



Xtramile Tuition Strategies

THE ABC OF BUILDING A BETTER STUDENT

By Peter Kenyon (Tutor)

**Online Maths Tuition
for
Year 1 to Year 8**

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INTRODUCTION - HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A TUTOR?

The process of choosing a tutor may be daunting and confusing. Generally, when a parent is told by a teacher their child is struggling it comes as sudden news to the parent but has been viewed as a gradual process by the teacher or various teachers. One wonders why measures were not taken sooner to halt this process.

For whatever reason, your student now requires tuition, so how do you choose?

I have seen many one-on-one tutors who do fine work helping the student with maths at their current level and at times this is successful. School results improve, and grades come up, but this system has its limitations.

Learning maths is a progressive process building upon previous knowledge of various maths strands until eventually the student can solve complex problems by drawing on their various knowledge strands. If there is a hole in their knowledge strands, this makes solving these complex problems more difficult. This hole may have appeared years before and not been patched.

The tuition process you choose should be able to identify these knowledge holes and plug them. By doing this your student is armed with complete knowledge that allows them to move to the top percentage of their class.

Your tutor should be able to identify the time when your child started to have difficulties; set up a program to begin at the point when confidence was lost; move progressively forward plugging up other holes as they are identified; monitor the student's progress (we do ours daily); provide progressive reports (our parents receive a comprehensive end of term report); and set goals that engage and reward students to keep them motivated.

This method takes time but produces the best long-term results.



XtraMile Tuition Strategies

“A” is for the Academic Year



Sometimes there just doesn't seem to be enough hours in a day to fit in what needs to be done, and there seems to be not enough weeks in the year for the school curriculum.

There are forty academic weeks to the Australian school year. This is little enough time to squeeze in the content of the curriculum. The problem is the school year is not exactly forty weeks.

There are several public holidays to be removed, and then there are “student free” days also to be taken out. If we remove the school camp that all students seem to be attending these days, sick days and time spent out of school for one reason or another

(sports, museums, etc.) then we have a shortened academic year.

This all puts our teachers and students under pressure as a larger amount of acquired knowledge is squeezed into a reduced amount of attendance time.

“A” initially stood for Academic Year but now I think it should stand for “Attendance”.

So, how do you make a better student? Don't add to the problem by reducing your student's school attendance by removing them from school for a week-long holiday because it is more convenient.

“B” is for Breakfast



No student can function well without fuel for the brain. Going to school without breakfast is starting the tank on near empty. The body's metabolism is slowed until the first meal to *break the fast* and it is running on reserve supply until then.

“B” could also stand for *B vitamins* as they help to convert the nutrients of food into energy; and there lies the next problem when developing a better student. How nutritious is the food if breakfast is eaten?

Children and teenagers require quite large amounts of nutrients to supply a growing body. Now, I didn't say they required large amounts of kilojoules, as it is nutrients that build healthy bodies and minds. Poor choices in food quality can lead to delivery of lots of kilojoules with few nutrients. This may lead to the problem of childhood

obesity.

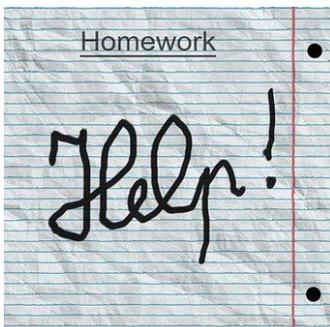
Parents play a pivotal role in the development of their children's eating habits. They do this in their role of parent by not giving into the child's whims for their favourite snack foods and their position as role model when they lead by example.

The energy requirement of a teenager in growth spurt is only marginally greater than that of pre-teen children and adults but their *protective nutrient* (protein, vitamins and minerals) per unit of energy consumed is greater. This means a teenager requires high quality nutrient foods to maintain healthy body and mind rather than high energy foods to keep them active.

“The energy needs of teenage athletes are increased, often greatly, if heavy training and competitive sports are involved.” (Human Nutrition and Dietetics – Ninth Edition).

It is important for your child to maintain three meals a day with the addition of healthy snacks for morning and afternoon tea.

“C” is for Copy Book



The downside to the Information Age is the decrease in fine motor skills used for writing. It is a problem presenting more often as laptops and tablets replace the use of pad and pen. An increasing number of students are unable to form legible letters of the alphabet or write numbers clearly enough so they may read them thirty seconds later.

Some students going into Year 8 are incapable of writing between the lines of a paper or forming numbers within the squares of a quad ruled page. Students in Year 5 are unable to produce or read their name in cursive script. These students are struggling with the fine motor skills required to help them to learn.

An article by Maria Konnikova, *“What's Lost as Handwriting Fades?”*, suggests evidence is emerging of a greater link between handwriting and learning. It appears children learn to read more quickly when they first learn to write by hand.

Learning is a complicated process. When we reproduce letters or anything else by hand, a plan is required before executing the action. The result is highly variable in that it will not exactly represent the original. Learning to identify variable representations is important to decoding letters when reading.

The research by Virginia Berninger, a psychologist at University of Washington, indicated that when a child who composed text by hand (either printing or cursive) *“They not only consistently produced more words more quickly than they did on the keyboard, but expressed more ideas.”*

There is also a suggestion of different neuropathways being developed in the brain when a child progresses on from printing to cursive writing.

Researchers at the University of California have reported laboratory and real-world studies of students learning better when they take notes by hand than when they type on a keyboard.

I ask you, “Is it time to throw away the pen and paper and adopt the technology of the keyboard? Was it time to give up walking when we invented the car?”

My suggestion to help build a better student is to let your pre-school child use colouring books and pencils; jigsaw puzzles and building blocks; to help develop fine motor skills. When they are at school continue to use the old-fashioned copy book, so your student may practise and learn to form letters and numbers. Encourage them to practise twenty minutes a day until they are proficient with writing the printed word. Allow this to develop into the practice of cursive writing so they may be able to record classroom notes in secondary school, lecture notes at university or record the minutes of a business meeting.

We may lose so much by giving up the pen.

‘D’ is for Don’t Give Up



People, being social animals, need to mix with others and children are no different. So, what is going on when a child who was excited about attending school is suddenly resisting?

