

ACADEMICS

Training

15 TRICKS TO IMPROVE YOUR GRADES

By Stephen Aloia, Ph. D.

Academic success is based, like any other component of success, on a series of skills.

Over the years, I have observed students and their performances and, with the help of a lot of research by other educators, have come up with my **TOP 15** academic tricks or strategies. In other words, things that will help make anyone become a better student. I will cover each of them individually in future articles, but they are summarized here:

1. SET ACADEMIC GOALS.

Set long term and short term goals. Develop the skill of using short term goals initially to help you with specific tests or assignments. For example, if you have a history test in a week, establish what grade you want to get on the test as a goal. But more importantly, establish specific goals as to how much, when, and where you are going to study each day of the week before the test. Keep a daily evaluation of how well you kept the goals. This process will help your performance substantially.

2. WANT TO LEARN — ATTITUDE. Remember that the objective of going to school is to learn. The concepts, principles and skills that you learn in school will prepare you to work and provide a

living for yourself and your family. You will find that it is much easier to get good grades and test scores if you go into each class and study session with the attitude in mind that you will learn what the teacher is trying to teach. Ask the question: "What does the teacher want me to learn in this class (or assignment)?" This attitude also will help in your personal relationship with your teachers. Be thankful for the opportunity to learn — don't make it hard for the teacher or coach. Try to impress your them.

3. ATTEND EVERY CLASS, BE ON TIME AND COMPLETE EVERY ASSIGNMENT. Experienced students know that it would be hard to get bad grades if they did nothing more than this. Attendance and completing the assignments provides a foundation for excellent academic performance. It is a great source of pride and self-confidence to have high attendance and assignment completion during the course of the school year. It also helps with your relationship with the teachers. If your coach asks you to complete a specific assignment in a game or practice, and you don't do it, what happens? The results are usually pretty drastic. Look at school the same way.

4. IMPRESS YOUR TEACHER WITH SLANT. This is a word that stands for:

- Sit Up
- Lean Forward
- Act Interested
- Nod
- Track the teacher

It is hard for a teacher to ignore a student who is consistently doing these things. But if a student comes into class the first day and slouches down in his or her seat, never watches the teacher and acts uninterested, the teacher immediately makes some judgments about the student that are not positive. Maybe teachers shouldn't do this, but we have to remember that teachers are human — they have feelings, they make mistakes and have bad days — just like the rest of us.

5. LOOK GOOD. Because teachers are human, they react to how people look. If someone

walks into their class with sloppy clothes, green and red hair, and rings in the ears, nose or other parts of the anatomy, most teachers immediately know that this student is likely to spend a lot more time impressing friends than the teacher and probably won't get good grades. Be well groomed and neat every day.

6. SIT AT THE FRONT OF THE CLASS. This forces you to be alert and helps you with the components of SLANT. It also sends a strong message to the teacher that you are interested and that you care about how you do in school. It is not always possible where the teacher assigns seats, but when you can sit at the front you should.

7. PREPARE WITH PREP. This is a word that stands for:

Prepare materials. Get the required notebooks, study guides, papers, pencils and books ready for class.

Review what you know. Just like you prepare for a game, you need to prepare for class by reading notes, texts, etc.

Establish a positive mind set. Tell yourself to learn is just like "getting up" for the game — you have to "get up" for class.

Pinpoint your GOALS. Review and re-establish your daily GOALS and objectives for this class. Establish what it is you want to learn.

You will find that this is a very effective strategy. It will help you mentally and physically use the other skills of GOAL SETTING, ATTITUDE, SLANT, and LOOKING GOOD during the school day, during study sessions and even in games and practices.

8. LEARN TO TEACH. In the classroom while you are using your SLANT skills, and the teacher begins to teach, you need to learn the concepts and principles with the thought in mind that you will have to go home and teach the same principles and concepts to your brother, sister, parents or STUDY BUDDY. You will find that this will force you to learn and understand the principles and concepts well. You will need to listen for major words and ideas,

review them and question them. Ask yourself, "Does this make sense?" "Do I understand it completely?" You may have trouble discerning what is important and what is not important. In those cases, ask the teacher.

