

Independent Learning Newsletter Tips

Top 10 FAQs

Having run over 3000 study skills seminars over the last 10 years, Prue Salter of ELES (www.studyskillshandbook.com.au) has been asked a lot of questions about study skills. Below are the top 10 questions parents ask.

1. Can you listen to music while studying?

The general rule is that if students are doing work that is not difficult, it is OK to listen to music. It makes them feel relaxed, makes them feel like the time is going quicker. However if they are doing work that requires concentration or memorisation, it is best to switch the music off (or else have Baroque classical music playing!) as otherwise it will take them much longer to learn the information.

2. Should you type or handwrite study notes?

If the exam will be handwritten, students are better to handwrite study notes. This creates muscle memory and helps student practice their handwriting skills. However many students prefer to type their study notes. If students choose to type, when they are learning their notes they need to read a section, see what they can write down without looking and check and see if they were correct. This will help them practise their handwriting skills while committing the information to memory.

3. How much work should students be doing each night?

Different schools will have different rules but general guidelines are that junior students should be doing around 1 hour of schoolwork most night, seniors between 2-3 hours most nights.

4. What if students say they have no homework?

In Primary school students learn to do the work their teacher tells them to do. Many do not realise things have changed in secondary school. There are two types of work in secondary school. The first is compulsory work such as homework, assignments, and preparing for tests. The second type of work is independent learning work. If students have no homework that night, they are expected to undertake independent learning. This could be reviewing what they have learnt that week, making a mind map, reading ahead, researching an area of interest, making study notes, reviewing difficult concepts.

5. What time should students go to bed?

Although it varies, most students need at least 8 hours of sleep each night. Therefore work backwards, allow an hour or so for students to get ready for bed and fall asleep, then work backwards to the time they need to get up for school.

6. My student doesn't seem to know how to study, what should they be doing?

Sadly many students think that studying for a test just means reading their notes over and over. This is the slowest and most ineffective way of studying. Studying involves 3 steps. The first is make study notes or summaries on what they have been learning. The second is to learn the notes by testing themselves over and over on the information to be retained.

The last step is to do as much practice as possible – the more different questions they can do, and preferably under time constraints, the better they will be prepared. Remember that we all learn in different ways so there is scope to allow students to use techniques that suit their individual learning style, such as recording notes to listen to.

7. How can students get more organised?

The first step is to work out what area of organisation you want to target. Books, computer files, locker, diary, desk, folders...the list goes on. There is no point saying to a student 'you need to be more organised'. Instead, identify an area where there could be improvement. Then, with your student, work out specific strategies to implement to address this issue. Once this issue is under control, then move onto the next problem.

8. Is it OK for students to do work in front of the TV?

Unless they are doing something like sticking things on a poster or colouring in, it is best not to do work in front of the TV. Instead students should do schoolwork in half hour blocks in an environment that is as distraction-free as possible.

9. My student has to do work on the computer, but they get distracted, how do you manage this?

One option is to switch off or disconnect the Internet for two half hour blocks each night. Your student will have to do any necessary research prior to this time and then can focus without getting distracted by Facebook and other interests on the Internet. You can also look at self-blocking software such as Self Control (MAC) and Cold Turkey (PC). Some students find they have the self-discipline to manage technological distractions, others need a helping hand – such as their phone in a different room for the half hour period where they are focusing on schoolwork.

10. How can I get my student motivated to do their work?

There is no quick or easy fix for lack of motivation. There are quite a number of strategies to try, but they all take time and effort and persistence. Check the Developing Motivation unit to print a guide for parents on getting your student motivated.

You can learn more about many other topics to help you achieve your best at school by going to the links section in your portal and opening the ELES handbook:

