

Next Level Up's Simple Guide to...

...ORGANIZATION

...TIME MANAGEMENT

and

...POSITIVE STUDY HABITS

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FOREWORD

On these pages, parents and students will find simple, but valuable strategies to help in and out of school. Each tool is designed to encourage students to think about the details of what area of school they are trying to improve. Each strategy is presented as a mnemonic device. Just like “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” for Order of Operations, or “Roy G. Biv” for the colors in the light spectrum, mnemonic devices make things easy to remember. In order to get the most benefit from each strategy, spend time figuring out which ones work best for you, internalize them, and make them part of your routine. All strategies are not meant for all students. It is important to find the one that works best for each individual.

In this world where perception often replaces reality, things seem more complicated than even just fifteen years ago. Simplicity still works. I believe that wholeheartedly and practice what I preach. The strategies that lay ahead are based on tapping into the simple nature of attacking problems in school head on with a common sense approach.

Hopefully you, your child, your student, or your classroom will find something useful and beneficial in these pages.

ORGANIZATION and TIME MANAGEMENT

It is important to have short term and long term goals in and out of school. Without goals, it is challenging to know what direction you are headed in.

This first strategy is designed to help you focus on setting goals.

TAP-D

Think of important things you need to do.

- First, make a list of things you need to do for a particular week.
- Then take that list and break it down into what you want to do each day of that week.
- Separate the needs from the wants. Put them in two different lists.
- Think hard about why you need to do each of the things on the need to do list and why you want to do all of the things on the want to do list.

Arrange the things you need to do into categories.

- Use the following four categories: academic, athletic, social, home.
- Go back to the list of things on the need to do list and sort them into one of these four categories. Do the same with the want to do list.
- Separate the things categorized as academic into each of their respective classes.
- Compare the needs to the wants.

Prioritize

- Prioritize each of these four categories based on what is most important. School must be ranked first if you want to be successful academically.
- Within each category, prioritize each thing based on what is most important to you. Typically it is a good idea to prioritize first the things that require the most time or are the most challenging.
- As a way of helping yourself complete tasks that you need to do, use the tasks that you want to do as a reward. For example, writing an essay may not be your favorite thing to do, but you know you need to do it in order to do well in your class. You also may like playing video games. Use the incentive of playing video games as a reward for after you finish your essay.

Do it!

- It is hard to keep priorities straight. It is a great idea to make the list of things you need to on a daily and weekly basis. It is an awesome feeling when you accomplish a task and cross it off your list.
- This will help you stick to your priorities and help you succeed in school. Your planning is useless if you don't follow your plan.

You cannot do well in your classes if you are not prepared and have everything you need.

This strategy is designed to help you remember to bring things to class every time.

CLASH

Check your planner to see what classes you have the next day.

- Every day and night, check your calendar or planner to see what classes you have the next day.
- Check also the assignments or quizzes/tests you have the next day.
- Check to see what materials/books/notebooks you need to bring from home or your locker.

List the items you need for the next day.

- On a piece of paper, in your planner, or on your device, list all of the things you will need for class.
- Keep in mind of anything that needs to be signed by your parents.

Always gather the materials and put them in your backpack.

- Gather everything you need and put them in your backpack the night before.
- DO NOT wait until morning because you may be rushed and forget to check if you have everything.

Set your backpack by the door so you won't forget it.

- This seems basic, because it is. Put your backpack right by the door so in the morning you can grab it as you walk out to catch the bus or get into your car.

Have a list in your locker or right on the inside cover of your planner of which materials you need for each class.

- Get a dry erase board for your locker. At the beginning of each school day, write a list of what you will need for each class.
- As you take the materials for each class, erase the item from the white board.

Typically when a student gets to middle school they have several different teachers for several different classes.

This strategy is designed to help you keep separate notebooks for each class.

BAND

Buy a different notebook for each class.

- Get notebooks that are color coded.
- Try to associate the color of each notebook with each class to make it easier to find.
- Definitely get notebooks with pockets in the front and back.
- Write the name of the subject in very large letters on the front and back of each notebook.

Always divide each notebook into sections.

