

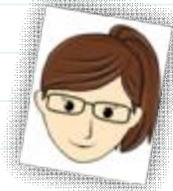
# The Thinking Cap

Winter 2010

Volume 2, Issue 1

## Alexandra in Tutorland

*alexandra's musings*



### *The gift of holiday study skills.*

There are still several weeks until the holidays, and I am already seeing signs prompting me to get an early start on my shopping. From newspapers to store windows, I am reminded that I shouldn't leave the gift buying until the last-minute. All the reminders got me thinking about the importance of setting a schedule and putting my best time-management skills to use.

In addition to the weighty issue of picking the perfect gifts, the end of the year usually brings extra responsibilities in the form of exams and projects. Consider the following tips so that you can have a stress-free holiday season:

**Make a plan.** Think about all the tasks that you need to accomplish before the end of the year, and make a list of academic and non-academic responsibilities.

**Divide and conquer.** Break big assignments into smaller and more manageable tasks. For example, if you have to turn in a term paper before break, divide the task of writing into brainstorm, research, organize, write first draft, edit, re-draft.

**Organize.** Make folders for various topics within classes to help study for tests (Ancient Greece, Rome, religions), and use Post-Its to mark pages of important passages and quotes.

**Mark your calendar.** Now that you know what you need to accomplish, plan out when you'll be completing your work. Remember to leave time for breaks (and holiday snacks)!

**Get help.** Consider studying with a buddy or recruiting a parent for review. Remember, you can always meet with a teacher if you're having trouble with specific content. It is a good idea to study with a teacher, friend, or parent so that your review is varied.

Happy studying this holiday season!

Send your questions to:  
[info@thinkingcapstutoring.com](mailto:info@thinkingcapstutoring.com)

**Sense and Sensibility**  
*you ask, we answer*

**Q: Elaborate...How?** When I get my essays back from my teacher, sometimes he writes "expand on the idea." I don't really know what that means.

**A:** "Expand" on your paper often times means more than to just explain an idea or quote. Take a few sentences and reflect on the idea or draw conclusions. Ask yourself, "How does this relate to the big picture?" or, "What does this mean to my thesis?" It is easy to get caught up in the details when writing an essay, so take a few sentences and step back and consider how the individual facts relate to the topic as a whole concept.

### Inside this Issue

- A Tale of One Tutor
- Great Expectations
- Sense and Sensibility
- The (academic) Odyssey
- Much Ado About Learning
- Cat's Cradle

### Great Expectations

- ü Good Luck to all of our ISEE/SSAT and SAT takers!
- ü Join our new book club: *PageTurners*
- ü Follow us on Twitter (ThinkingCapsNY)
- ü Get weekly study tips on our Facebook Group (Thinking Caps Tutoring)

- ü Upcoming test dates:  
 ACT—December 12, 2009  
 SAT—January 23, 2010

Have questions? Call us!



## Much Ado About Learning

### our tips and helpful hints

***My dog didn't eat my homework (I don't think). Our strategies for staying organized.***

For me, the first step to staying organized is keeping in mind what is and isn't important at the moment. This requires me to keep a careful to do list of all the tasks at hand, and that way keep whatever I need available, and file away old material that is not currently important. Then all the information is saved for future use (finals) and current homework and material is available and ready to be done.

—Laura Nocka

I make a calendar and stick to it. This helps me anticipate what I have coming up and plan out a schedule.

—Jessica Pfeffer

I try not to memorize the things I have to do, so I write them down! It's very easy to forget things ... unless I've written them down.

—Josh Fry

The key to staying organized is picking a system and sticking to it. Even if you're feeling too tired to put things in their place, the extra effort will go a long way later on!

—Meredith Fear

Keep separate notebooks or sections for different subjects so that you can identify them by color and with labels. Then try using the same techniques for each subject: have a section for notes, one for homework, and one for tests and quizzes so that everything is accessible.

—Robert Stevenson



## A Tale of One Tutor

### lessons we learned along the way

***A lesson in follow-through.***

When I was younger I was a pretty decent basketball player. I worked religiously on my handle, had a shutter-quick first step, and could finish near the rim. As you would expect, I got fouled a lot as well—and I used this fact to my advantage. If an opponent's big men were in foul trouble I was lowering my head and gunning for them. I thought I was the best player in the game every time I stepped on the court. So you can imagine my surprise when I got cut from my sophomore team.

The only explanation that the coach would give me was that I had "no follow-through." This was preposterous—my shot may not have been the prettiest anyone had seen but it was reliable. I complained about how unfairly I had been treated to anyone who would listen. I challenged some of my ex-teammates to shooting contests to prove that my follow-through was just as good as anyone's. It took a dedicated friend (probably sick of hearing my complaints) to explain it wasn't my jumper that was suspect, it was my foul shooting.

