

# TRANSITION

TO

# High School

with Great Results



**S4 Study Skills**

*Skills for School—Tools for Life™*



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# About...



Successful Study Skills 4 Students, (S4), teaches middle and high school students how to study, get great grades, and feel great about themselves

For over ten years, more than 8,100 middle and high school students have benefited from S4's evidence-based, logical and easy-to-implement study skills system in organization, time management and executive functioning.

S4's services include one-on-one customized private tutoring, and workshops, which have been hosted by over 70 schools and other local organizations.

In addition to providing services and support for students, S4 also conducts many free seminars and webinars for parents. Typically, such events are sponsored by a PTA or other organization, and always draw a large group. These seminars are highly interactive, and provide parents with concrete tools they can use right away to encourage their students' study practice.

*Skills for School, Tools for Life.* This is our objective. Providing students with the tools they need to be successful in school now, and in the future.

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- **Private One-on-One Tutoring**
- **Workshops for Students • Seminars for Parents**

*Experts in study skills, executive function, subject matter,  
and enrichment, for grades 1-12.*



# Introduction ...

## Successfully Transitioning into High School

High school is the major league. It starts to really count now.

Everything changes in high school. What worked for your student in middle school is not enough to help him or her achieve peak performance in high school. And peak performance is critical, because these are the years that determine your student's options for admission to a competitive college or university.



In a word, high school is not so easy. The intensity and volume of academic work is dramatically different from the middle school years. So are the expectations and evaluation metrics of teachers. It isn't enough just to complete homework and hand it in. Answers to tests are no longer black and white; critical thinking skills and the ability to apply the learning beyond the scope of the material are required to keep up.

As important, your student must face the realities of going from the top of the social hierarchy – achieved as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader in middle school, to the bottom. He or she must have the confidence and skills to get in the game, and play full-out. Achieving academically is critical, but broadening and diversifying his or her social network is also important, as is involving oneself with new extracurricular activities – elements that college admissions officers look for as an important indication of a student's interest and motivation.

### How Can a Parent Help?

For many parents, the memory of their own transition into high school is dim. Not that it's all that helpful for parents to rely on their experience for guidance anyway, as the demands and challenges of high school today are vastly different from that of the past generation. So how is a parent to begin?

Successful Study Skills 4 Students, LLC, a leading area resource for improving performance in secondary education, believes that the deployment of five key skills, used in conjunction with focus and discipline, provides high schoolers with the road-map to successfully navigate this critical transition.



# Chapter 1

## Goal Setting

Active and effective goal setting is the foundation for a clear path to the higher level of academic performance required to succeed in high school.

As they learn the discipline of goal setting, students begin to mature academically. They begin to take more personal responsibility for their ambitions, choices and decisions. They begin to learn the skill of prioritizing conflicting demands and desires in order to create the outcome they are truly committed to achieving.

“Your grades are up to you. Your parents aren't going to get a call home from your teacher if you don't do your homework. The only consequence for not doing work in high school is a lower grade....However, the price you pay is higher in high school – your grades finally matter here.”

Guiding students in the development of goals is important for several reasons. Without the benefit setting goals, some students may set unrealistic or impractical objectives that serve only to overwhelm and discourage the practice.

Likewise, students that don't set goals often don't have an overall focus. Moreover, many students who operate without goals miss the opportunity to evaluate and monitor their progress in an effort to assess what's working and what's not. The ability to self-assess is a very valuable skill because it allows a student to take stock and redirect effort in order to make better progress.

To start the process of goal setting, students must ask themselves:

### What do I want to achieve?

Defining a goal clearly and specifically is the critical first step. A specific goal is a target for the student. It works to focus attention, energy and time towards achieving an outcome.

### What must I do to achieve it?

Once a student has determined their goal, the next step is to formulate an action plan to chart the best ways to get the outcome desired. For example, an action plan might include a daily commitment to review notes taken in school every day. Or, it may include a self-commitment to better self-advocate and seek extra teacher support when necessary.



### How badly do I want it?

This may be a difficult question to answer because teenagers tend to think about the here-and-now without much thought towards the future — their future! However at this stage, it is critical for students to begin to understand the meaning of commitment and personal responsibility, and how it works to transition true desires into solid results.



*“What can be done  
at any time, is never  
done at all.”  
English Proverb*

## Putting It Into Practice

Here are some questions to ask to help strengthen your student's Goal Setting skills.

