

*“Learn the secrets A+ students  
use to get ahead...”*

# ***10 Ways To Raise Your Grades By Studying Smarter, Not Harder***

**A step-by-step system to get better  
grades and excel in school.**

***HomeworkHelpBlog.com***

# Introduction

## Congratulations!

In your hands you hold some of the most powerful time-tested secrets that A+ students use to get ahead. If you (or your child) have ever been frustrated to see another student score higher on a test even though you *know* you spent more hours studying, then this book is for you. By the time you've finished reading this book you'll know how to quickly improve your grades without having to spend more time studying.

Pop quiz: Who will get the higher grade on a test, the smartest student in the class or the hardest working?

Give up? Well it's actually a trick question. The answer is: the student who has the best study skills and who is the best test-taker.

Getting good grades comes from a combination of several factors including: intelligence, hard work, and knowing the right techniques. The mistake that many students make is to assume that intelligence is everything. A common assumption is that if another student is getting better grades, then they must be smarter. By extension if they are smarter, then that means you must be dumber. **DON'T FALL INTO THIS TRAP.**

In reality, this could not be further from the truth. There are many absolutely brilliant students (with IQ's much higher than yours or mine) who get terrible grades. Albert Einstein was one of them (he flunked out of math). Similarly, there are students with very little natural ability who make up for it by studying twice as hard as everyone else and still get good grades. Finally, there are students who have some natural ability and do an average amount of studying, but somehow manage to have straight A's.

They do this by becoming exceptional test takers, knowing how to absorb and memorize material quickly, and using the techniques in this book. With a little bit of practice, you too can use these techniques to get ahead in school.

## Why Should You Listen To Me?

My name is Brian Armstrong, and aside from getting excellent grades all the way through school, I'm also in the unique position of having owned and

operated a tutoring company for the past four years. During that time I have worked, either directly or indirectly, with over 400 students and I have been able to see how they've improved (or not improved) over time.

After seeing enough students go through the process of trying to improve their grades, patterns start to emerge. You can tell which students will improve quickly and which students will see very little progress. Much of this has to do with their attitude, but it also depends on which techniques they are willing to try.

The ideas presented in this book are the result of working with those 400 students and identifying the most promising areas for improvement. In other words, each of these ideas have been tested and proven in the real world. Hopefully, this book will save you the trial and error of figuring it out on your own and provide you a shortcut to what actually works.

## Distributing This Book

After reading this book, it is recommended that you share it with anyone who you feel may benefit from it. This book is 100% free and it is also free to distribute however you see fit, provided that the content is not altered. You can give it away to as many people as you like and even bundle it with other products, but please don't charge for it or use the content without attribution.

For more free information on homework tips and raising your grades, please visit us on the internet at <http://homeworkhelpblog.com/>.

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# Chapter 1: Work With The Best

## Surround Yourself With Greatness

One of the oldest secrets to success (in all areas of life, not just grades) is to surround yourself with people who are more successful than you are. They can't help but rub off on you and you will automatically start to become more like them. This is human nature and it's impossible to stop it from happening.

Probably the single most powerful thing you can do to start getting better grades is to do every single homework assignment and study for every test in a group with the best students in the class.

One of my biggest gripes about the school system is that it teaches children to always "do their own work". This is a mistake in my opinion, mostly because it's not how the real world works.

In the real world, a successful business owner doesn't have to understand all the nuances of tax law. He hires a qualified CPA to do that. A doctor doesn't have to understand how to put people to sleep during surgery; he has an anesthesiologist to do that. And the president doesn't have to understand the details of how interest rates affect home prices because he has the chairman of the Federal Reserve to advise him. In short, the real world is more about teamwork than it is about doing everything yourself.

Sure, you aren't allowed to take a test in groups (and for good reason), but you should certainly do every homework assignment in a group that you can.

You'll be amazed at what you start to pick up from other students in the group. "Wait, you've been using that shortcut on the calculator this whole time? I didn't even know that existed." "You mean you quote from that resource book and the grader always likes it?"

I remember the first time I stepped into a study group of the "smart kids" in high school. We had been studying matrices in math class and while I was able to get through it for the most part, it would take a long time. That first day I saw one of the other students do one of the homework problems in about 5 seconds. The exact same problem was taking me 5 minutes. "Wait,

wait, wait”, I said, “Can you show me what you just did there?” He did, and my homework was done much faster that night.

## Put Your Ego Aside

The other students in the class are not your competition. The mentality that one person has to win for the other to lose is very counterproductive to getting good grades. You are both on the same team.

If it seems like another student really has a certain subject figured out, then don't be afraid to approach him or her and ask if you can study together some time. Sure it might feel a bit awkward at first, especially if you aren't used to making new friends, but believe me it will pay off. You will be amazed how eager people are to help if you just ask. They are actually flattered most of the time.

