

Activity

Once we've identified the reasons we might have done poorly, we have to figure out what we do about them. How we can approach things differently going forward? Let's go through these reasons one by one and see what solutions we can come up with that might help us do better in the future.

A. Not allotting enough time for study/preparation:

Teacher prompt: Ask class what they might change going forward if they didn't give themselves enough time to study. Responses can include the following time management tips: Allot more time than you have previously to homework, study/exam or assignment prep, set a clear start time (the day or hour), make a schedule of when to study and check with parents to make sure you don't have conflicting obligations (like a family event on a weekend), add a cushion of time for unexpected developments.

B. Getting distracted:

Teacher prompt: Ask class to list possible distractions such as screens (phones, gaming systems, TVs, tablets and laptops), friends (friends dropping by or friend came to study and you ended up talking or playing instead), TV, sleep, siblings, noise, lack of privacy, lack of room/space to study, being hungry or tired, daydreaming, games.

Then ask class to identify solutions to each of the distractions listed, such as, turn off screens, when you're studying/working, find a quiet space, make agreement with yourself to only watch TV after studying for X hours, grab a small snack or nap if you're tired but make sure to set the alarm clock to wake up, make deal with friend to study first and talk/play only after you study.

C. Finding more effective study methods:

Teacher prompt: Elicit and list study methods for preparing for exams, writing papers, or doing projects such as: Rereading text, highlighting text, summarizing text, memorizing facts or spelling, doing practice questions/problems, talking about topic with friend/family, explaining topic to someone else, flashcards, internet research, and others.

Then take a poll about how many students use each method in order to make the point that we all use different methods and each person needs to figure out which methods work best for them. Explain that we need to try different methods in order to find the one that is more effective for us—the one that helps us learn best. For example, some of us work best alone and others work best with a friend or parent.

We also have to consider that a method that works best for one topic might not work best for another. For example, we might do best memorizing history facts alone but figuring out math

problems with a friend. We should be prepared to try different methods until we find the one that is most effective for us.

D. Not understanding/grasping material well:

Teacher prompt: Explain that in most classes there is often more than one person who didn't fully understand the material even if nobody asks questions. The problem is it can feel awkward to ask questions, especially if we think we're the only person who didn't understand something. And then when we see no one else asks questions we feel as though we're the only ones who didn't understand the material. Of course, that can make us feel even less confident and hopeful about succeeding. So, in order to overcome that feeling and get our hope back we have to take action by asking for help after class. The question is, who should we ask?

Ask class: What can we do once class is over and we realize we don't fully understand the material? Elicit suggestions like: Ask a friend who does well in this subject, approach the teacher in between classes and ask for help, search for youtube videos that explain the topic (e.g., Khan Academy: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>), or reread the textbook.

E. Getting anxious/nervous and having trouble concentrating:

Teacher prompt: Explain that it is common to get nervous before exams or to get distracted with a troubling thought. The problem is worry and troubling thoughts make it hard to concentrate and focus. The first thing we need to do is clear our mind so we can focus on the task at hand. Ask class what methods they might have learned that could be helpful. Elicit responses such as breathing exercise and calming the downstairs brain from lesson 3.

Story

Ryan's History Problem

Ryan wasn't good at history. There were just too many people and events to remember and too many dates to learn. He did his homework every week and he studied as hard as he could for tests but he just kept doing poorly. So when the teacher announced there would be another test the next week, he felt quite hopeless about his chances of doing well.

His friends Ivan and Shawn realized there was something wrong when Ryan was quiet at lunch.

"I hate history tests," Ryan admitted. "They make me feel stupid."

"You just have to try harder," Shawn responded.

"I have tried harder," Ryan insisted. "And I still do badly."

"Then don't study harder," Ivan suggested, "study differently."

"What do you mean?" Ryan asked, confused.

“How do you study for history tests?” Ivan asked.

“I read the chapter in the book,” Ryan said, “twice, sometimes three times.”

“That’s not what I do,” Ivan said.

Ivan was really good in history, so Ryan was curious. “What do you do?” he asked Ivan.

“First, I read the chapter. Then, I tell my mom the story of what happened in it.”

“You remember things that well from reading the chapter only once?” Ryan asked.

“No, I sit with the book open, read a bit and then tell her about the events. But I try to make it like a real story. Remembering facts is difficult. Remembering stories is much easier. And telling stories helps me remember the facts in the story I told.”

Ryan decided that he would try studying Ivan’s way and something interesting happened the moment he made that decision. He began to feel hopeful again.

Post Questions:

1. Why did Ryan dread the upcoming history test at the start of the story?

Teacher prompt: Elicit responses about believing he was bad in history and that he felt hopeless about being able to improve.

2. Why did Ivan’s suggestion make him feel more hopeful?

Teacher prompt: Elicit responses about how figuring out what you can do differently makes you feel more hopeful. If not mentioned, note to students that just having a specific plan of what you can do differently makes you feel more hopeful, even before you know if it’s going to work!

3. What should Ryan do if he tries Ivan’s way of studying but still doesn’t improve enough?

Teacher prompt: Elicit and list responses about Ryan needing to find another approach to studying history such as: writing out summaries, creating flashcards of key events and dates, studying with a friend, focusing on narrative first and adding in dates later, watching films or TV episodes about the events that make them easier to remember. The key is to keep trying new approaches or combinations of approaches until you figure out what works best for you.

Getting Our Hope Back by Changing How We Study/Prepare

When you are not doing as well as you would like in a subject, the following checklist will help you figure out what to change about how you study. You might have to do this exercise more than once to get the result you want.

A. Do I need to change how much time I put into studying?

I usually spend ____ hours to do (subject) _____ homework.

Instead, I should spend ____ hours.

I usually spend ____ hours to study for a (subject) _____ test.

Instead I should spend ____ hours.

I usually start working on a (subject) _____ project _____ before it is due.

Instead, I should start ____ before it is due.

I usually start doing school work:

- A. As soon as I get home.
- B. After I nap or relax but before dinner.
- C. After dinner before bed.
- D. In the morning of the day it's due.

Instead I should do my schoolwork: _____

B. The distractions I need to avoid are:

C. The other methods of studying (subject) _____ I can try if my method isn't working well enough are (ask friends and teachers for suggestions if you cannot think of any):

D. The people I can ask for help in (subject) _____ **if I don't understand the material are:**

E. If I get nervous or worried about a test or project and have trouble concentrating I can:
