a potential source of distraction during long study periods. For example, if there is a paper weight that has gone unnoticed for the previous 5 years, there is a high chance it will become wildly interesting the moment the math homework gets a little difficult! If your child has a regular work space such as a desk or section of the dining table, it is recommended they clear off all unnecessary items such as books, photos and magazines to prevent distractions from getting in the way.

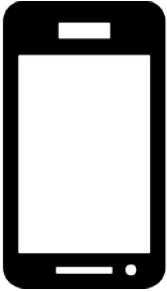


Concentration and Sitting Upright

A leading cause of poor productivity at home is students trying to “kill two birds with one stone” by studying while lying on a bed or sofa. While this may seem like a clever solution, in reality it takes a heavy toll on concentration as the body actually begins to fall asleep. By sitting at a desk or table rather than lying down, your child is more likely to remain alert and enjoy an increased level of focus and attention while studying.

What are some common study distractions for my child?

Cell Phones



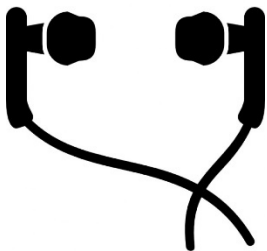
Most students can't live without their smart phones for more than a few minutes, to the point where many students will imagine their phone vibrating in a pocket when it hasn't even gone off! If students try and study with their phones within eyesight or earshot, they are very likely to become distracted and lose focus. We recommend that for the complete amount of time students are studying their phones be switched off or have airplane mode enabled (this prevents any messages and notifications from other devices being received). Students should feel free to check their phones intermittently throughout the day while at home, but only in breaks between study.

TV and Concentration



If your child tends to study with the TV on in the background (or while streaming their favorite TV show on their laptop) then they will most likely struggle to remember little if any of what they were studying the next day. Researchers suspect the uniquely distracting role of TV is due to the rapid refresh rate of most TV monitors that actually triggers a peripheral vision reaction, similar to seeing a car coming out of your field of vision while crossing the road. In addition, TV shows are usually more interesting than practice questions from a textbook, which results in limited attention being paid to homework tasks. Either way, students should not be studying near a TV when doing homework!

Music and Concentration



Most students study with music in the background, either to block out ambient (and distracting) noise or in the belief that music will help them recall information in tests and exams. The reality is that most music is inherently distracting, especially pop, electronic and dance music that is the mainstay of most teenagers' study playlists. Moreover, if students become accustomed to remembering content when they listen to particular music, they will find themselves struggling to recall information in a silent exam hall. 'Soundscapes' that are designed to block out ambient noise while minimizing distractions are a great alternative for students who can't study without their earphones. Our preferred soundscape app is called '*study*' and can be downloaded from the Apple and Google Play stores for most devices.

How do I manage social media?

Self-Regulation



If your child has a smart phone, tablet, laptop or all three it is highly likely that social media is a part of their daily routine. The main problem with social media sites and apps is that while they are highly distracting (this is a deliberate feature of their design), they are also very difficult to completely avoid as going cold turkey can lead to social anxiety. This is especially true if most of your child's friends are using social media. An outright ban is likely to have adverse consequences which can negatively impact on study. Instead, most top students use self-regulation software to prevent access to social media while they are studying. For example, apps like **Cold Turkey** (<https://getcoldturkey.com/>) can be installed onto a laptop for free, and configured to prevent access to sites like Facebook for a set period of time. The hassle of circumventing the app during study periods is usually sufficiently high to encourage your child to focus on their study until the app enables access to social media.

2. Time Management

A key area of difference between top and average performing students is the ability to manage time effectively. More specifically, top students are better able to prioritize tasks, allocate sufficient time to complete them, and ensure they have a balance of enjoyable non-study activities as well as study activities. A balanced study routine is more likely to be viewed favorably by students, and therefore remain in place across the school year. Students with unrealistic (i.e. overly ambitious) study routines tend to either abandon them early in the year, or develop high levels of stress as they try to adhere to an impossibly burdensome schedule.

How should my child make a study timetable?

To create a balanced study routine, we found the top students would first identify when they were *not* going to be able to study. After they had identified these times (such as soccer practice, music lessons, time spent on social media, socializing), they would then fit study blocks around these non-study activities. **Importantly, they never blocked out more than 45 minutes of study at a time to ensure they had time to relax and re-focus in between study periods.** There is a substantial body of evidence that shows concentration in young adults tends to drop significantly after 45-50 minutes of study, but regenerates almost completely after as little as 15 minutes of relaxation.

