

How to get A's in Middle School

Mr. Peske's super tips

1) Stay Organized. This will save you time and headaches.

- a) Use folders for each class to organize your papers.
- b) Don't just stuff things into your backpack!
- c) You need some kind of system—your teacher will give you one. But whatever system you use, stick with it!
- d) It is better to spend 30 seconds to put something away in the right place than to spend 3 minutes looking for where you put it.
- e) Every 2 weeks, go through your folders and clean out old papers that you won't need to take with you to school. But don't throw them away—save them at home.

2) Use a planner!

- a) Write down everything going on in your life! School stuff, personal stuff, after-school stuff!
 - Write down your homework for each class. Then when you get home, you can open up your planner and know just what to do.
 - Write down concert dates and big project due dates so you see them coming up.
 - Write down the things that happen in your personal life: vacation days, doctor's appointments, sports games, etc.
- b) Think about how long it will take to complete the things you have scheduled. Break big tasks into smaller parts and work a little bit at a time.

3) Find a study buddy

- a) Ask someone to be your study buddy. They can pick up papers for you when you are sick or help you remember what the homework was if you didn't get to write it down.
 - Your study buddy is NOT someone who will do all your work for you.
 - Being a study buddy works both ways—you have to help them out too!
- b) You can study for tests with your study buddy. You can help them with the things they still don't understand, and they can help you!
 - Pace yourself—don't get stuck spending a ton of time on the first few things and run out of time.
 - Try dividing up topics and teaching each other.

4) Tips for Group Projects

- a) Get organized! Use a group project organizer to figure out what you need and define responsibilities.
- b) Be sure to clearly communicate with your group members. Make sure you have their contact info in case questions arise.
- c) Find a time and place where the whole group can work together on the project.
- d) Group projects are not times to boss everyone around or be a slacker. Instead, find a way to help your group be successful.
- e) If you do have someone in your group who isn't doing their job, then the rest of you can get their job done for them, but let your teacher know when someone is not contributing.

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5) How to treat your teacher

- a) Don't run to them with every little question. Stop and see if you can answer the question yourself first (or ask a friend). If you still don't know, then it is ok to ask.
- b) If you are afraid to ask for help, practice what you will say.
- c) Keep track of your grade and politely ask your teacher if you have questions about that.
- d) Take responsibility to ask for things. Don't wait for your teacher to come chasing after you! If you were absent, it is your job to find out what you missed.
- e) Pay attention during class. Teachers hate it when students say they don't understand something, but weren't paying attention when instructions were given!
- f) Be polite and responsible. Say thanks and admit mistakes.

6) How to take good notes during class

- a) Be an active listener. While the teacher is talking, be thinking about what they are saying and trying to understand it. Participate in the class discussion.
- b) Write down things TO DO and things TO KNOW.
 - To Do: homework, tests, due dates, projects, etc.
 - To Know: main ideas of what the teacher talks about, key facts, information that is on the board, summary of what the teacher says, sample math problems...
- c) Don't write down every word! Look for structure and summarize main points. Use abbreviations, but make sure you will understand what they meant. Text message abbreviations can be used in your notes.
- d) Pay special attention to the things the teacher thinks are important. These are the things that they repeat, write down, or emphasize with a raised voice.
 - Star or underline these important ideas.
- e) Go back later and review your notes.

7) Have an organized place to work at home

- a) You need to do your work at the same place every day.
- b) Don't do your work in front of the TV or with other distractions (including brothers and sisters).
- c) Make sure you have all the supplies you need and room to work.
- d) Do an extreme makeover on your homework space
 - Use the checklist to help you fix up your work space.
 - Invite your study buddy to come help you with your makeover. Then go to their house and makeover their homework space!
 - Before:
 - *Disorganized*
 - *Can't find anything*
 - *No room to work*
 - After:
 - *Room to work*
 - *Everything is easy to find*
 - *Won't lose things*

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8) Use Rubrics to help you!

- a) A rubric is like a map, instruction manual, or recipe that shows you what to do.
- b) A rubric describes what you need to do to get a good grade. This way you don't have to be a mind reader!
- c) Read, re-read, and re-read rubrics. Don't lose them.
- d) As you do the project, refer back and make sure that you are following the directions.
- e) After you finish, use the rubric to grade yourself. What grade would you give yourself? Make sure again that you didn't leave anything out.

9) Computer Tips

- a) Don't use the computer to waste your study time.
- b) Learn how to type! Typing programs are cheap and some are even free online! Typing is a skill you will use your whole life!
- c) Learn how to use the programs on your computer. Use the help and tutorial options to teach yourself.
- d) Use email to communicate with teachers or study buddies.
- e) Find help on the web. There are lots of websites to help students with different subjects. Ask your teacher for recommendations.
- f) Check school and teacher websites for information.

10) Use 3 tools to become a better writer

- a) Understand that people will judge your intelligence based on how well you express yourself in writing.
- b) Dictionary:
 - for meaning, etymology, and spelling of words
- c) Thesaurus:
 - when you need "le mot juste": why use boring words?
- d) Grammar and Punctuation guide:
 - It'll learn you, to write good;
- e) These tools can be in book form, part of your computer software, or online.

11) Use a mental checklist: You don't have to be forgetful all the time!

- a) Before you leave the house, make it a habit to stop and ask yourself each morning if you have everything you need:
 - Homework
 - Class folders
 - Band instrument
 - Lunch (or money)
 - Anything else special I need today?
- b) What needs to go on your mental checklist?
- c) Make sure that you allow yourself enough time in the morning to stop and do your checklist.
 - If you wake up late, you will rush out the door and forget your checklist. Instead, get an alarm clock. Mommy doesn't have to wake you up anymore!

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12) Tips for tackling Homework

- a) Do homework before you start playing video games or watching TV.
- b) Don't distract yourself while you try to do homework. Focus on the task at hand.
- c) Look at your planner to see what needs to be done.
- d) Have a routine and do your homework at the same time every day.
- e) Plan ahead for big projects.
- f) Most of all: Be sure it gets done! Missing work kills your grade!
- g) If you have completed work, make sure it gets turned in so that it doesn't get counted as missing.
- h) Remember this saying: "It is much easier to KEEP up than it is to CATCH up."

13) Learn how to study for tests

- a) Don't wait until the last minute to study—it takes time!
- b) Ask yourself, "What questions would I ask if I was the teacher?"
- c) Try practice problems (especially for math).
- d) Make sure you memorize key facts.
- e) Study with your study buddies—quiz each other.

14) Learn how to take tests

- a) Relax—take a deep breath and don't stress!
- b) Take it one question at a time.
- c) If you get stuck, skip it and go on to the next one. Don't get worried, but remember to go back to it.
- d) It is better to write something intelligent than to leave it blank.
- e) Always re-check your work before you turn in your test.
- f) After each test, reflect on how you could prepare better the next time.
- g) The most important thing you learn in middle school is to learn how YOU learn. What works for you may be different than what works for your friends. Figure out what works, and then take the time to do it!

15) Set and work towards Goals

- a) Set goals for your personal life, academics, sports—everything that you do.
- b) What do you want to achieve?
 - Be specific about exactly what that would look like.
 - Find the right level of challenge: not too hard or too easy.
- c) What will it take to accomplish that goal?
 - If you don't change anything about your life, you won't suddenly reach a new goal.
- d) What would keep you from accomplishing that goal?
- e) How will you measure progress towards your goal?
- f) What will happen when you achieve that goal?
- g) Be patient and look for progress towards your goal.
 - Even if you don't reach that goal exactly, if you keep moving towards it, you will eventually hit it.
 - See if there is anything you need to change to be able to reach that goal.