

Tips for Success **(Ms. Henry's Guide to Becoming a Better Student)**

There is no quick fix, but don't fret. I am here to help you. While my main concern is that you understand the materials we cover and grow as a reader, writer, speaker, listener, and thinker, I understand that you are concerned about your grade as well. The best way to improve your grade is to think about how you can improve in the areas I mentioned above. Think about how you can be better at your job (being a student). The ability to improve is within your control, but it will take some thought, trial and error, and hard work.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN OUTLINE OF SUGGESTIONS EXPLAINED IN DETAIL BELOW.

I. Work on developing better reading habits.

II. Work on developing better note-taking habits.

III. Work on developing better study strategies.

IV. Work on developing better study habits.

V. English-Specific Suggestions:

- 1. Work on improving your vocabulary and study "smarter."**
- 2. Work on improving your reading check quiz scores.**
- 3. Work on improving your novel/play unit test scores.**
- 4. Work on improving your writing.**
- 5. Work on improving your grammar and mechanics.**
- 6. Work on improving your participation.**

I. Work on developing better reading habits. Consider the following:

- *Where do you read?* Do you read in a quiet place or a place where you find distractions? If you're not sure, try a few different places until you find the situation that allows you to be most effective as a reader.
- *What time of day do you read?* Find the time of day when it's best for you to read (when you understand what you read the best and can remember what you've read). If you know that you get sleepy if you read in bed right before going to sleep and can never finish an assignment, try changing the order in which you do your work. Maybe reading first would be better.
- *Do you rush through your reading just to get it done?* When reading for school, regardless of the class for which you're reading, take time to really understand what it is the text is saying. If it's difficult, you may need to read part of the book or assignment more than once. Look at the descriptions of different types of reading below. There are several different ways to read. (The following descriptions are adapted from Mrs. Glynn's "How to Study" handout.) Good readers automatically use the three kinds of reading, depending on what the task is. Studying reading is what you will use most of times you are reading books, articles, etc. for class.
 - **Study Reading:** This is what you do when you have to read tough material, and you need to remember it. When you do this kind of

reading, you should read at a rate that is slower than your normal reading rate, and you should stop often to see if you are remembering what you are reading. If you get to a particularly difficult part, try reading aloud; this often helps focus a reader. Take notes when you do this kind of reading (see the next black bullet below on note-taking). Study read when you need a *high level of comprehension*.

- **Skimming:** This is the kind of reading you do when you just need the basic idea of a text. Sometimes, we skim through a book to see if we'll like it, or we skim through an owner's manual to get to the part we need (then we study read that part). You won't be doing a lot of this for class prep or test prep, but you might skim through material before you test yourself to see if you know it. Also, the morning of a quiz or test, skim your notes. Use skimming when you need a *low level of comprehension*.
- **Scanning:** This is what you do when you have a specific question to answer. For example, when you want the answer to the question at the end of the story *and you've read the story once*, you can scan the paragraphs for a key word that will help you find the answer. For study purposes, you will use scanning when you've missed a question on a study sheet and want to find and review your answer. Use this when you need an answer to a specific question. Do NOT use scanning the first time you read a text (novel, play, article, etc.) for class.
- *Do you take notes as you read?* Academic reading requires more attention than reading for pleasure does. Be an active reader. Take notes (either on separate paper or on post-its) as you read. Jot down questions, outline ideas you want to remember, and mark important passages (key scenes that reveal who a character is, emphasize a work's theme, provide an important twist in the plot, express the author's main idea or opinion, explain an idea that you don't understand, etc.). Organize your notes in a way that will be useful to you during class discussions and/or when you look back at them later.

II. Work on developing better note-taking habits. Consider the following:

- *Do you take notes in class?* If not, there's no time like the present to begin. You should have notes from just about every day in English class. Even if nothing is written on the board, you should take notes during class discussions on reading, writing, grammar, etc. If we take the time to stop and talk about something, it's most likely important, so keep a record of it.
- *Are your notes labeled with the date and the topic of the notes?* Label notes properly; this will allow you to keep them organized in your notebook and make it easy for you to pick and choose what you need to study for a particular test, quiz, assignment, etc.
- *Are your notes legible?* If you can't read them, what good are they? If your handwriting is that bad, consider bringing a laptop in for note-taking.
- *Do you take notes as you read?* This is a repeat from the "reading habits" section. Academic reading requires more attention than reading for pleasure

does. Be an active reader. Take notes (either on separate paper or on post-its) as you read. Jot down questions, outline ideas you want to remember, and mark important passages (key scenes that reveal who a character is, emphasize a work's theme, provide an important twist in the plot, express the author's main idea or opinion, explain an idea that you don't understand, etc.). Organize your notes in a way that will be useful to you during class discussions and/or when you look back at them later.

