

College Readiness Curriculum

Lesson 6

Study Skills: Grades, Admissions Exams & College Success

Lesson Overview:

Students will continue the College Readiness Curriculum by completing the following steps: 1) exploring how to study effectively 2) assessing their own strengths and weaknesses in the area of study skills 3) setting and working toward goals designed to improve their study skills

This curriculum is part of STEM U
Sponsored by



College Readiness

Lesson 6 – Study Skills: Grades, Admissions Exams & College Success

Lesson Overview

During this lesson, you will guide students to identify the skills needed for academic success, and to assess and work toward improving their own study skills.

Core Concepts:

- Certain specific skills and habits are needed to succeed in academic courses and on exams.
- By setting and working toward related goals, students can improve their study skills and increase their readiness for college success.

Lesson Objectives

In this lesson students will:

- Explore multiple factors that contribute to effective studying and academic success
- Assess their current study skills and identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Develop 3 or 4 new SMART Goals to practice and improve your their skills.
- Complete the tasks necessary to meet at least one of their SMART Goals and reflect on the effectiveness of the skills practiced.

Materials Needed:

- [Study Skills Slideshow](#)
- Worksheet: Study Skills Questionnaire
- College Readiness Timeline from Lesson 1

Supplemental Videos:

- [No Stress Test Prep](#)
- [Good Studying Habits](#)
- [Goode Note Taking](#)
- [Mastering Time Management](#)

Step 1: Activate Prior Knowledge

You can't improve your study skills if you're not sure what study skills are! Ask 5-10 volunteers to identify an important study skill. List the skills on the board and ask the class to vote on whether each really is an important study skill, inviting volunteers to explain their votes/thoughts. Revisit the list at the end of the lesson or slideshow to determine whether students' thinking has changed and what skills they might add to or delete from the list.

Step 2: Begin the Study Skills Slideshow

Present slides 1 and 2, pausing after each slide to solicit and respond to students' questions and comments.

[Slide 1]

Why Improve Study Skills?

In terms of college readiness, you might want to improve your study skills for one or more of the following reasons:

- To help you achieve a good score on your admissions/entrance exam(s).
- To improve your grades (and thus your chance of acceptance into college).
- To prepare for the transition from secondary studies to post-secondary studies.
- To make your study time more *efficient*, so you have more time for other activities.

No matter your reason for wanting to improve your study skills, if you take the time work on them now, these new skills will benefit you for years to come.

[Slide 2]

Study Skills Categories

The term "study skills" can be broken down into a list of tens, if not hundreds, of skills and techniques. For the purpose of this lesson, we will break down study skills into four categories:

- Time Management – If you are skilled at planning and organizing your days, weeks, and months, it will be easier for you to make time to study. Effective time management also means scheduling ongoing study sessions, rather than cramming the night before a test. Not only will you feel more rested on test day, but neuroscience suggests that our brains learn and retain information better when we review and test ourselves over time.
- Note-Taking – Good note-taking systems and skills allow you to study more efficiently AND will help you to concentrate and participate during class.

- Active Reading – Active reading means that you are reading to understand content and not just letting your eyes slide across the page. When you are engaged with your reading, you will recall more and be able to use the knowledge when you need it.
- Study Habits & Test Prep – Our understanding of the brain suggests that some techniques work better than others when it comes to focusing, reviewing, and remembering new (or old) information. Make sure that you are using a technique that works, and that works for *you*.

Step 3: Take a Study Skills Questionnaire

Point out that students may be highly skilled on some study skills categories, but need improvement in others. Distribute the Study Skills Questionnaire and explain that its purpose is to assess students' study skills strengths and weaknesses. Invite students to complete the questionnaire before you continue with the slideshow. Circulate as students work, and/or hold a class discussion of students' responses after all students have completed the questionnaire. Be sure that each student understood the questions and has a clear idea of his/her strengths and weaknesses.

At a later time, you might also set aside a few minutes per student to meet with students and review their questionnaire responses and personal plans for improving their study skills.

