

Introduction

Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be.

- George Sheehan

Amazing Grades is the first book of its kind that includes new technology and allows you, the student, to learn in the personal style that works best for you. Use your smart phone to scan videos that are related to chapters, listen to authors reading their chapters aloud or if you prefer, read the words here and take notes.

This is a world-wide goodwill book! 101 authors and experts from 13 countries around the world collaborated to bring you unique and proven strategies that help you achieve academic success more rapidly by showing you how to remove any roadblocks that interfere with your learning as well as how to build the solid foundation you need for school and life-long learning achievement. You may want to take the quick inventory on page iii so you know whether this book is right for you before beginning.

Not only is this book designed to give you specific strategies to help you get higher grades, but it also includes life skills you will use forever. As you hold the book in your hands, you will find the chapters with life skills that help you develop into a conscious adult who knows how to think critically, solve problems, have a better memory, make good decisions, and achieve your goals. These skills prepare you to become a better person who has more to offer your family, community, state, nation and the world.

If you are in a hurry to get better grades, you may want to turn to the 'how to' success strategies in specific subject areas and they begin on page 77, successful study skills on page 35, learning differences on page 127, special factors that affect your learning on page 145 and life skills useful for every situation on page 1.

If you are a parent or teacher reading this book, please note we have included special sections just for you which provide the much-needed information that will help you support student success and give you unique tips never before seen in any one book! While I address the remainder of this chapter to students, I encourage parents and teachers to read it as it sheds some new light on specifically how students can maximize their academic and personal accomplishments!

Are You “Trying Hard” to Get Good Grades and Still Wish They Could Be Better?

When you “try really hard” and don't get the results you want, you need to know that “trying hard” does not take into account whether there are learning roadblocks in your way. Even though you may work very hard, something you might not even be aware of could be getting in the way of the success you want.

Do Parents or Teachers Ever Say You're Not Trying Hard Enough to Get Good Grades?

While they mean well, these people don't realize how the words on the printed page look to you, how your ears hear the words spoken by the teacher (maybe they are muffled or other noise in the classroom distracts you), whether or not you know 'how to learn' or how a dozen other factors affect *your* perception. Just because someone tells you to learn something does not automatically mean you know how to do it or that something undiagnosed is not interfering with the learning process.

When you are told to read a chapter in a book and that you will be tested on it later, there are built in assumptions that you heard the directions correctly, see the words on a page perfectly, understand them, know 'how to' study, have mastered all known memory strategies, and that you know how translate what you read into such items as essays. The assumptions behind instructions like this are almost frightening. It's akin to telling someone to solve a complicated physics problem before taking any type of math course to prepare them for it. Remove assumptions like this and it's much easier to see and fix learning roadblocks.

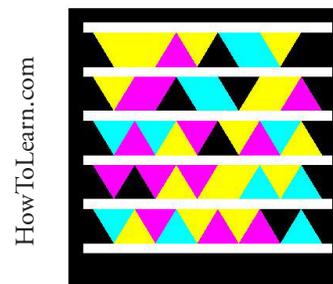
Get the Roadblocks Out of the Way and Good Grades Are Yours

If you want to get good grades faster, it's important to make sure that your learning foundation is clear and solid before adding the 'roof' to your learning house. Laying the foundation includes assessing your current learning strategies and removing the roadblocks to your success. My intention is that this introduction will help you build a great learning foundation before using the strategies in this book. Once you build it well, the sky's the limit on those “A's” you want! Let's look at the practical steps that you can use to successfully build a solid foundation for learning.

5 Steps to Build a Solid Foundation for Learning

1. Make sure you have excellent visual skills

Good visual skills make it easier to get better grades. Great visual skills speed up the process. Visual skills include acuity, tracking, focusing, eye teaming, visual motor integration, eye-hand coordination, peripheral vision, convergence, divergence, and more. The visual skills I am referring to include your eyesight close up and far away, as well as your *perceptual skills* which include how you interpret what you see. Unfortunately, near point and perceptual skills are rarely tested in school. When these skills are not tested, many students often struggle or even fail in school without knowing why. Poor visual skills can wreak havoc with academic success and cause serious self-esteem issues too.



For example, students with undetected visual skills problems get tired when they read, lose their place, hate reading altogether, have poor comprehension, a “bad” memory, don't do well in sports, and often believe they are not as smart as other students. They can appear to have ADHD, learning disabilities, get placed in special education, or be counted in with students who don't read at grade level. Thus it's easy to understand why visual skills' diagnosis and ultimate remediation of any problems found, is so critical to student success.

Suffice to say, visual skills impact everything you do both inside the classroom and out. Therefore it is essential to have strong visual skills (most of which are learned) as well as to discover whether undetected visual skills problems are causing academic struggles. To begin, you can take the free Eye-Q Reading Inventory™ at tinyurl.com/czefhzo and it will tell you precisely how YOU see the printed page as well as how to get further testing from a behavioral or developmental optometrist. In addition, there are two more chapters in this book that more fully discuss vision, visual skills and their impact on learning. Dr. Kristy Remick (page 145) writes about why 20/20 eyesight is not good enough for school success, and the Optometric Education Program Foundation (page 35) includes a visual screening tool which every parent, teacher and upper grade student will find indispensable when determining whether the visual skills needed for successful learning are present and more.

2. Find out how you learn best. What is your preferred learning style?

Students learn in different ways and this is known as their personal learning style. Some students prefer to look at and read new material (visual learners), some find it easier to listen (auditory learners), and some like to interact with, touch or move around when learning (kinesthetic or tactile learners). When you know how you learn best you can take certain steps to adjust the material you need to learn your preferred learning style. If you are an auditory learner for example, listening to the mp3 chapters in this book may help you master the material more quickly.