- ✓ What is the specific goal or outcome?
- ✓ What are the short term, medium term and long term milestones that need to be achieved in order to accomplish this goal?
- ✓ What is the action plan of tasks that will support progress from milestone to milestone?
- ✓ By what date will the goal be achieved? How about the milestones?
- ✓ Is this plan in writing?
- ✓ When and with whom will progress towards this goal be evaluated?

# Chapter 2

## Time Management

Time management is all about planning the work, and then working the plan.

With the right plan and the discipline to follow it, it is possible to manage it all – academic, social and extracurricular, and still come out alive!

“ You seem to have a lot less time in high school to get things done. While I always was able to find time to finish homework, hang out with friends, and still be in bed by ten in middle school, in high school I suddenly found myself staying up until three or four in the morning just trying to get through my freshman year. ”

Proper time management skills benefit students in a number of important ways. One of the key benefits, however, is that it reduces distractions, puts the student in control of their time, and supports staying focused on the tasks ahead – all elements that help the student feel less overwhelmed and stressed.

To start, students should quantify and chunk their available study time and allot it to their various assignments. Understanding what needs to be done and by when, allows the student to focus fully on one assignment at a time, enabling maximum value of the material to be absorbed. For instance, if the student has committed and budgeted specific time to work on a Science project, full concentrate on the work at hand can be made knowing that other assignments are on the plan and have been scheduled.

The commitment to implementing a time management plan requires rigor and discipline. Here are the essential ingredients:

### Allot Time by Day & Week Parts

Determine key day parts – the major allotments or chunks of time throughout the day:

#### A. School Day Considerations

- ✓ Budget time to meet with teachers for extra help or clarification
- ✓ Take advantage of study halls you get a jump on work, and study with friends, if that works for you

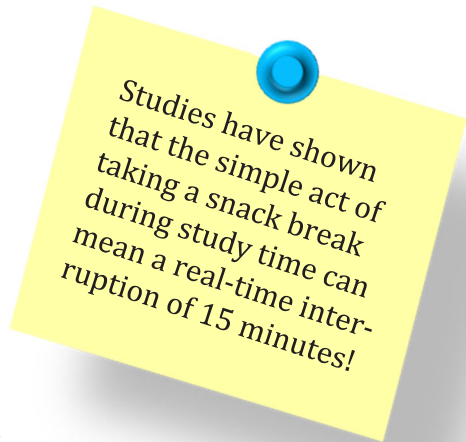
#### B. After School Considerations

- ✓ Note the scheduling for extracurricular activities
- ✓ Review notes taken during the day to identify areas requiring clarification tomorrow
- ✓ Establish deadlines for short term assignments



### C. Weekends

- ✓ Relax, socialize, and regroup
- ✓ Review longer term assignments for scheduling and deadlines
- ✓ Complete a comprehensive review of the past and upcoming week's assignments



### Chunk and Schedule

Determine how long it will take to complete each component. The key is to break down each project and assignment into smaller chunks. Then, schedule when they will be done on a specific day.

### The To-Do List

In conjunction with planning, chunking and scheduling, students will benefit from maintaining a to-do list of items that need to be done in support of the bigger assignments, projects and activities. Assigning and estimating the time needed to complete each chunk is helpful for planning.

A visual list is very helpful because students can quickly scan the list as to keep them focused and on track. Plus, it's very satisfying to check-off or cross-out accomplished tasks – and that reinforces the practice!

## Putting It Into Practice

Here are some questions to ask to help strength your student's Time Management skills:

- ✓ Do you take advantage of the week-end to regroup and look ahead to identify key initiatives, activities, goals and commitments for the week-ahead and beyond?
- ✓ Do you chunk apart bigger assignments, and a time value placed needed to complete each piece?
- ✓ Looking at your planner, do you identify the Day Parts available to devote to these initiatives for each day of the week?
- ✓ For each day, do you allot an activity to each Day Part?
- ✓ Do you create a To-Do list for each day?



# Chapter 3

## Planners

Planners are the tools that implement all the benefits of a well-constructed time management strategy.

There is never a better time to start cultivating the use of a planner than high school. Students have many more assignments and responsibilities that require time and attention well beyond what they've experienced in middle school. Community service, music lessons, advanced-placement classes, SAT/ACT prep – each one requires that the student shift gears to complete each properly.

