

# Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond

## Home activity 3: The A E I O Us of studying

Here are some tips based on my experience as a mother of three children and as a teacher. I hope you will find a few that are useful to you. Some will be easy to implement. Others may require skilled negotiation with your children or require some kind of compromise. Your starting point is your child's current attitude to learning, which may be highly motivated and organised, demotivated and disorganised, or somewhere in between.

### Apps

There is a huge range of apps available to help with studying. It is worthwhile asking your child's teachers to see which ones they recommend for their particular subject. Here are just a few that can be used across the curriculum:

#### Audible

[www.audible.co.uk](http://www.audible.co.uk)

Your child can listen to audiobooks on a smartphone, tablet, MP3 player or laptop. With a subscription you will save up to 70 per cent on each audiobook. I recommend that you buy a hard copy of the book as well and encourage your child to read this (visual) at the same time as listening to the audio version (auditory) and following the words with their finger (kinaesthetic).

#### Brainscape

[www.brainscape.com](http://www.brainscape.com)

This is a flashcard app with built-in repetition, which will help you to achieve good recall. It is a free study tool for students and teachers, and can be used on a smartphone, tablet or laptop. Audio and images are available too when you set up an account.

A key feature is its colour-coding system. You start with a grey-bordered card and must decide how well you know this card. Five rainbow-coloured buttons appear across the bottom of the screen: 1 = *Not at all* and appears in red; 5 = *Perfectly* and is blue. You tap a coloured button on this scale to indicate how well you think you know the answer. The progress bar changes colour to indicate your overall mastery.

#### Inspiration 9

[www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com)

Inspiration 9 helps children to brainstorm their ideas and group them in a number of visual formats, in particular a mind map which can also be transformed into numbered outlines. It helps them to plan and organise their written work. They can drag symbols, create text boxes with automatic links to one another, and enter their ideas in graphic or outline view. New in this version is a presentation tool to create PowerPoint-like slides and an external presenter application so you can show your work on computers that don't have Inspiration 9 loaded.

#### Quizlet

[www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com)

Quizlet is a study app that uses flashcards, games and quizzes. The tools can be used in and out of the classroom, individually or as part of a group. Students can choose from flashcards sets created by others or make their own, and then use them in multiple-choice tests and study games. They can also add images and listen to audio.

# Environment

---

Your child should work in a well-lit, clutter-free environment that is conducive to learning.

## Lighting

The best light for reading is natural lighting. If that is not possible, indirect lighting is best since it helps reduce eye fatigue.

## Seating

Your child's seat should give them good support and be at a height that means they can easily rest their non-writing arm on the desk. When reading, they should rest their book at about a 45 degree angle from the table. This gives them a clear, full view of the page and decreases eye strain. Placing a book that is about 2–3 inches thick under the book they are reading also helps to decrease neck strain. How they sit will affect how they feel: lying down, lounging or slouching will impair alertness and concentration.

## Temperature

Your child's studying environment should be cool but not cold (about 18–23 degrees Celsius). This will help with attention, focus and comprehension.

## Negatively charged air

All air, inside or outside, has an electrical charge. This is due to charged particles called ions. Negatively charged ions increase alertness and energy levels. There are several ways to increase the negative ionisation of the air: have plants in the room; keep a window open (as long as this means that fresh outside air is coming into the room); purchase an ioniser.

## Music

Some pupils assure me they can study and listen to their favourite pop music. I am not convinced! The words of the songs will clash with their learning. One pupil admitted to me that he had been listening to a pop song and started to write the words of the song in the middle of his essay. In my opinion, favourite songs should be kept for breaks between periods of study. I work best in total peace and quiet. I even find it difficult to teach with instrumental music in the background. Other people work better with background music, but this should be predictable, instrumental and in a major key, for example: *Four Seasons* by Vivaldi, *Water Music* by Handel or *Canon in D Major* by Pachelbel. Environmental music is great too. Ocean sounds, waterfalls and rain forest soundtracks work well in the background. What about trying out the Alpha Waves study music on YouTube? Your child should experiment and find out what works best for them.

## Sleep and study

If your child works in their bedroom, they need to strike a balance between a place that is conducive to sleep and a place that is conducive to work. Keeping the two areas separate will help. Plenty of storage – shelving, boxes, baskets – where their work can be put away is useful. A memo board is ideal for their calendar, work planners and any other reminders. A pull-out drawer where they can put their laptop means they can easily clear their desk, ready for spreading out their books, writing, mind mapping or making a set of index cards.

