



# Building Academic Success Step by Step



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## Building Consistent Study Habits

Achieving good grades and accomplishing your goals in high school come through hard work, and the ability to work consistently is attainable only with structured schedules and well thought out study habits. What exactly is a ‘habit’? A *study habit* is an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until your need to study, read, or finish homework becomes almost involuntary. Developing good study habits early in the school year means that you will soon be completing schoolwork without having to consciously think about working. Thus, doing class assignments on a daily or weekly basis will seem routine, and studying will no longer feel like a chore or burden.

How can you alter your daily schedule to begin to develop consistent study habits? Note that we are talking about ‘adapting’ your current habits to form a set of improved study skills; we are not requiring you to drastically change, because everyone studies in different ways, works at different paces, and sets different goals. To begin to *build consistent habits*, follow these tips:

1. *Make a quality decision* to change your study habits
2. *Develop and follow* your newly adapted study habits on a daily or weekly basis
3. *Set boundaries* to protect your new habits

When you make the conscious decision to develop good study habits, you will change how you perform academically because your mindset will be focused on the goal of achieving academic success. Instead of thinking “I wish I could succeed in school,” you will now be focused on the goal of “succeeding.” Thus, you have gone from being a passive student to a proactive individual who is firmly set on academic success. Making this quality decision to develop consistent study habits will be the source of your motivation.



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“Consistent habits” are exactly what they sound like—these are actions that need to be completed on a scheduled basis. A typical study pattern I have identified in past students is their desire to finish their homework during the time right after school finishes and before dinnertime. However, they usually become easily distracted once they arrive home by videogames, friends, or TV, and instead begin to see homework and studying as a tiresome chore. This is because they are not practicing their study habits; once you set a goal of studying during a specific time period, stick to it from the beginning and soon it will feel like part of a natural daily routine rather than a chore.

Once you have set up consistent study habits, you must respect those habits by setting up boundaries to protect your new routine. For example, boundaries for after-school studying include not turning on the TV, turning off your phone so you are not tempted to chat, or physically putting away the videogames out of your reach. Boundaries allow you to keep the distractions out of your sight, so that you can focus on studying or completing homework.



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## Set Daily Academic Goals and Review Them Everyday

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Academic dreams may not come true, but academic goals do! Set academic goals every night before you go to bed by writing them down in a list and posting them in a place where you can see them every morning. These goals are analogous to an academic ‘to-do’ list, but it is important to make your list as specific and detailed as possible. For instance, instead of writing down “Finish the biology homework due Thursday,” try to break it down by writing step-by-step instructions on your list. As an example, you could write:

1. Read Biology Chapter 7, pages 556-568
2. Review class notes taken during class for the lecture related to this homework.
3. Read the homework assignment, do Problems 1-5
4. Take a short break.
5. Do Problems 6-10.

By breaking down your original goal to “finish the biology homework due Thursday,” you have now just created a feasible step-by-step flowchart of how to complete your assignment. Writing down a list of your academic goals each night has several advantages. First, the list will require you to think about the exact sequence of actions you will need to do in order to accomplish your goal. Second, listing them out each night will allow you to reflect on what needs to be completed in the days to come. Third, writing a detailed step-by-step list of how to accomplish a goal will help you to mentally prepare yourself for completing that goal later on. Finally, having a specific list in your hand the next day will allow you to view your goal as something readily achievable. Seeing the words “Finish biology homework by Thursday” may seem like a daunting task and a chore to finish, but seeing the list above can help you realize that each small step is absolutely feasible.



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Here is another example of how to write specific step-by-step academic goals. What would you write instead of “Study for 5 hours tomorrow after school”? An example for breaking this down in your to-do list could be:

1. Get home from school at 3pm, eat a light snack.
2. Take out Chemistry textbook: Read Chapter 4, pages 45-58 until 4pm.
3. Review notes taken in Chemistry class from the past two weeks.
4. Re-read last two Chemistry homework assignments which will be tested on this exam.
5. Try to re-do problems from these two homeworks for practice until 6pm.
6. Take a short break.
7. Read “Othello” for English class, pages 78-96 until 7pm
8. Go back and take notes on the characters in “Othello” for tomorrow’s pop quiz.
9. Finish at 8pm, eat dinner with family.



### About the Author

Yun Chu is a current 4th year MD-PhD student at Harvard Medical School. She completed her undergraduate studies at Stanford University in Chemistry and Biological Sciences, and is now pursuing research in a neurobiology. She has had a history (3 years) of mentoring students at MIT, helping them to develop effective study habits and overcoming academic hurdles. Yun Chu also had multiple years of experience in mentoring high school students.

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