If you're struggling to find the right words, try something like “Hey, this might sound strange, but I noticed you seem to be doing really well in [SUBJECT]. Do you have any interest in working together on the next assignment? We might be able to get a little group together and help each other out.” Or if a study group already exists then it's even easier. You can just ask “Hey, do you mind if I join your group? What time are you guys meeting?”

If you feel like you are way behind everyone else in the group you can always ask one student to help you out one-on-one. They may just do it because you are friends or they enjoy helping people, but they are giving up their personal time so it wouldn't hurt to at least offer to buy them lunch. You can also hire a tutor.

## Tutoring

If for whatever reason you don't have access to some of the best students in the class, you can get the same benefit by working with a qualified tutor. An advantage of this is that the tutor can travel to your house and work on your schedule.

You can find qualified tutors in your city from a number of sources. For example, you could hire a student several grades above you who has already taken the class and did well. Or you can check out a resource like <http://www.UniversityTutor.com/> which is a directory of tutors in the United

States. The tutors are all college students and it's free to contact any of them.

In summary, remember that to get excellent grades you don't have to be the smartest person in the class, but you do have to surround yourself with smart people.



# Chapter 2: Use Memorization Techniques

## The Power of Mnemonics

Have you ever wondered how some people seem to memorize everything the night before an exam?

Sure there are a few rare people who are born with a natural gift for memory (for example, the 2004 World Memory Champion Ben Pridmore memorized the order of cards in a randomly shuffled 52-card deck in 31 seconds). But for the rest of us, using the simple technique of mnemonics is more than enough to prep for an exam.

The technique basically consists of making up a sentence or phrase where the first letter of each word has a special meaning. Because of how our brains work we can easily remember a single sentence word-for-word, but remembering a random list of unfamiliar material tends to cause us problems.

We're much better at memorizing words; this comes naturally to us.

One thing that's interesting about mnemonics (besides that it is a difficult word to spell!) is that even nonsensical arbitrary words or sentences can be easy to remember.

For example...

**"Roy" is a legitimate first name, but there is no actual surname "Biv" and of course the middle initial "G" is arbitrary. Why is "Roy G. Biv" easier to remember than to memorize the seven colors of the rainbow? (Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet) The sentence "Richard of York gave battle in vain" is commonly used in the UK, an almost meaningless phrase.**

You have heard "Thirty days hath September, April, June and November", to remember the number of days in the months. If you've taken music you will have heard "Every good boy does fine" to remember the notes which appear on the lines of the treble clef. Your English teachers may have taught the rhyme "I before E except after C".

Clearly mnemonics are used in many disciplines.

Furthermore, mnemonics don't have to be just for memorizing words. They can also be used to memorize numbers. The most common type of mnemonic is the word-length mnemonic in which the number of letters in each word corresponds to a digit. This simple one gives pi to seven decimal places (3.141592):

**How I wish I could calculate pi.**

And here is pi to 31 decimal places:

**Sir, I bear a rhyme excelling  
In mystic force, and magic spelling  
Celestial sprites elucidate  
All my own striving can't relate  
Or locate they who can cogitate  
And so finally terminate.  
Finis.**

Sure...you might not have the time to make a fancy rhyming mnemonic that looks pretty, but in most cases you can quickly string together a sentence on paper that is memorable to you. Remember, it doesn't have to be grammatically correct, use real words, or even make sense!

When you get your test, take a minute to write out your mnemonic at the top or back of the paper and decode each word into its actual meaning. Now sit back and relax, you're taking an open book test!

As a little exercise, let's try memorizing the countries of South America and see what mnemonic we come up with.

To keep the order straight I'm going to start on Brazil (the biggest) and go left in a circle around the outside toward the center. This seems easiest to me but you can do it in any order that works for you.

So my order will be...

Brazil => B

French Guinea => FG

Suriname => S

Guyana => G

Trinidad => T

Venezuela => V

Columbia => C

Ecuador => E

Peru => P

Chile => C

Argentina => A

Uruguay => U

Paraguay => P

Bolivia => B



Let's see, the first  
thing that comes to mind is...

**Brian fails golf so George takes vengeance. Come eat  
pineapple chips at ugly park bench.**

It might look a little funny, but I guarantee you I can memorize that in  
30 seconds or so instead of 30 minutes.

Use the power of mnemonics any time you need to memorize for an  
exam. It's a secret weapon that good test takers use to take an "open book"  
exam while everyone else is racking their brain.