Step 4: Continue the Study Skills Slideshow

When students have completed the Study Skills Questionnaire, continue the slideshow. (As always, you may wish to add, delete, or edit slides according to fit your specific school, location, and students.) Ask students to pay particular attention to information about skills/ areas they have identified (via the questionnaire) as those they need to work on. Point out that that some students may decide that they want to work a little on each category, while others might want to focus on just one or two categories.

Tell students that just like any other skill set, study skills require practice and patience, so students may need some time to hone their skills. Assure students that the more they practice, the better they will get. They will begin to see results in their learning, testing, and self-confidence.

[Slide 3]

Time Management

Good time management can set you up for success in studying, working, and making sure that you have time for fun, too. In terms of studying, time management helps you to spread out your studying (and project work) over time.

Research shows that quizzing yourself helps with memory retention. Quizzing yourself multiple times works even better. Spreading out your studying over time – rather than cramming – is another tried and true technique for better studying. Both of these study skills require you to *plan ahead* and make time to study.

In many ways, time management is simply organizing your time – setting aside time for everything that you need or want to do, and setting priorities when you have a large number of things to do. It is just as important to prioritize and schedule time for activities that help you relax or have fun, as it is to schedule time for studying. Doing activities that you enjoy can refresh your mind and prepare you to focus when you study.

Pause to Ask: What is "cramming"? Invite a few students to share their thoughts on why cramming is not the most effective way to study.

[Slide 4]

Tips for Improving Your Time Management Skills

- Write it down – Find a time management organizer (to-do lists, planner, calendar, app, etc.) that works for you and use it. Don't try to remember everything – give your brain a break!
- Write it all in the same place – Try not to keep your school schedule separate from other schedules, otherwise something is bound to get missed. Put it all in the same place and see how the puzzle pieces fit together.
- Schedule EVERYTHING – If it is in your planner, you are much more likely to get it done.
Time you might consider scheduling:
 - Studying
 - Family time
 - Work time
 - School
 - "Me time"

Once you schedule the time, be sure to honor it, too.

- Plan ahead – If your teacher or professor gives a syllabus at the beginning of the semester or quarter, add everything into your planner. Schedule in study time and work time now. You can be flexible later and move things around if you need to. Just be sure to think about how much time you will need to study or work on a project and block out some time between now and the test or the due date.

- Preview your day first thing in the morning or the night before – Take 10 minutes at the end of each day to look at your calendar for the following day. Do you need to move any to-do list items that didn't get done? Move them to the best day (tomorrow, next week, whatever makes sense). Make sure you understand what you will need to accomplish tomorrow and have a plan or schedule in mind.
- Pay attention to your personal "body clock" – Do you have a time of day when you have the most energy or mental focus? Are there other times when you feel sluggish or tired? Try to plan important studying/work for times when you have lots of energy and focus.

Pause to Ask: Inquire whether everyone has and uses a planner (either print or electronic). Invite a few skilled time managers to recommend types of planners and methods of scheduling that work for them. Encourage students also to share any other time-management tips they may have.

[Slide 5]

Side Note: Time Management and Your Family

You may be great at managing your own time, but when you must consider family commitments and schedules, things can get a bit trickier. You don't want to schedule a group study session at the same you promised to drive your younger brother to the dentist or join your family for a birthday celebration.

If possible, work with your parents or guardians to make sure you include important family events, gatherings, appointments, etc. Check your own calendar/planner against the family calendar. If your family doesn't keep a calendar, encourage and help them to start one if you can.

[Slide 6]

Note-Taking

Taking effective notes in class can set you up for successful studying overall. Some of the benefits of active note-taking include:

- Taking notes keeps you engaged with the material and helps you to concentrate.
- Note-taking increases your ability to participate in class discussions (because you are engaged).
- The act of writing, in addition to hearing, improves learning.
- Notes give you material to study besides the book.

Practice Opportunity: If students are not already taking notes on the slideshow, ask them to begin doing so now.

