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AUTUMN 2023

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Study smarter, not harder in 2023



With a new academic year upon us, let's help our children work smarter, not harder. Dalena van der Westhuizen, cognitive development specialist, master brain coach and co-founder and MD of BrainAbility, shares some tried and tested strategies

Five top research-based study tips to make learning easier

1. Self-explanation

Come up with explanations, in your own words, of to-be-learnt concepts or ideas.

Rather than relying solely on precise provided definitions (eg from your textbooks or lessons),

create your own, while still making sure that they're accurate.

2. Use a timer

This is called the Pomodoro technique. Set a timer for 20-25 minutes and start studying. When the buzzer rings, take a five-minute break.

After two to three repetitions, take a 30-minute break. Repeat!

3. Interleaving

When studying, instead of focusing exclusively on one concept or subject at a time, alternate them.

For example, rather than studying only subject A on one day and only B on the next day, you can practise both on each day by switching back and forth between them.



4. Dig deeper

It's hard to remember a string of facts and figures if you don't push further. Ask questions like "Why?" and "How?"

This is called elaboration. Elaboration helps you combine new information with other things you know. It also creates a bigger network in your brain of things that relate to one another.

That larger network makes it easier to learn and remember things.

5. Be the "teacher"

Research shows that pupils have better memory and recall abilities when they learn new information with the expectation of having to teach/explain it to someone else.

Studies also suggest that pupils are more engaged and will instinctively seek out methods of recall and organisation when expected to take on a "teacher" role.

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Things to remember for your work/study space

1 Switch off your cellphone When working or studying, your phone can be the biggest source of distraction, affecting your focus and time management. So switch it off or set it on airplane mode. Don't just put it on silent because you'll be tempted to keep looking at it whenever there's a new message or e-mail notification. It's best not to have your phone with you while you study.



2 Keep it simple For the most efficient, distraction-free use of your work/study space, keep only the things you use daily within reach (no extras, only what's really needed and used regularly). Store everything else away from your desk.

3 Keep your planning in sight Put up a visual calendar where you can write down important tasks, due dates for tasks/projects, etc. Knowing and visually seeing what's next makes planning for it easier and reduces anxiety.



4 Make the clock work for you When studying, a wall/desk clock can be your best friend or your worst

enemy. Keeping an eye on the time gives a sense of urgency, but can also distract you from the work you're busy with. Use the clock to your advantage by setting time-related goals (use the Pomodoro technique). Before starting to study, set a timer for how long you plan to do it. Each time you resume studying after a short break, set it again.