## Flashcards Are Your Friends

The other major memorization technique that is often overlooked is the  
simple flashcard. There are a few problems with memorizing something (like  
a list of words and their definitions) off of a regular sheet of paper:

- You will tend to memorize them in one order
- You will tend to memorize them in one direction
- You will tend to spend your time equally on each item

What do these mean and how do flashcards solve it? Let's look at the common example of memorizing a list of words and their definitions.

Memorizing in order simply means that if a list of words appears on a page, then your brain will get used to seeing them in that order. It will be somewhat easier to memorize them because your brain will start to expect what comes next (not just based on the definition but also based on what word came before it in the list). The only problem is that on the test they probably won't be in that order! Flashcards allow you to shuffle the deck to make sure you know them in any order.

Similarly, when memorizing a list of words you will tend to memorize them in one direction, meaning either knowing the words from their definitions, or knowing the definitions from the words. Although these may appear to be the same thing, when it comes to memorization they are certainly not. You can prove this to yourself if you've ever struggled to remember the name of a movie, even though you can remember the actors, the plot, and everything else about it. Of course, the moment someone says the name of the movie you shout, "Yeah that's it!" Memorization definitely has an order or "direction" to it, and knowing it one way does not guarantee you know it the other way. If you know which order you will be tested in, then be sure to study that way. If not, then study them both ways. Flashcards solve this by allowing you simply flip the cards over to test yourself both ways.

Finally, when memorizing from a single sheet of paper, you will tend to spend equal time on each item. Inevitably you will know some of the items on the first try, and some of them will keep tripping you up over and over again. Going through each item each time is inefficient. The beauty of flashcards is that once you're sure you have one item committed to memory, you can set it aside. Now your deck has shrunk by one card and the difficult items will start to appear more and more often. This gives you the most practice on the items that are mostly likely to trip you up, which is a huge benefit.

I'll conclude with two final tips on flashcards. First, if you have an especially long list of items to remember, break them into chunks. Work with a stack of 10 cards until you have them memorized. Then set them aside and work on the next group of 10. Once you have done each group, come back and try to combine them. The human brain naturally groups things in this way. It has a much easier time understanding "a group of 10 cards" or "10 groups of 10 cards" than it does "100 cards". Secondly, there are websites that will help you generate flashcards (try <http://quizlet.com/>). These will help you generate them and test yourself quickly.

## Chapter 3: Break It Down

### Every Complex Concept Has Simple Steps

Many concepts can seem overwhelming when you see them for the first time. But underneath them all are simple steps. For example, Algebra would make no sense if you had no concept of addition and subtraction. Similarly, addition and subtraction would make no sense if you had no concept of what a number was.

The best teachers teach this way: a new concept is built upon simple steps involving old concepts you already know. Unfortunately, not all teachers are good and you may have to make your own steps in some cases.

Here is an example. It may not be immediately obvious to a new math student that:

$$(4x+6)(x+2) = 4x^2+14x+12$$

It looks intimidating and complicated. Yet underneath, we find there are simple steps.

**First** - multiply the first term in each set of parenthesis:  $4x * x = 4x^2$

$$\overbrace{(4x + 6)(x + 2)}$$

**Outside** - multiply the two terms on the outside:  $4x * 2 = 8x$

$$\overbrace{(4x + 6)(x + 2)}$$

**Inside** - multiply both of the inside terms:  $6 * x = 6x$

$$\overbrace{(4x + 6)(x + 2)}$$

**Last** - multiply the last term in each set of parenthesis:  $6 * 2 = 12$

$$\overbrace{(4x + 6)(x + 2)}$$

Image Source: <http://www.freemathhelp.com/using-foil.html>

By using the FOIL method (stands for first, outside, inside, last) this problem becomes much easier. Just add everything together to get  $4x^2 + 14x + 12$ .

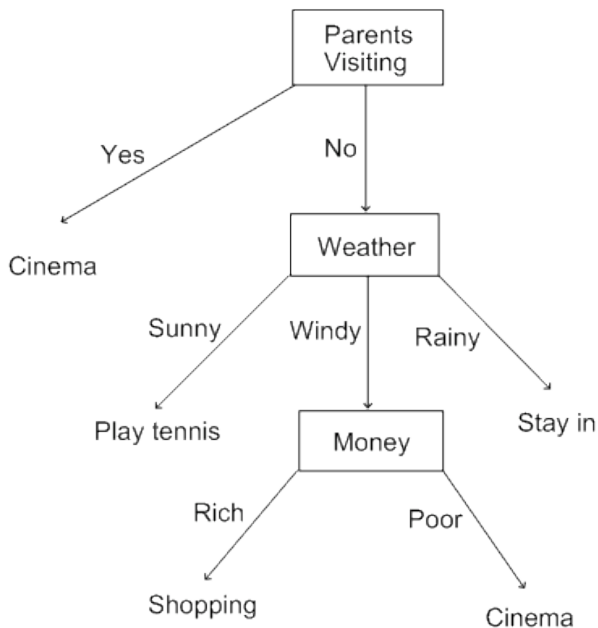
It's easier to understand now because we know the underlying simple steps, right? Incidentally, you may have noticed that FOIL is a mnemonic (or an acronym). That's probably why it is one of the best-remembered techniques in math.

