

***STUDY***

***LEARNING TO  
LEARN***

***A PARENTS' GUIDE***

***The  
Institute  
Of  
Guidance  
Counsellors***



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Study—Learning To Learn  
A Parents' Guide

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## 1. Introduction

Academic success in secondary school requires several elements to be in place. Regular attendance, good punctuality, adherence to school rules, and consistent attention to homework, are the basics needed for a smooth progression in secondary school. However, experience shows, year in year out, that it is a mistake to assume that once all of the above are in place, that success is guaranteed. Something extra is needed, i.e. study.

Study is often viewed as work carried out in the run up to exams. A week or a few days before exams, students become conscious of the need to revisit topics covered weeks or months previously in order to obtain a reasonable grade in the imminent exam. However, for most students such an approach is flawed.

If we define academic success as the student trying his/her best, the focus shifts from the results obtained to the efforts made in obtaining that result. It could be argued that studying in the run up to exams does not constitute a student's best effort. Students who perform to the best of their ability –regardless of grade achieved – are those students who consistently study throughout the school year and not just in the run up to a class or end of term exam.

If a teacher is teaching topic 7 in class, that teacher will be focusing on the class work and homework associated with that topic. However, as real learning is incremental, topics 1 to 6 cannot be ignored or let go by the wayside. Therefore, in order for a student to maintain *his or her best effort*, a routine should be in place that involves studying topics 1 to 6 when the teacher is focusing on topic 7.

It is natural for students to expect parents and teachers to check that they are keeping up with current topics by checking day-to-day homework. As a result there is no necessity on the part of the student to be concerned with the past topics. If these past topics are not studied nothing goes wrong today or tomorrow and there is no apparent immediate damage to progress. However, this focus on short-term goals neglects the longitudinal study that should be done. Without addressing this, only serves to store up trouble. Therefore, for a student to be able to say they have done their best – regardless of grades obtained – that student needs to have a weekly routine of study throughout the academic year.

Moreover, whatever year your son or daughter is currently in, it is useful to project ahead to 6<sup>th</sup> year to see what habits a successful 6<sup>th</sup> year student exercises. A successful 6<sup>th</sup> year student has a weekly routine *throughout the academic year* that consists of the following: keeping up to date with current homeworks, and studying 6<sup>th</sup> year material that had been previously been taught in the early part of 6<sup>th</sup> year and, studying old 5<sup>th</sup> year material. These habits do not suddenly switch themselves on when a study starts 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year. They evolve over time i.e. a number of years, and have their origins in study habits developed earlier on the secondary school cycle. Therefore, the earlier in the Junior Cycle years that habits are formed, the greater the chance these habits will be implemented in the Senior Cycle.

## 2. Study: Learning To Learn

When students are asked how they study Maths, the general response is that they do different examples of problems over and over again. When asked why they do not just read the maths book, the response is that that does not work; the problems need to be written for the methods to be absorbed. What is actually happening is that the student is **processing** the information by carrying out a physical activity with a pen in the hand. Students agree that this is necessary for Maths. The argument here is that it is necessary for all subjects, i.e. reading only does not work - there should be some form of processing of the information for all subjects. Reading alone or re-writing or transcribing the text from a book into notes does not ensure retention. Indeed, using a highlighter or underlining key sections of text –while helping to highlight important points – does not help retention.

Three main ways students can learn.

1. **Visual** (seeing) learners like to learn through written language such as reading and writing. They remember what they have written down. They use bullet points, charts, graphs, mind maps, pictures, write stories, or use flash cards.
2. **Auditory** (hearing) learners make speeches or presentations, use recordings, read out loud, create musical jingles to aid memory or tell stories.
3. **Kinesthetic** (doing) learners learn by doing, touching or making. They often move about while studying.

Nobody falls neatly into any of these categories. While one or two styles may be dominant, we tend to move between the various methods. Any method employed will vary from person to person and will also fluctuate depending on the type of material being studied within each subject and from subject to subject. However, it can be argued that all of the learning styles above are just different forms of **processing**. There are as many ways to process information as there are individuals. Below are some examples of different methods of processing, but the challenge is for each student to find the best methods that work for him/her and vary these methods as the need arises.

## 3. Note Taking

One way of achieving quality and productive study is to make shorthand, concise, hand written notes *in parallel* with what is being read. (This should not be transcribing). These notes can be words or phrases preferably not long and full sentences. Each new point should be written on a new line. This should result in one page of text being condensed down to about 10 to 15 lines. It is also sometimes useful to skip every second line to create space in which to add comments/notes at a later date. In addition, once these condensed sentences have been written, the student can then say these sentences out loud and then automatically hear them. All of this has the effect of processing the information through the “cogs” in the brain, which does not happen if the student reads *only*.

This system of reading followed by a physical activity is effective for text based subjects like History, Geography, English, and Business. For subjects with a lot of text material e.g. English and History, it is very tempting just to read – this should be avoided. Other subjects like Maths, and some of the problem solving exercises in Science, should be studied by doing examples over and over again. Also, with the Maths type subjects making templates and/or spread-sheets for definitions or formulae facilitates the practice of writing out (repeatedly), this is what is needed to solve problems. The technique of making short hand notes can also apply to languages (Irish, French, Spanish and German). Here is an example.

Topic from History Book  
“Slaves”

The Romans, like most ancient civilisations, used slavery. Slaves were brought to Rome from Africa and other parts of the Roman Empire and bought and sold in the marketplace. They were mostly used to do heavy manual labour; however, many slaves had been educated and these were used as teachers, clerks and scribes. A slave usually accompanied wealthy women and children as bodyguards when they went out. When Rome was at its height, there were some 300,000 slaves in the city. It was very rare for a slave to escape for any lengthy period – any Roman citizens who helped an escaped slave were severely punished. Some slaves eventually got their freedom (manumission) by buying it or in reward for loyal service.

1. Read it (read a sentence or two – not the whole piece)
2. Think about it (the sentence/s just read)
3. Rephrase it (after thinking about those sentences)
4. Re-write it (in a condensed bullet/form)  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Say Out Loud (what is written in #4)
6. Hear it (automatically happens after saying out loud)

