

July, 2006

A+ Test Prep and Tutoring Newsletter

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Featured Students

Kristina Dalsey, a sophomore at Wissahickon High School, was having difficulty in her Spanish II course this past spring. Her mother contacted A+ and arranged for her to be tutored by Dorri Friedman. Dorri focused on Kristina’s weak points--verbs and vocabulary--and drilled her in commands and the conjugation of verbs in the present and past tenses, and taught vocabulary through the use of flashcards and other techniques. Dorri felt Kristina was “a pleasure to work with” and that she made significant progress in short span of time (6 weeks). With much practice, Kristina improved her Spanish grade significantly and says that she felt “more confident in class” and is looking forward to tackling Spanish III this fall. Olé!

Chris Lovelace, a 5th grader in Philadelphia, struggled with arithmetic for a number of years. As a result of his one-to-one instruction by Dorothea Brown, at A+ this spring, he is finally beginning to feel comfortable working with numbers. He has made quick and steady progress. Chris' parents were very pleased with his final report card grades. His aunt, Meriam Lovelace, notes that he is getting along better in school across the board. She attributes this to the significant reduction in his frustration level. Chris and his family are looking forward to a successful 6th grade year. ☺

What’s New?

As tempting as it is to just “chill out” in the summer, it’s also a great, stress-free time to be productive. Check out our suggested summer to-do lists.

For college-bound juniors and seniors:

--Research colleges either on-line (check our website’s Archives for “Helpful Links for College-bound Students” from the June 2006 A+ newsletter) or by purchasing a guide such as The College Board College Handbook 2006: All-New 43rd Edition (paperback; \$28.95).

--Create a list of schools and group them geographically so you can visit several in the same area over a period of days. If your family is planning a summer vacation, take a side trip to one or two schools in that vicinity.

--Call or visit the websites of individual schools to find out about their policy on visiting the campus (Do you need to register in advance for a tour? How many tours a day are offered?)

--Develop a list of questions for the tour guide. Inquire about points of interest that may not be on the tour, such as the athletic facilities or a particular academic department that interests you and arrange to see those places if at all possible. You may even encounter a coach or a professor who may be helpful in answering your questions and appreciate your curiosity.

--Once you've determined that you are interested in applying to a particular school, request an application, review their requirements, inquire about an interview, look over their essay question (start brainstorming!), and make note of all deadlines. Create a system to keep track of all your college information.

--Register for the SAT or ACT. Visit the websites (www.collegeboard.com and www.act.org) and determine--with the input of your parents, teachers, and/or guidance counselor--which test is better suited to your strengths. Select the test date that works best for your schoolwork and test preparation schedule. Keep in mind that test prep programs often take several months to review all the material covered on the SAT or ACT.

For all students:

Summer is also a good time to get organized and catch up on those clerical tasks that seem to fall by the wayside during the hectic school year:

-- Empty your virtual trash can! Clean out your computer files; delete any old papers or homework assignments that you no longer need. In addition to cleaning up your virtual desktop, tidy up your desk or workspace at home. Sort through flashcards and notebooks; keep what you need and toss the rest!

-- If your school has required summer reading, make sure you stay on track with it. Keep a list of the main characters, bracket important passages, make notes in the margin, etc. This will save you valuable time in September when you may have to write an essay on the book.

Procrastination blues!

The following article was written by Judith E. Rader, MA, LMFT. She is a family therapist affiliated with the Council for Relationships in Wynnewood and can be reached by phone at 610-642-2648, ext. 2.

One of many parental stressors in raising children is watching our teenagers procrastinate on test preparation, knowing that they will have to eventually cram--often with disappointing results. Similarly, their procrastination on homework assignments often results in inferior learning. And if left unaddressed by parents, it can lead to a pattern of

not completing homework assignments at all. But given that teenagers are at a point in their lives where they feel they can “handle everything,” they will often resist attempts by parents to give advice, comment, or otherwise intervene. So what’s a parent to do?

First, parents must recognize that their teenager’s decision to consistently do second-rate work is simply not an option. Our children’s primary “job” in life is to learn to the best of their ability, which means that our sons and daughters must devote time, focus, and care to their homework. Their internalizing this important message has implications for their personal future, as well as the future of our society. (Imagine a generation of leaders, teachers, health care providers, executives, etc. who have grown up with the message that they can do “just enough” to get by!)

With this in mind, parents concerned about hastily prepared schoolwork must:

- Have a general discussion with their child to determine if the work avoidance in question is due to inability (for example, their teen is truly struggling with algebra concepts or French conjugations), or if it’s the result of their teenager’s simply not wanting to put in the requisite time to study or to complete assignments.
- In the case of the former, parents should give their teen the option of providing some help by either arranging for a tutor or encouraging him/her to receive after-school teacher help.
- If homework avoidance is due to laziness or to their teenager simply prioritizing fun or non-academic activities over homework, parents must intervene to reorganize their teen’s priorities. TV-watching, computer-gaming and the like must always come after homework completion for a period of time until their teenager demonstrates that he/she can successfully complete homework and adequately prepare for tests.

Specifically:

- a) For a period of three weeks, for example, insist that your child complete homework before watching TV, playing video games, chatting with friends on the phone, etc. (with the possible exception being that he/she may perhaps need an hour of “down-time” directly after returning from school in order to attend to homework in a more focused and refreshed way).
- b) Insist that your child show you his/her homework upon its completion.
- c) Communicate to your teen that you are looking forward to getting out of the role of “homework cop” and that after the first test results come in (with a satisfactory grade) and/or once the three-week period is over with teachers indicating that all homework has been satisfactorily completed, you will once again give him/her the opportunity to assume full responsibility for his/her homework completion.

d) Maintain accountability once you give control back to your teen. Contact teachers to ensure that homework is being completed. If they indicate that your teen is slipping again--or if the next test comes back with unsatisfactory results, have another discussion with your teen to determine how he/she understands the latest developments. If the problem continues to be a failure to devote adequate time to work (rather than an issue of needing a tutor), go back to your parental intervention for perhaps four weeks this time. As such, you will be communicating to your teen that you are utterly serious about positive, long-term changes and that if he/she tests your resolve over time, you will indeed hold firm with your consequences.

Usually parents' firm, consistent consequences are adequate interventions for getting their teens to reverse patterns of hasty homework completion and test preparation. However, if the problem persists or if parents struggle with providing the necessary resolve and consistency to generate change, a family therapist whose specialty includes work with teenagers, can be helpful in providing additional support and guidance for change.

Helpful links for coping with procrastination and time management issues

<http://www.dexterity.com/articles/overcoming-procrastination.htm> This brief yet insightful article by Steve Pavlina, CEO of Dexterity Software, sheds light onto the causes of procrastination and gives several practical tips to overcoming the "inertia" of beginning a dreaded task. Of particular interest is the "timeboxing" method.

<http://www.sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/procrastination.html> This article which appears on the California Polytechnic State University website is aimed specifically at the procrastinating student. It offers a more in-depth look at the emotions that feed the behavior of procrastinators along with tips to overcoming this negative thinking, a discussion of the benefits of overcoming procrastination, and a humorous list of "things we tell ourselves" that will ring uncomfortably true with many people.

<http://www.getmoredone.com/tips.html> Students and non-students alike can benefit from these "Top Ten Time Tamers," including advice about "How To Plan Your Day," "How To Handle Paperwork," "How To Use E-Mail Effectively," and "How to Prevent Interruptions."

Current A+ Promotions

\$100 off a complete SAT Program if you register by August 1. Use offer code P0706. Please note: This promotion will not be extended. This is the final date to take advantage of this promotion. So call today!

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