# Internet

---

The internet can be a fantastic resource when it comes to studying and there are many brilliant uses for smartphones and tablets – as the small selection of apps above shows.

## Problems

These devices are also, however, a huge source of potential distraction. It is debatable whether we are naturally good at multi-tasking. I believe it is far better to focus on one task at a time and do this as well as possible. When I am discussing their studying schedule with pupils, I ask, 'Hands up all those who love revising'. Very few hands go up! So, if they have decided to devote time to this unpopular activity, they should at least make sure it is quality time. They should save communicating with friends and games for the very end of their revision time because in their short breaks they should be doing something that does not clash with the learning that their brain is still subconsciously processing. See Chapter 1.3 of *Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond* (ISBN 9781471868870) for suggestions on what to do in short breaks.

## Blue light and sleep

There's a lot of research on the negative impact of our devices on sleep. The artificial light they emit – blue wavelength light – activates our arousing neurons, making us more awake and possibly anxious. A simple solution is to put devices away well before going to bed. Our bodies will then produce melatonin which helps us fall asleep and stay asleep.

## Organisation

Your child needs to have a reason for getting organised and tackling their revision. It really pays off to spend some time thinking about *why* they are learning, not just *what*.

### Setting goals

Success is all about achieving a goal and is crucial for motivation. However, each pupil will have a different perception of success: for one pupil, achieving a B grade is a failure; for another, it may be an incredible achievement. Goals need to be specific, personal, relevant and realistic. (See Chapter 2.1 of *Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond* (ISBN 9781471868870).)

It is vital that your child chooses their goals and their reasons for them. This may be an activity they would prefer to carry out with someone other than you – perhaps a grandparent or adult friend of the family. This will enable them to choose their own goals and not be influenced by what they sense you want. This will be far more likely to motivate them. They should write their goals down as this increases their chances of achieving them. Your child could use the attached sheet to record their targets for the week.

### Their schedule

Download the planners from [galorepark.co.uk](http://galorepark.co.uk). It's a good idea to start with the year planner. Then, as exams start to loom, discuss setting up a weekly planner. Make sure your child includes time off in the planner or, if this is during the holidays, a day off to look forward to. Discuss what time of day they are going to work and for how long. A one-hour period of study should include two or three short breaks followed by a review of what they have just been learning before moving on to something new. See Chapter 1.3 of *Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond* (ISBN 9781471868870) for more about reviewing.

### Equipment

Check out the general equipment list on page 22 of *Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond* (ISBN 9781471868870). Also consider the revision techniques that your child is going to use, such as mind maps, flow charts and index cards (see Chapter 4 of *Study Skills: Building the study skills needed for 13+ and beyond* (ISBN 9781471868870)), and look at the list of what is needed for each of these.

## Understanding

Your child is the team leader of their learning. Your child needs to become expert in the 3Rs of great learning:

### Responsibility

They should take responsibility for their actions. Their choices on when, what, how long and how to revise will all have consequences. The better your child understands how they like to learn, the better the chances are that they will make informed choices about how to work in an effective, brain-friendly way.

### Resourcefulness

They should be prepared to take risks, accept challenges and try new approaches. 'Practice doesn't make perfect; practice makes permanent.' They should get into good studying habits and then make these permanent to maximise the chances of success. They should try out a range of strategies in a creative and personalised way.

### Resilience

They should be able to deal with frustrations and setbacks. The brain believes what we tell it so your child should change negative thoughts into positive ones. Change 'I can't' into 'I can't, yet'; 'There's no way' into 'I'll find a way'; 'I don't know how' into 'I don't know how to do this so I will need some help'. Once your child learns to think in this way, they will see that there is no such thing as failure, only feedback. These are just a few of the ways in which your child can become a smart learner, not just in preparation for Common Entrance or Scholarship examinations, but for the rest of their academic education.

## My targets for this week

Date \_\_\_\_\_

What?

---

---

---

---

How?

---

---

---

---

Achieved?

Yes

No

## My targets for this week

Date \_\_\_\_\_

What?

---

---

---

---

How?

---

---

---

---

Achieved?

Yes

No