HIGH SCHOOL

November 2026

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Santa Cruz Valley Union High School

Help your teen use a five-step process to boost writing quality



In an age when AI can write convincing papers, your teen may wonder why developing writing skills matters. It's simple: Learning to write well will help your teen strengthen thinking and communication skills—which are essential for academic and career success.

Review this five-step writing process with your teen:

1. **Brainstorm.** Spend 10 minutes writing down all known facts about the topic.
2. **Research.** Gather credible sources (a librarian can help) to acquire in-depth knowledge of the topic and find facts, quotes and other details that support the points your teen wants to make.
3. **Outline.** Teens often dislike this step, but it helps to organize ideas and evidence into logical order. The traditional numbers-and-letters format works for some teens. Others prefer a series of connected circles.
4. **Write multiple drafts.** The first draft is for getting ideas down, without worrying about being perfect. After a break, look at it with fresh eyes and decide how to clarify and improve the next draft.
5. **Proofread.** Look over the final draft carefully and correct spelling and grammatical errors.

Source: S. Graham and K. Sandmel, "The Process Writing Approach: A Meta-analysis" *The Journal of Educational Research*, Taylor & Francis.

Suggest forming a serious study group

When it comes to studying in a challenging class or prepping for a test, your teen may not have to do it alone. In a study group, your teen can share strengths, get help with weaknesses and gain practice working with peers.

The key is for your teen to form a study group in which the members *really* study. Have your student follow these guidelines:

- **Choose four to six members** who are serious about studying and want to do well in school. Close friends may not be the best choice unless they are skilled at prioritizing study over socializing.
- **Divide the work.** Assign parts of the material to the members that do them well. Then they can explain their sections to the group.
- **Stick to a schedule** and select a leader for each meeting (rotate this position). The leader's job is to keep the studying on track and prevent one person from dominating the discussion.

Stomp out cyberbullying



Cyberbullying negatively affects mental health—and more than half of teens in a recent survey said they had experienced it. Tell your teen that bullying is always wrong, no matter what form it takes. Then, ask your teen to:

- **Tell you about incidents** of online bullying.
- **Keep records** of bullying emails or posts, but never respond to them.
- **Unfollow or block** people who post negative things about others.

Source: "2025 Cyberbullying Data," Cyberbullying Research Center.

Offer patient guidance

Your teen is busy exploring new interests and ideas and trying to expand horizons and navigate changes in the world. To support these efforts:

- **Be patient** with your teen. Discuss new interests and choose battles carefully.
- **Discuss possible outcomes** of actions.
- **Ask questions** to guide your teen to think things through.

Boost motivation to learn

Motivation drives everything from academic achievement to personal development. To foster motivation to learn in your teen:



1. **Point out** connections between schoolwork and your teen's goals.
2. **Share** time management and other study strategies, but let your teen put them to use.
3. **Talk through** school issues without taking responsibility for solving them. Help your teen identify solutions rather than imposing them.

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Q&A How much help should I give with schoolwork?

Q: We're months into the school year and my ninth grader is still asking for my help with assignments. Should I still be helping with homework in high school?



A: Staying involved with your teen's education in high school is important. But rather than helping your student *do* assignments, shift to supporting your teen's efforts to do them independently.

You can do this by offering structure and encouragement. Here's how:

- **Help your teen schedule** a regular daily homework and study time.
- **Demonstrate that learning** is a family priority. Have family members do quiet activities while your teen does schoolwork. At other times, discuss books and news items with together. Watch educational shows and talk about what you are learning.
- **Ask about what your teen is studying.** You might ask, "Do you find anything about this topic surprising?" or "Have you done anything like this before?"
- **Strategize together.** If your teen isn't sure how to approach a large project, for example, brainstorm the process step by step.
- **Notice and praise progress and effort.** When your teen is tackling a challenging assignment, say you know your student can handle it.

Parent Quiz Do you promote learning from mistakes?

Your teen is human and will make mistakes. What really matters is what your teen does next. Are you teaching your student to treat mistakes as learning opportunities? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you teach** your teen to admit mistakes and set an example by admitting your own?
2. **Do you stay** calm and make it clear your teen can discuss errors without fear of upsetting you?
3. **Do you ask** what a mistake has taught your teen? How will your teen avoid it in the future?
4. **Do you tell** your teen about some of the lessons you have learned from your mistakes?
5. **Do you remind** your teen that it isn't necessary to dwell on mistakes? After learning from them, your teen can move on.

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are showing your teen how to learn and do better after mistakes. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"You must be big enough to admit your mistakes, smart enough to learn from them and strong enough to correct them."
—John C. Maxwell

Encourage your teen to put thanks in writing



Writing in a "gratitude journal" for a few minutes each week can have a positive impact on students' grades and engagement at school. To get your teen started, suggest topics such as:

- **A personality trait** your teen is proud to have.
- **A recent opportunity** that was rewarding.
- **Something wonderful** that happened to your teen or a friend.

Source: G. Bono, "Gratitude Practices at School That Work (and Why Some Don't)," EducationWeek.

Teens still need parenting

Your high school student may look like an adult. But your teen is not your peer, and you are still in charge. To maintain authority and avoid falling into the friend trap:

- **Insist on respectful behavior** toward you and other adults. Don't continue a conversation if your teen is being rude.
- **Make decisions** based on what is best for your teen, rather than to please or seem like a cool parent or "one of the kids."

Keep thinking skills sharp

Active, analytical thinking is essential for learning. To keep thinking skills ready for action, regularly ask your teen to:

- **Explain situations,** examples and problems in detail. Your teen will need to know vocabulary and express ideas clearly.
- **Verify information.** After reading something online, ask your teen to find credible sources to double-check facts.
- **Consider all sides** of an issue. Ask your teen to defend opposing viewpoints with equal dedication.

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