At the start of the school year there are mixed emotions from the new students. Most of the time going to school for the first time will be met with excitement generated from buying books, a school bag, trying on uniforms and covering schoolbooks.

The first day or three will be an absolute dream, unless it is your first child going off to school and the tears come from you. There will come a time when the novelty wears off and your eager young prodigy will dig their heels in explaining they have finished with school.

Sometimes explaining that this is their lot for the next twelve plus years (an explanation better than that I hope) will have them merrily kitting up for the next day, but at times there may be

a deeper problem.

School refusal is an emotional problem experienced by some parents with their children. Some signs of school refusal are when your child:

- Throws tantrums about going to school
- Hides when it is time to leave for school
- Begs or pleads not to be taken to school
- Complains about being ill when it is time to leave for school

There are other indicators for *school refusal* you may read about on the Raising Children website. Addressing the cause is the key to handling the problem. There are many causes, but tuition may help when the cause is school refusal because of academic problems.

It is sad to think a Year One student is experiencing academic problems, but it does occur with no fault of any person. A new school student may be having difficulties because:

The assumed knowledge of Year One (e.g. spatial skills, order and counting, grouping, singing the alphabet) has not been learned in Prep.

The student is not quite ready to learn. Sometimes students struggle with learning something they see others around them learn easily. They become frustrated to tears, at which point we praise them for giving it a go. One day their eyes light up as they have answered a question correctly, but more importantly they understood the question they answered. Their brain is now ready to learn, and they take off catching the class (with the help of tuition) and at times moving to the head of the class with their results. Every child is ready to learn at a different time, so you never give up on them. Sometimes they are seven years of age before they are ready academically for school. This is a problem when school commences at five years of age.

The student has a *learning disability* and this may be something as simple to correct as a tracking issue.

Sometimes you may need the assistance of your G.P. or a child psychologist to help overcome your student's school anxiety or low academic results. Never give up on them and consider an after-school tuition program to help subdue their anxieties and achieve academically.



“E” is for Enough Sleep

“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” - Benjamin Franklin

And on the other side of the coin insufficient sleep will make children:

- Hyperactive.
- Lacking in confidence.
- Irritable.
- Inattentive; and
- Fall behind in class

If this sounds like your youngster then it is so easy to fix.

Much study has been devoted to knowing how much sleep is needed, or not needed, to remain healthy and productive. The conclusion being “.... *there is*

a lot of individual differences in what children and adolescents need to sleep to be at their best.” (Australian Centre for Sleep Education).

As a general guide, primary school students require between ten and twelve hours of sleep per day, while secondary (higher) school students get by with eight to ten hours each night. Research has indicated children of any age will arise at about the same time each day so the difference in hours of slumber occurs at the time of going to bed.

What time should a child go to bed to be at their peak the next day? To make this exercise easier and because Australian schools commence at 9:00 a.m. let's assume our children get up at seven to start their day during the week. This would require a primary school student to be in bed by 7:00 p.m. and no later than 9:00 the night before, and our secondary student in bed by 9:00 pm no later than 11:00.

The younger the child the more sleep required. Students from grades one to three require closer to twelve hours of sleep each weeknight while those from grade four to six/seven may drop to needing ten hours of sleep.

Problems occur with teenagers as their bodies are not ready for sleep when the clock says it is time for bed and they stay up whiling away the hours until slumber overtakes them. Unfortunately, the activities they do while waiting to sleep may not be conducive to bringing sleep on and they miss out on their required sleep quota. They then go into *sleep debt* which they try to reclaim on weekends by sleeping in. This problem may be compounded by staying up later during weekend nights to interact with friends and sleeping even more of the morning away to further knock the body clock around and make sleeping during the week more difficult. As a parent, you must take control of this situation.

Children deprived of sleep, like adults, are hard to rouse and will feel sleepy during the early part of the day. Unlike adults, primary school students will become more active during the day, though still be less able to concentrate.

Because they have become more *wired*, they will be less likely to fall asleep easily, thus becoming more sleep deprived. Parents may have trouble identifying a young child who is not getting enough sleep because they are active.

Some home factors compound sleep deprivation in children. Families in general are not going to bed as early as they need. For one reason or another, parents are staying up later and as role models may be setting poor examples of a healthy lifestyle.

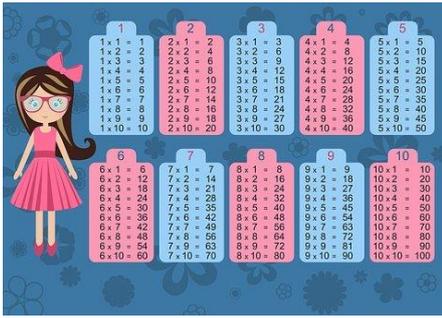
We see how the concentration of a child who has insufficient sleep is affected in our tuition room. A student who the previous week was performing wonderfully on our program suddenly has low scores and answers very few questions. When asked what they did the previous night the answer always involved a late night of movie watching, game playing, internet surfing or social media. We have also seen how a poor student changes so quickly when they stop being tired.

You can take steps to create good sleep habits by *cleaning up* the bedroom and time leading up to retiring. Some good sleep hygiene habits are:

- No T.V., computer, mobile phone or exercise 1 hour before going to bed.
- No T.V., computer, mobile phone in the bedroom.
- No coke or caffeine drinks 2-3 hours before sleeping.
- Set bedtimes and wake times and keep them to form healthy habits.
- As a parent, be a good role model and lead by example.

Visit the Australian Centre for Education in Sleep website for a more comprehensive read.

“F” is for Foundations



If your child was an average student last year, chances are they will be an average student this year. If they struggled with maths last year, they will probably be struggling with maths this year. Nothing changes unless something changes. What must change to improve your child's grades?

The first thing that must change is someone's attitude. Children are children and they will not change unless they are given a reason to change. Telling them to do better or to change their ways will probably not get the result you, as a parent, desire because they do not know how to change. They are children, they are young, and have a limited frame of reference when it comes to change. They must be taught how to change. At this stage, the biggest change must be in you as a parent. You must make the decisions for them, and then guide them along the path.