III. Work on developing better study strategies. There are many ways to study. The important thing is to find the way or ways that work best for you. Keep in mind that *you may use different strategies for different types of tests or quizzes.*

- flashcards
- make up a study sheet and ask someone to quiz you
- read and reread
- highlight your notes
- summarize the text book or your notes (make notes of your notes to really get to the most important ideas)
- read your notes aloud
- outline the text or notes you're reading or make a graphic organizer (lists, columns, Venn diagrams, etc.)
- quiz yourself using your notes or possibly by finding a practice test online
- make up a quiz/test
- write things you have to memorize over and over until you feel confident that you know the information
- use a worksheet as a quiz by covering over the answers and re-doing it
- look over old quizzes and try to figure out why you're making mistakes; retype the questions you missed, and try them again the next day
- answer study guide questions
- go over your answers to the study guide questions
- teach your parent/guardian what you've learned
- Use websites like Quizlet and Study Blue

IV. Work on developing better study habits. How do you get into good habits? Start. Then continue. (Tips below adapted from Mrs. Glynn's "Study Habits.")

- Take your time. This means that you can't save it all for the last minute when you have a quiz or an important test. Cramming rarely works, and it's frustrating and stressful. Space your studying out over time.
- Schedule your study time. Plan to spend a set amount of time each day studying each subject and stick to it. Review your English notes each night, especially when a test is coming up. Make notes for yourself if there are things you don't understand. Ask about them in class or at extra help.
- Remove distractions during your study time. **THIS MEANS NO CELL PHONES, TEXTING, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, SNAPCHAT, ETC.** Tell your friends you will

be done at ____:00, and check your messages then. Use an away message and mean it.

- Set specific goals for your studying. Maybe divide it up by subject or topic, test yourself to see what you've learned, then move to your next goal. Be clear with yourself about what, exactly, you want to accomplish in each study session. Have a buddy who can help you out if you are struggling. This might be a classmate, older sibling, parent, or tutor. When you find something difficult in your notes, homework, or study packet; highlight it and bring it to class or to an extra-help session with your teacher. He/she will appreciate a specific question rather than an "I don't get it."
- Sleep, eat, and exercise on a regular schedule whenever possible, but especially during weeks where you have a lot of tests. Staying up to cram for a test is not the best plan; chances are you will make careless errors if you are sleep deprived.
- Come in for extra help any time there is something going on in class with which you're struggling. Come with questions if possible.

V. English-Specific Suggestions:

1. Work on improving your vocabulary and study "smarter." The vocab. we will study will consist of Latin and Greek Roots and Prefixes as well as words from the literature we read (vocabulary in context). The reason we study the Greek and Latin Roots and Prefixes is because many of our English words have their origins in Greek and Latin. Understanding the roots and prefixes and how they work will enable you to figure out the sense or meanings of some words even if you have never seen them before. Realizing this may help you study more effectively.

- ✓ Take your time doing the homework. The homework is designed to help you understand the words and go through the process of figuring out the best way to use them. The homework is *not* busy work. The more time and effort you put into the homework, the better you will understand the roots, prefixes, words, etc.
- ✓ Do your homework on your own so you can figure out what is giving you trouble. If you get answers from someone else, not only are you attempting to deceive me, you are also doing yourself no good. You're not learning anything except how to get answers from someone else, and you won't know what to ask about in class or when you attend extra help.
- ✓ Make corrections on your homework when we go over it in class. Jot down notes in the margins when needed to add an example or remember something that is mentioned during class.
- ✓ Make flashcards of the roots and prefixes. On one side, put the root or prefix. On the other side, put a definition AND a sample word. For the sample word, pick one that you know or can easily remember. Picking an easily-recognizable sample word will help you connect the root or prefix with its meaning.

- ✓ Make flashcards for the vocabulary words. On one side put the word. On the other side, put the definition AND a sample sentence in which the word is used correctly. While memorizing a definition may seem helpful, *what is most important is that you understand how to use the word in speaking and writing* (in sentence form).
- ✓ Study the sample sentences from your homework. You can do this by reading through them, writing them over and over, typing them (with blanks where the vocabulary words go and then studying them).
- ✓ Study the vocabulary in context sentences from the book or story from which they've been taken.
- ✓ Have a friend, sibling, or parent read the sentence to you with a blank where the word goes. Then have them give you a few choices of possible words. Try to pick the correct word.
- ✓ Use an online site like Quizlet to help you study.
- ✓ Set up a study schedule. Study for several nights in a row before the test or quiz. Don't try to fit it all in on the last night or on the day of the quiz or test.

