

THE READING TREE NEWSLETTER

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Organization: A Key to Academic Success

Study the anatomy of failure in almost any endeavor or institution, and somewhere in its history you will find a description of poor planning and administration.

No one has to argue about the importance of getting and staying organized, but for some it is a greater challenge than for others.

It is not uncommon to see a van or SUV sporting a sign such as “I came...I saw...I organized,” driven by one of the professionals who is now available for people who feel that they need help bringing order out of chaos in their homes and offices.

Nor will it be many weeks into the new school year before parents start hearing from teachers regarding their students’ failure in some area that relates to poor organizational skills.

A PREDICTOR OF SCHOOL FAILURE

That is unfortunate because there is probably no single greater predictor of school failure than poor organizational habits. Whether poor organization is a primary cause of failure or is symptomatic of more serious underlying problems is another question. But it almost goes without saying that if students don’t stay organized that their grades are going to suffer.

What is the most tell-tale sign of a disorganized student? Take a look at the way that they store their class notes, handouts, and returned tests and assignments. Not infrequently these sheets of paper will spill out of a textbook or be jammed haphazardly in a folder. Lift open the desk top of a younger student and you may find the same disorder.

Disorder in the way students keep their papers almost always reflects an accompanying disorder in many other areas related to their academic lives:

- recording assignments due the next day
- storing completed assignments in a place where they will be easily accessible to turn in on a timely basis, and
- keeping track of upcoming tests and long-term project dates

But it’s not as if parents don’t start early enough helping their young students learn ways to organize their materials. Walk the aisles of any office supply store during the

early weeks in August and you will see parents helping students select folders, spiral-bound notebooks, and a variety of organizers.

But check that eighth grader's or high school junior's American history text or folder at the first marking period, ten weeks into the new school year, and you may find little reflection of a long-term transfer of any sort of system for keeping materials organized.

It's never too late, however. Not if adults, many of whom are highly educated with full-blown careers, are turning to others for professional help in this area. So, how can parents help?

TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH: Since reminders, reprimands, and efforts to hold poorly organized students accountable haven't worked, try taking a positive approach.

Establish Common Ground: Recognize the difficulties that adults and perhaps you or an associate has in staying organized. Disorganized students often are the ones failing or doing poorly in school. If they recognize that successful people struggle with the same issues, they may be encouraged to invest in the process of getting organized. HGTV Cable regularly broadcasts a show on an individual or couple who hire a professional to help them get organized. After viewing the program with their student, parents may want to discuss what made the participants so pleased and relieved. What value did they see in getting organized and how might those advantages apply to their student?

Discuss the Values: Make a list of the advantages of staying organized. Students will

1. know what to do, when they need to know it
2. have what they need when they need it
3. get credit for what they've done without suffering the consequences of being late
4. have the information in notes, handouts, and returned tests that they need to review for tests at appropriate intervals
5. save time and effort in the long run

BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE: Some poorly organized students have struggled for so long in school that they have lost confidence in their ability to effect any change in their grades. It may boost their self-image if they understand that modern scientific research has shown that people's brains are wired differently. Creative, imaginative people tend to be disorganized and not given to administrative details. That is why many entrepreneurs who start successful businesses sometimes fail when their businesses reach a certain size. Understanding how they learn best helps students deal with areas of weakness without feeling bad about themselves. Several sources that supply guidelines or checklists that yield a rough but rather accurate approximation of students' mental profile are [*Dyslexia: Definition and Solutions*](#) (available at Anderson's Book Store) by Leonard Punt, *A Mind at a Time* by Mel Levine and *Intelligence Reframed* by Howard Gardner.

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Maximizing Academic Performance