One of the biggest issues seen with students is they have problems with weak foundations. They simply don't know their multiplication tables up to their year level and they don't have in place a memory of subtraction and addition of the numbers up to twenty (20). No matter how well a student understands the mathematical concept they are being taught at school, if they can't perform the foundations, they will not be able to solve the maths problem. Continually getting the wrong answer whittles away their confidence.

Every student needs to build strong foundations. You can't have lasting structure without strong foundations.

“G” is for a Good Read

“Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.” – Margaret Fuller

How important is it to be a reader in this world of instant information?

Does sitting with your child and playing computer games produce the same outcome as sitting with them and reading a book?

Does it matter that you have never sat with your child and read to them before they have attended school?

More research is coming forward to indicate it does matter that a child is not read to or encouraged to pick up a book, even to scribble in.

Sitting with book in hand and child on lap allows them to see symbols, words and images. Moving your finger, leading their eyes along symbols of words and from words to images, allows little ones to make connections, at their own pace, with these symbols, words and images. Their vocabulary grows.



They may not yet be attending kindergarten or pre-school, but you are already preparing their mind for life-long learning. You have been helping their brain develop neuropathways that will assist with learning when they attend pre-school and beyond. Now, not every child will be ready to make these connections, just as not every child is ready to attend school at the tender age of five. These things happen when the child is ready, and you can't rush it.

Spending this quality time with your toddler is crucial to early childhood development.

Andre Biemiller, a Canadian psychologist, studied the consequences of lower vocabulary levels in young children. The results of his studies indicated that children entering kindergarten in the bottom 25% of vocabulary generally remained behind the other children. By year six they were approximately three years behind their peers in vocabulary, reading and comprehension.

But what of teenagers? Is this a time for them to stop reading and focus on computer coding and superhero movies? Jonathon Douglas, of the National Literacy Trust (U.K.) doesn't think so in his 2013 article “The Importance of Instilling a Need to Read”

“Teens who choose to pick up a book for pleasure are more likely to succeed in life.”

His article intimates that reading for pleasure reveals a predisposition for life-long learning which he suggests explains increased social mobility. If life-long reading is one indicator for success, then how may you encourage your moody teenage, or pre-teen, to put down the games console in exchange for the printed word?

We are unlikely to read material that doesn't interest us, so to encourage a reading for pleasure environment in your household you should supply reading material (graphic novels, magazines, fiction and non-fiction novels) that will be of interest to your teenager. Hopefully, the school library will also have a supply of reading material that falls outside the curriculum.

What about reading on the internet? Research has shown that we adopt different styles of reading for different formats. Internet reading tends to lead to short concentration skimming rather than long-term absorption.

Over the past few decades, authors have been producing extraordinary books written with the adolescent in mind. These books deal with issues teenagers may be exposed to or experiencing in their life and allows them to deal with them from the safety of the book.

This is not to say teenagers should not be exposed to the classics of Dickens and the like, but there are books more relevant to them and their time. The classics may come later in life with the pleasure of reading.

Exploring the world through books, gathering information and understanding develops a solid core of knowledge upon which to build ethics, morality and character that becomes the young adult.

“H” is for Help



A decreased ability to concentrate, confused thoughts, motivation low, increased irritability, grumbling, quarrelsome, overly sensitive to criticism, anxious or depressed. This may sound like a typical teenager, but they are also warnings a coach watches for in athletes.

Good coaches recognise the signs of over-training and adjust their athletes' schedule so the next phase of over-training, burn-out, doesn't occur. A great coach will not let these signs develop because they know how to pace the training sessions without over-stressing the athlete.

What has fitness training to do with students? Burn-out may occur in any person in any profession at any age. Many parents don't realise how much pressure they place on their children when they load up their awake time with sports training and competition outside of school hours. Some students are playing two sports a season. Some parents don't realise they may be setting their child up for burn-out later that school year because they haven't

planned enough recovery time for their student.

If you are a parent who encourages outside sports for their children, then you should consider these three things:

1. Training and playing sport are tiring, very tiring.
2. A tired student will find it difficult to concentrate in class.
3. In today's world, a person has a much better chance of achieving a high income with good grades than becoming a highly paid athlete.

An over-committed student who finds it difficult to concentrate in class will eventually fall behind on their grades. They may require the help of a coach, an academic coach.

When athletic students attend tuition sessions, we ask parents to consider dropping one activity before introducing a program of tuition. There is no sense in adding to an already over-loaded timetable. Nothing will be achieved. The tuition, depending upon the grade the student is in, will probably take one full year to bring them aligned with the class. That is only one season of any one sport, so they will not miss much when dropping one activity to replace it with tuition.

As an academic coach (with a long background in fitness training) I watch for signs of over-training in our students and act on it. Sometimes, that action will be to remove tuition from the student's timetable if nothing else is removed. We do this for the well-being of the student.

You don't have to be a sporting student to fall behind. At times, a high achieving student places themselves under unnecessary pressure because they have not learnt to budget time or to study correctly. A student like this will benefit from some one-on-one guidance so they may learn from an expert how to research and produce assignments, or how to prepare for secondary school exams.

So, as the school year progresses, watch for signs that indicate your student may not be keeping up and is silently crying for help.

“I” is for Interest

“A man who limits his interest limits his life.” – Vincent Price



We all want our children to do well in school and in life, but how do you ignite that spark that fuels a need for knowledge. How does your child develop an interest in the world around them?

For starters, let's look at *your* environment. After all, we shouldn't put the responsibility for learning and growth upon the school system alone. Children's exposure to teachers and schools is small compared to their exposure to parents and home life. So, let's take stock of the most influential environment upon your child's growth – you and your home.

Talk *with* your child, not *at* your child

Talking *with* your child encourages conversation and participation while talking *at* your child is more about giving instruction: “Don't do that”, “Sit and be quiet”, “Go outside and play”. Which type of parent are you? Is most of your

communication one directional, or do you urge a more open form of communication? Do you talk with your child about the things you are interested in, such as books, movies, and gardening?

Talk with your child about your interests

Your growth and learning don't stop when you become an adult. Your child is likely to become the adult you are because you are the major role model in their life. Your continued growth doesn't have to be purely academic. Your interests, hobbies and activities continue to develop you as a person. As an adult, have you continued to grow, or do you come home at night and sit in front of the computer surfing YouTube or watching television?