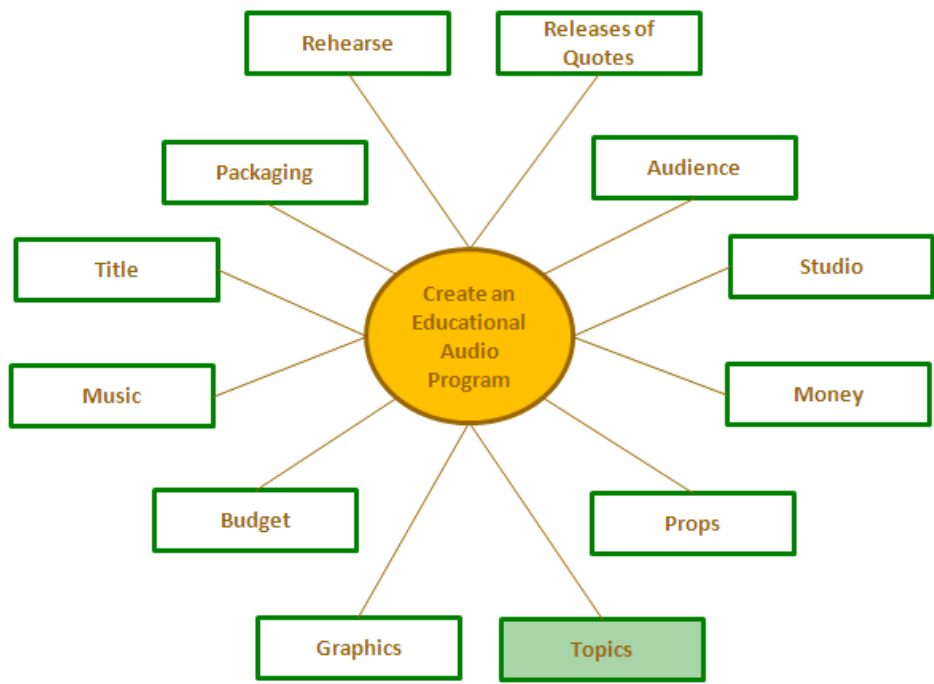
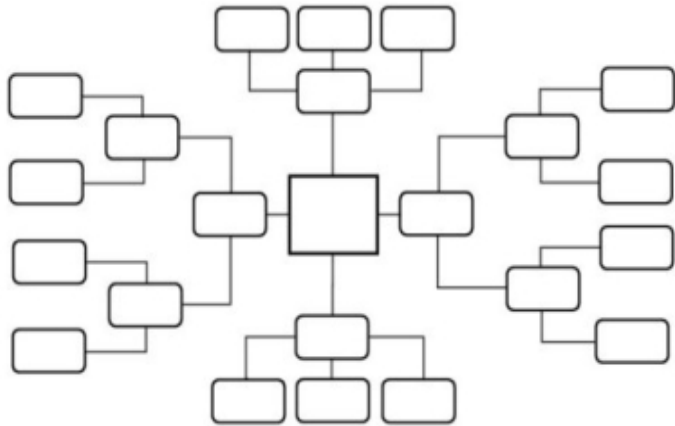
Slaves

- Like most civilisations, Romans used slaves.
- Brought Africa/other parts of empire
- Bought/sold market place
- Manual labour/educated – teachers etc.
- Woman/kids è bodyguards
- 300,000
- Escape rare/punishment
- Freedom = manumission/bought or reward

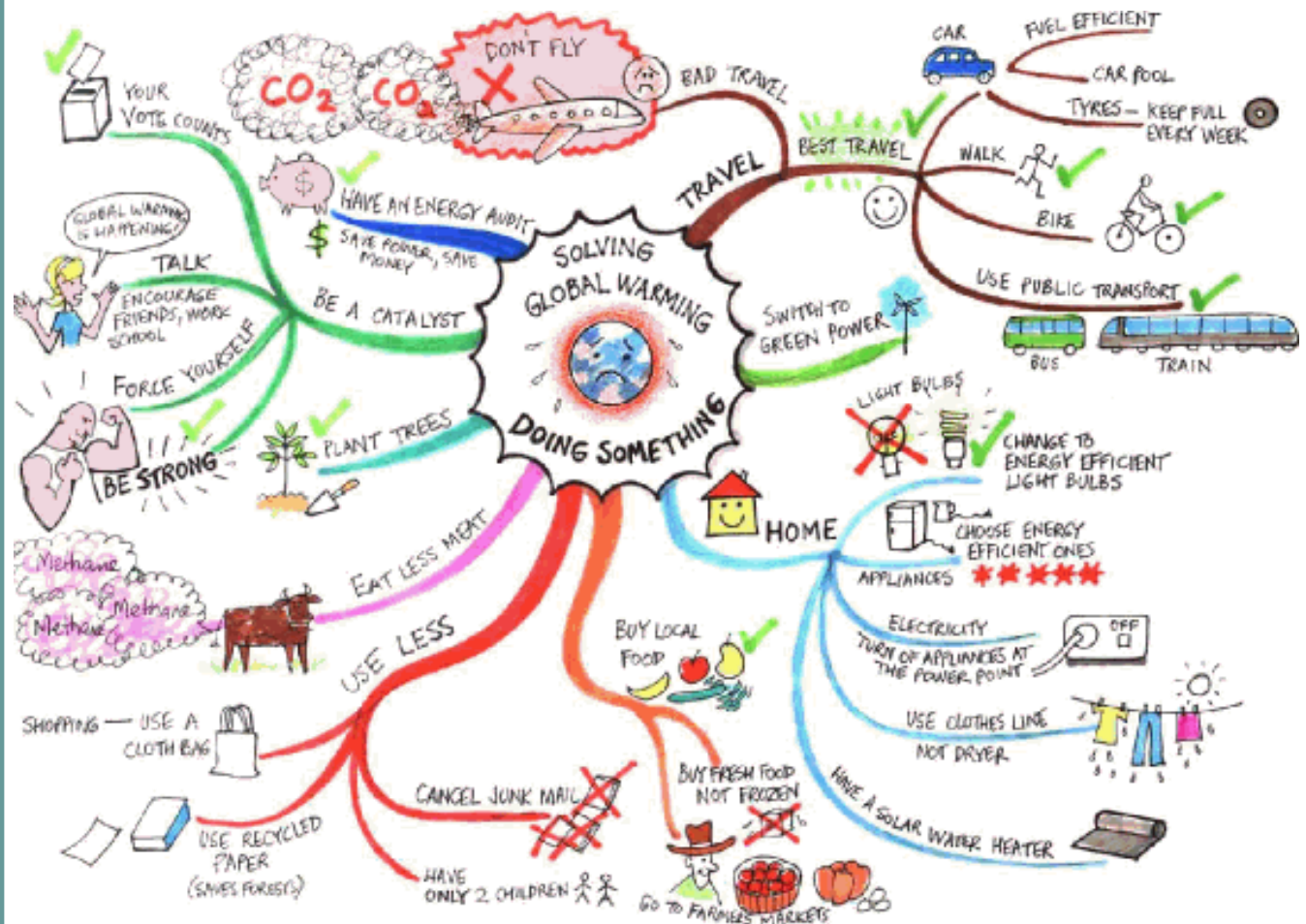
There are many variations on note taking.

- **Mnemonics** are various word games which act as memory aids which allows for personalisation and creativity. For example, to remember the colours of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) the following sentence can be constructed “**R**ichard **O**F York **G**ave **B**attle **I**n **V**ain.
- Using **synonyms** can also be useful. For example to help the understanding and meaning of the word ‘compassion’, the word ‘pity’ can be tagged along side it. The use of a Thesaurus can help with this.
- Thinking up an **analogy** to a particular point to be remembered can result in a high degree of processing the material.
- Using **antonym** can also help stimulate the retention of words. An antonym is a word that means the opposite to another word. Using the word ‘eager’ may help the understanding of the meaning of the word ‘reluctant’.

Other methods involve the use of **mind maps** or **flash cards**. The following pages illustrate some examples.



Flash Cards



## 4. Processing Information

Research shows that we remember 20% of what we read, 30% of what we hear, 40% of what we see, 50% of what we say and 60% of what we do. However, we remember 90% of what we read, hear, say and do at the same time. Indeed, some argue we remember 95% of what we teach. In other words, use as many senses as possible when learning i.e. read, think, write, say and hear. Whatever method of note taking is employed, one method used to help with retention is to recite out loud the notes taken. This can take various forms.