- Some teachers will have a system they want you to follow. If not, have a section for notes and another for homework assignments. Use the section for homework to list the materials you need to bring home. (See ADAPT)
- Make sure you use the pockets in your notebook only for papers from that class. Don't mix papers from other classes.

Need to update your notes and notebook daily.

- Date all sections and headings every time you write in your notebook.
- As you complete things in the homework section, cross them out.
- Go through your pockets, folders, binders, and backpack daily and clean out any loose papers that you no longer need. Put all of the papers in their proper places.

Do buy a new notebook IMMEDIATELY if you lose one.

- If you lose one of your notebooks, get a new one quickly with the same color of the notebook you lost.
- Replace the notes that were in the lost notebook by getting them from a friend or asking the teacher.
- Replace any worksheets, handouts, or assignments by asking your teacher for copies.

You cannot expect to do well in school if you don't bring everything you need home with you or are not sure of your homework.

This strategy is designed to help you remember to bring all of your studying materials and assignments home with you.

ADAPT

At the end of each class, make a list of what you need to take home.

- In the homework section of your notebook or in your planner, make a list what you need to take home for studying and homework for each class.
- Think ahead by including things on your list that you will need to complete in the future like short term or long term projects or papers.

Decide what you need to take home from your list at the end of the day.

- Look at the list and see what work you finished at school and see what still needs to be taken home.
- Check off the items on the list as you put them in your backpack.
- Check the list carefully to see if you need to ask your teacher questions or details about specific assignments.

Ask your teacher to answer questions you have about that night's studying or homework.

- After reviewing your list, ask your teacher for clarification.
- After you get your answers, make sure you have the necessary materials to take home.

Pause right before you walk out of school and ask yourself, "Do I have everything I need?"

- Even if you checked your list, make sure you check it out one more time before leaving school. Remember, it is about changing your habits.

Try not to give up even if you discover at home you forgot something.

- If you need something, call a friend, go on the teacher's website or Google Classroom page.
- If the teacher approves and is known to respond, call or email them.
- If you cannot get help from anyone, complete the assignments to the best of your ability. Do not leave them undone just because you forgot something.

It is important to hold onto your assignments and quizzes/tests, especially when you get to middle school and high school. Having old quizzes/tests helps you prepare for midterms or final exams. These can also give you great insight into your test taking habits.

This strategy is designed to help you keep track of quizzes, test, and assignments.

3C

Create a calendar for the marking period.

- Lay out all assignments and tests for each course using the syllabus.
- If these are not listed in the syllabus, ask your teachers for them.
- Fill in all school activities, including extra-curricular activities (e.g., basketball games, school musicals).
- Fill in after-school activities, such as music lessons.
- Add new items to the calendar as soon as you become aware of them. Keep your calendar up to date.

Create a weekly planner.

- Lay out plans for the week based on the marking period calendar.
- Include all assignments, tests, school activities, and work obligations.
- Lay out study plans over a weekly period to give yourself enough time to study for tests or do everything needed for assignments.
- Review your weekly calendar at the beginning of the week, usually Sunday night or Monday morning so that you know what to expect.
- As you complete each item on your weekly calendar, check it off. At the end of the week, see which items have not been checked off and decide whether to include them in the next week's planner.

Create a daily list.

- Based on your weekly schedule, make a daily to-do list. If you use a daily planner, transfer the items on this list to specific times.
- Consult your list at the beginning of the day and at certain times throughout the day.
- Check off each item on the list as you complete it.
- At the end of the day, analyze the items you didn't do and decide whether to add them to the next day's to-do list.

You cannot have success in school if you show up to class late or not at all.

This strategy is designed to help you improve class attendance and punctuality.

LIST

Look at the cause of your poor attendance and tardiness.

- Analyze why you are late or absent from each class. Look at causes such as: I don't care.
 1. I have too many things to do.
 2. I don't like the class.
 3. I don't like the teacher.
 4. I don't understand the material.
 5. I'm getting poor grades in the class.
- Analyze what you accomplish by not going to class.
 1. Nothing
 2. Socializing with friends
 3. Sleep late
 4. Get other work done

Identify the consequences of your poor attendance or tardiness.