Step 1: Identify non-study activities

The first step in creating an effective study timetable is to identify the times of the week when your child will not be able to study, or will find it very difficult to focus if they were to try and study when the activity is taking place. In the example below you can see how the student has quarantined time for hanging out with friends (mates), church on Sunday, as well as a casual job. These are times when study will be very difficult if not impossible to fit in.

Weekly Study Planner

When are you going to get your study done?

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
3:00	STUDY GROUP						
4:00	STUDY GROUP			Facebook			
5:00							
6:00		WORK	FOOTY TRAINING		MUSIC LESSON		CHURCH
7:00		WORK	FOOTY TRAINING		Youth Group		
8:00							
9:00	Facebook						
10:00				LATELENS			
11:00							
12:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
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11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00							
19:00							
20:00							TV
21:00							
22:00							
23:00							

Step 2: Fit study around these activities

The second step in creating an effective study timetable involves fitting 60-minute blocks of study around the non-study activities. This ensures the study timetable is easier to stick to, because there is at least one non-study activity happening each day. It also allows students to see how much more time there is for study than they may have previously thought.

Weekly Study Planner

When are you going to get your study done?

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
3:00	STUDY GROUP		Class Revisions				
4:00	STUDY GROUP	English Notes		Facebook	Music Practice		
5:00							
6:00	English Assignment	WORK	FOOTY TRAINING	Notes Q7-9	MUSIC LESSON		CHURCH
7:00	English Assignment	WORK	FOOTY TRAINING	Notes Q7-9	MUSIC LESSON		
8:00				Music Practise	Youth Group		
9:00	Facebook	Q 3-5 (Maths)	SOSE Assignment				
10:00				LATELENS			
11:00							
12:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
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14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00							
19:00							
20:00							TV
21:00							
22:00							Facebook
23:00							

Step 3: Use as a guide, not a rulebook

Once students have created a timetable that has both study and non-study activities in it, it's important for them to remember that they don't need to stick to the timetable 100%. **Most top students are able to stick to their timetables around 80% of the time**, and will often amend deadlines to allow for impromptu events. However, sticking to the timetable 80% of the time still results in significantly better outcomes than not having a timetable at all. When supporting your child at home, it's essential to make sure you emphasize the down-time as much as the study. Most students are genuinely surprised when their parents first push them to stop studying because their timetable says it's time for TV – but this tends to result in a less combative and more supportive relationship over the issue of time management. This is because parents no longer have to be perceived as nagging their child to get study done!

How long should my child study for?

The 45-minute rule



While many students see value in pulling an all night study session to get school tasks done, research shows that diminishing returns kick in after around 45 minutes of uninterrupted concentration for most students. Studying for longer than 45 minutes typically results in lower levels of memory retention, reasoning ability and focus. As such, **we recommend students study for blocks of no longer than 45 minutes**. A 15 minute break in between study blocks is usually sufficient to restore concentration and ensure the next 45 minutes of study are more productive.

When is the best time for my child to study?

Zones of Effectiveness



There is a considerable body of research that suggests adolescents have a delayed circadian rhythm, meaning they are only fully awake from the late morning. Accordingly, most students tend to have the highest level of concentration in the afternoon and evening. However, study periods late at night tend to be counter-productive as they reduce sleep time which tends to have a cumulatively negative impact on focus during the day. Therefore **most top students tend to cluster their study blocks in the late afternoon, after school and before dinner**. This frees up the evening for socializing (or social media) and allows them to get to bed at a reasonable hour.

3. Note-taking

One of the most compelling findings of our research is the difference between the way top and lower-performing students write notes. This is a study skill that is easy to get right, but only a small fraction of students actually do. **The problem for most students is they write or type too much on the page.** This results in two main problems:

1. Their notes are difficult to study at a later date, because there are too many words on the page
2. If students are handwriting notes, their handwriting gets messy as they try to write as many words as the teacher is saying.

In either case, these students will need to spend time re-writing their notes at home, which is a low-value study activity. On the other hand, top students were found to write concise notes in class that ended up being easier to read at home, which allowed them to instead spend their time on high-value study tasks such as doing extra practice questions, and extra reading (both of these tasks are linked to higher performance in tests and exams – re-writing notes is not).