- Some students practice as if they are making a **speech to a pretend audience**.
- Some students **tell the story to another parent**.
- Some students put themselves in the shoes of an examiner and try to think of questions they would ask students if they were setting the exam. They can then give these questions to a parent. This allows them to be **examined by another person**.
- Some students **record themselves** and listen back to these recordings.
- One variation on recording can be particularly useful with vocabulary for languages. For example, if the student has to know a few phrases or words, he/she should press record on a disc, say the first phrase/word then leave a five second gap. Say the second word/phrase and leave a gap. Say the third word/phrase and leave another gap, and so on. When the disc is replayed it is then possible to hear the phrase and then repeat it during the gap in the recording.
- It can be argued that we remember 95% of what we teach. Therefore, **teaching what has been learned to another person** can be a very effective method of retention.
- One other way of using more of the senses is to find, **listen and watch videos on the internet**. However, this is only useful if the material is relevant to what is being learned and is not the sole method of studying and is used to prompt additional processing.

(Students are very often given learning homework to do. Most will spend a few minutes just re-reading what they are told to cover. To them this constitutes the work being done. No so. At least some of the methods above should also be used when approaching learning homework).

In summary, there are as many learning styles as there are students. What is outlined here are a few examples of different methods of **processing** information. Employing some of these methods will help your son/daughter start the process of studying. No method will make the task of studying easy. However, what each student should be searching for is the optimum method that works for them. Each student also needs to acquire the skill of altering any methods as the task demands. **It's all about learning how to learn**. Some students may find the concept of learning to learn somewhat abstract. Therefore, when discussing the topic of study methods with your teenager, it might be preferable to talk about "**finding their best method of processing**".



## **5. Time Spent Studying**

As each secondary school year has its unique characteristics and each teenager is at a different stage of their development in each of these years, the amount of time spent studying is very much individual and can depend on the cognitive and maturity levels of each individual. If your son or daughter is in 1<sup>st</sup> year in secondary school, not only might you read the suggestion regarding 1<sup>st</sup> year, but it might also be useful to read the suggestion made regarding subsequent years as this will give you an idea of what lies ahead. If your son or daughter is in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, you might find useful tips in the 1<sup>st</sup> year suggestion. Indeed for parents of student in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year it might also be useful to read what lies ahead in the exam years of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year respectfully.

### **5.1 First Year**

The amount of time spent by each student studying will vary considerably. The length of time spent by each student should be determined by when the quality starts to decline e.g. daydreaming etc. For some students this may be as short as 3 x 15 minute sessions (with short breaks in between). Some students may do 2 x 20 minutes. Other students may do 2 x 20 minutes plus 1 x 15 minutes. Others 3 x 20 minutes, and others 4 x 20 minutes. The combinations are as numerous as there are students. Remember, the moment the quality starts to decline the student should stop and have a short break and/or move onto a different subject. If a student has had a particularly long day perhaps they could still do e.g. 3 x 15 mins. If a student has not done much study to date then they should start off with e.g. 2 x 20 mins. and then progress from there. Shorter time slots e.g. 10/15 minutes are very useful for languages especially when C.D.s are used. Language teachers recommend that 10 minutes a night spent on vocabulary is better than 2 hours once a week. When starting this process in first year, it is recommended that each student has at least a number of study sessions in a week, from Monday to Thursday and one session at the weekend. Homework should always be done on Friday, as soon as possible after school. This leaves the weekend session for study only. If homework is left until the weekend, the weekend study session will become just a homework session. One other point worth noting is that the routine for most students may not be exactly the same each week. For example, if there is an unscheduled family event or music lesson or training session on Monday evening, there may be no time to study. The routine for the rest of the week should adapt to take account of such circumstances.

The timing of when your son or daughter is introduced to the concept of study in 1<sup>st</sup> year can vary greatly. Having moved from the comfortable and familiar environment that was primary school, first year students need to be given the time to adjust to their new lives in secondary level. They need to be given time to adjust to their new routines, environment and new friends. It is recommended that only after this transition has been made that the concept of study should be introduced. This will be a relatively short time for some, and will take longer for other, but the vast majority should have settled into secondary school by January of the academic year. This might be considered to be the latest date/most suitable time to introduce a study routine.

## 5.2 Second Year

If your teenager has established a study pattern in 1<sup>st</sup> year, it might be useful at the start of 2<sup>nd</sup> year to repeat the pattern created in 1<sup>st</sup> year. Once this becomes established, and if you feel your teenager is able for more, then it might be time to increase the length of each session, for example from 15 minutes to 25 minutes or from 20 minutes to 30 minutes. In addition, if it is feasible increase the number of sessions per evening from two to three, or from three to four. Moreover, if your son or daughter is capable, can they do a study session each night from Monday to Thursday?

There should also be a session at the weekend, slotted into Saturday morning or afternoon or evening and/or Sunday morning or afternoon or evening (preferably not Sunday evening). This session at the weekend should be a little more ambitious than the week night sessions. For example, more subjects, longer time slots, or more/extra time slots of the same length. It is also worth remembering that each student will know on Friday what they are likely to be doing over the weekend, as a result a slot for studying should be planned. Homework should always be done on Friday, as soon as possible after school. This leaves the weekend session for study only. If homework is left until the weekend, the study session will become just a homework session. Also, if your son or daughter had established a study habit in 1<sup>st</sup> year, can they do two sessions over the weekend, have they done enough from Monday to Thursday? It is also worth remembering that if there is an unscheduled family event or music lesson or training session on Monday evening, there may be no time to study. The routine for the rest of the week should adapt to take account of such circumstances.

However, if a study habit was not established throughout 1<sup>st</sup> year, it needs to be remembered that “second year [is] a critical year in shaping the future trajectory of students, with some students becoming more disengaged, and others studying harder and becoming more engaged as learners”<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, “second year emerges as a key phase in shaping students engagement with learning”<sup>2</sup>. It is important therefore to try and engage your son or daughter in the learning process that is *study*. Given this, if study habits have not been established in 1<sup>st</sup> year, it might be preferable to start of 2<sup>nd</sup> year with the guideline outlined for 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

## 5.3 Fifth Year

Sixth year, with its class work, homework, study, grinds, family, friends, sport, courses choices, C.A.O., etc. can be a time of great pressure and stress. Your teenager will have to cope with a great deal. Unless it is managed well, it is quite possible that something may have to give. Will it be time spent with friends, studying, or hobbies that suffer? Will it be that dream of a particular course being lost or, indeed, might repeated be a possibility? Therefore, fifth year is a valuable opportunity to lay the foundation for all of this to be taken in its stride so that the necessary study can be carried out. This will allow – within reason – for the student in 6<sup>th</sup> year to socialise occasionally, still play sport and achieve the results they want and the course they want. Sixth year can be the most enjoyable year in secondary school if students take all the opportunities 5<sup>th</sup> year has to offer. The key is study. Study that should be done over and above time spent doing homework. Indeed, each student needs to be reminded that the material covered by teachers in the first week in 5<sup>th</sup> year is equally likely to be examined as any of the material taught in 6<sup>th</sup> year. It is therefore recommended that you have a conversation with your teenager regarding the following.

<sup>1</sup> Emer Smyth et al. *Pathways Through The Junior Cycle: The Experience of Second Year Students*. (Dublin: E.S.R.I. 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Emer Smyth et al. *Leaving Certificate to Leaving School – A Longitudinal Study of 6<sup>th</sup> Year Students*. (Dublin: E.S.R.I. 2011).