[Slide 7]

Note-Taking Tips

- Listen – Give your full attention. If you are easily distracted, sit near the front of the room.
- Ask questions – Be sure you understand and ask questions during or after class if something is unclear.
- Write down only as much as you need to remember what the teacher is saying – you can return to your notes to elaborate later.
- Draw – doodle, sketch, process the information through visual means when it makes sense.
- Use pen/pencil and paper – leave your laptop at home. Science supports that we learn better when we write things down instead of typing.
- Review your notes every night – Fill in additional information that you didn't have time to fill in during class, and look for gaps in your understanding, so that you can look it up or follow up with the teacher. *Bonus:* filling in the additional information that you didn't write down in class is a great way to quiz yourself – a tried and true, high-impact study technique!

Practice Opportunity: If they have not been doing so, invite students to ask questions about anything they need to clarify so far from this lesson. Encourage them to continue doing so as the class proceeds through the rest of the slideshow and completes the lesson.

[Slide 8]

Note-Taking: What to Write

Not sure what to include in your notes? Try this:

- Paraphrase the teacher's words – Don't write down every single word. Try to pull out the main ideas and key terms.
- If your teacher provides an outline for a unit, try taking notes directly on the outline. The important ideas are right there and your notes can elaborate. You should be able to distinguish between important information and tangential ideas.
- Create your own abbreviations to save time.
- Jot down ideas/concepts that the professor repeats – this is a good sign that the information is important.
- Copy down notes that the professor writes on the board – another good sign that the information is important.
- Listen for verbal cues such as "This is important," "Write this in your notes," and "This will be on the test."
- Write down information that the teacher emphasizes with his/her tone of voice, gestures, or other body language.
- Write down examples.

[Slide 9]

Active Reading

Maximizing what you learn from your reading can take a little extra planning. (But that's why you are improving your time-management strategies, right?) You will want to make sure that you are in a good place to read and that your brain is ready, too.

Once you are prepared to read, there are several different techniques that you can use to increase retention and understanding. Try a few of the following active reading tips, and later, check some of the active reading resources for specific strategies. Use the ones that best suit you.

[Slide 10]

Active Reading Tips

- Spread reading assignments out. Don't put them all off until the last minute. Active reading can take time. Make sure to schedule time in your planner or to-do list.
- Pace yourself. Try to complete your reading in small enough portions that you don't get tired or lose energy.
- Read when you feel energetic. Avoid reading important assignments right before bed (and definitely not in bed!).
- Choose a location that is comfortable, without a lot of distractions. Sure, your bed isn't the perfect place, but you don't want physical discomforts to distract you from your reading. If you prefer sound in the background, choose something that doesn't pull your attention away from your reading (white noise or music without lyrics).
- Take notes. Use the margins (if you own the book) or a separate sheet of paper. Make a glossary of terms or note key concepts. Write down questions that you don't understand and then look for the answers in the text and bring any unanswered questions to your teacher.
- Preview and Review. Skim the text or the headings before reading to get an idea of what to expect. Review after reading, using end of chapter reviews, key concepts, or your notes.

Pause to Ask: Does anyone already use these or strategies for active reading? Invite volunteers to share their own tips for active reading with the class.

[Slide 11]

Study Habits and Test Prep

Good study habits play a huge role in learning and retaining information in such a way you can recall it and combine it with other learning as needed. Strong study habits also create a solid foundation upon which you can prepare for *any* kind of test.

Once you have strong study habits in place, if you have been practicing good note-taking and active reading, preparing for a test – any kind of test – should be as simple as “writing” and “reciting.” Write key information down in a way that makes sense to you, and then quiz yourself to be sure you recall and understand it.