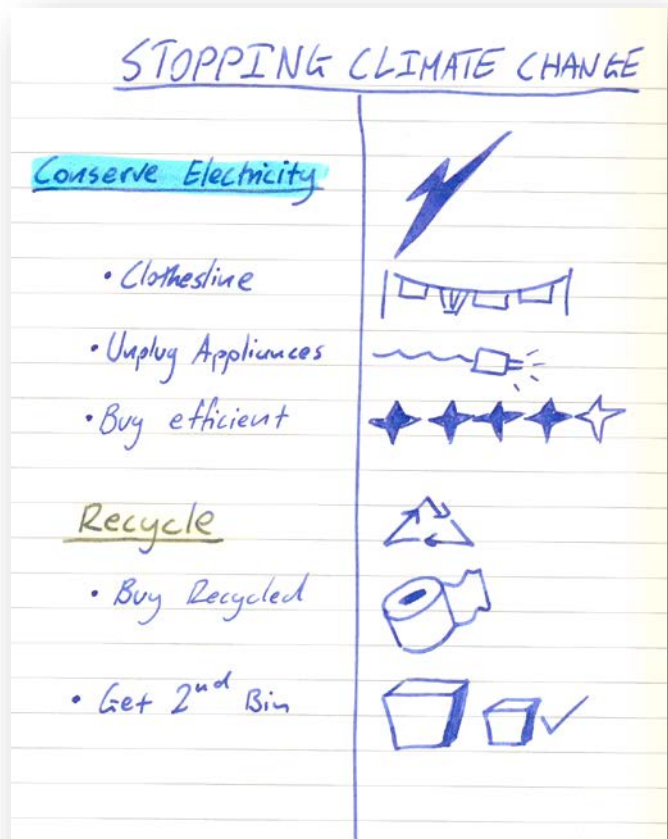
How should my child write notes?

Less is more

Most students can reduce the number of words they write by around 80%. This is because only around 20% of the words we write down are used by the brain to remember key content. When writing notes, students can achieve this by drawing a line down the center of their page and forcing themselves to stop writing when they hit the line. If they write beyond this point they are likely writing too much.

Use pictures

Studies have shown that spending as little as 4 seconds drawing a related image or icon next to a key point can increase long-term recall of the information by up to 50%. Top students will tend to draw images to remind themselves of key points on the right hand side of the dividing line on their page.



A note from our Presenters

During my final year, my relationship with my parents fluctuated as rapidly as my mood. For most of the year, things were great; we had healthy communication and my parents were incredibly supportive. However, as my stress levels increased in the lead up to exams, things changed.

I was more irritable and sensitive, and the pressure from my parents didn't help things. In the lead up to exams, students often adopt a 'with me or against me' mentality in relation to their parents. Right or wrong, parents are often demonized for simply tracking progress and giving friendly reminders to their children. Even parents with great intentions struggle to balance the idea of involvement and trusting their child's sense of responsibility and autonomy.

Unfortunately, while students can be unreasonably emotionally reactive to parental advice, being a good final year parent can mean taking this in one's stride. That is, sometimes being supportive can mean pandering to oversensitivity, and taking a tactical approach in providing tips and input.

The tactical approach is as much about the 'don'ts' as it is about the 'dos'. Sometimes, knowing what not to say is as important as the right things to say. Therefore, this article addresses the behaviors to avoid, and the techniques that can be used to reinforce good study habits and great results.

Don't be a police officer

There are a vast range of concerns that parents have throughout their child's final year of high school, however one remains the most popular; "is my child doing enough". This concern is widespread because it is valid. Despite its validity, voicing this concern to your children can be alienating.

The following are examples of three rhetorical questions posed to me by my parents throughout 12th grade, none of which provided me with extra motivation or drive:

"Do you think you're studying enough?"

"Do you think you really need another study break?"

"I think you should maybe cancel a few of your activities. Is that friends 18th really necessary? School is about prioritizing. Work out what is important to you."

When considering the above questions objectively, they are both reasonable and necessary to determine a student's attitude and workload. However, parents often forget that when people experience high levels of stress, they are often over-sensitive and defensive.

I remember when my parents asked me these questions. Completing a year that was very much 'about me', I didn't consider their perspective and their concerns. I viewed such questions as adversarial, and as an interrogation.

The issue with this approach is that it alienates the student, and leads them to resent the well intentioned question. When my parents reminded me of my workload, I felt patronized and misunderstood. Of course I knew that I had to study hard; reminding me of this fact made me feel that my current efforts were unappreciated. I remember when my parents suggested that I not attend a party, my frustration at their intrusion only motivated me to attend the party and somehow 'prove' my ability to self-manage; even if they were correct.