- Lowered final grade
- Fail the class
- Have to take the class again
- Make the teacher think I don't care
- Unable to participate in sports and clubs
- Will not be able to graduate.
- Your confidence takes a hit and you don't feel good about your effort

Set goals to increase your motivation to attend class and be punctual.

- Think of the negative consequences for poor attendance. Write these down and look at them every time that you consider being late or absent from class. Try to visualize what will happen.
- Set up a plan to reward yourself for improved attendance and punctuality. Use rewards such as buying yourself something you want (e.g. a new cd) for going to class for a certain period of time (e.g., and entire week). Or you can simply attend class because it is your responsibility and the rewards are intrinsic (feeling good on the inside).
- Keep in mind that being a student is your first real job. You don't get payed money, but you learn positive habits, you learn how to learn, and you receive intrinsic rewards in addition to massive amounts of useful knowledge.

Talk to your teacher

- Make an appointment to talk to the teacher about your plans to improve your attendance and punctuality.
- Clearly present your plans to do everything possible to improve your attendance and punctuality.
- Do not blame the teacher or the nature of the class. Take responsibility.
- Rehearse how you will present your case with your friend or parent.

STUDY SKILLS and HABITS

Sometimes the hardest part of studying is just getting going.

This strategy is designed to help you start studying and stop procrastinating.

CHECK

Change environments.

- Find the environment that is best for YOU.
- Consider whether you like to be away from people or not, whether you like noise or not, and whether you like a bright or dim light.
- If you are distracted for some reason, find a new place to study that will have less distractions.
- As soon as you are distracted, change environments.
- Do not waste time trying to shut out distractions or wait for the distractions to go away.

Have all necessary materials/supplies nearby while studying.

- Before studying, collect the materials you will need (pens, pencils, paper, notebooks, books, paper clips, note cards, etc.)
- This will save time so you won't have to find materials during your study time and then have difficulty again getting started studying after you find the materials.

Establish rewards for yourself.

- You may have difficulty getting started studying because it looks like you may never finish or because you keep thinking of other things you would rather do than study.
- To help, you need to set rewards for your yourself. For example, you may reward yourself after you finish reading a chapter. Or you may divide your study time into shorter periods (e.g., 30 minutes) and reward yourself at the end of these periods.
- You can use rewards such as food, tv, video games, computer, talking to a friend on the phone, or playing your instrument. If you are using a reward in the middle of your study time, be sure to set a time limit on how long you can devote to the reward (e.g., 10 minutes of talking on the telephone).

Create a checklist of all the tasks you need to do before studying.

- You may have difficulty getting started studying because you think you have too many tasks to do or you have no idea of what you have to do so it seems like your studying will be endless. Things may seem overwhelming. Breathe.
- Make a list of what you have to study and prioritize these tasks starting with the most important tasks to be done. These may be the assignments that are the most difficult or the most time consuming.
- After completing each task, check it off to see how much you have accomplished. The list will also let you know what you need to finish.

Kee a "distraction pad" while studying.

- If distractions are keeping you from concentrating, create a "distraction pad", which is a piece of paper where you write all the ideas that keep popping into your head.
- After you write an idea down, try to put it out of your mind until you are finished studying. Each time a worry interrupts your studying, write it on the paper.

Sometimes distractions happen. The idea is to limit them or avoid them altogether.

This strategy is designed to help you avoid distractions.

PATS

Pick the right environment to study.

- Choose a place to study where you feel most comfortable. You may like to study in a place with people around (e.g., the library) or with no people (e.g., your room at home). You may like music or TV to drown out background noises or you may want complete quiet. You also may like to study with bright light or with dim light.
- Reserve the place for studying only so that you associate that place **ONLY** with studying. For example, if you study in your bed, you may confuse yourself because your bed is associated with sleeping, and not studying.

Always reduce visual distractions.