[Slide 12]

Study Habits – Tips and Techniques

In addition to reviewing your notes each day and actively reading for comprehension, here are a few suggestions to help make your study time effective and efficient:

- Spread out your studying – Cramming the night before a test can create unnecessary stress and spreading out your study sessions is more effective in producing long-term learning.
- Make flashcards and quiz yourself. You can use index cards in various colors or try out a flashcard app.
- Create a two-column study guide with terms on one side and definitions on the other. Fold it in half and test yourself, or have someone else quiz you. *Tip:* This might be really easy if you have been using the Cornell Technique for note-taking.
- Organize the material visually into a mind-map. Creating the map may help you to make additional connections within the material, and having a visual representation may be helpful for recall during the test.
- Verbalize what you know – Tell or teach someone else about the materials.
- Attend all review sessions – If your teacher or professor offers an optional review session, GO! The session will be an opportunity to ask questions. Pay close attention to what your teacher shares, as review sessions often end up highlighting the most important concepts and information. Now you know what to focus on when you study!
- Keep study sessions short and focused – Since you are spreading out your studying, there is no reason to cram everything into one session. Keep each session long enough to get through the material you planned to study, but not so long as to burn yourself out. When you are studying, try to reduce distractions such as your phone, social media, email, etc.

Practice Opportunity: Ask partners to work together to practice using flashcards or two-column study guides. Have partners create three flashcards with key pieces of information from the slideshow, or one study guide with three important terms from this lesson. Then invite partners to quiz each other, using the materials they created.

[Slide 13]

Study Habits – Group Efforts

While studying alone can be convenient and allow you to focus exclusively on your personal study needs, sometimes it's helpful and fun to study with others. Group and partner study sessions are a great way to implement study techniques that have been proven to enhance learning. For example:

- Use group study sessions as a time for quizzing each other. Studies show that quizzing is an effective way to improve memory/recall. Plus, working with others will keep you from "cheating" and looking at the other side of the flashcard, for example.
- Practice explaining concepts to one another. If you can teach material to your study group, you probably understand it well enough to be successful on a test.
- Compare notes to fill in gaps in your own understanding. While you are at it, check out others' note-taking techniques to see whether they might work for you, too!

Pause to Ask: Does anyone have a favorite study habit or technique that was not covered on the slides? Invite students to share their personal study tips.

[Slide 14]

Test Prep – Tips and Techniques

You may be preparing for a test that feels extremely important. Perhaps your grade for the entire semester depends on your success on this one test. Maybe your entire college acceptance depends upon your test score. Instead of getting overwhelmed or completely stressed out, use some of the following tips and techniques to help you relax and feel prepared.

- Take practice tests. If you are studying for a college entrance exam, you may be able to access practice tests online or in books. Taking practice tests will help in at least three ways:
 - You will be able to assess for gaps in knowledge and will know *what* you need to study.
 - Multiple practice tests will require you to recall the information several times – each time you are forced to recall something, it becomes a stronger memory in your brain.
 - You will know what to expect in terms of test questions, length, time available, etc. No surprises the day of the test to stress you out!
- Don't cram the night before the test. You have great study skills, you've spread out your study sessions over time, and you don't need to cram.

- Be well-rested. Get a good night's sleep for several nights before the test. Even if you are nervous and don't sleep well the night before, you will still have the energy you need for success.
- Eat a healthy, light breakfast. But don't eat any unusual foods that may disagree with you in the last few days before the test.
- Don't let the stress get to you. See the following slide for ways to reduce stress and to channel it so that it helps you.

[Slide 15]

Test Prep and Stress

Test taking can be stressful, so it can be helpful to develop strategies for relaxing, focusing, and using your stress to power through the test-taking experience. Try a few of these ideas ahead of time so that you know what works best for you the day of the test.

- Relaxation techniques – Explore breathing techniques and other self-calming methods to help you to relax and focus your mind. You can use these techniques the night before to help ensure a good night's rest, just before the test, and even during the test. (Learn more in the Resources section.)
- Visualization – Visualize success. You've taken practice tests or talked with others about what to expect. Imagine yourself confidently answering questions correctly. Picture yourself moving past trouble spots and coming back to them later. If you can see it, you can achieve it!
- Make stress your friend –Use stress as an extra boost of energy to help you do a great job on the test. (See the video in the Resources section.)

Pause to Ask: Does anyone have a test-taking tip to share? Invite volunteers who are successful test takers to share their personal strategies for taking tests.

[Slide 16]

College Entrance Exams

If you have not done so already, you will want to make sure that you understand what exams you will need to take as part of your college admissions process. You can learn more by visiting the websites for the universities and programs that interest you or by talking with your school guidance counselors.

