

Having run over 5000 study skills seminars over the past twenty years, Dr Prue Salter has been asked many questions about study skills. Below are the top 5 questions parents ask.



1. HOW MUCH LEARNING SHOULD STUDENTS BE DOING EACH NIGHT?

Different schools will have different expectations, but the general guidelines are that junior students should be doing around 1 hour of self-learning most nights, seniors between 2-3 hours most nights.



2. BUT WHAT IF STUDENTS SAY THEY HAVE NO HOMEWORK?

In Primary school, students are used to just doing the work their teacher specifically tells them to do. Many students do not realise that things should be different in secondary school; there are actually two types of learning students should be doing. The first is compulsory work such as homework, assignments, and preparing for tests. The second type of work is independent learning work. If students have no homework that night, they are expected to undertake some independent learning in secondary school. This could be reviewing what they have learnt that week, making a mind map, reading ahead, researching an area of interest, making study notes or reviewing difficult concepts.



3. CAN YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC WHILE STUDYING?

The general rule is that if students are undertaking learning that is not difficult, it is OK to listen to music. It makes them feel relaxed, makes them feel like the time is going quicker. However, if they are doing work that requires intense concentration or memorisation, it is best to switch the music off (or else have slower music with no vocals such as classical musical) as otherwise it will take them much longer to absorb and learn the information.



4. IS IT OK FOR STUDENTS TO DO WORK WITH DEVICES OR IN FRONT OF THE TV?

Unless students are doing something mindless like sticking things on a poster or colouring in, it is best not to do work in front of any devices such as phones or TV. Instead, students should do their home learning in an environment that is as distraction-free as possible. It works well if students do their learning in distinct blocks of time and remove all distractions during those blocks. Some students find they have the self-discipline to manage technological distractions, others need a helping hand – such as their phone in a different room for the half-hour period where they are focusing on schoolwork.



5. HOW DO I STOP MY STUDENT GETTING DISTRACTED WHEN WORKING ON THE COMPUTER?

Have a discussion with students about doing schoolwork in focused blocks of time so that they can really enjoy their time away from the books (or computer). If students find it challenging to be disciplined, they can also look at self-blocking software such as Self Control (MAC) and Cold Turkey (PC). If students are still struggling, parental management programs such as Family Zone allow families to block particular sites at particular times.