When you encounter a difficult concept in math or any subject that is intimidating or confusing, take a deep breath and step back for a moment to remember that underneath there are simple steps. Take the time to break it down. You can even go through it with the teacher or tutor and specifically ask them to think about it that way. You could say something like "Ok, I think I understand the first step is to do X, now what would be the next step?" When you're done sitting there looking at a list of 5 steps the teacher might even say, "Wow, I actually never really thought about it like that. It's much easier to understand when you break it down like that".

## Decision Trees

Keep in mind that not every concept can be broken down into a simple list of steps. It may end up being more like a "tree" with several branches. Each branch will represent a decision, which would loosely translate into "if this is true take one action, otherwise take another action".

The point to keep in mind here is that *you can still break any concept down into simple*



*components.*

Image Source: <http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/~sgc/teaching/v231/dt1.gif>

Practice this idea of breaking down, whether to a tree or a simple list, and you'll never be intimidated by a new complex concept.



# Chapter 4: Get It All On One Page

## Muscle Memory

Did you know that the very act of writing something helps you remember it? This is known as “muscle memory” and has been proven in numerous studies.

This is intuitive and easy to see, but what might not be as obvious is the idea that condensing your writing can help you remember more. Imagine for a moment that you have 50 pages of notes for an upcoming test. It may seem like a lot to remember as you go through it. If you were to leave it as 50 pages and just read it a few times, it may seem a bit overwhelming. But what if you tried to condense it and rewrite it in simpler terms?

Not only would you get the additional muscle memory of writing it again, but you’d also make new meaning in your head. Allow me to explain.

## The One Page Cheat Sheet

The one page cheat sheet is a powerful concept that top students use on a regular basis. Note that this has nothing to do with cheating (you won’t use it on the actual test, unless the teacher allows it, which they sometimes do).

As you are going through the 50 pages of notes, you will probably start to see patterns and main concepts that start to emerge. You will start to see that two problems are really variations of the same thing. You will start to *group* items together as main points and sub-points.

When you’re done, you might be able to re-write those 50 pages in just 5 pages and still have it make sense. It’s important to note here that those 5 pages might not make any sense to someone who was seeing it for the first time, but that is okay. It only needs to make sense to you! In fact, it’s a great idea to write in short hand notation. Don’t use complete sentences (it’s a waste of space). As long as you understand it, that’s all that matters.

Then once those 5 pages are done, you will probably be able to go through again and simplify it even more into just one page of material that encompasses everything.

While doing this, you will have gotten the “muscle memory” of writing the material again, but you will have also gotten the much greater benefit of “chunking” the material in your own head.

By forcing yourself to do this exercise, you will understand the material at a much deeper level. You will start to see how each piece relates to the whole.

## Chunking

There is something magical about having everything on one sheet of paper. It's just plain *easy* to wrap your head around. Why is this?

Well, the only way you can get everything on one sheet of paper is by “chunking”, or grouping similar items. There might be about seven or so main concepts, but each one has seven sub-concepts underneath it. In fact, there is some great research in psychology that shows human beings are best at remembering items in groups of about seven (plus or minus two). You can read more about “chunking” at this link on Wikipedia:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chunking\\_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chunking_(psychology)).

Perhaps the simplest example of this is looking at words on a page. When you first started reading, it just looked like a huge jumbled mess of letters on the page (to remember what this feels like all you have to do is look at a page of writing in another language). There were so many letters that you couldn't make sense of it. But once we understood letters we could “chunk” them into words. We started to be able to read words. Once we understood that, we could chunk those into sentences, and then sentences into paragraphs, and then paragraphs into essays, and so on.

The point here is that there is no limit to human memory if you can chunk things appropriately. You will have a very hard time remembering the order of 1000 random letters on a page. But if you can chunk those into words it becomes much easier. If you can chunk those words into sentences it becomes even easier.

You can use this trick of human memory in all areas of school by chunking your notes, or difficult concepts into manageable groups before a test.

Before every exam, create a “one page cheat sheet” of all the material.

# Chapter 5: Stop Losing Points To Simple Mistakes

## Paper Is (Practically) Free, Use Lots

Although condensing all your notes to a single sheet of paper is a great exercise, remember that when trying to *solve* a problem you should do the opposite: use as much space as you need. Paper is practically free.