Involve your child with books

Look around your house and count the books on your bookcase. What? You don't have a bookcase. Reading is still the best source of gaining knowledge. It is a sad fact that today many households don't have a library. Their interests and knowledge are not on display. I enjoy visiting people and scanning the titles on their shelves as it immediately lets me see the interests of the people who live there and gives a basis for conversation. Many people will have a display case for their sports trophies and I consider bookcases as display cases for your knowledge. Now, before you go thinking I am some sort of nerd, as well as having several hundred books, our household also has a movie library with several hundred movies. Display your interests and talk about your interests.

Do things and show your child how you do things

Involve your child in your interests, within reason. If your hobby is your garden, then have them help with the weeding. If you love live theatre, then take them to some live shows to expose them to the experience. Just keep the experience relative to their developmental level. Let your children see you reading at night instead of squatting in front of the television. Being entertained by books offers a different intellectual experience to being entertained by X-Box. If you are an X-Box kind of dad, you may just have to try a little harder. Try playing board games that offer challenges and choices while playing to help with the thinking process. Become involved with your children in thinking games and not just reaction games.

Become your child's best teacher

From the day they are born your number one priority is to protect them and to prepare them. The adult they become is the result of your influence as much as that of the school system they fall into. Sometimes being a good parent requires learning new skills, but that is alright as learning new skills is part of life's processes. No-one is born knowing how to parent. We learn some of it from our parents through their role modelling and we learn some from interacting with people as we grow up. Though, having said that nothing will prepare you for being a parent, you just learn as you go along. But you do have to learn.

Don't overload your child

You don't have to expose your child to everything at one time. There is no need to fill every waking moment with experiences and knowledge. You should allow down time, so they may process what has been experienced, what has been learnt and to rest and recover. Being a child takes a lot of energy and there is a need to re-charge their batteries from time to time. Build quiet times into their day when it is alright to sit and do nothing. Remember, a tired child will struggle at school.

Be positive about their school experience

"It's alright mate, you have to go and there is nothing we can do about it." doesn't send a positive message about going to school. The school years are such a wonderful time of our lives and must be reinforced as such. Don't bring the woes of being an adult, or the problems you are experiencing upon your child's fun years. You can use their experience to bring some release from the pressures of your life. Encourage them to become involved with school activities and then be supportive and join in with them at these events. One of my most vivid memories is when my father and his friends turned out to watch me at my school rugby league game. I played many games but that one I remember. Don't underestimate the importance of being part of their school experience.

"We will all be role models in our children's lives. We don't have that choice. The choice we do have is whether we are a positive role model or a negative role model. That is our choice." – Peter Kenyon

"J" is Just in Time

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

— Nelson Mandela

Is there a good time to seek out tutoring? Does your son or daughter display any of these?

- Lacks confidence with schoolwork
- Becomes distraught about going to school
- Struggles with Maths
- Reads without interest or understanding
- Reads through punctuation marks or skip lines completely



Of course, these indicators are not the only signs for a cry for help. Any change in behaviour or mood may be an indicator that moves you to further investigation.

One thing you should not do is shrug off these indicators as, "Oh, it is only a phase they are going through." because chances are it is a phase they will not get through. The cause, or trigger, of the change may vary from changing teachers to taking your children out of school for off-season holidays. The latter has a considerable effect on children in Year 3, 5 and 7.

Years 3, 5 and 7 appear to be the years when new concepts are introduced in Maths, and probably other subjects. But we, at the tuition room, see these years as the most influential to the student's development. Basically, a lot of new stuff is taught in Maths

during these years. Missing one or two weeks during the school period has a lasting and recurring effect on that area of knowledge through the following years.

Back to our original question, is there a good time to seek out tutoring assistance?

You would think Year 1 students would not require tutoring assistance, after all they have just started school and what have they learned? Prep is used to prepare children for Year 1 and it is at this stage they learn the simple things like singing the alphabet, counting to ten or twenty and spatial skills such as left, right, in front, under, first, second, last and inside and outside. Even colouring in pictures helps to develop the fine motor skills required to hold a pencil to form letters while learning to write.

Sometimes children miss some concepts, and this puts them behind during the first year because there is *assumed knowledge* in Year 1. Yes, tuition does help to restore confidence to a Year 1 student.

It is always easier to help students who are in Year 2, 4 or 6 because these are the years before the next knowledge jump. Catching them up in these years aligns their Maths knowledge for the next year jump in concept learning. We have noticed the most distressed students who come to us are in Years 3, 5 and 7.

When is the best time to bring a student for tuition? When you notice a change in behaviour that continues for more than two weeks. There is generally a reason for that change and if it is related to learning then tuition may be your answer. Having said that, it is never too late to seek out tuition. We have had students in Year 8 that have received tuition to cover knowledge short falls from Year 5. No, it is never too late to help a student who wants to be helped.

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."

— Confucius

"K" is for Kinaesthetic Learner



Not everyone learns the same way, and that creates problems in classrooms and at home.

As a generalisation, there are three types of learners: auditory, kinaesthetic, and visual. These are the main channels of learning. It's a generalisation because, a person is more likely to be a combination of two (or more) rather than simply one, as in being purely an auditory learner. How do you identify a kinaesthetic learner?

Kinaesthetic learners just want to touch and feel everything. As adults, their mates give them plenty of personal space because they just want to playfully thump them all the time. Their house is a mess because they just want to collect and pull everything apart, just to see how it works. Putting it together again may be another matter. Does this sound like someone you married?

It is easy to identify an adult kinaesthetic learner, but how do you identify it in your child?

Well for starters, their teacher will be strongly suggesting you attend *Parent Teacher Nights*, so they can discuss how disruptive this young pupil is in the classroom. They fidget, leave their seat to touch things, move things and find it difficult to sit and learn. They may not even be aware of their movements as they are easily distracted by the movement of others and want to investigate.

This student needs a hands-on approach to learning so sitting in class and listening, reading from a book, or even taking notes from the whiteboard is not the best way for them to learn.