2. Work on improving your reading check quiz scores.

- ✓ Think about your reading habits. Where and when and how do you read when you're reading for English class. Review Parts I and II on developing better reading and note-taking habits. When you are reading for class, you must read actively. That means stopping to take notes, jot down questions, and think about what is happening in the pages you're reading.
- ✓ Make smart use of the handouts Ms. Henry has given you. Most are also posted on the website in case you can't find yours. If you have study questions, stop after each chapter or reading assignment and complete the questions for the sections you've just read (even if these questions are not required). If you've just read that section, you should be able to answer the reading check questions without looking back at the pages. If you're having trouble doing this, it may be a sign that you're rushing the reading and it's negatively affecting your comprehension. If this is the case, slow down and read that section again. Then go back to the questions. If there are any you can't get answers to, go back to the text. If you're still having trouble, ask for help in class. Study questions are mostly plot based questions, so there shouldn't be many you can't answer if you're reading and comprehending what you read.
- ✓ When you have study questions to answer, do not simply scan the chapters you have assigned to you to look for the answers. First you must carefully read the pages. THEN go to the questions. They are for after you read to check your comprehension and focus you on some important details.

- ✓ Do your homework on your own so you can figure out on which questions you need the most help. If you get answers from someone else, not only are you attempting to deceive me, you are also doing yourself no good. You're not learning anything except how to get answers from someone else, and you won't know what to ask about in class or when you attend extra help.
- ✓ If you have a character chart, map, or some other handouts, have those out as you read. You can fill them in as you go or wait until you've finished reading for the day and then fill in what you can. Continue this the next time you have a reading assignment. Don't leave these types of activities for the end of the book. It will be overwhelming to try to do it all at once. These handouts are a kind of note-taking. Even when you don't have them, you can create your own when reading a novel, play, story, etc.
- ✓ Take notes during class discussions. If we are taking the time to talk about it, chances are it's important.
- ✓ Review your handouts and study questions before you come in to take the reading check quiz.
- ✓ Use process of elimination on multiple choice questions and check over your answers before turning in your completed quiz.

3. Work on improving your novel/play unit test scores.

- ✓ Review the tips in #2 above regarding reading check quiz scores. Also review Parts I and II on improving your reading ability and note-taking ability.
- ✓ Novel/play unit tests are designed to test more than your knowledge of the plot of a story. If you have done poorly on the reading check quizzes, you will need to go back and do some re-reading before your unit test. Before you can do well on an analytical type test (which is what the unit test mainly are) you must understand what happens in a book. You may say, "I read the book, and I still did poorly." If that is the case, then you will need to rethink your reading strategies, note-taking strategies, and focus during class. How can you improve in these areas? Everyone is different, so you will need to try a few things to find what works best for you. Please ask if you'd like help with this.
- ✓ Quotation Matching Questions: When you are given quotations to match with the speaker, you are being asked to consider what is being said in each quotation and consider who would most likely say something like that. For these types of questions, you must have a good understanding of the characters. This is where your notes on the characters (or a character chart) will come in handy.
- ✓ Quotation Analysis Questions: Review the bullet above on Quotation Matching Questions. The same idea applies in the analysis questions except that in addition to identification, you will need to use your

writing skills to explain why the quotation is important. Consider the theme or message of the work as a whole and how/why what the character is saying relates to that theme.

- ✓ Study your notes. You should have notes. If you don't have notes, review Part II above and make a pact with yourself that you will start taking notes now, today, the next time you are in class. Keep your notes organized with the date and topic at the top of each new day of notes. Keep your English notes in your English notebook. Bring your English notebook to English class. Take your English notebook home and study from it for your unit tests. Review the study strategies and study habits sections above (Part III and IV). Mark up and highlight your notes. Make them work for you. Star the important things. Create a system for yourself that will help you use your notes most effectively.
- ✓ Work on pacing yourself as you study. Do not wait until the night before a unit test to start. Review each night. Study each night, especially for the 3-4 nights before a test.
- ✓ Work on pacing yourself during your test. Generally, you will know ahead of time how the test will be organized. Spend some time the night before figuring out how much time you have to spend on the different sections of the test. The more tests you take, and the more you pay attention to your timing, the better you will get at it.
- ✓ The section below on improving your writing, as well as the section on improving your grammar will also provide useful tips. In short essays you will be marked down for poor grammar and mechanics. There is more leeway given for in-class test than on formal essays that you have several days to complete, but grammar and mechanics is a consideration in your score.

