

National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) The Practical Teacher



This Issue's Topic:

Study Skills Package

Students often benefit in unexpected ways from explicit instruction in improving their study skills. Research has shown that students with behavioral difficulties and academic deficits can show improvements in both behavior and learning when taught strategies to study and absorb information more efficiently. Students' self-esteem and self-esteem can also increase, as they acquire the capabilities to manage their own learning program.

This intervention plan outlines a 3-strategy package for helping students to (1) organize an assignment notebook, (2) maintain a calendar of school assignments, and (3) prepare neatly formatted papers (Gleason, Colvin, & Archer, 1991).

Notebook/Organization Folder

Students must learn how to manage the substantial paperflow that is generated by their in-class and homework assignments. For example, students are expected at an early age to carry assignment handouts between classes or take them home, to save corrected quizzes or tests for future review, and to maintain collections of drafts as they write a paper.

There are many methods for organizing student papers, and all will probably benefit students. One sample organization system that teachers may find helpful, particularly with younger children, is to assign the student two folders.

- **School Folder.** The first folder is used to store classroom papers. The left pocket of the folder is labeled "School Work" while the right pocket is labeled "Paper".
- **Home Folder.** The second folder is for materials that the student is to take home. The left pocket of the Home folder is labeled "To Be Left at Home" while the right pocket is labeled "To Be Returned to School."

Students will need to be trained to use their School and Home folders to manage their paperflow. As a teacher, you will probably first have students practice organizing their papers under your guidance, giving children encouragement and appropriate feedback about how well they accomplish this goal. Students may initially need to be coached, for instance, to immediately store new in-school handouts in the appropriate pocket of the classroom folder. Similarly, you might hand students a mixed group of papers (some of which are to stay at home and others that are to be reviewed by parents and returned to school) and ask students to sort the papers into the appropriate pockets of their take-home folder. When first introducing the folder system, you will also want to monitor students' success in keeping their current classroom assignments organized or in returning papers from home.

Note: Any alternative notebook or folder organizational system can be substituted for the two-folders approach outlined here, so long as it follows a similar plan.

Assignment Calendar

Along with keeping their work organized, students must manage their time efficiently to make sure that they complete and turn in all assignments by their due dates. As students advance to higher grades, their assignments become more complex. Before turning in a final paper, for example, a middle school student may be required to select and research a topic, summarize that research on note-cards, and write several intermediate drafts of the report.

Students can be much more efficient managers of their work time when they record all assignments on a weekly or monthly assignment calendar. The teacher gives students a blank work calendar that spans several instructional weeks or even the entire school year. The calendar contains blanks for each instructional day that are large enough for students to write in a range of information relating to school work, including:

- pertinent homework assignments
- dates of upcoming quizzes and tests

- long-term assignments (e.g., science projects; research papers)

To use an assignment calendar competently, the student must be able to identify the current date and day of the week, find dates reliably on a calendar, accurately record assignments and their due dates, etc. You will need to set aside enough class time when first introducing the assignment calendar to demonstrate to students how to use it and give them a chance to practice filling it out under your supervision. It is also a very good idea to post a master assignment calendar in a conspicuous place in the classroom. Students can consult this master calendar periodically to ensure that they have correctly recorded all assignments on their own work-calendars. Another idea that you might use occasionally is to pair off students as 'calendar buddies' with each child checking his or her partner's calendar for completeness. Or parents might be encouraged to review and initial their child's work-calendar each evening to signal that the parent is aware of the student's homework assignments.

Guidelines for Written Assignments

Students with poor organizational skills may also produce messy written work. These students may need specific guidelines for formatting their papers in a presentable manner. The eventual goal, of course, is that they will internalize those formatting guidelines to create neat assignments independently.

One strategy to improve the appearance of students' written work is to give them a 'guide sheet' (Gleason, Colvin, & Archer, 1991) that prompts the writer to pay attention to proper headings, good organization, and neat writing in school writing assignments.

When you first introduce students to a particular guide-sheet, set aside enough time to demonstrate its use, explain your rationale for requiring each of the formatting requirements, and give students a chance to use the guide-sheet under your supervision. After students have been instructed in the proper formatting of papers, you can hold brief individual conferences periodically to review students' written work and compare it to the guide-sheet formatting standards. (Remember, writing is hard work, so give students lots of encouragement at first!) Students may also want to tape a copy of the guide-sheet inside a work folder for convenient review. You can also publicly post examples of well-formatted student work and single out students for praise who have significantly improved the appearance of their work.

References

Gleason, M.M., Colvin, G., & Archer, A.L. (1991). Interventions for improving study skills. In G. Stoner, M.R. Shinn, & H.M. Walker (Eds.) *Interventions for achievement and behavior problems*. National Association of School Psychologists: Silver Springs, MD.

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