IMPORTANT: School, with all its written tests, caters to highly visual learners. These students excel at test-taking because they turn what they read and hear into pictures in their mind, then recall those images faster during a test. Brain research supports this rapid image recall. Knowing that visual learners have an advantage school, you can get the same advantage by adding some visual learning strategies to your preferred learning style. When you read, stop every little while and make images of what you just read. Add color and motion, then, during your tests, look up, see the images and turn those images back into words.

To find out how you prefer to learn best take the Learning Styles Quiz at HowToLearn.com. There is an app that lets you email the results to your teacher and friends or place your results on social media sites to compare how you learn best with your friends and then talk about what that means in school or even in relationships. (Yes, learning styles affect relationships too).

3. Verify that your listening and speaking skills are excellent

Hearing involves what is known as receptive language (your ability to hear clearly and understand what you hear) and expressive language (your ability to produce language and communicate your message).

For example, have you ever been on the phone talking and someone else in the room tries to speak to you at the same time? How does this affect your concentration and conversation? There are technical names that relate to receptive and expressive language skills you need for good grades but my goal here is not to be a sesquipedalian. Part of those skills include things like auditory figure ground issues which means that you may miss a portion of what you hear because you can't separate one person's voice from the rest of the background noise in the classroom. The bottom line is that listening and speaking significantly affect your learning abilities and grades just as reading does.

If you feel that you're struggling at all when you're trying to listen, speak or learn then I recommend you go to an audiologist as well as a speech and language pathologist to have hearing, perception, receptive and expressive language tested. Make sure your foundation in this area is really solid and if not, take steps to make accommodations for it.

4. Accommodate learning differences

Amazing Grades contains a listing of special learning differences, such as ADHD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Asperger's, ODD and others that could affect some people's ability to learn. Be sure you know that none of these differences has anything to do with your innate intelligence or ability to succeed in school and life. You will simply want to ensure that you are aware of the accommodations you are entitled to if you have learning differences so that you receive the same education everyone else does.

5. Be brain and body smart

Folks, eventually your eating habits will catch up with you. It may not seem like it today but if you really want to enhance your ability to get better grades, just know that the food you put into your mouth affects both your brain and your body. Eat a bunch of fast food and you put stress on all your organs, including your brain. Use common sense when eating. If you skip breakfast, your blood sugar plummets from hours of no nourishment and then you can't concentrate as well. The answers to better food choices are part of building a good foundation for learning and they are all listed in this book.

Why are Lifelong Learning Skills Important?

The days when the information you need is delivered in just one format and for a single purpose are long gone. *Amazing Grades* gives you video, audio and tactile strategies to get higher grades, and also includes 'how to learn' life skills – information that will help you become a lifelong learner. Your ability to learn is fundamental to your ability to grow, change and achieve your purpose in this life. It allows you to acquire new knowledge, shows you how to act consciously and teaches you to become self-sufficient. In sum, understanding how to learn is the key to achieving your highest potential.

In addition, it's currently estimated that you will change jobs a minimum of seven times in your life. Each one of these jobs will require that you learn new things. Add to this that you may need to study for a certification, learn for on-the-job changes and promotions, take professional exams or simply study to renew your driver's license. You will continue to need to learn as you may also want to maintain quality relationships, raise a child well, be truly healthy, buy a home, decide who to vote for, grow a garden, and so much more...

All of these things require that you know 'how to learn'. As a learning expert, my favorite quote is this:



Learning is not about being smart – it's about strategy
- Pat Wyman



Those who want to know how to use their innovative thinking, intuition, creativity, kindness, empathy, big picture understanding, intra and interpersonal skills in combination with the learning strategies in this book already have a significant head start on learning success.

Every Person is 'Smart' in Their Own Unique Way

I've never really cared for the word 'smart' to describe a human being. What if you're a gifted artist and yet your grades in school make it appear as if you're not "smart" in that environment? What if you inspire millions of people with your actions but still don't have a report card reflecting the kind of person you are? Smart is a relative term so it's more accurate to say that every person is "smart in their own unique way." While grades in school are simply a representation of what you can accomplish and the type of habits you are developing, you are born with innate talents and gifts that are uniquely yours. Remember, intelligence in nearly all forms can be developed.

Put School in Perspective

When you put school learning and grades in perspective, you realize that school can only measure specific types of success. Your grades alone do not determine *who you really are* because your intelligence and talents cannot be simply reduced to letters on a report card. That said, school *is* a place to develop certain habits that society believes will represent the type of person you are and can become. Your good grades indicate that you know how to organize your time, work together on a team, make tough decisions when needed, communicate well, relate parts to the whole, read, write, think, and a host of other "Bloom's Taxonomy" skills. The habits it takes to produce good grades predict, in most people's minds, whether you are prepared to enter the workforce or higher education equipped with positive and important skills that will serve you, and others, for a lifetime.

Ultimately, the best advice I can offer you is to use this book to find out *how to get the very best grades* and then use those grades to open more doors than you ever thought possible. Your good grades can help you get scholarships, better jobs, quality work training, and much more. Then you can head out into your life, positively confident that your excellent grades and strong life skills will pave the road to your highest and best success.



Pat Wyman, M.A., is the founder and CEO of HowToLearn.com, a top learning site with over one million visitors per year. She is also the author of several best selling books, university instructor at California State University, East Bay, and winner of the James Patterson Page Turner Award for her work to further literacy. Wyman is a frequent media guest affectionately known as America's Most Trusted Learning Expert. Her mission is to help all students succeed and achieve their full potential. Take the free Learning Styles Quiz and get thousands of free study tips online at HowToLearn.com.

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