4. Work on improving your writing.

Here are some steps you can take:

- ✓ Be sure to prepare your ideas before writing (a pre-writing activity). There is no one correct way to pre-write, but prewriting is an important step. Your pre-writing may take the form of:
 - a formal outline. Use one Ms. Henry has given you or the generic one in the "Writing Help" section of the website.
 - a graphic organizer.
 - a list of your ideas that you can organize in a logical order before writing
- ✓ Make sure you have a strong thesis statement and strong examples. If you are unsure about this, refer to the handouts Ms. Henry has given you or look them up in the "Writing Help" section on the website. Of course, you can also ask for assistance in class or during extra help.
- ✓ Show Ms. Henry your outline and get input before you start writing.

- ✓ Finish your paper a day or two early so you can get input from Ms. Henry before turning in your final copy. Finishing early also gives you the advantage of putting the essay aside for a day before doing your final proofread. Often having this “distance” or gap in time will enable you to see errors and areas that need improvement before turning in your final draft for a grade.
- ✓ Use the essay checklist or assignment checklist (if there is one that is specific to the assignment you’ve written). You should have one of these in your notebook. You can also print out a generic one from Ms. Henry’s website. These are intended to help you but may seem time-consuming to you. That is to be expected. Improving in any area takes time.
- ✓ Rewrite your papers after you receive them back with a grade and comments. Don’t simply correct errors in grammar and mechanics. Look at the rubric and see where you need to improve. Rethink what you’ve written and make significant improvement to the ideas now that you’ve had more time to think about your work.
- ✓ Improve your grammar and mechanics (see #5 below).

5. Work on improving your grammar and mechanics.

- ✓ Grammar and mechanics are really difficult for some students. I get that. We will spend time in class reviewing skills you may have already been taught and learning new ones.
- ✓ Take good notes during class lessons.
- ✓ Review your notes.
- ✓ Do your homework where there are no distractions.
- ✓ Do your homework on your own so you can figure out in which areas/topics you need the most help. If you get answers from someone else, not only are you attempting to deceive me, you are also doing yourself no good. You’re not learning anything except how to get answers from someone else, and you won’t know what to ask about in class or when you attend extra help.
- ✓ Ask for help in class or set up an appointment with Ms. Henry for extra help.
- ✓ Do additional practice exercises online. I have some sites linked to my website in the “Grammar Help” section. Try those or simply Google the topic and “practice exercises.” For example, if you’re having trouble with pronoun agreement, Google “pronoun agreement exercises.” The sites usually give you the answers and sometimes provide explanations as well.
- ✓ If your notes don’t make sense, Google the topic, or look it up in your textbook. Sometimes a different explanation of the same topic will “click” better than what you have in your notes.
- ✓ When writing, take your time. Pay attention to spelling, grammar, and mechanics. Go back and check your work. If grammar and

mechanics is an area in which you struggle, check it again. In our digital world, most communication is fast-paced. When you are writing for class, you may need to put the breaks on a bit. You need to be able to communicate in Standard English.

- ✓ Ask a classmate, a parent, Ms. Henry to go over your work with you before you turn it in. Sometimes going over it and talking through it on a few assignments will help you to be able to find errors on your own in the future.

6. Work on improving your participation.

- ✓ Come to class on time. When you are in class on time and ready to go, you are less likely to miss any important information.
- ✓ Come to class prepared (with your English notebook, English materials, and a pen).
- ✓ Be active in class discussions on a daily basis. Ask questions. Offer your thought and ideas. Being involved and engaged in class will reinforce your learning.
- ✓ Be a positive and cooperative in your attitude toward the class, Ms. Henry, and your classmates. Having a positive outlook will affect the way you experience the class. The more positive you feel, the more you will succeed.
- ✓ Help your classmates when you can. Explaining concepts or directions you understand to others will reinforce your own understanding.
- ✓ Avoid disrupting the class. If you are distracting others, you are also pulling yourself away from the lesson or the task at hand.
- ✓ Volunteer to answer questions. Being involved and engaged in class will reinforce your learning.
- ✓ If you are absent, be sure you make up your work in a timely fashion so that you can participate and don't fall behind.