

# ORGANIZING

## Better organizing = Better grades

The first day of school is fast approaching. Some families are trying to squeeze out every bit of summer fun in these last few days by heading to the pool or sleeping late just one more time. Some are busy shopping for school supplies and making plans for that first day.

Angie Hyche

There are so many mixed emotions about the beginning of a school year. Parents are worried about everything from paperwork and packing lunches to bullying and report cards. Children can feel excited one minute and terrified the next about starting their first day in a new grade. Teachers are finishing up getting their rooms ready and frantically planning those crucial first few days. Clearly this is a busy time packed with activity and planning.

Even though my children are grown, I still get excited about the beginning of a school year. It takes every bit of restraint I can muster to not go out and buy things I really don't need. As a student, I took the selection of items on the school supply list very seriously, making sure that the color of the notebook corresponded in some way with the class subject. I wrote especially neatly on the first page of a spiral notebook, knowing that I would be looking at that page all year.

After the first few days of school though, the excitement of new supplies was soon replaced by anxiety as I began to worry about my grades. I was (and still am) very driven and competitive, so good grades meant everything to me.

For many students and parents alike, grades are the biggest worry throughout the school year. This worry starts early and continues throughout all grade levels, even into the college years. It can often seem like so much is riding on these scores. So many factors can influence



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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When I think back over my school years and those of my children, I am convinced that the most important factor in achieving good grades was simply being organized. While intellect, creativity and study methods definitely played a part, basic organizing skills were pivotal in achieving good results.

In light of this observation, here are my top suggestions for staying organized during the school year. Keep in mind that depending on the age of the student, parents' assistance may be needed. The older the child, the more responsibility should be transferred to them. I strongly advise parents, grandparents or anyone who is working with a child to teach them basic organizing skills. These principles will serve them well throughout their lives. I would like to thank my daughters Emma and Lydia

(both college students) and my husband Eric for their input.

**Check backpacks before leaving school.** Nobody enjoys finding out at 9:30 p.m. that your child forgot the textbook they need to complete their homework. If you pick up your child from school, this isn't too difficult, but if they ride the bus or with someone else, you'll have to train your child to do this. We learned this lesson the hard way.

**Establish and reinforce routines for papers.** Students come home with a LOT of papers, some of utmost importance and some that go straight to the recycling bin. Make it a habit from day one to have a designated spot for papers. Establish a drop zone for backpacks with a container (one per child) nearby for all papers to go into as soon as children arrive home. This container can be wall-mounted to save counter space. If possible, a parent should look through these immediately to identify anything

urgent (forms to be returned, homework to be completed). At the end of the evening, check again to make sure all papers that need to be returned are in the backpack.

**Declutter backpacks regularly.** At least once a week, every single item in the backpacks needs to be taken out and everything unnecessary removed. I have heard many stories of children getting a zero on a homework assignment that was completed on time but not turned in because the backpack was a disaster area. Don't be that family!

**Keep an updated checklist.** Each child needs one central location to keep track of dates, deadlines, homework, etc. You might try using a different color for each class. There are some wonderful student planners that are perfect for this. Or it may be that digital solutions work better for your family. Either way, I can't overstate the importance of this strategy.

It's never too early to start an assignment. Look over assignment sheets and descriptions early to avoid last-minute issues. For a large assignment, use a technique called "backwards planning," which is working backwards from the desired result to figure out all the steps needed to achieve it, and creating mini-deadlines to break big tasks up. For a long-range assignment, one good strategy is to work a little on it each day after finishing homework that is due the next day.

**When your child says they don't have any homework, don't believe them.** I'm not implying that your child is a liar. I'm simply suggesting that perhaps they have forgotten it. Either way, it's better to just double check before assuming they have the night off. There is always something to work on (see above point about long-range assignments).

**When your child says they don't have any homework, don't believe them.** Yes, I meant to repeat that sentence. Did you catch it? So many times when asked about homework, I was assured there was none. Then I would find out there was a test the next day. Studying for a test definitely counts as homework! There are many effective methods of studying for a test: looking over notes, working problems, making note cards, having a group study session, creating a practice test (this was my favorite), outlining material, etc. Different methods work better for different subjects and learning styles. Teachers are great resources for best study habits.

I'd love to hear from you, readers! Do you agree that organization is the biggest factor in student success? What has worked well for your family?

Here's hoping for a wonderful and organized school year!

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