- If you are visually distracted, be sure to find a place to study where there is nothing to distract you (e.g., the desk in your room). If you are studying in the library, make sure to sit away from the main desk and the door. If possible, sit facing the wall or the book stacks.
- Even if you like to study with people around, you need to be sure that you will not be tempted to watch people rather than study. For example, if there is a baseball game happening outside the room where you're studying, be sure to sit far from the window so that you're not tempted to watch the game.
- Do not study near things that you may be tempted to play with (e.g., a video game or a stapler)

Try to eliminate noise around you.

- If you are distracted by noises, study in a quiet room. If you are still distracted by noises (e.g., the air conditioner), use earplugs to block out all background sounds.
- If you like to study with music or TV, make sure that they are not distracting you. Find out if music helps you or not. If you listen to song lyrics while studying, you are distracted by the music. If you ignore the lyrics, you may be helped by the music. If you have the TV on and you

are listening to what people are saying, then the TV is distracting you. If you don't pay attention to what people are saying, then the TV may block out background noise.

- Use earplugs if necessary.

Self talk to control internal distractions.

- Sometimes people are distracted by internal factors from their own bodies (e.g., grumbling stomach, itch, thoughts about other things to do).
- When you become aware of internal distractions, talk to yourself and direct your attention back to studying. For example, if your stomach is grumbling, say to yourself: "It's almost lunch time and I'm hungry. I have to study for another 30 minutes before lunch, so I'll ignore my stomach noises."

Often times you will need to study from a textbook or fiction/nonfiction novel. It is important you don't spend a lot of time wondering what is important and what isn't.

This strategy is designed to help you study from books.

CON AIR

Copy chapter headings/subheadings from notes onto colored note cards.

- Use different color note cards to show that these are main ideas.

Organize the important facts and information onto white note cards.

- Use white note cards to indicate that these are specifics that go under the different main ideas.
- On one side of the card, write a fact, definition, or information. On the other side write a question that asks for this fact, definition, or information.

Number the white note cards to show the order they appeared in the book.

- Put a number on each card to show the order the material was given in the book.

Arrange the colored note cards in columns.

- Leave space under each colored card to place the white cards underneath.

Identify each card's correct place underneath the colored cards.

- Put the cards in numbered order under each colored card.
- Try to remember the location and order of the cards when you take a test.

Review information on each card.

- Shuffle the white cards and then place them under the corresponding colored cards.
- Test yourself on the information on the white cards. Read the questions, answer them, and then check for the correct answer on the backs.

This strategy will help you study from your notes by focusing on organizing the information.

ALWAYS REVIEW AND POLISH UP YOUR NOTES EVERY NIGHT.

WORRY

Work with both note cards from reading and class notes.

- Get your note cards from a specific reading and the related class notes on the same topic.
- You want to read through the note cards and class notes to find main ideas covered in both.
- Use skimming, or fast reading, to get these main ideas.

Outline key points covered in both reading and class.

- Make an outline of the main ideas of the topic based on skimming the note cards from the reading and the class notes.
- As you go through the note cards and class notes, write down the main ideas included in both in your outline. If a main idea is included in one but not the other, think about why this is. If you think that the idea is important, then include it in your outline.

Read your note cards for facts.

- After you have made your outline of the main ideas, read your note cards again to see where the facts fit in relationship to the main ideas.

Read class notes for facts.

- Read your class to see where the facts fit in relationship to the main ideas.
- If there are facts in the class notes that you want to memorize, make note cards for them and add them to the note cards you used from the reading.

You're ready after one more reading of the outline.

- At the end of studying, review your outline one last time to make sure that you have an understanding of the main ideas included in the reading material and class notes.
- For your last reading, read the outline aloud to help remember the overall meaning of the content you are studying.

Now you have your notes. How do you study them effectively and efficiently?

This strategy is designed to help you study your notes more efficiently.

R3 HI

Read your notes after class.

- This allows you to review the lecture and get clarification of any notes that are unclear.
- Reading your notes after class is helpful because the lecture is still fresh in your memory, and you can add any material that you did not write down.

Read your notes before class.

- This makes it easier for you to understand the new lecture because you can see the relationship to the previous lecture.

Read your notes before a test.

- This is a very important strategy for studying for a test.
- It is best to read the notes aloud. Hearing the information helps you to remember it.
- First read all your notes. Then read your highlighted notes.
- Read the highlighted notes as many times as necessary to recall the information.