They will respond better when learning is through participation, such as in chemistry experiments, or building a model. These students do well in sports, drama and live for school lunch breaks. By the age of seven, they have been categorised as being an under-achiever, or worse still, hyperactive. But fear not.

Being a kinaesthetic learner is not a problem, as approximately fifteen percent of the population are kinaesthetic learners. The problem is our education system is geared towards auditory and visual learners, and kinaesthetic learners are the speed bump in our systems road to education. What can you do?

For starters, accept them for who they are, healthy active children. Give them down time after an active session and reward them for the tasks they perform. These guys may be reward driven. Kinaesthetic learners do best with images so paint them a picture of what you want from them and give them regular breaks while studying.

Your student is likely to become an actor, dancer, physiotherapist, massage therapist, surgeon, mechanic, carpenter, P.E. teacher, athlete, farmer, etc.

The point is, be patient, give them space and let them grow.

“L” is for The Listening Learner



‘Sounds good to me’; ‘It’s starting to ring a bell.’

These are a couple of the phrases used by roughly twenty percent of the population that help to identify them as auditory learners.

Of course, your little one may not be using such readily identifiable markers, but you may still be able to see qualities that help to give you an insight as to the type of learners they may be.

An auditory learner enjoys movies and music and probably notices the sound effects in movies more than other people. They will readily put up their hands for discussion, happily participate in discussion groups and be involved in discussions without a group as they use self-talk. These students are not afraid to speak in class and may be accused of speaking in class as they process the

information through self-talk.

They will perform their worst at reading passages and writing answers relating to those passages in a timed test but excel in responding to what they have heard and in oral exams.

The auditory learner learns best when reading aloud, receiving verbal instruction, repeating facts with eyes closed and memorising steps and procedures by repeating them. Older auditory learners need some external sounds (T.V. or music) while they are reading their notes or processing their homework. Writing their notes and recording them to listen to later is their best way of obtaining and retaining information.

Remember, looking out of the window while the teacher is talking does not necessarily mean they are not completely aware of what is being said. Auditory learners do not require a visual context in order to learn.

“M” is for MEMORY

“I just don’t get this!” is a cry for help from a student of any age. Here is the first thing about the learning process – if you don’t get it you won’t remember it and you won’t learn it. A student must understand a concept, in their own words, to be able to learn it.

So, the first step to learning something effectively is to understand it and if you don’t understand it then ask your teacher or instructor to explain it another way. You will not be the only person not understanding and it is your teacher’s job to see that you do understand.

Once you think you understand it then write it out in your own words, this will help to put it into short term memory. This is where most students stop and then wonder why they can’t remember material. Short term is good for a few minutes, hours or days, after that it is gone. You must take the next step to move it into long term memory.

Recitation (saying something repeatedly) has been proved to be the most effective way of placing information into long term memory. And by long term I am talking about a lifetime. Reading something quietly repeatedly to yourself or writing it down several times is not as effective as reading the material, in your own words, repeatedly ALOUD.

“N” is for Nutrition

Your car will not run without fuel, and neither will your body, including your brain.

A child of any age is growing rapidly and needs plenty of food for energy and nutrients (protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals) to help supply the body with the building blocks to allow the cells to multiply and the body to grow.

The inability to concentrate, feeling listless, unenthusiastic and headaches are all signs of insufficient nutrient intake. The body begins to slow down by mid-afternoon after a day of high activity and little nutritious food.

The best way to maintain high-energy output is to ensure a nutritious breakfast, a healthy lunch and perhaps morning and afternoon tea. A healthy round of vegemite sandwiches with a glass of water or milk will ensure the B Vitamins for energy production are in the body to spur the brain into motion.

The chief function of B Vitamins is to act as spark plugs for the body to assist in converting glucose into energy for fuel. They are also important for the functioning of a healthy nervous system and in helping to promote relaxation in stressed individuals. Very few vitamins are found in a packet of potato crisps and a can of coke. A person will literally obtain more miles out of a banana than soft drinks and chips.

The importance of Vitamin C can't be over-looked. The highest concentration of vitamin C in the body is found in the adrenal glands because it is required to make cortisol and adrenalin for conditions of stress. But the next highest concentration is found in the brain. Why would the brain require vitamin C? So, the body may produce dopamine, serotonin and melatonin. Vitamin C helps to keep your sanity as well as your collagen intact.

There are five essential nutrients for effective brain function, and this includes memory. Many teenagers are low in iodine, as can be said about the general population. It is readily found in some seafood but if you do not eat seafood then you must obtain it from another source.

Decades ago, iodine was placed in table salt so inland populations may have a non-seafood source of the nutrient. If your family eats salt, then it may be beneficial to purchase iodised salt. Other nutrients are omega-3 (from oily fish), iron (meat), zinc (almonds) and the B vitamins.

Two herbs gaining respect for their ability to aid memory are Ginkgo biloba and Gotu kola. Ginkgo increases blood flow and fluidity to the brain. Improved circulation aids brain function.

The quality of food is so important. We do no good for our children when we give into their tantrums for low nutrient junk food. Be parents to your children now and their friends when they grow up.

According to Henry Osiecki (B.Sc. Grad. Dip Nutr. & Dietetics) some symptoms of ADHD are like those of essential fatty acid (EFA) deficiencies. Behavioural and learning problems, tantrums and sleeping disorders are common to both. Supplementing with omega 3 has been shown to improve learning and concentration behaviour.

Other Nutritional Deficiencies in Learning – if your diet is inadequate then consider a quality multi-vitamin because:

B Complex

The functions of the B vitamins in mental alertness and energy are well established.

EFA – Omega 3 & Omega 6

Introducing fish oil into a youngster's diet may do wonders for concentration.

Zinc

The functions of zinc and the immune system have been known for over 100 years. Knowledge of its other functions is relatively recent. Low levels of zinc are associated with low alertness, inability to think along abstract lines (learn a language e.g. English), mood and memory problems.

Magnesium

One of the most deficient minerals in the modern western diet. Low brain magnesium gives unrefreshed sleep, causes easy fatigue (important for the Krebs Cycle of energy production), poor concentration and daytime sleepiness.