What is your son or daughter capable of doing in terms of study on Monday, Tuesday Wednesday, and Thursday evenings? Can he/she do their homework on Friday after school? What is he/she capable of doing over the weekend? It is impossible to be prescriptive for each individual student. However, the session each weekday night and at the weekend should be suited to the capabilities of each student. Once again if there is an unscheduled family event or music lesson or training session on Monday evening, there may be no time to study. The routine for the rest of the week should adapt to take account of such circumstances.

## **5.4 Third & Sixth Year**

These academic years - with their state exams - can be the most stressful that teenagers have experienced to date, at least in terms of academics. Throughout the year students will encounter, highs and lows, stress, fear and anxiety. They will also feel under extreme pressure not least from themselves.

To try and help your teenager survive the academic year when State exams are involved, here are a few thoughts based on past experience of observing previous groups that have taken this journey. However, it should be noted that there is no prescription or formula and that can guarantee success.

### **5.4.1 Easter Holidays until the Leaving/Junior Certificate Itself**

When students are asked what they feel about the year ahead, the feelings expressed are those of fear, trepidation and anxiety. At the beginning of the year, students are thinking about their Christmas exam, the mocks, the orals and the Junior or Leaving Certificate itself. They are trying to cope with all of these aspects of the year all at once. To do so can be viewed as a mistake. Each student should break up the year into manageable blocks. For example, Block 1: September to December exams. Block 2: During the Christmas holidays. Block 3: January to the Mocks. Block 4: Mock to Easter. Block 5: during the Easter holidays. Block 6: Easter to the start of the State exams.

Consider Block 5: Easter to the State Exams. This will be the most intense time in terms of study. As these are the weeks in the lead up to the Leaving/Junior Certificate itself the amount of study will, and should, reach its maximum. Each student will possibly be studying all day every day, seven days a week. In other words, your teenager may end up studying every possible moment. The period may last from the Easter Holidays until the beginning of the exams in June. One way of defining this period of the year is that students will be doing all they possibly can i.e. the equivalent of 5<sup>th</sup> gear. This may also happen a couple of weeks before the mock exams.

Some students feel they should be in 5<sup>th</sup> gear from September until May. Can any student study all day every day for seven days a week? Can any student continue this pace from September until next May? To attempt to do so may result in your teenager obtaining the required grades – in the mocks – but not in the Junior/ Leaving Certificate itself? In other words, these students peak at the mocks and from that point onward either burn out or become complacent and obtain less points in June. The intensity of each student's study in May – and perhaps just before the mocks – can be a useful gauge to determine the level of study that should be put in at the various times throughout the year.

### 5.4.2 Block 1: September until the Christmas Exams

Most schools schedule their Christmas exams sometime in December. Given this, the intensity of study after the midterm – in the run up to these Christmas exams- should be greater than the intensity before the October mid-term. If 1<sup>st</sup> gear is just attending school, and 2<sup>nd</sup> gear attending school and doing homework only, this period should be characterised by attending school, doing homework and doing extra study, i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> gear. That is to say, a number of hours should be spent doing academic work each night Monday to Thursday. The homework should still be done late Friday afternoon or early Friday evening. Sometimes it may be necessary for students to take at least one of the weekend days off be it Saturday or Sunday. A lot of students will need this as the quality of work done on the other days is better as a result of having a day off. Some students may opt to spread the weekend workload over the two days, or those who have the stamina, may not take the day off or some students may opt to take a day off every second weekend or just as needed. On the weekend day that is allocated to study the amount of time allocated to academic work should be, approximately, twice that time spent during the weekday nights. This time should normally be study because the homework has been done on Friday afternoon/early evening. This should continue until the October midterm break. You will notice that there are still some time gaps in the students' weeks. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, to work during these gaps may be at a too intense level that cannot be sustained up to the Christmas exams. Secondly, student's need a break to recharge the batteries. Thirdly and most importantly, these gaps can then be used to increase the quantity of academic work covered. The plan for any weekend should also be influenced by study done or not done during that week. One other point worth noting is that the routine for most students may not be exactly the same each week. For example, if there is an unscheduled family event or music lesson or training session on Monday evening, there may be no time to study. The routine for the rest of the week should adapt to take account of such circumstances. After the October midterm break, these gaps should now be filled. The day off at the weekend should now be used to do an equal quantity that is done on the other weekend day. The amount on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday should, if possible, (it depends on each individual student) be increased slightly. This now qualifies as 4<sup>th</sup> gear. When the exams are over students should revert back to 3<sup>rd</sup> gear, which might include a day off at the weekend.

The above is a general outline of one possible plan your teenager might implement from September until the Christmas. In addition, the amount of time spent studying *during* the October midterm itself should be determined by:

- The amount of work done up to that time.
- The grades/points your teenager wishes to obtain.
- The commitments they may have during the rest of the year in other areas of their life e.g. sports etc.
- The cognitive and maturity levels of the individual.

### 5.4.3 Block 2: After the Christmas exams until school resumes in January

This period can be the most undervalued period throughout the whole year. If your teenager decides to do nothing after the exams the chances are that this will continue during the Christmas Holidays. No student can afford to take these weeks off. All students should be in 3<sup>rd</sup> gear throughout this period. There should be pre-planned days off during the Christmas Holidays. These days should be determined by family commitments and the damage done to work prospects the day after a night out. For example, it may sound over the top to suggest that a student should study on New Year's Eve. However, if a student was to study in the morning and/or the afternoon this still leaves time to do what they want to do that evening and take all of New Year's Day off.

#### 5.4.4 January until the Mocks

Your teenager should be in 4<sup>th</sup> gear just after returning to school in January. This should then be increased to 5<sup>th</sup> gear a few weeks just before the Mocks. It should be noted that experience shows that next June, if a student is asked to look back at the process of preparing and sitting for the Mocks, it will be preparation i.e. the process of studying *for* the Mocks rather than the act of *taking the exams* that will prove to be of lasting benefit. The argument also holds for the Christmas exams.

#### 5.4.5 After the mocks until the Easter Holidays

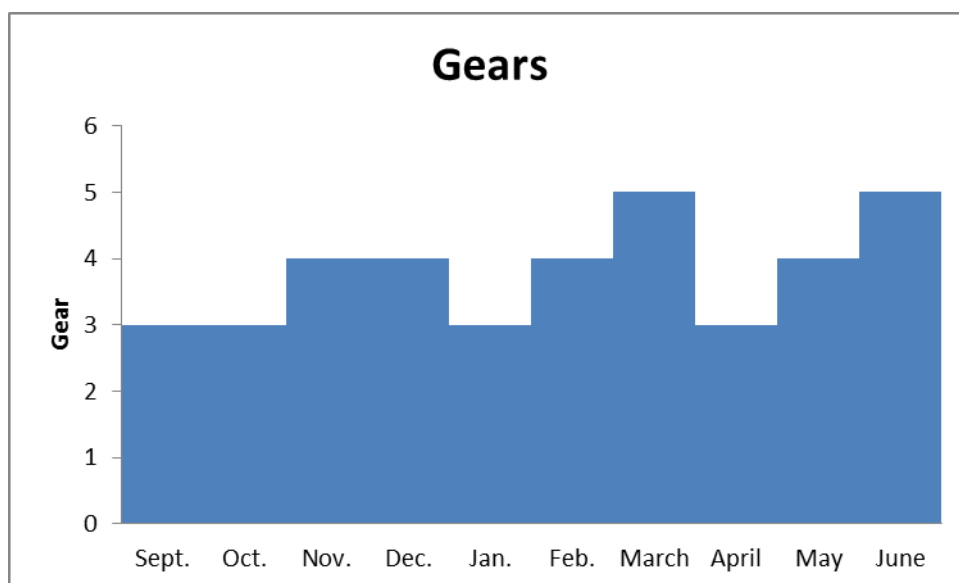
Your teenager should be in 3<sup>rd</sup> gear. This may seem too low, but they are about to enter into the most intense period of the year. It will be up to each student to decide if they should be in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> gear during the Easter Holidays. Given that all students should be in 5<sup>th</sup> gear after the Easter Holidays it needs to be considered if 5<sup>th</sup> gear is too early in Easter for some students. To go into 5<sup>th</sup> gear at this point might result in your teenager not last the pace until June. Care should also be taken not to allow preparation for the orals not to interfere with others subjects.