Highlight important information.

- While reading your notes, highlight important information.
- Do not highlight everything. Try to limit your highlighting to specific words, phrases, or sentences. Never highlight an entire paragraph.
- The next time you read your notes, the highlighted text should speed up your review process.

Identify material you think will be on the test.

- As you re-read your notes, concentrate on material that you think will be on the test based on what the teacher told you or based on the types of tests the teacher has given in the past.

- It may be helpful to re-write the material that you think will be on the test and re-read this several times. The act of writing will help you remember the information that you wrote.

Studying for tests can be overwhelming. It is important to have consistent methods that help you maximize your study time by focusing on the quality of your studying time and not the quantity of time you put in.

This strategy is designed to help you remember the information you need to know.

BREAK

Break memorizing into short time periods.

- Never try to memorize a lot of information at one time. This leads to overloading and your mind won't let you memorize any more information. Or it leads to boredom and you can't get motivated to keep working on memorizing. Study what you DON'T know not what you DO know.
- Try to arrange short, frequent blocks of time for memorization. Spend a certain amount of time working on methods to memorize some information and then review these methods at certain times throughout your studying time. For example, you may devote 10 minutes to memorizing your Spanish vocabulary at the beginning of a two hour block of studying, and then 10 minutes in the middle and another 10 minutes at the end. This will give you 30 minutes of studying your Spanish vocabulary. It is less effective to spend 30 minutes at one time working on the vocabulary because of overloading and boredom. It's easier to work on it in short time periods spaced out over time.
- Never cram! Don't try to memorize information you haven't worked on right before a test. If you do, this will make you anxious. However, before a test you should review memorization techniques that you have been using while studying.

Recite information aloud.

- Read aloud the note cards you are studying from. Read the questions on one side and then the answers on the other side.
- After reading aloud, test yourself on the information by shutting your eyes and asking and answering the questions again. Have someone quiz you.

- If you get the answer wrong, write it several times as you say it over and over.

Establish mnemonic devices to help you remember information.

- Mnemonic devices are a system of words and letters that help you remember information.
- To make up a mnemonic, make a list of the important facts you need to remember. Use the first letter of each fact to make up another word that will help you remember the ideas to be memorized. For example, the mnemonic device PEMDAS (Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally) is used to represent and help students remember Order of Operations.
- You take the first letters from **P**arentheses, **E**xponents, **M**ultiplication, **D**ivision, **A**ddition, **S**ubtraction

Always try to picture in your mind words or pictures to help you remember.

- As you study, try to visualize (or picture in your mind) words and pictures that will help you remember. For example, if you are trying to remember the parts of an animal cell, you may picture in your mind the diagram from your science book where the different parts were shown. If you used graphic organizers to help you learn, picture the graphic organizer in your mind and then recall each of the parts.
- After looking at the picture or graphic, shut your eyes and try to recall as much detail as possible. If you can't recall all the details, study the picture or graphic again, and then shut your eyes and repeat the process. Do this until you can recall all parts to be memorized.
- When answering a test question involving material you visualized, shut your eyes for a second and try to recall all aspects of the picture or graphic in your mind.

Key words help.

- If you have to memorize words or facts that are new or hard for you, it may help to associate these with key words. For example, if you can't recall the meaning of the word ziggurat (a temple built in a series of terraces with each terrace smaller than the below with a staircase and a shrine on top) for a World History test, look at the word to find something related to the meaning.
- It is best to combine the key word approach with visualizing. Once you identify a key word, picture in your mind a relationship between the keyword and the original word (picture the zig zag pattern of the ziggurat).

This is another strategy to help with taking notes from reading materials.

SCROL

Survey the material to be read.

- Look at the section and paragraph headings to get an idea of what will be covered in the chapter. Look at side boxes and end-of-chapter activities to get additional information.

Connect the ideas.

- Look at how the section and paragraph headings relate to each other.
- Write down key words to show how the sections are connected.

Read the material.

- Read the information under each heading.
- Pay attention to words and phrases that are in bold face or are italicized because these usually express important information about the heading.

