



Enhanced Learning
Educational Services
"the study skills specialist"

FAQs ABOUT DR PRUE SALTER'S STUDY SKILLS EVENINGS

After the evenings I read through the evaluations, but don't get a chance to reply or explain. So here are my replies to things sometimes written on the evaluations, or asked by parents to teachers after the study skills evening.

All the best,

Dr Prue Salter

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1. WHY CAN'T WE DO THIS OVER A NUMBER OF EVENINGS?

The main reason is that I am completely booked out and cannot offer schools any more options for evenings. However, we did try doing it over 2-3 evenings with one school in the early days and the response from parents was that we are too busy, we have too many things on with multiple children, just do it all in one evening! A few parents say can't it be on the weekend? But with the number of different activities families do it would be impossible to find a time on the weekend that didn't clash with family commitments. We know it is not ideal and educationally it would be much better for mind, memory and sanity if we could do this over a number of shorter sessions throughout the year. As that is just not possible, the reality is we have to make the best of the time we do have available.

2. THERE IS TOO MUCH COVERED WE CAN'T ABSORB IT ALL IT'S OVERWHELMING, WHY CAN'T YOU REDUCE THE CONTENT?

We know there is a lot to take in and we do not expect you to absorb it all in one go. That is why you receive a comprehensive booklet, access to all the slides from the evening, a follow up booklet you can download and materials you can access on the website. On every evaluation form we ask would you rather we cut one of the sections, or keep everything in even if we have to cover it quickly. At every school over 97% of parents reply not to cut anything, even though it means going fast. I am sorry if you are one of the 3%, but we have to go with the majority. Don't feel you have to take it all in on one go, no-one could do that. Just take in what you can on the night then review the materials again at home until you feel you have absorbed everything.

3. THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME TO DISCUSS EVERYTHING FULLY WITH MY CHILD, CAN'T YOU GO SLOWER?

No, see above. I know I talk fast as I get excited, and I would love to give you more time for discussions, but the aim is not that you come along and then go tick study skills is all done I don't have to think about it again! We cannot address this all in one night. Unfortunately you will have to do work at home with your child on this, we can't do it all for you – it needs to be an ongoing conversation throughout their years at school. The study skills evening is about getting these conversations started. The aim is you come along and experience the night, initiate the conversations, then you go home and over the next weeks work through all of the material again at your own pace, in your own time. You can spend more time fine-tuning your action plan and deciding what you are going to implement first. I know it is also hard if your child is not as speedy as those around them, but I try and give enough time so even the students who work much slower at least get a chance to finish the questions even if it means doing the action plan at home.

4. WHY CAN'T THE EVENING BE LONGER/SHORTER?

We can never make everyone happy! But we have experimented over the years with different lengths of time. 2 hours is too long, even with a break in the middle, it is just too long for students to be there trying to focus and concentrate on a school night after a long day at school. 1 hour is too short, people feel like it is a lot of travel time for only an hour and it restricts how much can be covered. We have found with trial and error that 1.5 hours is the best length of time.

5. WHY CAN'T THE EVENING START EARLIER/LATER?

The school decides what time the evening starts. Some schools have policies where all events always start at a certain time. Some schools have worked out what is the best time for their parents, earlier so they can come straight from work and so students won't be as tired, or later so they can have dinner first. If you feel strongly about the starting time for events at your school it is best to talk to the school about it. We can never choose a time that suits everyone, but my preference is the earlier the better.

6. WHY AREN'T THE TEACHERS DOING THIS AT SCHOOL?

Some of it is covered at school! Individual teachers will explain study strategies for their particular subject and teach students more about making study notes. However, the focus of the night is about what happens at home in the home environment. It is also about the interaction between parents and students. Teachers at school are focusing more on the teaching and learning in the classroom. The aim of this evening is to get parents and students on the same page about how things will be set up and managed in the home environment.

7. WHY DON'T YOU JUST DO THIS DURING THE DAY AT SCHOOL WITH THE STUDENTS ONLY?

It is absolutely essential that parents and students hear the same message. You also need to be discussing things as you go. Many parents say after the evening that is more than they have ever talked with their child about their approaches to managing learning. Also, I have doubts as to whether the younger students Years 7-9 can actually retain, absorb and implement this if they heard it without a parent to take in the information as well and follow it up. I used to run daytime sessions with the juniors, but I no longer offer these as I honestly believe that unless parents and students hear the same message and can discuss as they go, it will be a wasted opportunity. It is the same reason why I don't offer parent only sessions. By the time they get to the senior years it is mostly a different story as most students are much better equipped by then to manage their own learning.

8. WHY DO YOU FOCUS ON ROTE LEARNING IN TESTS. ISN'T THAT OUTDATED COMPARED TO HOW STUDENTS LEARN THESE DAYS?

This evening is focusing on what is happening at HOME, not in the CLASSROOM. I do not discuss teaching pedagogies in the classroom, nor would I ever advocate old fashioned chalk and talk and rote learning only. Students would have had weeks of progressive inquiry-based learning where they are doing active construction of their learning prior to any test – clearly that is what happens in the classroom. But in this section I focus on how to specifically study for a test at home. The reality is that memorisation plays a large part AT THIS STAGE. They have already had weeks of all the curious, critical thinking etc etc. Now they have a short time to get ready for a test. Students can be the best essay writers in the world, but if they have no content to put in their essays then that is a problem. They can be wonderful problem solvers, but if they don't know the rules and formulas then they won't pass the test. I personally don't like how we test memorisation in our school system, I would prefer every test from Years 7-12 to be open book. But they aren't. As a pragmatist, I know that memorisation skills play a big part AT THIS STAGE of getting ready for a test. Unfortunately for many people rote learning has become a dirty word, it's not trendy like all of the latest educational fads and so we dismiss it – and that is unfair to students. The reality of tests and examinations is that students will need to memorise dates for History, definitions for Science and so on. There is no getting around this, as much as none of us may like it. I definitely do not believe in rote and regurgitate – that will not work. But I do believe students will need to memorise the content, then they do lots of questions to make sure they can apply the content to different types of questions. Hopefully due to the interactive way they have been taught the material at school, they will have already absorbed much of what they will be learning so they will have less to actually memorise just before the test.

9. WHY IS THERE SO MUCH FOCUS ON MARKS AND ACHIEVEMENT?

It's a study skills evening! We all know that marks are not the be all and end all. We all know that many people are very successful in life who did not do well at school. My focus is how can we help our students to navigate the current and often flawed school system so they can achieve their personal best with the least amount of stress and anxiety. I tell students there are always many paths in life to get to where you want to go, the marks might make some paths quicker or easier or give you more choices.

10. I HATE THE CATS WHY ARE THEY IN THE VIDEO?

Have you ever watched a video of someone writing? It really is not very interesting. Add the cats and suddenly the brain lights up at the incongruity and all those circuits in the brain start firing. Whether you hate them or love them, it gets the brain firing and you will be more likely to absorb the information. I love dogs too, but I didn't have any when I made the video.



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