One of the biggest mistakes I see students making is to cramp all their work into a small space. If the problems are written on a handout, they may try to work the problem on the same sheet and cram everything into the provided space. Or they might try to save space and fit the problem into a narrow column or at the very bottom of the sheet.

This is a recipe for disaster. Sure, when the problem is easy you can get away with this. But when you are right at the edge of your ability (as you should be often in school) then why make it harder on yourself? With a clean sheet a paper you have a clean perspective on a difficult problem. A cluttered paper is a cluttered mind.

If you start on one approach to a problem and then later change directions, just cross it out and start over in a new space. Don't bother trying to convert the old problem into the new one, or trying to rewrite on top of poorly erased pencil marks. Just pull out a clean sheet of paper.

## Neatness Is Key

Many students I've worked with understand the concepts in class perfectly, but they miss most of their points from making small errors. This is truly a shame because they are getting the hard part right (understanding) and not getting good grades because of something easy (neatness). When solving a problem try following these simple guidelines:

- Use plenty of space. There are no extra points for using less paper.
- Do only one step per line.

- Keep everything in neat columns because this will help you spot errors.

Let me give you an example that is math related (although this applies to many subjects).

Here we have several ways to solve the same algebra problem.

$$151 = \frac{2x + 3}{5}$$

$$755 = 2x + 3$$

$$752 = 2x$$

$$376 = x$$

$$151 = \frac{2x + 3}{5}$$

$$5(151) = 2x + 3$$

$$755 - 3 = 2x$$

$$2x = 752 = 376$$

Notice how the problem on the left sticks to a grid? The equal signs all line up in the same column and so do the “x’s”. Notice there is also only one operation per line. This is clean and simple and *makes it easy to spot errors*.

The problem on the right is all over the place. The lines are squished together, they don’t match up in columns, and the last line combines two steps in one line (resulting in a technically incorrect statement that  $752 = 376$ ). It is *difficult to spot errors here*. You’ve put the effort in to understand the material, why make it harder on yourself?

Keep in mind that you may see your teacher or other people use sloppy notation like the one on the right. It is perfectly fine to use that sort of notation when you’re doing something that is *trivially easy*. In other words, once you’ve been doing this type of problem for years and you can do it in your sleep, then it’s fine to jot down quick notes. But when doing problems in homework or on a test in a relatively new subject, just being neat will do wonders to raise your grades. It takes just as much time as being sloppy so why not try it?

# Chapter 6: Learn To Speed Read

## Is it real?

If you're like most students, you've seen an advertisement for a speed reading course at some point in your life and wondered if it was real.

Well, the short answer is a resounding yes. Speed-reading and speed comprehension are real. I was personally able to double my reading rate in about a month by working through Peter Kump's [Breakthrough Rapid Reading](#).

If you are able to double your reading rate, then you could read your homework material in half the time. Or, viewed another way, you could read twice as much homework material in the same amount of time. This is a skill that will pay dividends not only throughout school but also for the rest of your life. Imagine how your life would be different if you could automatically read an extra book per week without spending any more time?

## How does it work?

The best way to describe it is with an analogy.

When you first started reading, you looked at each individual letter, right? You probably had to sound out each one individually ("cuh....aahhh.....tuhhh.....CAT!") just like every child does when first learning to read.

But after some time you were able to just take one glance at the word cat and you instantly recognized it. Your eye was no longer focusing on each individual letter, it "just saw" all of them at once and read it.

Well in much the same way you were able to move from seeing individual letters to whole words, speed-reading allows you to move from seeing individual words to whole phrases or sentences in one glance. Literally, your eye only stops to focus in one spot in the entire sentence (they know this by using high speed cameras to watch how the eyes of a speed reader move).

This doesn't necessarily come naturally to most people, and you may think it sounds like something that only a few "genius" type people would be able to do.

But that is not really the case. By doing the exercises diligently, and continuing to practice something that doesn't quite seem natural, you can eventually retrain your brain on how it sees words and reads.

## How It Can Be Learned

There are several ways you can learn to speed read.

The first is by teaching yourself with a book such as Peter Kump's [Breakthrough Rapid Reading](#). This method is the least expensive, but it does require a lot of discipline. The book includes 30 days worth of exercises. Each day, for 30 days, you read one short chapter and then do the exercises at the end. To be perfectly honest, the exercises are not very much fun. However, investing 15 minutes per day for 30 days is hardly anything when compared with the benefit you'll get (a doubling or sometimes more of your reading rate for the rest of your life).

If you don't think the idea of doing exercises at home by yourself sounds very fun or likely, then you can always consider a speed-reading course. These are common and can be found in any major city. A classroom is a great way to help stay motivated since you'll feel guilty if you pay and then don't show up.

In both the class and the book, you will periodically measure your improvement (both in reading rate and reading comprehension to make sure you aren't skimming). This will let you know how well it has worked by the end.