9. GET A STUDY BUDDY. In every class, develop a relationship with a student that will allow both of you help each other. A STUDY BUDDY is someone who you can call up at night to ask questions about assignments or homework problems. They can give you assignments when you are sick and miss school and you can do the same for them. Try to pick someone who is a good student and develop a solid relationship with them. Make sure you hold up your end by helping them, too.

10. BE NEAT — COPS. Learn to be neat. Turn in neat and well-organized assignments and papers. Write test answers neatly. This will make a tremendous difference. It has been estimated by some educators that neatness can make up to a 15 percent difference in grade performance. COPS stands for:

Capitalization. Make sure your capitalization is correct and complete.

Overall Appearance. Your work product (homework, tests, papers, etc.) should be good to look at. Not only should it be NEAT, but it should look attractive and balanced aesthetically.

Punctuation. Make sure your punctuation is correct and complete.

Spelling. Never turn in a paper that you haven't checked and re-checked for spelling errors.

You will find that almost immediately after you have started being NEAT and using the other COPS skills, that you will be proud of your work and you will get better grades. You also will find that really doesn't take a lot more time to be neat — it is just a skill that will help you perform.

11. LEARN TEST TAKING WITH PIRATES. Students who master PIRATES are very good

test takers. PIRATES stands for:

Prepare to Succeed. Just like "getting up" for the game or the class, you need to "get up" for the test. Write your name on the test. Write the word PIRATES on the test. Review the test and allot time for the various sections. Tell yourself mentally you are going to do well on this test.

Inspect the Instructions. Read instructions carefully. Underline what to do (T or F, + or -, underline or circle, special instructions).

Read, Remember, Reduce. Read the whole question. Remember what you studied. Reduce the choices.

Answer or Abandon. Answer the question or abandon it (mark it and return to it later).

Turn Back. When you finish the test, turn back to the abandoned questions and re-examine.

Estimate. When in doubt, you can make good guesses.

Avoid absolutes. In other words, if the question says "never" or "only" or "none" or "always" or "all," then it usually is a false question. If the question uses words like "few," "some," "sometimes," "seldom," "most," "many," "often," or "usually," it usually is a true question. Choose the longest or most detailed choice.

Survey. Survey to ensure that all of the questions are answered. Switch and answer only if you are positive. Studies show that 80 percent of the answers that are switched are wrong.

12. & 13. STUDY WITH SQ3R AND IN 15-MINUTE SEGMENTS. A simple, but very effective study skill can be learned quickly. It is called SQ3R and stands for:

Survey. Look over the material you have to study and get a general idea of what it is about. Read the titles and subtitles. Look at the pictures and charts, maps, etc. Read the introduction and the concluding paragraph.

Question. Look at any question presented at the end of the material or that have been given to you by your teacher. Make up your own question by

turning through the titles and headings.

Read. Read the material carefully. Identify the main idea in each section. Look for answers to the question as you read.

Recite. After reading, recite in your own words your answers to the questions. Make brief notes to help you remember the answers and other ideas.

Review. Read the question again. Try to answer them without looking at your notes. If you can't, then look over your notes so that you will be able to recall the information at a later date.

Studies also have shown that this process, or any study or reading, is most effective when it is done in 15- or 20-minute segments. Every 15 or 20 minutes, get up and walk around. Get a drink of water. Take a two- or three- minute break, but no more. Then start your next segment. You will find that you get much more done this way.

14. BECOME FRIENDS WITH YOUR TEACHER. They are generally pretty good people or they wouldn't be teachers in the first place. They are there to help you. If you are friendly with them, you will feel more comfortable asking questions. They also will generally give the benefit of the doubt when it's time to start handing out grades.

15. BE MENTALLY TOUGH. Just as athletes need to be mentally tough, so do students. It takes mental toughness, self-discipline, concentration, resiliency and drive to be a good student. You have to use these skills every day.

If you use these 15 tricks, you will find that your academic performance will increase almost magically.

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Dr. Stephen Aloia is a Professor of Education at California State University Fullerton and is owner of Classical Learning Center in Mission Viejo. He also has been a coach, referee and player on the college, JC, prep and youth levels for more than 20 years.