

# Psyched to Learn

Having taught elementary and middle school full-time for 34 years, I want to write down the main ideas which helped me in my learning process, and my students in theirs. So here, in a nutshell, is what I have told them over the years, and still tell my private students to help motivate them to learn, now and for the rest of their lives.

1. Be honest with yourself and your teacher. If you don't understand something, ask as soon as possible. Ideas are often based on previous ideas, and if you don't understand each one, the rest may not make sense. The smart person is *not* the someone who knows everything, but the one who is not afraid to admit he/she doesn't know or understand something, and asks questions. Be honest, be humble.

2. Do your best to focus on what your teacher is saying. That's difficult at times because it's difficult to concentrate. The untrained or lazy mind gets bored easily, and wanders away. It takes an active effort to stay focused. The average ten year old can concentrate for about 10 minutes at a time; the average 14 year old can stay focused for 14 minutes, and so on. I myself had to almost slap myself in the face to stay focused in classes in high school.

3. Find out what works for you...your learning style. Taking notes on important things being said in class helped me to stay focused because I was doing something. Also, I could study them later on, and didn't have to remember everything the first time I heard it. Some kids learn best by writing out their spelling words ten times. Finding out what best works for you is very important because we all have different learning styles.

4. Make what you're learning **IMPORTANT** to you, and take it seriously. Trust your teachers, that if they have all this training, and they are taking all this time to prepare this lesson, and the Government and your parents are paying all this money, then it must be important. Your job is to find out **WHY** it's important. Once you do, then learning it will be easier. On the other hand, if you have a negative attitude, "Oh, this is stupid," or complain "Why do I have to learn this," then you are making excuses for your not learning it, you will not try, you will not focus, you will not take notes, you will probably fool around to

distract yourself and others so you do not have to work. And yet sincerely asking yourself and finding the reason "why I choose to learn this" is a good question if you can find a positive answer. Get psyched!

5. Don't beat yourself up if you don't understand something. Even the "smartest" people often don't "get" things, but they keep trying, and keep asking. (My friend, a the rocket scientist, says he often doesn't understand things.) In high school I had to study twice as long as others.

6. When I was a boy I told my father I couldn't do something. He told me, "There's no such word as *can't*." "Sure there is," I argued, "It's right here in the dictionary." Yet he kept on saying, "There's no such word as *can't*." What do you think he meant?

7. Develop a curiosity about as much as you can. Force yourself to notice details. Read as much as you can: newspapers, magazines, and books. Pay attention to what people (not just your friends) are saying, ask questions---



anything you can to help you be your own teacher. When you watch TV, see how much you can practice paying attention, and learn what's really going on in the world around you. The more you do these things, you will find that: a) you will learn more; b) ideas and things are related; c) it will be easier to learn new ideas because they hook up with the known ones; d) your brain will become more trained to focus whenever you want; e) you will feel more self-confident of yourself as a learner and as a person; f) you will have more insight and information to offer people, be a better conversationalist, be a more interesting person. And so on.

8. As the marines and the boy scouts say, "Always be prepared." Not only does this mean bringing your books, materials, and homework to class, and glasses, if you wear them, but also bringing the right attitude about all the things we've talked about above: being honest, being focused, having a good attitude, knowing your learning style, getting psyched, being patient with yourself, having a can-do (positive) attitude, being a curious person, and being prepared.

9. ...