“O” is for Over-Worked Student

“O” is for
the Over-
Worked
Student

The ABCod Building a Better
Student



Many parents don't realise they may be setting their children up for burn-out later in the year because they, as their child's coach, have not planned their activities so their academic athlete may peak at the appropriate times (exams).

It is with the best intentions that many parents will fill almost every minute of their little one's waking hours with sport, training for sport and transport to and from sport. I am amazed at how many children are undertaking more than one sport a school term. If you are a parent who is building a champion, please remember three things.

1. Training and playing sport are tiring, very tiring. That is why great coaches don't over-load their prized athletes. They allow down time for recovery and for their protégés to spend time doing non-competitive recreational activities.
2. A tired student will find it difficult to concentrate in class. Many students who participate in after school sports are still running around during the day at school. Play is how they socialise with their friends. An over-loaded student will take the inactive time in the classroom to recharge the batteries with rest. This will affect their learning.

- In today's world a person has a much better chance of achieving a high-income future with good grades than becoming a highly paid athlete. It is best to plan a balanced week for your child. Yes, sport is important, but it should not be the only focus to your child's development.

Children are growing and that takes energy. You can help by planning their week to include some down time when there is no running around, high energy sport or study. Sometimes, it good to let them be themselves to develop their own interest.

"P" is for PLANNERS



Quite often students begin the year in a casual stride and who is to blame them? After all, they have just come off holidays (about 1 ½ months' worth).

I come from a sports training background and understand that an athlete who wants to perform well will not take six weeks off their training year. The repercussions are too great as they will lose too much form. They must work too hard to get back to square one.

A dedicated rugby player will be maintaining his/her aerobic fitness with moderate exercise during the off-season. When January comes around, they are ready to start full swing on improving their strengths, building on fitness and working on skills. That is how you stay ahead of the pack.

Most learners will forget the last four weeks of learning over the six weeks of Christmas break.

Pretty much everything learned in November is lost by the time they go back to school in January/February.

I often wonder why students don't undertake the same planning when it comes to academic performance. Most students and parents of students are willing to let the achievements of the final months of the previous year disappear through resting the brain after the school year.

The brain doesn't need that much time to recover. In fact, that length of time of recovery is detrimental. The last month of knowledge learned prior to exams has been lost and must be relearned in the first month of the new year!

During the last two weeks of the Christmas holidays many students maintain their academic conditioning by working with their Academic Coach at after-school tuition. Some use their coach (their tutor) to work on their weaknesses from last year while others use the time to get a head start on the subject they know is in the next year.

These guys, like their athletic counterparts, are staying ahead of the pack. Is it worthwhile? You bet it is. They will go into the new year confident and stress free. They have locked in with their coach who is helping them to perform at their peak.

We live in a competitive world and those who rise to the top are those who are willing to go the extra mile to achieve that result. Time and effort are often put into young people with their sport, but will that effort bring a return on investment for them? Will these skills bring them an income? Most likely not.

If the same effort was put into their academic ability, or at least more evenly distributed well.....

"Q" is for Questioning What the Eyes See

The Eyes Have It When $5 + 1 = 5$

Some students are behind at school through no fault of their own.

They look at the work and don't understand what is going on. They ask themselves "Why am I the only person in this class who doesn't get this?" Eventually they begin to believe "I must be a real dummy I just don't understand why I keep getting this wrong!" Their self-confidence disintegrates and at times their behaviour will follow. After all, "What is the point of turning up every day if I can't learn this?"

What is happening with this student?

What would happen if you saw the number zero as a one? For one thing sometimes five plus one will equal six and other times it will equal five. When you are in primary school and just learning about numbers and maths, things will become almost incomprehensible. You won't understand why sometimes ten is ten and sometimes it's eleven. Everything will become an exercise in guess work for you. These students will also have trouble seeing decimal points, and fractions are just another language when your eyes skip over the line between the numerator and denominator.

That's just maths. When they read, "was" can become "saw" and whole lines are skipped because the eyes didn't see the line to read it. By the time they are Year 7 their reading comprehension is extremely low and there are gaps in their mathematics understanding because fractions and decimals don't exist.

The problem is with their eye tracking.

Eye Tracking issues occur when the two eyes don't move smoothly and accurately across a line or from word to word. The student will often lose their place while reading, skip lines, misread short words as in "was" and "saw" and cut off the beginnings and endings of words.

Eye tracking issues are usually corrected by visiting a Behavioural Optometrist who tests for the condition and prescribes glasses that are worn until the condition is corrected. Normal optometrists don't usually check or test for this condition, so if your student has glasses and their schoolwork has not improved it may be time to visit the specialist.

"R" is for Readiness for School

"A stitch in time saves nine." How do you know if your pre-schooler is ready for their big jump into primary school?

Does your child understand these words – "above"; "below"; "on"; "in"; "before"; "after"; "beside"; "first"; "second"; "last"; "stop"; "go"; "left"; "right"; "top"; "bottom"; "middle"?

Pre-school education should help young learners with their spatial skills and prepare them for primary school, but there are times when these skills are not acquired. This is no reflection upon the child, though not having an understanding can place the young learner at a disadvantage when they first attend primary school.

Can you imagine the difficulty a young learner will have following the simplest directions if they do not understand the words from the list above? We are seeing more instances where the parents of children in Years 1 and 2 are seeking help because their little ones are not keeping up at school.

How can a student fall into difficulty at such an early stage of their education?

Let the early years be play. Young children learn through play, being read to, and through song. Have any of these three things changed in the last two decades? Do children play with other children or with their parents like they used to? Are they being read to by an adult? Do the songs they listen to teach them about the spatial world around them?

The things we do with our children before they attend school are just as important as the education they receive before they become adults. If you can get the foundations right the structure is strong.

"S" is for Stressed Students

Daily Diary Does the Deed

The year is going to progress whether we become involved with it or not. Those students who don't take control of time will have time controlling them. It is these students, particularly Secondary School students, that display symptoms of stress as the year progresses.

Students who learn how to use a diary and planner at the beginning of the year are more likely to feel relaxed as the year progresses. Keeping a written diary or planner appears to be almost a lost science. Everything today seems to be electronic with touch pads for keying entries and apps that help to link all the diaries together and co-ordinate your appointments. This is all very impressive but is it helping your student?