However you go about it, take a moment right now to get started in speed-reading. Resolve to do it no matter what. It will be far too easy to procrastinate and never end up doing it. But if you order the book right now or Google for classes in your area and call, then you'll have no excuse.

## Chapter 7: Use A Calendar (With Text Message Reminders)

### Not Turning In An Assignment Is Worse Than An ‘F’

One of the other big reasons I see bright students get bad grades is because they aren’t organized. They forget to bring assignments, can’t find them in an overflowing backpack, or just plain don’t remember when they are due.

The biggest offender here is not having a good calendar system in place or not using it.

Even if you aren’t very busy, it’s pretty much impossible to do everything you need to do on time without a calendar. It’s easy to get distracted, especially when there are far more fun things to do than homework!

There isn’t much to say here other than if you aren’t using a calendar system religiously, it’s going to be very difficult to get good grades.

Why is not turning in an assignment actually much worse than getting an ‘F’? If there are 10 assignments and you don’t turn one of them in, the highest grade you can possibly get in the class, if you were to ace every other assignment, is only 90%. If you got an ‘F’ on one assignment (a grade of 50%) then you can still get a 95% overall.

Even if your teacher takes pity on you and lets you turn in an assignment late for a deduction of one letter grade, why make it harder on yourself? Just like the little mistakes that nickel and dime many students out of good grades (see tip 5), turning in assignments on time is supposed to be the “easy” part. Those are free points. You’ve already done the hard part of understanding the material, why mess up on the easy part of just getting it in on time?

### What Type Of Calendar To Use

There are plenty of different calendar systems out there today, and the standard hand written calendar book is probably sufficient for most students. However, if you want to take things to the next level, considering using a

calendar system such as [Google Calendar](#), which can send you text message alerts.

The benefit of this is that while you may not always have your calendar in front of you, you will (presumably) almost always have a cell phone. This prevents the inevitable situation where even though you have an appointment written down on your calendar, you still miss it because you lost track of time. This isn't as important if you are only writing down homework assignments. In that case, as long as you check your calendar once per day to make sure you have everything ready for the next day, then you should be set. But if you have study group meetings or other events after school, then missing an appointment becomes easier. Your phone can be like your personal secretary, reminding you whenever necessary of upcoming meetings that you might miss.

To get better grades by working *smarter*, instead of *harder*, you should absolutely have a calendar system in place to track everything you have due.



## Chapter 8: Get More Homework Done In Less Time

Part of getting good grades is being efficient. This section is a crash course on time management and productivity. Top students consistently use these techniques to get more homework done in less time, and you can use them too.

### Use Prioritized To-Do Lists

The perfect compliment to your calendar system is a to-do list. You'll be amazed what you can get done when you have a list.

It can be discouraging to think about all the stuff you need to do, but if it's written down then you can get it all out of your head (you don't have to worry about forgetting it). Then it will be easy to focus on the most important task at hand.

Here are some good general guidelines on putting together your to-do list for schoolwork:

- Use pen and paper, this probably isn't the time for fancy gadgets.
- Once you have everything down, put an 'A' next to the tasks which you absolutely must get done, a 'B' next to the items which would be nice to get done, and a 'C' next to the remaining items.
- Most importantly, start with the biggest 'A' item first.
- When you complete an item, make a big satisfying line through it on your to-do list.

### Never Do A 'C' When There's An 'A'

Unfortunately, the 'A' items on our list will often be the least appealing to do. They will probably take the longest, require the most mental exertion, and not be very fun. This is exactly why you must do them *first*.

One of the hardest things in time management is to avoid doing the “easy” little tasks that we enjoy getting done. When you sit down to work, your brain has an amazing ability to “invent” little tasks that suddenly seem so much more fun than what you need to do.

You might start checking email, text messaging, or doing homework from your favorite class. However, one of the biggest secrets to getting things done is to do your most important task first. The worst thing you can do is say “Oh, this will just take a second”, and start on a lower priority task. Often, getting your first ‘A’ item done is more important than getting every single ‘B’ and ‘C’ item done on your to-do list.

Resolve to always do your biggest ‘A’ item first, no matter how quick and easy it would be to sneak in a ‘C’ item first. Your productivity will skyrocket.

## Eliminate All Distractions

Some people like to talk about how they are great multi-taskers. You may see them watching TV, chatting with friends, or surfing the internet while working on homework. Sorry, but the research is in. Numerous studies on productivity have all shown that multi-tasking is a *huge* cause of inefficiency and nobody is “good” at it.

According to the research, you will be your most efficient in uninterrupted blocks of about 90 minutes. This is about how long we can really concentrate hard on something before our productivity starts to decline. Usually after 90 minutes you should take a break for about half an hour and relax or get your mind on something else. Go for a run, play a game, or watch some TV. Then you will be refreshed and ready to go back for another period of 90 minutes of uninterrupted time.

