

Strategies for Skills Improvement

Rote Memorization:

You have the most control over this grade. The key is putting in the time and effort you require to memorize information.

- Find your *best* method of study. Try a different method if the one you have been using is not providing the desired results. (Remember that flash cards work well because they involve so many of the different ways we learn, but you have to use the cards to practice.)
- Begin preparing several days before the quiz instead of “cramming” the night before. You have vocabulary lists long before the quizzes.
- Start with about five words, and practice them until you know them all. Next, memorize five new ones, and then, practice all ten. Keep adding more words until you have them all memorized. This technique works best over several days.

Graded Homework:

These tasks, by definition, are straightforward assignments that should earn a high grade if you complete them carefully and promptly.

- Slow down and spend more time looking carefully at the requirements of the task. For example, are you required to use full sentences? Are there multiple parts to each question?
- Use your agenda to manage your time and plan ahead; this way, you do not have to rush to complete the task. Do you find that assignments due on Mondays or Tuesdays surprise you? Try writing yourself a note on the week before. (Write the note in the same spot each week so you grow accustomed to looking for it.)

Class Participation:

- Are you afraid of answering a question when you are unsure of the answer? Look at the “markups” you made on your homework. Know what questions you are sure you completed well so you know when to contribute to the class discussion. When brainstorming, try to contribute right away; if you wait too long, someone else will say your great answer that you were trying to psyche yourself up to say.
- Look alive! Making eye contact, providing nonverbal cues (with smiles, frowns, and even looks of confusion) make it clear what you are thinking and feeling on the inside. You sometimes can contribute to the class discussion without even saying a word.

Writing:

This is the most challenging skill to build independently. (Even if you can find sample essay questions online to write, it is difficult for you to self assess perfectly.) Here are some strategies to use the materials from our class to help you improve your writing skills.

- You may want to keep the following items together in your notebook for easy reference: your essays, reflection journals, the transitions list, ellipsis/brackets rules (maybe the essay parts chart and sample essays, too).
- Create your own rubric. You know what makes a strong essay in terms of structure and organization, so you can make a checklist to follow. Start with the broad, general statement and continue through to the clincher. You can expand this to create a more detailed outline based on the specific requirements of an essay question.
- Determine how many supporting quotes the task requires. Lacking textual evidence severely affects your grade. Also, be sure to copy quotes exactly, and make sure to follow the rules for proper use of an ellipsis or brackets.
- Refer to your reflection journals and my comments on your previous essays to see what mistakes you are making and proofread your current essay for those specific errors. Also, look at your reflection journals to see what you did well and try to do it again. 😊
- Implement information covered in class. Use the vocabulary and grammar we practice in class.
- Proofread your essay for only a few aspects at a time. For example, most students find it difficult to check verb tense and look at anything else at the same time. (I read your essay multiple times to grade it, so shouldn't you read it multiple times?)
- Read your essay aloud. You don't really have to read it to someone (you can read it to the family pet), but be sure you are reading with normal inflection (expression), and most importantly, listening to what you are saying. You will hear awkward phrasing and some grammatical errors if you read aloud that students miss when they proofread on paper only.

Literary Analysis:

- You build these skills with practice. The more you read, the more you begin to know what to look for, and you see that authors often use many of the same techniques. You will become familiar with looking for patterns of organization, for the effects of word choices and various literary techniques, and for evidence of the same idea repeated within the work that points to a theme.
- Remember that this is critical, close reading instead of reading for leisure. While you may enjoy reading the piece, this is work. If you curl up in bed late at night with a soft light to begin a reading assignment, you probably will fall asleep.
- Read with a pen, and perhaps even sticky notes, to highlight important phrases and record ideas. Also, make notes about what you do not know so that you are prepared to ask questions in class.
- Use your literary terms list to help determine the basic effects of certain literary devices. Then, you want to think about why an author uses a device in a specific way. For example, while similes help readers better understand what the author is describing, a simile that says something exploded like a bomb creates a very different image than one that says something exploded like springtime.
- Be prepared to read and reread text to gain a deeper understanding.
- If a question refers to a specific passage or line, go back and reread the section.
- Even when a question is multiple choice, always look for textual evidence to support your answer.

Grammar:

- There are an endless number of grammar websites on the Internet. Type the name of the grammatical concept into your favorite search engine. You can find more practice than the questions I have given you, and you can learn additional grammar rules and practice those. Many sites have interactive quizzes that give you answers right there.

Keep Growing!

