



Get Your Student Ready to Go Back to School...Again

The holidays are upon us, and with vacation beckoning, school is soon to become an afterthought. However, whether your student is in 1st grade or 12th, with a little bit of planning, there are a few things parents can do to ensure the second half of the school year is even more successful than the first.

By Anne Crossman

Read, Read, Read

The research findings are consistent—reading to children is very important to their academic success. Make time over the holidays to read at least one book together as a family. Even if your student has long been able to read, listening to a book as it is read aloud challenges the brain in unique ways: reading comprehension is strengthened and imagination soars as listeners illustrate the story in their own mind.

Growing up, my parents read aloud to us nearly every Thursday night from elementary school through our high school years. Even though our ages spanned six years from oldest to youngest—admittedly a large span where reading comprehension is concerned—they asked great questions of each of us that helped keep us engaged in the story. *The Littles*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Little House in the Big Woods*, *Black Like Me*, *Johnny Tremain*, *The Sign of the Beaver*, and *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* were some of our favorites. Listening to stories and talking about them afterward will help keep your student's mind sharp and excited about learning while he is away from the classroom.

Sleep

Nearly all students, no matter what their age, are tired, and for good reason. They're growing! Even through college, it is recommended by experts that students aim for at least nine hours of sleep a night to achieve the best health and maximum success in school. Use the holidays as a chance to catch up on some needed sleep. Rather than letting your student stay up late and sleep in, try to maintain an age-appropriate lights-out time and then allow her to sleep in as late as she possibly can.

Reset the Clock

Three days before school—yes, even if it is the weekend—work your family wake-up time back to its original schedule. It will be much more fun to do so if you make a game of it. For example, go out to breakfast. If you live in a warm climate, you can go camping (where the birds are sure to wake you!) or take an early hike to see the sun rise and talk along the way about something you are looking forward to in the new year. By using a span of three or four days to work back into your routine, it will make the adjustment to the first week or two of school that much easier and more productive for your student.



Skip the New Year's Resolutions

Let's face it, resolutions are tough to keep. Instead of making New Year's resolutions, use your time over the holidays to set some short- and long-term goals with your student that will help him map out a plan for success for the rest of the year. Try to think up realistic and specific goals, some of which he can aim for in the first few weeks of the new semester and others that will last him until the end of the school year. "Get good grades" is an example of a bad goal, not because it isn't a good thing to want, but because it isn't measurable. "Get an A in algebra" is a much better goal because it is specific; how realistic that goal is will be up to you and your student to decide.

Short-term goals serve as small milestones to celebrate along the way, which builds momentum and helps students achieve long-term goals. You might even offer an incentive for the end of the year and create a trophy, poster, or visual reminder that will encourage your student to keep trying as the year rolls on.

Make a Time Map

Come January, there are fewer holidays to break up what feels to some like the monotony of school. For many students, it helps to chart out their time for the next semester so they can anticipate their schedules, work ahead, and make extra time to play. The easiest way to do that is to build a Time Map (available for free at www.StudySmartStudyLess.com, under "Students"). This tool works for students of all ages. I have used it with a wide age range of students, from 1st graders to high school sophomores and college freshmen with great success.

First, fill in the Time Map with unmovable and essential time commitments, such as school, football practice, and violin lessons. Once those commitments are put into place, add the flexible, yet equally necessary tasks, such as homework, practicing a musical instrument, and strength training. Encourage your student to be intentional about choosing the best time to study, whether or not it conflicts with his social aspirations. If your student studies better after school, help her find a quiet place to get the work done while she is still in student mode. If your student needs an hour to unwind from the day before hitting the books, encourage her to do so, but provide some accountability so that hour break doesn't stretch into two.

Once these parts of the schedule are in place, encourage your student to fill in the remaining time with whatever other activities she wishes to prioritize, such as hanging out with friends, time with family, or watching TV or YouTube videos. By intentionally choosing where and when to spend her time, she will be deciding where it goes instead of wondering where it went—a key to every student's success.

The holidays are a wonderful time to relax and celebrate with family and friends. As much as our students may wish the winter break would last forever, parents can prepare them for a rewarding return to school with a small investment of time to help the whole family get organized and stay sharp. **OC**

Anne Crossman is coauthor of Getting the Best Out of College: A Professor, a Dean, and a Student Tell You How to Maximize Your Experience (Ten Speed Press, 2008), and Study Smart, Study Less (Ten Speed Press, 2011). A former teacher, she has also published work in the Washington Post, Nimrod: The International Journal of Prose and Poetry, and various nationally syndicated journals. Her website is www.AnneCrossman.com.

Resources on PTA.org

Countdown to School Success – PTA.org/countdown

Advice, tools, and online resources parents will need to help their children have a school year packed with fun and learning. These resources were developed in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, National PTA, and *Parenting* magazine.

Homework Help – PTA.org/homework

This site serves as a clearinghouse of ideas for how parents can provide homework help and test prep assistance for their children to help ensure their success as students.

Literacy Resources – PTA.org/literacy

Tips for parents and some fun activities for families to support literacy at home.