At the beginning of the term or semester your student is given their assignments and due dates. They are also aware of sports training and events they should be attending; forthcoming birthdays and family events; and school activities. Showing your son or daughter how to use a diary is a valuable life skill to pass on to them. Sitting down once a week and running through that week's entries helps to co-ordinate lifestyles.

Remember: We are all given twenty-four hours a day, how you use them is up to you.

"T" is for Tying Laces Requires Writing



It caused considerable concern when I read that the American Government dropped teaching cursive writing from the core curriculum in 2010. They have left it up to the states to decide if it should be taught in elementary schools. Some have decided not to teach the writing and reading of cursive script. Their students are not being taught to read or write past the printed letter.

Does not teaching how to write have repercussions other than affecting the way we develop and record our thoughts? Is it even a concern that we become solely dependent upon smart phones, tablets and computers for recording our words?

People may have asked the same question as the motor car replaced the bicycle or television replaced evening family interaction. Change produces change and each alteration to our lifestyle needs to be considered for its own new path. If we haven't

looked far enough down the path before taking the first few steps, we may arrive at a destination we did not desire. I don't think an obese society and world environmental problems was what Henry Ford envisioned with his Model T; nor did Steve Jobs foresee family members retreating to separate rooms when he wanted to bring the world together.

What damage can possibly be caused by not teaching cursive writing to young students? I have already encountered a young postman who has difficulty delivering handwritten letters because they used "running writing". So, we don't receive our mail, is that a problem these days? The fact the young man couldn't decipher or decode the letters on the envelope is of greater concern to me.

Cursive writing as with all writing requires the development of fine motor skills; skills that come with practice. The fine dexterity of finger and hand movement learned by a seven-year-old child is the same skill required to tie shoelaces, do up buttons, place a nut on a bolt or to produce a painting. I have already begun to see within my tuition experience young students unable to control letter and number formation between 8-millimetre lines or contain them within 7-millimetre squares of a quad page. Is this a problem?

When I was in primary school, the pencil and then the pen was an important tool to my learning. Our teachers came in early to prepare the black board with the day's lessons. These lessons were copied into our notebooks. Maths problems were copied from the board or the textbook before being solved. Our scholastic days were filled with scribing and learning. Our weekends required us to compose an essay, so we could practise our scribbles and improve our imagination. Even now I produced drafts for this post with pencil and paper before committing them to digital creation.

Reading, writing and arithmetic formed the foundation of independence for an individual. With all three mastered a person was armed to contribute to society, create wealth from nothing and control their destiny. I am afraid the removal of just one may have an impact on creating an independent individual.

"U" is for Understanding the Curriculum

There has been some talk of late about the school curriculum and the changes it is going through. These changes, like any change, cause ripple effects of anxiety on students, teachers and parents. But what are the learning expectations of our young students?

I have been looking at www.australiancurriculum.edu.au for some guidance just so I, as a tutor, am aware and aligned with expectations. I would advise popping onto the website and having a look. Meanwhile I will give a brief summary focusing on maths as this is the area parent seek the most guidance from tutors.

Year One

By the end of Year One a school student is expected to *know the numbers* to one hundred; *skip count* by 2, 5 and 10; and be able to *locate numbers* on a number line. Simple addition is accomplished by counting on, re-arranging or performing partitioning. Fractions are introduced as they learn to recognise "1/2" and be able to tell the time to the half hour.

I mentioned only a small area of the curriculum as these are the areas I see most when a student is presented for tuition. At this stage of learning any short coming in these areas may be made up by parents sitting down with their little one and turn learning into some form of game. There are several aids available from various websites and suggestions on the Australian Curriculum site.

Year 2

If you are a parent with a young student in Australia, then chances are you have your mind in a muddle as to education expectations.

In Year 1 students have mastered the numbers up to 100 and skip counting by 2, 5 and 10. This year sees them progress even further on the number line as they move towards recognising and placing order to the numbers to 1,000, and investigate the number sequences of 2, 3, 5 and 10. It is this year they explore the connection between subtraction and addition.

By the end of this year they will master reading a clock (analogue and digital) to the quarter hour using the words "to" and "past" appropriately. They will be able to name the months of the year in the correct order as well as the seasons of the year. They will be able to use a calendar to find the date and know the number of days to the month.

This is only a small amount that is on the curriculum and only relates to maths as this is the area, as a tutor, I see the most problems. How can you help your child with their studies? Do you remember this:

*"Thirty days has September, April, June and November,
all the rest have thirty-one days clear,
except February alone which has twenty-eight days
and twenty-nine each leap year.*

Year 3

"These are the best years of your life.", self-assuring words spruiked by many a parent and teacher to seven-year-old students who don't need reassurance after remembering their potty-training years. They have just cruised through the first two years of primary school, they know all the numbers, the alphabet and can write their name; what else is there to learn?

Year 3 is where many young students realise their world will never be the same again. It is during this year they discover numbers do not stop at 1,000 but continue all the way to 10,000 and they must know their order, place value, and be able to recognise if they are

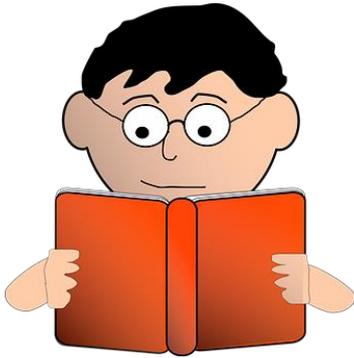
odd or even! Not only that but there are numbers smaller than one that no-one told them about as they are introduced to the fractions $1/2$, $1/4$, $1/3$, and $1/5$.

When learning the multiplication table by heart for 2, 3, 5 and 10 no-one warned them about having to manage multiplying a two-digit number by a single digit number, without a smart phone. In fact, they are expected to develop strategies to perform addition and subtraction in their head (mental maths). Counting on, regrouping and partitioning are all strategies employed to perform mental maths.

It is during this year our students are introduced to metric measurement. I hear very few complaints from students in our tuition centre about learning measurements. I simply remind them that learning 1,000 metres equals one kilometre is much easier than remembering there are 1,760 yards to a mile, 22 yards to a chain, or 16 ounces to a pound.