Once you know what exam(s) you need to take, be sure to do the following as part of your test preparation:

- Add registration dates and exam dates to your Lesson 1 Timeline.

- Build test study time into your Timeline and/or time management system.
- Determine whether you want or need to take a test-prep course. Depending on where you live, test-prep classes may be an option. Talk with your family and guidance counselor about different courses and alternatives. Cost may be a factor. You may find less expensive or free online options, so do a little research.

Step 5: Set Study Skills SMART Goals (15-30 minutes)

Review with students how to set a SMART Goal (Lesson 1). Ask students to set three or four new goals for themselves that will help them to improve their study skills and habits. Remind students to be sure that each goal is:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time bound

When students have drafted their SMART goals, set aside a few minutes to meet with each student and review his or her goals. Respond to students' questions and concerns, as well as using the following points to guide discussion:

- Based on her/his Study Skills Questionnaire and what you already know about the student, do the student's SMART Goals seem appropriate? Can you recommend ways to make them stronger, more useful, or more meaningful?
- What study skills work best for you? Are there specific skills you would recommend to students?

Ask students to revise their SMART goals according to your feedback and add the final goals to their Lesson 1 Timelines.

Step 6: Follow-Through and Reflect on SMART Goals (15-30 minutes)

Guide students to choose at least one new SMART Goal to begin working on immediately, perhaps suggesting that they choose a relatively short-term (one month or less) goal. One week to one month from now, ask students to revisit the goal and assess their progress:

- *Did students achieve the goals?*

- *Did the goals help students to improve their study skills?*
- *What other goals do students need to work toward to continue their skill-building?*

As needed, meet briefly with each student to provide feedback and suggestions for next steps.

RESOURCES

Time Management Resources

To learn more and get the most out of time management, suggest that students try a few of the following links:

- [How to Manage Your Time Better](#) (Video) and a [worksheet](#) to accompany the video
- [MindTools – Time Management](#)
- [University of Kent – How to Manage Your Time Effectively](#)
- [Forbes – Millionaires Don’t Use To-Do Lists](#)
- [Time Management – How to Write a To-Do List & Know Where Your Time Goes](#) (Video)
- [Top Time Management Apps for Students in 2015](#)

Note-Taking Resources

There are some great systems/strategies for note-taking. Some strategies will work better for different people, or in different kinds of classes. Encourage students to try a few ideas out and use what works best for them!

- [How to Take Great Notes](#) [video] and a [worksheet](#) to go with the video
- [Note Taking Systems](#)
- [4 Popular Note Taking Strategies](#)
- [Classes: Notetaking, Listening, and Participation – from Dartmouth Academic Skills Center](#)
- [Effective Note-taking: The Cornell Method](#) [video]
- [Drawing in class: Rachel Smith at TEDxUFM](#) [video]
- [Sketchnotes 101: The Basics of Visual Note-taking](#)
- Want to know more about handwriting notes is more effective than typing them? Check out this [Scientific American article](#).

Active Reading Resources

Just as with note-taking, there are many different techniques to help with active reading. Encourage students to check out these options and use what works best.

- [MindTools – Reading Strategies](#) [article and video]
- [Reading Strategies St. Mary's College of California](#)
- [7 Critical Reading Strategies – Salisbury University](#)

Study Group Resources

- [How to Form a Successful Study Group: Tips and Strategies](#) (Duke University Academic Resource Center)
- [Using Study Groups](#) (Education Corner)
- [3 Tips for Setting Up a Successful Study Group](#)
- [7 Benefits of Study Groups](#)

Background Information on Study Skills

These resources provide scientific information on which study skills work best for the human brain (and why forgetting can be a good thing):

- [How Does the Brain Learn Best? Smart Studying Strategies](#) (Mind/Shift, KQED News)
- [Psychologists Identify the Best Ways to Study](#) (Scientific American)

Test-Taking Resources

These resources are designed to help test takers manage anxiety:

- [Test Anxiety Relaxation Techniques](#)
- [How to Make Stress Your Friend](#) (video)