“ Although I don't think you have to 100% sacrifice one of these things — sleep, school, friends — you definitely have to start prioritizing... Would you rather study for the big Bio test or play on your PlayStation? Would you rather go to sleep by eleven, or stay up cramming for the Geometry quiz? How you prioritize is up to you, and you only. ”

Without planning, chaos, stress, and that feeling of overwhelm can result. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a student to juggle these activities while remembering the details precisely....*“Was that science outline due Tuesday?....Do I have soccer practice Wednesday **and** Thursday?....I think I have until Friday to get my SAT registration in...”*. The list goes on.

The only way for a student to get organized, stay on track, and complete assignments on time is to use a planner. (This is true for adults too!)

Students may be reluctant at first to start using a planner, especially as most schools post their assignments online. Here are some suggestions that will help your student begin the practice:

### Where to Start

The school's website will often include teachers' posting of homework assignments, dates to remember, as well as a general accounting of school activities. Many students believe that because this information is posted online, they do not need to plan, schedule and use a planner. This is a false assumption. All of the web posted assignments and general school-based and extracurricular activities, as well as those given in the class, should be recorded in one's planner. so that students can see what's coming up. Filling in the general and specific activities in the planner helps the student track and plan for activities – and reduces the likelihood of being caught unprepared at the last minute!



### Paper or Electronic

It doesn't matter if a paper or electronic planner is used, just as long as one method is chosen, and is consistently used. Multiple planners will just lead to disorganization and forgotten commitments. In this new technological age, some students prefer electronic planners on their smart phone. Other use a laptop in school. If the student is already in the habit of their smart phone or computer, it makes sense to extend their use with the device's features and reminder options.

### Putting It Into Practice

Here are some questions to ask and tips to consider to help strengthen your student's Planning and Scheduling skills:

- ✓ Which one will it be? Paper or electronic? Choose one option and stick with it.
- ✓ Have you entered the school's general activities? What are the specifics—do you need to travel, prepare certain items?
- ✓ Refer to your planner at the beginning of the day, every day.
- ✓ Before leaving a classroom, record any teacher given nuances and details that may be helpful in completing an assignment.
- ✓ Keep past records so that you can refer back to them.



# Chapter 4

## Active Learning

Students should begin to take responsibility for becoming active learners — a crucial concept that must be adopted and mastered in order to be successful in high school.

Active learning requires the student to interact with the course material — not just passively absorb it. Notetaking is a critical skill to help achieve this objective, and one that also promotes a deeper understanding of the material, as well as supports retention and recall.

“High school tests are a lot more nuanced. Questions asked are more complex and require critical thinking skills. Teachers expect you to reason with the questions and bring your knowledge — maybe even beyond that which was taught in the classroom, to bear on the answer.”

### Notetaking when listening

Notetaking when listening to a teacher is crucial. Even if the teacher does not expect the student to take notes — and even if no one else does — it is a good idea to take notes anyway. Certainly if the teacher provides a concrete example of a concept, the student needs to make a note of it. Similarly, if the teacher writes key points on the board, or keeps stressing a particular concept, that should be noted as well, as these are obviously the points the teacher wants students to know and remember.

Taking good notes does not mean that every word spoken be recorded. Rather, students need to understand that good notetaking means *actively listening* to the most relevant and important information and writing it down. Knowing how to distinguish between high level ideas and supporting details will be the hallmarks of good notetaking.

### Notetaking when reading

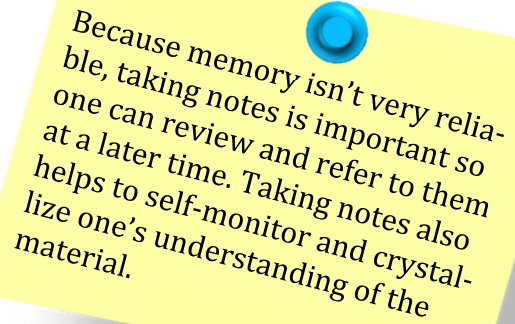
When reading a textbook, notes should be taken as well. Why? Because it's just too challenging to remember all the details from a textbook, and let's face it — a lot of the information read is not easy to remember.

Reading requires intense concentration, and many students find themselves daydreaming in the process, which means that they can barely recall what they just read! Getting into the habit of taking notes when reading will prove to be an enormous time-saver when studying for upcoming quizzes, tests and exams.