#### 5.4.6 Easter until the start of the exams

All students should now be in 5<sup>th</sup> gear. This however will be punctuated by days off around the last day of class and Graduation. This is a very long stretch so care needs to be taken when deciding the intensity of study over the Easter Holidays.

It is worth repeating that the above is not a mathematical formula that implies a rigid adherence by your teenager. This is impossible and unfair on students. It is for this reason that this pattern of the intensity of studying should change at various times throughout the year going up and down through 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> gear should only be treated as a rough guide. Your teenager is not a robot.

The concept of gears varies from student to student. One good guide is that a student should be mentally tired and challenged by the volume and intensity of the academic work studied. If a student claims that what he/she is studying is having no effect on his/her cognitive ability the enough study is not being undertaken. If it is not hurting it is not working!



### 5.4.7 Other points to note for 6<sup>th</sup> year

One interesting fact from the C.A.O. office is as follows. 50% of students who miss out on their 1<sup>st</sup> preference do so by only 25 points or less. Turning a D3 into a D2 is five extra points. Turning a C3 into a C1 is 10 extra points. Increasing five subjects up one grade is 25 points more.

Students will always add up the points from the Christmas and Mocks exams. It is suggested that if a student is short points at Christmas from what they want, split the difference. If they get 200 points and needs 400 they should aim to get 300 in the Mocks. This will or will not indicate if they are on the right track.

Socialising in 6<sup>th</sup> year is always an issue. Instead of focusing on whether your teenagers should be allowed out it might be an idea to focus on what happens the morning after he/she goes out. If the next day's study suffers from the night before either because of drink that has been taken or because of getting to bed too late, or both, then what may need to be addressed is the time he/she goes to bed or the activities (when out socialising) that have a negative impact the next morning.

If your son or daughter aspires to achieve sufficient result to qualify for further training or education, a stern reminder might need to be issued stating the fact that no student is entitled to a place on a further or higher education course – this entitlement has to be earned. The entitlement is earned by making sacrifices. With enough forward planning sports and hobbies need not be the sacrifice that needs to be made. How much time is spent on Facebook? How much time is spent playing a computer game? How much time is spent watching 2½ Men, Big Bang Theory, Eastenders or Hollyoaks? Are these things worth sacrificing? When the exams results are published will spending less time on these activities be regretted? Probably not!

## 6. Fitting Study Into A Weekly Routine

At the end of this document a generic study timetable is provided. Normally, such a timetable relies on the student filling in what he/she *intends to do* and making a commitment to this. If your son or daughter needs such a pre-planned timetable and finds it useful, he/she should write in what subjects they indeed to study each night and how long they indeed to spend on each subject. However, there is an alternative way of using this timetable. To avoid the mind set of failing, or not sticking to a routine, or to avoid the guilt of not doing what was intended, students will often do nothing at all. This is easier than facing up to the task at hand. With this in mind the timetable should *not be filled* in with what the student *intends to do*, but rather with what he *has done* that day/week. *After* each study session, the number of minutes spent at each subject should be filled in. Over time, this can mount up considerably. This results in a very positive and cumulative effect that will hopefully act as a motivating factor to do more work. This will hopefully happen as the student fills in the boxes. There are daily, weekly and subject totals. Your teenager may use all or just some of these. Also, adding up the totals for each subject at the end of each week/month can achieve a sense of accomplishment, as well as pointing out any subject that he/she may be neglecting or avoided. It is worth repeating that it might be more positive for your teenager to write in what he/she *has already done*, however small, rather than what he/she *intend to do*. Remember, the time spent doing homework should not be filled in but rather the time spent studying. At the start of each month you should give your teenager a new monthly timetable. It is also worth pointing out that it is not necessary to have every box or indeed every day filled in. Everyone needs a day off.

MON.	TUE.	WED.	THUR.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)	(Sub.)
mins.	mins.	mins.	Mins.	mins.	mins.	mins.
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>

## 7. Revision

If homework is work that needs to be done immediately based on the current topic being taught, study is working on previous topics that have been taught in the past. Having studied for 3/4 weeks students might find it useful to *revise* the work studied. Therefore, at some point, say every 3<sup>rd</sup> /4<sup>th</sup> week, it might be useful if no new study was carried out. Instead, that week or next few days should be spent revising the study notes that have been compiled over the last number of weeks. This revision may help cement the information long-term, and help it to be retrieved when needed. These revision sessions do not require new notes to be written. The original study notes should be retrieved and re-read so that steps 5 & 6 (see page 5) can be activated again. However, this does not apply to a subject like Maths, where problems should be re-done even if they have been done before. Some students may opt to do their revision (instead of study) every second week or every second weekend. Here is some interesting research.

*“The secret to remembering material long-term is not to cram and over-learn but rather to periodically review what you’ve studied. That’s according to Doug Rohrer and Harold Pashler who have identified an intriguing relationship between how long to leave it before returning to previously studied material, and the ultimate duration for which you want to remember it. The technical definition for ‘over-learning’ is any time you spend continuing to study material which you have already mastered. So, for example, once you’ve correctly recalled a list of French vocab without any errors, any additional time you immediately spend learning that vocab is over-learning. The evidence shows that time spent over-learning is only beneficial over the short-term. For example, one study found over-learning was advantageous when tested a week later, but not when tested four weeks later. According to Rohrer and Pashler, if your aim is long-term retention, time spent over-learning would be better spent reviewing material at a later date. Just how much later depends on how long you want to remember the material . Their research suggests the optimal time to review material is after a period which is 10 to 30 per cent of the time for which you want to remember it. Another study that looked at retention over 6 months, found the optimal time for reviewing material was one month.”<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Doug Rohrer et al. *The Effect of Overlearning on Long-Term Memory*. Applied Cognitive Psychology, University of Florida 2005, p 361-374.

## 8. Filing

Each student should have a good filing system that allows information to be retrieved almost instantaneously. One suggestion is that each student should have a separate copy/folder for each subject. This copy should be for study notes only (not homework). There is tremendous benefit to be gained, coming up to class exams and end of term exams. This will ensure that the study notes written can now be found during these important later date/s. When this happens the information should come flooding back and will be easily remembered especially if the technique of speech making is used.