Yes, there is a lot to learn in Year 3 (and this is only maths) and yes, these may be the best years of their life because Year 5 is ahead of them, but we won't tell them about that yet.

“V” is for Visual Spatial Learner



“Let’s look at this differently”, “I can’t see the big picture”, “See how this works?” - stand back here comes a visual learner and a future artist, builder, inventor or musician, that is if they can get through our education system.

These right hemi-sphere thinking (that’s creative thinking) students are not wired to produce written reports on the thoughts they visualise in their mind, at least not until they learn how. They think and learn in multi-dimensional images. Our education system is more geared to teach left hemi-sphere thinking auditory learners who think and learn in words rather than images.

A visual-spatial learner may be good at spelling and lousy with names, needs a quiet study time, likes colour and is good with charts, maps and diagrams. They remember pictures and are good with direction. They will always have trouble remembering verbal instructions and

must learn by taking notes.

As a parent you can help by explaining a project you wish them to do by explaining why you want them to do something, because they need to see the big picture first.

“W” is for Writing Your Lessons by Hand

“Does handwriting matter? Not very much according to educators. The Common Core standards, which we have adopted in most states, call for teaching legible handwriting, but only in kindergarten and first grade. After that, the emphasis quickly shifts to proficiency on the keyboard.”

“What’s Lost as Handwriting Fades” – by Maria Konnikova

The article suggests evidence is emerging of a greater link between handwriting and learning. It appears children learn to read more quickly when they first learn to write by hand.

A 2012 study by Karin James at the Indiana University supported the association between handwriting and learning. Children who had not learned to read were presented with index cards with a letter or shape they were to reproduce. They could either:

- Trace the image on a page with a dotted outline.
- Draw it on a blank sheet of paper.
- Type it on a computer.

A study of their brain waves as they reproduced the shape or letter showed an area of the brain, active when an adult reads and writes, was highly stimulated when the child drew the letter on a blank sheet of paper. The activation was significantly weaker through the other two processes.

Learning is a complicated process. When we reproduce letters, or anything else, by hand a plan is required before executing the action. The result is highly variable in that it will not exactly represent the original. Learning to identify variable representations is important to decoding letters when reading.

The research by Virginia Berninger, a psychologist at University of Washington, indicated that when a child who composed text by hand (either printing or cursive) *“They not only consistently produced more words more quickly than they did on the keyboard, but expressed more ideas.”*

There is also a suggestion of different neuropathways being developed in the brain when a child progresses on from printing to cursive writing.

Research at the University of California have reported laboratory and real-world studies of students learning better when they take notes by hand than when they type on a keyboard.

So, is it time to throw away the pen and paper and adopt the technology and the keyboard? Was it time to give up walking when we invented the car?

“X” is for the X Factor in Learning with Technology

In his book “How Language Works” David Crystal discusses the possible effect computer-mediated communication (CMC) has had on both spoken and written language. CMC is the written communication that takes place on the internet, emails, forums etc. David Crystal infers that CMC is not like written or spoken language.

An elementary social grace we learn at an early age is that of turn-taking when we hold a conversation and *“Turn-taking is so fundamental to conversation that most people are not conscious of its significance as a means of enabling interactions to be successful.”*

When we ask a question and expect an answer; or expect a complaint to be followed by an excuse or apology; even when we acknowledge the receipt of information with a “thank you” we are turn-taking. This social formality allows people to take turns when they talk and not compete to talk at once.

On the internet turn-taking is dictated by the software rather than the people involved in the conversation. It is your turn after you push the “send” button and when it is received by the other party, which could be days if they are infrequent with checking their email.

Similarly, CMC is not like traditional writing because it can lack the permanency and traditional structure. Because there is so much *perceived* pressure to communicate some people are happy to send their messages with typographical errors, misspellings, erratic capitalisation and lack of punctuation. It would appear the care taken to revise their writing is of little or no importance to most authors of communication.

Written language has always had problems of interpretation when compared to face-to-face conversation but no amounts of “????”; “!!!!”; or smiley emoticon on emails or Facebook will replace the quizzical look or a raised eyebrow as immediate feedback to a statement.

“Y” is for Your Child’s Early Years

Are there things you can do to help your prodigy to become a person who thirsts for knowledge?

Maryanne Wolf in her book, “Proust and the Squid” addresses this question.

“The more children are spoken to, the more they will understand oral language. The more children are read to the more they understand all the language around them, and the more developed their vocabulary becomes.”

“... many efforts to teach a child to read before four or five years of age are biologically precipitate and potentially counterproductive for many children.”

The reason for this is the myelin sheath (fatty coating around nerves to help electrical information to flow) in the angular gyrus (that part of the brain related to language, number processing, spatial cognition, memory and attention) is not sufficiently developed until five to seven years of age. It develops in all children at different rates and in girls faster than boys.

Sometimes your five-year-old is just not ready for school and your young lad may not be ready until seven years of age. By that time, they are in year two or three and maybe well behind at school. It is not that they can’t learn, it is just their brain was not ready for them to learn. They can catch up, but by this time they may need some assistance.

“Z” is for Zee Final Word

“What then of children who come from homes where no-one hears Mother Goose, where no-one is encouraged to read signs, write scribbly letters, or play with books of any kind? What happens to them as they enter kindergarten has serious consequences for the rest of their lives – for them and for all of us.”

Though they may not be able to read by the age of five (and we should have no expectation of this) there is no reason for not sitting a child on your lap and reading to them. Let them see the words and the pictures as you read them. They may, or may not, develop at their own pace as they link the symbols of the word with the symbol of the picture. Just remember, if they don’t, they just may not yet be ready so let them be children.

Spending this quality time with your toddler is crucial to early childhood development. Andre Biemiller, a Canadian psychologist, studied the consequences of lower vocabulary levels in young children. The results of his studies indicated that children entering

kindergarten in the bottom 25% of vocabulary generally remained behind the other children. By year six they were approximately three years behind their peers in vocabulary, reading and comprehension.

How to build a better student? Read to them. It's a good start.