

Study Skills are Boring! Or, are They?

“Study skills are boring!” That is what most students tell me when I first meet them.

Boring!? These are skills that can help them get better grades and spend less time on homework...how can they be boring?

Honestly, there is a good explanation for the bad rap that study skills have developed over the years because a lot of boring things are labeled as “study skills.” Learning how to use guide words in a dictionary...a necessary skill, but boring! SQ3R...a reading strategy with many merits, but leaves me asking, “Who wants to take the time to do all five steps?” Boring! Worksheets about identifying the main idea and supporting details...another important skill, but still boring.

There is a broader and more important role study skills should be playing in the lives of our middle and high school students, especially in our current Information Age, when we must prepare students for many careers and jobs that do not even exist yet. Study skills are:

- The skills required to be an independent learner.
- Skills that build confidence.
- Skills that develop efficiency.
- Skills that improve performance to prepare our students for high-stakes tests and the globally competitive job market of the future.
- Skills that enable students to be proactive, make good decisions, and think critically.

The LAST thing they should be is boring!

We were all born with a natural desire to learn. Infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers love to explore their world and take pride in learning new things. Just yesterday, my four-year-old was so excited about learning that he stood on top of his chart and raised both arms in triumph exclaiming in a ‘na-na-na-na-na’ tone, “I learned a new wo-rd! I learned a new wo-rd!” THAT was utter exhilaration over learning!

But, sometime in the elementary years, most students lose that enthusiasm for learning, usually because they lose all of their choices with learning. Learning becomes dictated by their teachers, school districts, and state-mandated

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curriculum. They are suddenly swallowed into a bureaucracy of texts, tests, and lectures that would bore any rational human being.

Much of these mandates and “lack of choices” are and will remain out of students’ control, but there is a vital component we can offer students to bring some pizzazz back to learning. Teach them study skills...principles and strategies to be organized and learn efficiently. Show them they have the power to beat the system. Well, maybe not beat the system, but at least work with the system *strategically* to be successful. When strategic learning enters the picture, students regain some control. They develop personal power. And they learn important life-long skills that will someday help them manage a home and career.

These may sound like lofty concepts, but they have real, concrete implications. For example, as parents and educators:

- We can acknowledge that organizing papers and school-work is difficult because traditional systems actually complicate the process. We can then explore principles for organizing and strategies to simplify the process.
- We can acknowledge that text-books are boring. But, if students understand how to maximize their brain’s learning process, they can be strategic readers and exponentially increase their reading comprehension while only reading a fraction of the text.
- When we want to say, “Why can’t you plan ahead?!” we can pause and understand that they have never really learned how to plan ahead. Armed with that perspective, we can help them discover how to prioritize their time and think proactively.

There is a commercial that depicts two professionals heading into their office building at the beginning of the day. They are both neatly groomed and dressed professionally. You can presume from their appearance and surroundings that they are well-educated people. They are both half-way up an escalator when the escalator suddenly stops.

They look shocked and bewildered. “I don’t need this!” complains the woman. “Figures!” grumbles the man. They look around in panic and start feeling around for their cell phones, but both discover they have forgotten their phones at home.

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As the commercial continues, these two “smart professionals” remain stranded for what appears to be hours, yelling and screaming for help and wallowing in their unfortunate sorrow that they are stuck on an escalator.

That’s right...it’s an escalator, NOT an elevator.

Are you wondering why they don’t just stand up and walk off?

That’s the point of the commercial...some solutions are so blatantly obvious to some, but not to all. Students, in particular, are commonly stuck on their own escalators, running for help every time they get stuck and not employing any strategies or critical thinking to move forward.

Arming students with study skills --skills for thinking strategically about organizing, managing time, and learning-- gives them the power to simply stand up and walk off their own escalator.

Taking control over their learning? Learning how to ‘play in the system’ with strategy? There is nothing boring about that!