## 9. What to Study

One common problem that students verbalise is that they do not know *what* to study. Every day when doing homework students take out their homework diary and work through the to-do list that they have compiled throughout that day. This idea can be used for study. Each student should write out a to-do list. This study list should contain a number of past (not current) topics that need to be covered that week or over the coming weeks. The differences between subjects dictate how such a list should be compiled. For example, History and Geography may list topics and sub-topics that need to be covered, but Maths may simply be a list of problems that need to be done. If a student is trying to start a study routine it is very unlikely that they will develop the good habits necessary by beginning with the subjects they dislikes the most. Therefore, initially, it might be more productive to start off with two/three of the subjects they feel more comfortable with, and then once the habit has been established, expand this to include the subjects they find more difficult.

<b>To Do List</b>		
<b>Subject: History</b>		
	Bronze Age	
1.	Smelting	
2.	Farming	
3.	Homes	
4.	Daily Life	
5.		

<b>To Do List</b>		
<b>Subject: Maths</b>		
	Algebra	Statistics
1.	P17 Q. 3,4,5	2010 Q. 1
2.	P19 Q, 5,6,7	2012 Q. 4
3.		
4.		
5.		



## 10. Grinds

One other point that may become an issue for some students in some years is grinds. This refers specifically to grind schools. Before you pay for (full class) grinds it is worth considering the following point. For a student to grasp a particular topic/subject two steps are necessary. Step 1, the information needs to be delivered by a teacher. Step 2, the student must now apply him/herself to studying/working on the information themselves. Both steps are necessary. No matter how confident a student feels after leaving a (class) grind, or how well the information was delivered by the teacher, or how many notes the student may have been, step one alone is not sufficient. A student that takes a grind replaces step 1 only. It does not substitute for step 2. Too many students use grinds as an alternative to step 2 and delude themselves into thinking that after a grind their own study is not necessary. Grinds only work effectively when the student follows them up with their own study. Grinds are an addition to - not an alternative to study. Also, if the number of grinds taken over a full week (e.g. a week at Christmas and/or Easter in 6<sup>th</sup> year) is more than two, it is impossible for the student to follow this up with step 2. There is NO substitute for a student doing their own study! This also applies to on-line grinds also.

## 11. Understanding V Knowing

The points made in the above paragraph are useful in exploring the difference between a student *understanding* and *knowing* academic material. Part of a teacher's job is to help students *understand* new concepts. When this task is carried out to a satisfactory level by the teacher a student will leave the classroom confident that they *understand* what has been taught. However, this is not the same as *knowing* the material. If the student does not return to the material that was explained, and if the student is then asked to explain the material, e.g. two weeks later, more than likely they will be unable to do so. It can therefore be argued that given that the student *understood* the material at the time, they actually did not *know* the material. So in order to *understand and know* the material it is necessary for the student to return to the material as soon as possible after the material has been explained. Homework on the material will indeed help towards knowing the material, however, study – as outlined in this booklet – is needed for the material to be continued to be *understood and* to be *known* into the future.

## 12. Parent/Teenager Conversation

When your teenager is studying, it is important for them (with your help) to regularly check what is being done is of good quality. It is wasteful to be putting in the time and receive no pay off because what is being done is not productive. Bearing this in mind, here are some prompts/questions you might occasionally mention to your teenager so that, at the very least, they will mentally question themselves while they are studying.

- Are your notes short/concise?
- Have you got a pen in your hand all of the time?
- Are the notes being filed?
- Are you transcribing?
- Is your concentration slipping?
- Is there anything disturbing you?
- Can I see your notes?
- Are you making speeches?

- *"The deal with my parents is that I do two hours in total each day Monday to Friday, made up of homework and study. I do ½ before dinner and ½ after dinner."*<sup>4</sup>
- *"My Mum checks my homework and sometimes gives extra questions"*<sup>5</sup>
- *"My Dad tests me after I have done my study"*<sup>6</sup>
- *"I study with my Mum and do 20 minutes three times each night on different subjects"*<sup>7</sup>
- *"I am let watch T.V. only after all my work is done"*<sup>8</sup>
- *"I always have to do my homework immediately when I come home and always do my homework on Friday and never over the weekend"*<sup>9</sup>
- *"I am not let use the computer [games or internet] until I have done all my homework and study"*<sup>10</sup>

Those who struggle to achieve their potential stated the following:

- *"I only study when I have tests"*<sup>11</sup>
- *"I leave my homework until around 8.00 p.m. after I have relaxed and watched the T.V. and checked Facebook- I leave my weekend homework until Sunday night"*<sup>12</sup>
- *"My parents don't check my homework or push me to do any study"*<sup>13</sup>
- *"I am allowed one hour on my computer before I do my homework"*<sup>14</sup>
- *"I go to bed at 11.00 p.m. after I have watch X"*<sup>15</sup>
- *"When I go to bed, before I go to sleep I spend an hour or so on my i-pod or on the internet using my phone or texting"*<sup>16</sup>
- *"I hang around town until 5/6.00 p.m. Then I have to do home"*<sup>17</sup>

Parents are also find it helpful to throughout the academic year.

- Create a study-friendly environment away from distractions such as T.V. computers and other siblings that may cause a distraction.
- Mobile phones should be left in another room where they are not a distraction.
- Ensure there is a space i.e. desk to study and they have all the necessary equipment.
- Provide a healthy diet.
- Encourage exercise and good sleeping patterns which are also necessary to allow good study habits to develop.

<sup>4</sup> Student I.

<sup>5</sup> Student II.

<sup>6</sup> Student III.

<sup>7</sup> Student IV.

<sup>8</sup> Student V.

<sup>9</sup> Student VI.

<sup>10</sup> Student VII.

<sup>11</sup> Student VIII.

<sup>12</sup> Student IX.

<sup>13</sup> Student X.

<sup>14</sup> Student XI.

<sup>15</sup> Student XII.

<sup>16</sup> Student XIII.

At some point your teenager will “*fall off the wagon*” in terms of study. If this happens they may continue to go through the motions of going to the room and sitting at the desk. This going “*through the motions*” can actually make the situation worse. To get out of this rut there are two suggestions. Firstly, your teenager should stop studying for a few days (while continuing to do their homework). This break should allow for a fresh mind to tackle studying from the following Monday. Secondly, another option might be to study 2-3 of the subjects that they find easiest to study. Do this for one week and then get back into the habit and then tackle the rest of the subjects the following week. It should be noted that a few students have will go through the motions of going to their room and sitting at their desks. This is done to keep their parents off their backs even though they know they are not doing quality study.

When discussing school exam results the following points might be useful. To determine if a result is good or poor it should be remembered that for some students a D is a good result while for others a B might be viewed as a poor result. This is a very individual judgement that depends on the student and the subject. However, the spirit of the guidelines outlined in this document tries to shift the focus from results obtained to the amount of effort used to achieve the results. An American psychologist, Carol Dweck, of Columbia University studied<sup>18</sup> the effect of praise on students in a dozen New York schools. Students were randomly divided into two groups. One group was praised for their *intelligence* (“you are really smart”), and the other group was praised for their *effort* (“you must have worked really hard”). Each group was exposed to the same academic tests.