How to fix it: Working as a Team

Fear not! There is a way to gauge your child's ability to manage their time without imposing. The key here is communication and cooperation.

It is most certainly important to do a 'check in' with your children every once in a while to make sure that they are meeting their goals and timelines. However, I found that when working with my parents early on, I could avoid feeling like I was under the microscope. Two months before my exams, we sat down for 20 minutes and devised a 'study timetable'. The operative word here is 'we'.

My parents allowed me to determine my own goals and study habits, however they provided helpful suggestions in the process. Given that we devised these documents together, it made me feel like my parents were on my team, and also it kept me accountable to myself because I knew that I was in charge of determining my study, not my parents.

We decided to make a study timetable. I expressed to my parents that while I had lots of study to do, I didn't want to give up all of my hobbies. I took guitar lessons once a week, and played basketball and other sports quite regularly. As a result my parents asked me to set out all the activities that I felt should remain as part of my life during my exam period. This included sports, television, playing video-games, and seeing my friends. We estimated how long I spend doing each activity, and then put them into a study timetable in an excel spreadsheet. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there was still plenty of time to get my studies done; as long as I planned in advance.

Writing everything down helped conceptualize things concretely. I then put my studies into the gaps in my timetable and proceeded to study in the allocated periods. It also reversed my perception of a study timetable. That is, because I put my hobbies and sports in the timetable first, I felt as though I was prioritizing them and not making a study timetable that I would be a slave to.

I conceived of it as a life timetable that included study as a necessary element.

I think it was particularly helpful that my parents had a copy of my study timetable. This kept me accountable, and also stemmed the flow of questions about my study commitment. After making the timetable, I would not be faced with guilt trips when leaving the house. My parents knew what I was doing. Further, they understood that the timetable was a helpful device, and not a rule-book. That way it was a general guide for me and my parents. I really felt that making the timetable together was a team effort. It put my parents on my side and made my life easier.

Make life easier, not harder: Exam months with reduced chores and work-shifts

It's really important to remember just how challenging exam preparation is for students. In the months leading up to exams, students are dealing with multiple subjects, each requiring significant time and effort to master. As a result, they may find it difficult to balance the study with everything else. This point may seem contrary to the previous point regarding study timetables. The major point of the study timetable is to provide structure; it cannot make more hours in the day.

Study timetables may also serve as a reality check in that students may find that they do in fact have to reduce some other activities. For example, a student who works once or twice per week in a part time position, may want to consider working once per fortnight. My parents encouraged me to put my part-time job on hold for the month before exams, and in doing so, I felt a massive weight lifted. It meant that I could use my spare time to relax and de-stress, and work was one less thing to worry about.

The pre-exam period is not a time to remind children about their chores and 'grown-up' responsibilities such as work. If you can support them in these ways, it is worth doing so that they can hone their focus on their exam preparation.

Invest your time: Study with your child and offer to quiz them

I studied Psychology and Theatre Studies 12th grade, which required a high level of memorization. I was cognizant of the fact that memorizing in my bedroom was very different to being examined. My parents were really helpful in this regard.

For Psychology, I wrote the definitions of key terms on speech cards and used mnemonic techniques to learn the definitions. Once I felt comfortable with the content, I asked my parents to spend half an hour testing me on the definitions. Once I had demonstrated that I understood the material, they would then shuffle the speech cards and ask me again to further test my memory. I also used a similar process with my theatre studies scripts. I found it incredibly helpful to have someone test me.

It is important to remember however, that offering to quiz your children can go either way. If the quizzing is not welcomed or initiated by the child, it can be viewed as overly intrusive. It is important to offer the opportunity to help them with their studies but not to push it, or insist upon it. If a child seems hesitant, it is not worth pushing the matter. Simply offering help with studies can be an appropriate way to show that you are on their side.

Conclusion

As a parent it's really easy to forget how sensitive your children become before exams. As a result, treading carefully will be constructive and help your children to see you as a friend during this period. Psychological studies have shown that difficult goals are easier to attain when motivated through positive reward behaviours, rather than through punishment and fear.

Rather than checking up on your child's progress and reminding them of the importance of the year, it is much more constructive to sit with them once at the beginning of term, or in the months before exam and to work out a plan of attack. Working with your child as a team shows that you trust your child and value their opinions. Consequently, when the student is in charge of setting goals and structures, they become accountable to themselves. In this sense they are able to increase their accountability, take responsibility and maximize their grades.



Want to learn more?

Contact us at info@elevateeducation.com
or call **201.721.8564**

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