## Putting It Into Practice

Here are some practical tips for strengthen your student's Notetaking skills:

- ✓ Remember to take active notes while reading AND listening!
- ✓ Use visual cues in text books to distinguish the difference between main ideas and supporting details.
- ✓ Become an effective and engaged listener in class to help you stay active and focused.
- ✓ Pay attention to what the teacher writes on the board or repeats several times.
- ✓ Ask questions for clarification, and be willing to adapt and adjust information in your notes later on.
- ✓ If you don't know how to take effective notes, see one of your teachers, guidance counselor, advisor, or other resource, so you can get the support you need. This is part of the high school experience.



Because memory isn't very reliable, taking notes is important so one can review and refer to them at a later time. Taking notes also helps to self-monitor and crystalize one's understanding of the material.

# Chapter 5

## Take Responsibility

In earlier years, your student may have declared, “You are not the boss of me!” While this may not have been true then, it’s true now as it relates to their study practice.

In high school, your student is in charge of his or her own academic career. Teachers don’t track down absent students to be sure they have the assignments – it’s up to the student to make sure they get it. Likewise, teachers don’t seek out students when they perform poorly on tests – it’s up to the student to ask for extra help. Teachers are approachable in high school – but the student often has to make the first step.

There are four action steps that can help a student take responsibility for their high school career:

### Initiate

Students can initiate activities to become more involved in their own education, such as creating a study group for a tough subject, or joining an extracurricular group that interests them. Now is the time for students to initiate and take control of their own high school experience.

### Self-Advocate

Students need to self-advocate to let teachers know when they are lost or need just a little extra support. In fact, teachers respect and appreciate students who take initiative, and often help boost effort grades. Is your student unsure of how to start? At home at night, students can reflect on the day’s lessons and make a list of the areas that are still confusing or unclear, and then, seek out the teacher in school or via email.

### Motivate

What do Thomas Edison, Sir Isaac Newton and Marie Curie, among other famed inventors, have in common? They all asked questions that inspired amazing discoveries and inventions. Asking questions is one of the keys to being a successful student, too. The more questions asked, the more engaged, informed and enlightened your student will be.

“ Every point counts in every class, impacts your final grade. And, every grade you earn, starting your freshman year, goes onto your transcript for college. Resolve to establish good study habits from Day One of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Establish your habits now, otherwise your junior-year self will be hating your freshman-year science grade. ”



### Focus

Your student needs to learn to commit to the activity in front of him or her. That means when doing homework, do homework only – no texting, no TV, no getting up multiple times for a snack. When working on an essay, your student must think: “Okay, I need to complete a rough draft before I take a break” and then follow through!



**The 4 Steps to taking responsibility:**  
**1. Initiate**  
**2. Self-Advocate**  
**3. Motivate**  
**4. Focus**

## Putting It Into Practice

Here are some questions to ask to help your student take responsibility:

- ✓ Are you in a class where other students wish they had more help too? How about joining with them to seek help from the teacher together?
- ✓ Do you take time after school or at the end of the day to quickly review the day's classes and activities? What pops into your mind as being unclear? Do you write that down and look for clarification from your teacher the next day?
- ✓ How do you feel about asking questions in class? Jot down the question in your notes, and then practice asking just one question in class. You may find that others had the same question, but didn't want to ask!
- ✓ Do you have a quiet study place away from distractions? The more you can concentrate without interruption, the better you absorb the material – and finish it!

# A High Schooler's Perspective: *What you wish someone had told you before you started*

Alexandra Neenan  
Graduate of Staples High School, Westport, CT  
A Student at Boston University



High School is quite different from middle school. This seems obvious, but I wish someone had told me this before I started my freshman year. I also wish that I had had the benefit and insight gained over my four years from the beginning, so that I could have taken maximum advantage of what was available to me and not been so stressed when I started.

High school offers some blatant differences from that of middle school. Some differences are very obvious and apparent: such as the fact that everyone is a lot taller, and the building is a lot bigger. Other differences are more subtle, such as the expectations your teachers, parents and maybe even you have on you. When you start high school, you don't always notice, or even recognize, the many changes and nuances. But, when you look back at your high school experience and compare it with that of middle school, the contrast is startling.

As a graduated high school senior, off to Boston University this September, these are the points I wish someone had told me before I started 9th grade:

**It's a lot harder to get an A or a B.** While middle school teachers are often generous in their grading protocol, thus making it a lot easier to do well with significantly less effort, high school is not so cushy. Teachers expect you to put in the time and effort. Doing your homework is not enough; you must also study, and work with your teachers if you find a particular class to be difficult.