Some, in both groups, scored poorly in some of the tests. Those that were praised for their *effort* assumed that they hadn’t focused enough and subsequently with later tests got more involved and were more willing to try different methods to solve problems. Those that were praised for their *intelligence* and had subsequently score poorly become stressed and opted out in future tests. In addition, on further testing, those that were praised for their *effort* improved their scores by about 30%, and those that were praised for their *intelligence* scored worse by about 20%. In addition, the groups were given a choice for further tests. They were informed that some tests were harder and some tests were easier. In the group that were praised for their *efforts*, 90% consciously chose harder test and the majority of those who were praised for their *intelligence* consciously chose easier test.

The conclusion was that those that were praised for their *efforts* “came to see themselves as in control of their success” and that “the brain was a muscle” and “that the harder you work the bigger it gets and the smarter you become”. The conclusion was that “emphasising effort gave [students] a variable that they can control”. Those that were praised for their *intelligence* learned intelligence was more important and “discounted the importance of effort” and felt that “intelligence determined your success”. The above observations were the same regardless of gender or socioeconomic class.

<sup>18</sup> www.nymag.com “How Not To Talk To Your Kids” New York Magazine.

During state exam:.

- Try to keep noise and distractions in the home to a minimum. This is especially important if there are siblings in the house.
- If siblings being around are likely to cause tension, it might be worth your while to be around when needed to defuse the situation.
- Be lenient if your son/daughter is irritable and it might be preferable to let them off household jobs and other responsibilities.
- Please do not induce guilt by saying “I told you so” or “You should have done more study during the year”.
- Ask your son/daughter what they would like you to do for them. They may say, “Just leave me alone” However, in response you can shift the conversation to “What snacks would you like”, or “What would you like for dinner” or “When would you like to eat”, or “What clothes would you like sorted and ready”.
- On the day of exams ask them “Do you need money”, or “Do you need a lunch” or “What would you like to eat when you come home”, or “Do you want a lift” etc.
- When they arrive home from an exam, you should not initiate or encourage post mortems. Let them tell the story of the day but try and shift the focus to “What’s up next”.
- If they are wound up don’t tell them to relax – it won’t work. Listen and empathise. Being heard and understood by another person will automatically cause them to relax to some degree.
- If you are anxious, please do not let them see or feel this, as it will heighten their stress levels. You may need time out just as much as they do.
- Finally, remind them that no matter what happens, they will always be your child and you will always love them – no matter what.

### 13. Blocks to Study

There may be adolescents who, through previous experiences (be they in the home, at school, or in their peer group), may have developed a strategy that results in what is referred to as “self-defeating beliefs.”<sup>19</sup>

Since research has shown that “self-esteem is important to adolescent motivation towards success, achievement, and mental health,”<sup>20</sup> and since “self-esteem is recognized as a powerful motivational force,”<sup>21</sup> it is necessary to be conscious of the sources and symptoms of low self-esteem and how the adolescent “acts out” such perceptions of him/herself. Experience shows that low self-esteem and a negative self-image can sometimes result from previous experiences, whether in the home, peer group, or school. The adolescent may have experienced repeated academic “failure” in the school or he may have suffered negatively from not achieving – as viewed by his parents and/or peers – in other areas such as sport or other leisure pursuits. Deliberately or otherwise, teenagers may have had their attempts to be successful mocked or their ideas ridiculed<sup>22</sup> by those that matter to them. This may have resulted in their feelings of worth and being valued eroded. Indeed, it is often observed that adolescents who perceive that they matter very little to others are highly depressed, unhappy, and report a wide variety of other negative emotional states.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Robert Nathan and Linda Hill, *Career Counselling*, (London: Sage Publications, 2000) p 69.

<sup>20</sup> J. Dacey and M. Kenny, *Adolescent Development*, (Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1994) p 173.

<sup>21</sup> T. Gullotta, Markstrom, *The Adolescent Experience*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (California: Academic Press, 2000) p 96.

<sup>22</sup> J. Dacey and M. Kenny, *Adolescent Development*, (Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1994) p 123.

<sup>23</sup> T. Gullotta, and Carol Markstrom, *The Adolescent Experience*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Academic Press, 2000) p 97.

Whatever the source or cause of low self-esteem some adolescents may work to protect their self-worth. They develop various coping strategies in an effort to protect themselves from further negative attention and/or prevent further erosion of their view of themselves. It is necessary to endeavour to identify symptoms of such behaviours and develop strategies to help the adolescent progress beyond these destructive feelings and the coping strategies he has employed. It can be argued that adolescents in such situations are motivated to “protect their self-worth by avoiding failure.”<sup>24</sup> These “self-handicapping strategies”<sup>25</sup> may include one or more of the following. “Non-performance” is one such strategy, where the individual may avoid eye contact with a teacher; another strategy is “shame effort”, where the individual asks questions to which they already know the answer.

Some individuals may use “procrastination” and delay any effort to attempt a task so that they can later blame time management in order to direct attention away from the real issues. Another strategy is for the individual to set “unreachable goals” so that they can use the excuse that no adolescent could possibly achieve to what they had aspired. Another strategy is what is referred to as the “academic wooden leg” whereby the adolescent admits to minor failings such as panicking in an exam in order to avoid acknowledging a greater weakness. In addition adolescents may adopt “negative aspirations” as a reflection of their desire to avoid failure.<sup>26</sup> In some cases individuals may adopt what is referred to as “negative identity”<sup>27</sup> and do the opposite to what is expected in order to distract attention from the real issue. Indeed, if some adolescents with low self-esteem do experience success they may attribute such success to some “capricious factor as opposed to personal causation.”<sup>28</sup>

Another coping mechanism is where the adolescent aspires to grandiose or unrealistic goals which are doomed to failure and as a result the adolescent “will not admit their limitations; instead, they convince themselves that they have been blocked in the achievement of their goal by someone or something over which they have no control.”<sup>29</sup> From the adolescent’s perspective such coping mechanisms make sense and indeed work in that they hide the truth, avoid exposing any weakness, and prevent further failure and thereby avoid feelings of “incompetence.”

Other *scapegoating strategies*<sup>30</sup> are as follows:

- Some students comparing the results obtained by their peers who may be achieving lower scores as a way of finding comfort and/or distracting from their own performance.
- Others blame the teacher.
- While others use hatred of a subject as a reason not to get stuck in and perform.
- Some state that the exam was too hard or too long.
- Some students comfort themselves that there is plenty of time to sort this later on.
- Some say they freeze in exams. This is normally caused by (i) the student not knowing the material due to poor or no study habits, or (ii) an emotional fear of the consequences of doing poorly.

<sup>24</sup> John W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005) p 439.

<sup>25</sup> John W. Santrock, *Adolescence*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005) p 439.

<sup>26</sup> E. Hurlock, *Adolescent Development*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972) p 184.

<sup>27</sup> J. Dacey and M. Kenny, *Adolescent Development*, (Brown & Benchmark, Publishers, 1994) p 185.

<sup>28</sup> John Colman and Leo Hendrey, *The Nature of Adolescence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Routledge, 1990) p 71.

<sup>29</sup> E. Hurlock, *Adolescent Development*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972) p 197.

<sup>30</sup> John Colman and Leo Hendrey, *The Nature of Adolescence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Routledge, 1990) p 47.