Outline.

- Write down the main ideas and supporting details in outline form.
- Use your section and paragraph headings as main ideas, whenever possible. Also, the topic sentence, or first sentence of a paragraph, will also serve as a main idea.
- List at least two details under each main idea.
- You may want to list additional details under detailed headings if you are studying for an objective test that will include many facts.

Look

- Look back at each chapter and paragraph heading and information under each heading.
- Make sure that your outline contains all of this information.
- If you have omitted information, add it.
- If there are relationships between the sections that you want to note, draw arrows to show ideas that are related.

Does your teacher talk fast? Is it hard to keep up with what they are saying?

This strategy is designed to help take notes and follow your teacher when they talk quickly.

ISWAM

Integrate all previous notes and readings.

- Be prepared for the lecture. Don't go in "cold" and expect to understand the lecture.
- Read the previous lecture notes and any assigned readings for the lecture. If possible, do this right before the lecture so that you can relate the ideas you hear in the lecture to the ideas in your previous lecture notes and readings.

Sit close.

- Sit as close to the teacher as possible.
- Be sure that you can clearly see the whiteboard or screen, if there are overheads, Power Point presentations, or a computer screen used.

Write everything.

- Teachers write down the most important things to be remembered so write everything from the whiteboard or screen.
- Write down the information the teacher gives when s/he pauses because it is expected that you will write this and learn it. That pause is your signal to take the notes.

Analyze verbal, nonverbal, and body language cues.

- Teachers send messages about the most important parts of their lectures by sending verbal, nonverbal, and body language cues.
- Important verbal cues are key words ("Important") or phrases ("primary causes of the war"). Listen for these words and write down the ideas being conveyed. Also, listen for lists ("the first characteristic") and write down all items that are listed.
- Important nonverbal cues are conveyed by emphasis that the teacher places on words and phrases by talking louder, by drawing out words,

or by pausing. Whenever a teacher pauses, it is usually to allow students to write down ideas so be sure to write these down.

- Important body language cues are conveyed by the teacher's face, body movements, and posture. The teacher may lean forward or use hand motions to signal important information. Look at any change in emotion conveyed by the teacher's facial expression (e.g., when the teacher says, "This was a tragic event," she may change her facial expression to show sadness).

Monitor your attention.

- If you stop writing for a period of time, ask yourself why you haven't taken notes.
- If your attention has lagged, change your position or look more closely at the teacher.
- If you don't understand what the teacher is saying, try to write as much as possible down. After the lecture, read what you have written and compare it to other student's notes or to the teacher's notes to add or clarify points you had difficulty with.

It can be easy to get distracted when taking notes in class.

This strategy is designed to help prevent you from getting distracted.

TASSEL

Try not to doodle while taking notes.

- Doodling breaks your concentration and takes your focus away from your note taking.
- Each time you feel yourself wanting to doodle, take that urge and write down what the teacher is saying.

Arrive at each class prepared.

- Read all assigned readings and review all previous lectures so that you will understand what is covered in the lecture.
- If you are not prepared, you will be more likely to daydream and become distracted.

Sit near the front of the classroom.

- Sit near the front so that you can clearly see the teacher, the whiteboard, and any overheads, Power Point or computer presentations.

Sit away from friends.

- If you sit near friends, you will be tempted to talk or pass notes to them.
- If you have assigned seats and you have to sit near friends, resist talking to them or passing notes during class.

End daydreaming.

- If you become aware that you are daydreaming, immediately change your position. Sit forward and look at the teacher's eyes.
- Turn your attention to the teacher and write down whatever s/he is saying even though later you find out that it was not important.

Look at the teacher.

- Make eye contact with the teacher as much as possible. This will give the feeling that you are having a conversation with the teacher.
- Whenever you are not taking notes or looking at the whiteboard, overheads, Power Point presentations, or computer screen, keep your eyes on the teacher.

I hope you find this resource helpful for years to come. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. These simple strategies have years of evidence showing that they work well. The key is to find the ones that work for each individual student.

**Thank you,
Todd Blechner
Founder, NLU Learning Center**