

Excerpt from
Study Skills and Academic Competence by Patricia W. Newhall
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Meeting the Need

Children between the ages of 6 and 18 spend close to half of their waking lives in school. During the school years, parents, teachers, and peers profoundly influence a child's life. Research indicates that success for children who have learning disabilities is dependent on how their educational, social, and emotional needs are met.

Many students require explicit instruction and guided practice to develop study and self-regulation skills. Without coaching, for example, very few tennis players learn how to grip and rotate their racquets to achieve purposefully placed returns. They learn because a coach models the grip, racquet, and body position used to achieve a particular type of return, and then helps the player do it. The coach hits easy shots to the player as she practices the new strategy. As she masters the skill, the coach increases the difficulty of the shots she is to return. A good coach does not show a player a new strategy and then expect her to execute it perfectly during a match. This analogy extends to most sports, as well as to other acquired skills such as playing the violin, or cooking. In school, though, students are often expected to do something—take notes, for example—without having had the modeling, coaching, and practice required to master the skill. Students, like athletes, musicians, and cooks, need to learn a variety of strategies that will enable them to manage challenges. Teachers need to be their coaches.

Strategy-based teaching is essential for students who have language-based learning disabilities. Strategy-based teaching also carries the important benefit of putting students in control of their learning. The feelings of self-efficacy that researchers highlight as part of academic competence can only begin to develop when students feel that they have the skills to rise to a given challenge and find success.

“Just Study Harder”

“The admonition to study harder in order to succeed academically presents barriers for students with LD who have not developed an effective reading system, do not understand the importance of good notes, do not know how to organize their study time and manage their academic assignments, or do not know how to approach test-taking situations in an effective manner.”

Hodge, B. M., & Preston-Sabin, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Accommodations--or just good teaching? Strategies for teaching college students with disabilities*. Westport, CT: Praeger.