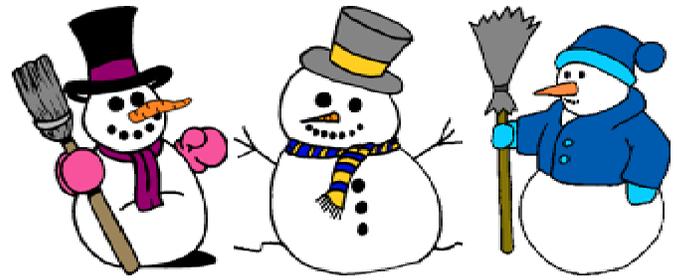
My dirty little secret had been revealed. I had never worked that hard at foul-shooting, and as a result I shot a dismal 48% from the stripe. My coach was right, my follow-through on free-throws, as well as the follow-through in my work ethic, were both ugly. This distinction plays a very important role, especially at this time in the school year, in determining how to make the move from a B+ average to an A average. The B+ student studies and considers him/herself intelligent, so why the low grade? *The B+ student is just as good as any of the A students! It must be a biased test! The teacher has it out for the B+ student!*

The truth of the matter is that the B+ student would do well to search for blind spots in the studying routine. Chances are, there's a weakness lurking somewhere in the details, and an opportunity to refine one's follow-through.

—Macy Todd

# Happy Holidays!





# The (academic) Odyssey

review of education news

## **Executive Function—A work in progress.**

Recently, I received a call during my weekly call-in hour that really gave me pause; a mother who had just been told that her twelve year old son, Jake, “has an executive function disorder.” She sounded devastated. She said that Jake was smart, kind, creative, and funny; he was a superstar in elementary school. However, middle school had been another story. He just can’t seem to get started, particularly on long-term assignments.

From the tone of his mother’s voice, it sounded like she was just told her son had a terrible disorder. Yet, recent research in brain development shows that the prefrontal cortex, the part responsible for executive function, goes through major changes beginning in

adolescence. In other words, it was likely that Jake’s problem was just a variation of normal development. With the right strategies, he should be able to reclaim his old academic success while his prefrontal cortex catches up with his teachers’ expectations.

So what is executive function? It’s not a single skill, but rather, a complex symphony of brain activities responsible for the “project management” parts of school. In Jake’s case, we found that weak sequencing was the culprit, which refers to the ability to process or produce information that is arranged as a series of steps. Students that struggle with sequencing have difficulty developing and executing a step-wise plan for completing tasks. As a result, they are often overwhelmed and unable to begin; they

might need support breaking projects into steps, deciding how much time each step will require, building a work-plan, and then remaining engaged until completion.

Once Jake and his mother understood that his difficulty was not a terrible disorder, but rather a common rough spot in development, they were relieved. In addition, Jake was reassured that his elementary school success was no fluke: he was reminded that his numerous strengths more than balanced his previewing difficulties. With a new perspective and a manageable plan, Jake was receptive to the strategies to complete his work while his prefrontal cortex continues to develop.

—Dr. Paul Yellin  
visit Dr. Yellin: [www.yellincenter.com](http://www.yellincenter.com)



## Cat’s Cradle

tantalizing brain ticklers

### **Tricky words.**

A misnomer is a word that implies something that may not be true, like using a brand name to refer to something that is not specific to that brand. It may be an inappropriate word as it relates to what it is describing, or it may be something outdated that is still associated with the original product, like tin foil.

Check out our list of common misnomers.

|             | Sounds like... | Really means... |
|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Lead pencil |                |                 |
| Guinea Pigs |                |                 |
| Peanuts     |                |                 |
| Kleenex     |                |                 |
| Driveway    |                |                 |
| Funny bone  |                |                 |



**Thinking Caps Tutoring** is an innovative, after-school educational company that helps students acquire the skills and confidence needed to succeed in school, college, and beyond. TCT, through an individualized, descriptive screening process, matches students with student tutors best capable of overcoming a child’s weak points and emphasizing strengths. Services provided at TCT include subject tutoring, skills coaching, homework support, standardized test prep and more.

For more information about TCT or any of the programs, please call us at 917.779.8183 or send an email to [info@thinkingcapstutoring.com](mailto:info@thinkingcapstutoring.com).

© Thinking Caps 2008. All rights reserved.

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please email [info@thinkingcapstutoring.com](mailto:info@thinkingcapstutoring.com) with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.