Why is it so important for it to be uninterrupted and free of distractions? The reason is that it takes us a while to get really deep into a subject. Some people call this a “flow state.” You may have noticed that when you first start working on something you aren’t very productive. You are probably shuffling papers or reviewing the topic and just getting your mind ready to work. Only after about 10 minutes, when you have done the first few problems and really gotten into a good rhythm, do you start to make progress. That’s when you’re at your peak efficiency.

If you stop to answer a phone call or say hi to a friend right then, you have just brought yourself out of the flow state, and it can take up to 10 minutes to get back into it! Interruptions are the arch-nemesis of productivity and you should do your best to eliminate them while working. Turn off all email, phones, chat programs, and go to a secluded place. You'll be amazed at how much you get done in 90 minutes.

Productivity is an art that you study like any other subject. You'll see a big improvement with just the simple ideas shared in this section. When it comes time to work, write down your to-do list, prioritize it, get rid of all distractions (email, phone, TV, people, etc), and then start with the biggest and most difficult task in an interrupted block of 90 minutes. The rest will all be downhill from there.

## Chapter 9: Run Your Brain Like A High Performance Engine

Your brain is like a high performance car. With the right fuel, tuning, and maintenance you can get far more performance out of it than you are right now.

### Blood Sugar Level And Concentration

As stated in the previous section, your brain can only really concentrate on something for about 90 minutes before it starts to fade. This is why movies, classes, and speeches are all around 90 minutes or less.

After you've worked on something for 90 minutes, you can push it further with caffeine, sugar, or just plain will power. But when you push it past 90 minutes your recovery time goes up as well.

If you've been working on a particular problem, concept, or essay for about 90 minutes and you get stuck, then try my sure fire recipe to figure it out: take a 20-30 minutes break, eat something that will raise your blood sugar level, and then come back refreshed.

Your blood sugar level has a proven and noticeable affect on your ability to concentrate and how easily you get frustrated. Note that you don't have to actually eat candy if you don't want to, but it should be something that is quickly digestible and will raise your *blood sugar* level.

Continuing to work and struggle on a problem where you are making no progress will only exhaust and frustrate you further. It's the equivalent of revving the engine on an already smoking racecar. You need to give it a break to cool down, change the oil, and it will be back in no time purring along happily for you.

### Clear The Mental Calculator

On most calculators there is a clear button. This allows you to clear whatever number is on the screen and reset it to work on the next problem.

Well just like a calculator can compute one number at a time, your brain can really only focus on one thing at a time. If you are still thinking about

the last problem or focused on multiple things at once, you won't have a clear mental calculator.

Before tackling a difficult problem or concept, take a moment to clear the mental calculator. Free your mind from distractions, both physical (like your phone) and mental (relationship problems or something that someone said to you that day).

## Anxiety

Everyone gets nervous before a big exam. This is human nature and it affects everyone no matter how experienced you are. I guarantee you that The Beatles got nervous before performing on stage, Brad Pitt gets the jitters before doing an important scene, and the president has sweaty palms before giving the state of the union address.

In short, part of becoming successful at doing anything in life (including exams) is to become *comfortable with discomfort*. It will never go away completely, but you can learn to still perform under pressure.

Think for a minute about what it feels like to be excited. Your heart might be racing, you might be pacing back and forth, and you might break into a cold sweat. You have adrenaline coursing through your veins. Sound about right?

Now think for a minute about what it feels like to be nervous. It turns out to be almost exactly the same for most people: elevated heart rate, pacing, sweating, and adrenaline. So what's the difference between being nervous and excited? There really isn't one. When you were a kid you didn't know the difference. You'd try anything and were fearless. You only learned how to have anxiety as an adult. Try channeling that nervous energy into excitement. With all that adrenaline your brain will be extra focused and sharp.

Finally, if you are still nervous before an exam, try closing your eyes, slowing your breathing, and visualizing success. This will calm your nerves and help you perform at your best. Many pro-athletes use techniques such as this before big games.

Picture yourself *in detail* making your way through the exam with ease, finishing first, receiving a big red A from the teacher, or being congratulated

by the teacher after class as being one of the brightest students. Use whatever imagery is meaningful to you, and picture it in detail.

It may sound silly, but once again the results are proven and they really work. For more information on this check out a book called [Psycho Cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz](#).

## Chapter 10: Use Computers To Get Better Grades

Some of this final advice may seem unconventional to people who remember the “good old days”. Whether the technology revolution is overall a positive or negative thing I’ll leave up to you, but I feel obliged to give you these tips because the truth is that top students are using them everyday to be *far* more efficient in their studying.