- Sometimes students find comfort with other students who also do not study.
- Parents sometimes go along with these strategies. This collusion only serves to prolong finding a long-term solution. Remember, the solution is always internal, not external.
- Some students constantly resorting to the line “*I don’t know how to study*”. This is practically common for students who may have actually studied and who (i) find that method is difficult i.e. it is not simple and easy, (ii) did not get a perfect results or the result they wanted. In these cases it needs to be pointed out that there is no study method that is easy and there is no study method that can produce the perfect results. Sometimes students just need to accept that studying will always be difficult and these students need to learn to be happy with their effort and results obtained. It all about the *optimum methods* (even though these may be difficult) and the *optimum results*.
- Some students resort to only studying what they already know. It acts as a comfort blanket.
- Other students sometimes *revise* the homework that was just finished, instead of doing genuine study.
- Other students *revise* the material done in class recently instead of doing genuine study.
- Some students develop the habit of relying on an adult to help them do their work. When this becomes over reliance, it can be one factor that prevents a student taking ownership of his study routine.
- Some students say “*if only I had a new desk, I would study*”. They never do when they get that desk. This is to seek an external rather than an internal solution to not studying.
- Some students say “*the computer or T.V. distracts them*”. No it doesn’t. They switched on the computer or T.V. It doesn’t switch itself on. Again, this is to seek an external rather than an internal solution to not studying.

All families have their ups and downs. There may be periods of difficulties with relationships between husband and wife, between parent and child, or between siblings. Indeed, there may also be the trauma of redundancy, illness, or bereavement that may impact on the atmosphere in the home. Some students who experience such family difficulties can continue on and cope without these difficulties impacting on their school lives. However, other students can, and do, encounter situations whereby difficulties in the home have such an emotional impact that they hinder their emotional and academic progress within the school. In such situations we strongly advise parents that the provision of information to the Year Head is vital if the school is to help your teenager. Such a request will always be treated in the strictest of confidence and the information only used to adapt the school responses to cater for your child’s situation. Without such information schools may inadvertently treat your teenager’s possible *acting out* or *acting inwards* as purely a disciplinary matter and, without knowing, add to their difficulties. Experience shows year in year out, that when parents withhold vital information – mainly through an unfounded sense of embarrassment – they prolong their teenager’s difficulties and prevent the school from acting in their best interests.

Given all of these possible scapegoating strategies it might be useful to shift the language from *telling* students to study, and instead, switch to asking the student what is *blocking* them from doing what they know they should be doing, and for the majority of students, what they want to be able to do.

## **14. Conclusion**

The guidelines outlined in this booklet are exactly that, just guidelines. It needs to be remembered that each individual is unique and will spend different amounts of time studying and that the number of methods of studying (processing) are as numerous as there are individuals. There is no fixed definite schedule and there is no single easy way to study.

Think back to when they were toddlers and they were learning the letters of the alphabet and how to recognise words. The mastering of these skills did not happen as a result of one action, event, or a single conversation. It was a *process* that was spread over a considerable amount of time. Similarly, the concept of studying at secondary school cannot be acquired by one action, event, or single conversation. It needs to be seen as a continuous process that both parent and student need to engage with and in, and revisit, assess, and adjust constantly over *all* the years spent in secondary school.

## To Do List

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

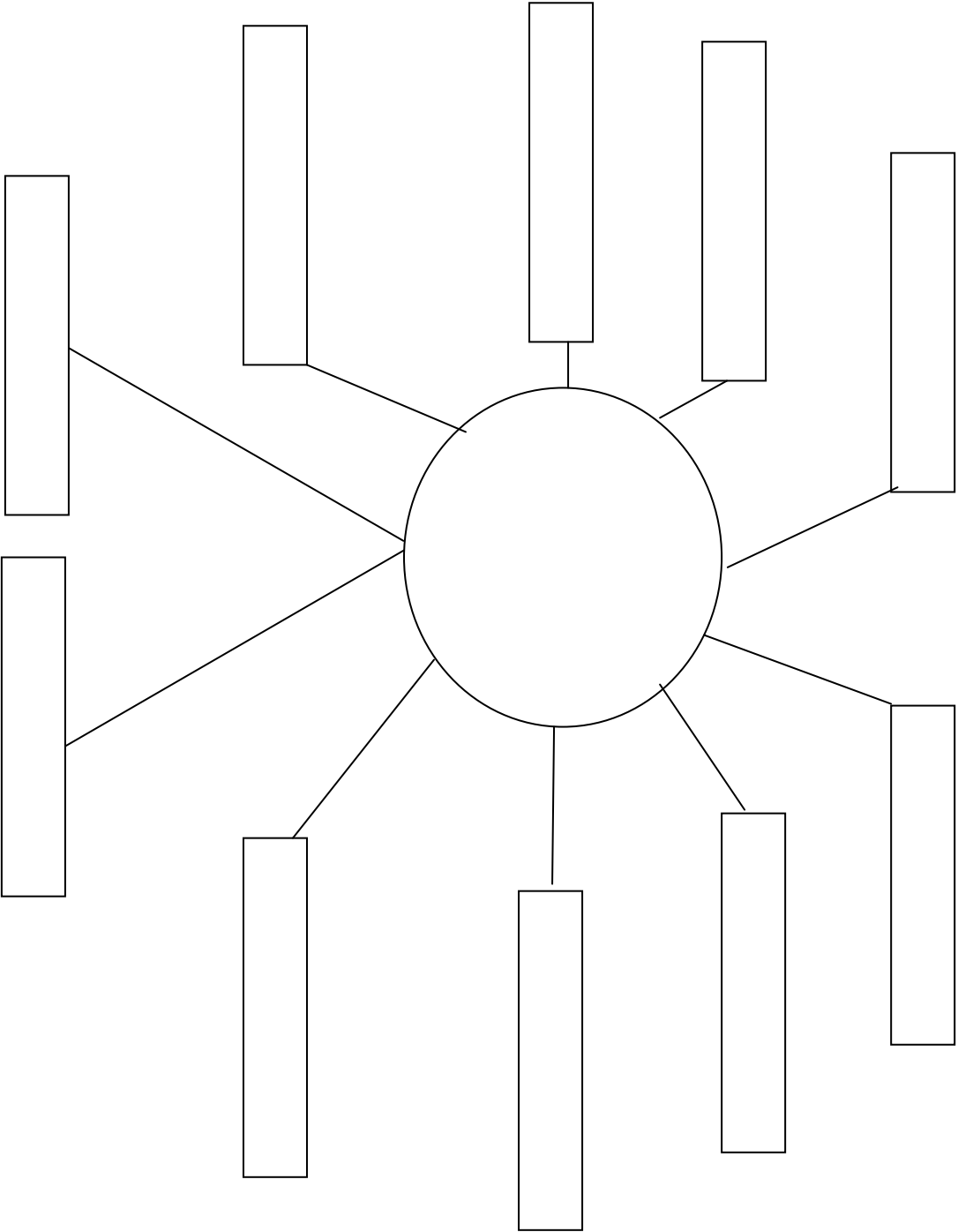
Topic 1: _____	Topic 2: _____	Topic 3: _____	Topic 4: _____	Topic 5: _____	Topic 6: _____
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					







**Mind Map**



## Acknowledgments & Bibliography

- Student I.
- Student II.
- Student III.
- Student IV.
- Student V.
- Student VI.
- Student VII.
- Student VIII.
- Student IX.
- Student X.
- Student XI.
- Student XII.
- Student XIII.
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- www.nymag.com “How Not To Talk To Your Kids” New York Magazine.

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**Optimising Choices -  
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