**Your grades are up to you.** Your parents aren't going to get a call home from your teacher if you don't do your homework. The only consequence for not doing work in high school is a lower grade – no more detentions for forgetting your notes at home. However, the price you pay is higher in high school – your grades finally matter here.

I wish I had been told before high school to **put yourself out there** and **fully get in the game**. In middle school, there were maybe ten or so extracurricular activities you could participate in, such as your school's newspaper, or the drama program. That number gets multiplied when you get to high school. The number, and breadth and depth of extra-curricular options are staggering. From ski club to debate to Honor Society, to the track-team, this is

the time to join some clubs, play some sports, get involved in a cause. Maybe you don't have experience, or maybe you don't know much about a particular club, but that's okay. Now is the time to explore. This is also a great way to make friends!

**Tests are different in high school than middle school.** Middle school assessments are very straightforward and concrete, with black and white questions such as "what year did America declare its independence from England?" However, high school tests are a lot more nuanced. Questions asked are a lot more complex and require critical thinking skills. Teachers expect you to reason with the question and bring your knowledge - maybe even beyond that which was taught in the classroom, to bear on the answer. Instead of an easily answerable question about the date of America's independence, you may have to write an essay about *why* America declared its independence or *what* were the consequences of the Founding Fathers' actions. This requires a completely different style of thinking that took me a couple of years to figure out.

You seem to **have a lot less time in high school** to get things done. While I always was able to find time to finish homework, hang out with friends, *and still* be in bed by ten in middle school, in high school I suddenly found myself staying up until three or four in the morning just trying to get through my freshman year. There's a common saying amongst fellow high school students that you get to pick two of these three priorities in high school: sleep, school, and friends. Although I don't think you have to 100% sacrifice one of these things, you definitely have to start prioritizing. Would you rather study for the big Bio test or play on your PlayStation? Would you rather go to sleep by eleven, or stay up cramming for the Geometry quiz? The ways of doing this are endless: from planners to lists, how you prioritize is up to you, and you only.

Luckily, **high school teachers are really cooperative.** This is something I really wish I'd known. In my Freshman year, I was too terrified of the upperclassmen in the hallways, let alone the teachers, to approach them for assistance. Don't be afraid to ask your teachers for help! Having trouble with your paper on Of Mice and Men? Ask your English teacher if you can conference with them before school. Most teachers have time specifically built into their schedule to work with students who need help. This isn't middle school, where you get yelled at for chewing gum. If you're polite and courteous to your teachers, they'll treat you like adults.

**Every point matters.** The difference between an A and a B grade is only one point!!! Yes it's true and I wish I had realized this from the beginning. I've had grades that were 0.1 away from being an entirely different letter grade. Don't become too much of a grade grubber, but make sure you do every assignment, because one missed homework can mean the difference between an A or a B.

**High school counts.** Every point, and every class grade, will impact your final grade. Every grade you earn in every class, starting your freshman year, will go into your transcript





for college. Although most colleges don't care about the first years of high school as much as junior and senior year, grades still matter. Get started on your schoolwork, extracurriculars, and habits early. Resolve to establish good study habits from Day One of 9th grade. Make the commitment now, or your junior-year self will be hating your freshman-year science grade.

But finally, and most importantly, **have fun!** Most of the stressing I did freshman year was completely unnecessary. If you study smart and work smarter, you'll be fine. Get out there, make new friends, and learn a lot not only about the world, but from yourself as well.



## Everyone Benefits When Students Know How to Study: Students, Parents, Families, Teachers, and Schools.

The Successful Study Skills 4 Students, (S4), mission is to unlock the power of learning to improve, enhance, and support students' academic careers.

With S4 Study Skills, your student will learn tools and strategies to study, approach school with confidence, and manage time to achieve their personal best.

All types of learners benefit from our evidence-based Study Skill methodology. If your student experiences any of these attributes, then we can help them achieve better results:

- Does not know how to study, plan, take good notes
- Effort in studying is not reflective in the grades received
- Does not know how to study, plan, take good notes
- Gets inconsistent grades
- Spends too much, or too little, time on homework
- Stresses easily before tests, exams, projects
- Disorganized, distracted, and procrastinates
- Ineffective, inefficient in their study practice
- Wants to better effectiveness and efficiency
- Loss of confidence, easily overwhelmed, anxious
- Not performing to potential

If you think your student would benefit from learning how to study, please contact us . Using our skills, your student will succeed and get great grades.



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