

# 5 Tips for Busy & Successful Students

The idea that only top students who go to elite colleges become successful is not only patently false but is also deeply discouraging to the 90% of kids who will not be in the top 10% of their class. Moreover, a high percentage of students who do go to elite colleges suffer from anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. So, instead of viewing high school as a four-year audition for college, we recommend seeing healthy brain development as the most important outcome of adolescence. We also suggest being patient with yourself — because so many successful adults were late bloomers, who simply needed the benefit of time to come into their own.

## 1 Take the Long View

## 2 Make Sleep a Goal

Sleep is arguably the most important input for a developing brain (and for maintaining a developed one!). When you're well rested, you learn better and more easily develop resilience and motivation. Bonus: Your parents will seem less annoying! Encourage your parents to be well rested; they'll find it easier to be non-anxious, consultative, and supportive of your autonomy. Take a lesson from financial advisors by "paying yourself first." Experiment to see how much sleep you need to feel rested and then brainstorm ways to move in that direction. Once sleep is "in the bank," "spend what is left" on the activities and goals that matter to you, not the other way around.

There is compelling research evidence that "doing nothing" is highly beneficial for your development. Specifically, periods of downtime for mind wandering or daydreaming activate the brain's Default Mode Network, fostering creativity and problem solving. Downtime also plays an important role in developing a sense of identity and a sense of empathy. Don't schedule every moment of your day, as downtime is as integral to successful activity as activity. Additionally, extensive research has demonstrated that meditation benefits teens in the same ways it benefits adults, especially high performance/high stress students.

## 3 Practice Radical Downtime

## 4 Engage with Flow

Research suggests that one of the most effective ways to develop autonomous motivation is not through dutiful completion of homework but in the passionate pursuit of your pastimes. When you are deeply involved in play (dance, music, sports, debate, art...), you're experiencing a brain state that combines high energy, high effort, high focus, and low stress. This is the brain state you want to nurture for success in your adult life. Work hard at things you love. Also, remind your parents not to threaten to take away the activity you love most (e.g., sports) to motivate you!

People are afraid of things they don't understand. Many parents are understandably concerned about your use of technology and have a first impulse to radically restrict your use of video games and social media, often without first attempting to understand why these appeal to you. Although we recommend that parents minimize young kids' exposure to technology, with teens we suggest they learn about the games and apps you like, show interest, and participate with you as much as possible. They'll be much more likely to treat respectfully your use of technology when they understand it. Help them! Lastly, remind yourself and your folks how important it is for you, with parental help, to learn to manage your use of phones and computers before you head to college with hopes and dreams and a suitcase of your parents' money. Ideally your parents work with, not on, you. You and your parents don't want you to head to college until you can regulate for yourself your use of these powerful and omnipresent technologies.

## 5 Teach Your Technology



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Since 1993 Ned has spent over 40,000 hours helping students conquer an alphabet of standardized tests and honing his insights on communicating with students and parents. Ned has written for numerous press outlets and has co-authored three books, including the best-seller *Self Driven Child* and *What Do You Say?* Stop by his Twitter page to say hi! @NedJohnson