### Google It, Wikipedia It

I really think that every student now days should be studying with a computer in front of them. It can make you so much faster and more efficient if you know how to use it. How so? Let me give you a few examples.

Let’s say that you were studying for a history exam and had a list of terms that you needed to know. You could look up each one in the back of your textbook, then turn to the right page, and find where it talks about it on the page. Or you could type it into [wikipedia](http://wikipedia.org). Wikipedia takes about five seconds and is easily four or five times faster than using an index in a textbook. If you have a lot of terms to look up, this adds up quickly.

Let’s say you were learning about acceleration in physics class and some parts of it weren’t quite clear yet. Typing “acceleration” into Google takes you to the Wikipedia page that includes a different explanation, photos, and links to other resources. You can even find video demos online and other superior teaching tools that can’t appear in a textbook. An interesting fact is the Wikipedia page for a certain topic is often *far better* than what you will find in a textbook. I’m not sure what this says about the future of textbooks, but take it for what it’s worth.

Let’s say that you needed a quotation for a paper you were writing on Henry Ford. You could take a trip to the library to find a quote book. Or you could simply Google it in seconds. For that matter, you could probably write your entire paper on Henry Ford citing nothing but sources from the internet. The internet is quickly becoming a very credible source in research, primarily because many major publications (the New York Times, etc) are all online as well as offline. When citing a quote from the New York Times, you don’t

need to specify whether it came from their website or in print because contain identical text. It used to be common to hear teachers say “you can’t use the internet as a resource because anyone can post anything they want. You have no way of knowing whether it’s true”. Those days are largely gone for the reasons mentioned above (most mainstream publications now have an internet presence).

It’s really hard to overstate the importance of Google in getting better grades. Basically *any* time you are struggling with *anything*, try typing it into Google. I’m serious.

## Type Everything You Can

You should be typing every single assignment that you can. Typically, assignments with equations (math, physics, etc) are still faster to do on paper. But every single other assignment should be typed.

Why? Well, yes it will make you neater, which your teacher will appreciate. But the main benefit is that you can type much faster than you can write. For most people it is actually much, much faster (200-500%).

Want to learn to type faster? There are plenty of good resources online. Here is [one free one](#) to see how fast you can type.



# Conclusion

## Let's Review

Here are your action items to start *immediately* getting better grades. Pick one or several of these on the list and take some action *right now* to put one of them into place. Ask a friend to study with you or use a mnemonic on your next exam. Then next week do another, and another. You'll start seeing results right away.

1. Start doing every single assignment that you can with other people in your classes who are already doing well. Surround yourself with students who get good grades!
2. Use mnemonics and flashcards to quickly memorize large amounts of information before an exam. At the start of the exam, take a minute to write out everything you need. Now you're taking an open book test!
3. Don't be intimidated by complicated concepts. Just break them down into simple steps (and "trees"). No matter how complicated it is, if you can do each individual step then you can get it right on the exam.
4. Condense your notes down to a "one page cheat sheet" to prepare for an exam. By using "muscle memory" and "chunking" you will understand it at a deeper level.
5. Stop losing points on "simple mistakes". Give yourself plenty of space to work a difficult problem and be meticulously neat when laying it out. A clear paper will help you spot the errors that are costing you points.
6. Speed-reading and speed comprehension really work. Invest the time to take a class or work through a book. It will pay off for the rest of your life.
7. Use a calendar system and stop forgetting to turn in assignments. Not turning in an assignment is worse than getting an 'F'.

8. Be more efficient when actually doing homework by using prioritized to-do lists, always doing your biggest 'A' task first, and eliminating all distractions (cell phone, email, chat, TV, etc) for periods of 90 minutes.
9. Run your brain at it's best by understanding when to take a break, blood sugar levels, clearing the "mental calculator", and how to deal with anxiety.
10. Finally, use computers and the internet to be more efficient. Look up concepts and terms in Google and Wikipedia (which is often better than the text book's explanation) and type every assignment that you can for improved speed and neatness.

## Teach This To Someone Else

Did you know that one of the best ways to learn something new is to teach it?

If you've enjoyed this book, now would be a great time to consider sharing it with someone else. This book is 100% free to distribute, as long as the content isn't altered, and I'm sure you can think of some fellow students, parents, PTA groups, online communities, blog readers, newsletter subscribers, etc who would benefit from reading it.

Why not help them out? Ironically, you'll be helping yourself out too by reinforcing the ideas in the book and making sure your friends keep you on track to getting better grades.

Please take a moment right now to email this book to anyone you feel would enjoy it, and don't forget that for more great homework tips you can subscribe to our free blog at <http://HomeworkHelpBlog.com>.

I wish you all the best!  
Brian Armstrong

