

THE MASTER NOTEBOOK ROUTINE

Joan Sedita, M.Ed.*

The Master Notebook Routine is an ongoing system for filing, organizing, and studying school papers and materials. It consists of two parts:

- ▶ Working notebook
- ▶ Reserve files

Parents can help students set up a “Working Notebook” and transfer material from the “Working Notebook” to the “Reserve Files” on a regular basis. The combination of the Working Notebook and Reserve Files makes it easier for your child to find exactly the papers they need and to avoid losing important papers. The system also eliminates the overstuffed notebooks and backpacks that typically develop as the school year progresses.

* Joan Sedita, M.Ed. is the founder and director of Sedita Learning Strategies (<http://www.seditalearning.com>). Ms. Sedita is an experienced educator, nationally recognized speaker and teacher trainer, and author. She has worked for 30 years in the field of education, and has presented to thousands of educators, parents, and related professionals at schools, colleges, clinics, and professional organizations throughout the United States.

THE MASTER NOTEBOOK ROUTINE WORKING NOTEBOOK

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The Working Notebook is the main tool your child will use for all of his classes and homework. It holds all the papers and information needed each day. Any three-ring binder can serve as a Working Notebook. However, it is recommended that you use a nylon, zippered type because it tends to hold up better and last longer. The ring size should be 1.5 to 2 inches in diameter. Your child's Working Notebook should contain:

- A portable, three-hole punch
- A zippered pouch with three holes to hold highlighters, pencils, pens, clips, "sticky notes", and other small supplies
- A monthly calendar
- Four section dividers for each subject labeled "*homework*", "*notes*", "*handouts*", and "*quizzes/tests*"
- An assignment book
- Several plastic page protectors to keep reference papers such as a copy of the class schedule, math facts, spelling list, etc.

These items are available at most office supply stores in a three-hole punched format so they can be inserted easily into the notebook. This is important, because if the items are not attached to the notebook, they will get lost in backpacks or left at home or school.

On a daily basis, your child should date, three-hole punch, and file all of his school papers under the appropriate divider for each subject. Your child should also note assignments in detail in the assignment book. The monthly calendar is used to note upcoming tests, quizzes, or long-term projects.

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THE MASTER NOTEBOOK ROUTINE RESERVE FILES

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Reserve Files are used for storing completed work and material no longer needed for class. The files usually stay at home, but if the teacher is willing to use the system in class, they may be kept at school. They may be stored in a file cabinet, a plastic or cardboard file box, or a portable file box. There should be one section of the files for each subject. Reserve Files provide a single place to organize and store finished work. They also keep the working notebook from getting too full.

On a regular basis, preferably at the end of each week, your child should remove all notes, homework, and other papers not needed for class the next week and clip them together by subject. Your child should then review the material, make a list of the main points covered in class that week, and write a summary in his own words for each subject. The next step is to attach the list and summary to the clipped-together work and to store the packet in the Reserve Files. After several weeks, your child's Reserve Files will contain a series of packets, filed by subject, which can be used to review and study for a unit or semester test.

The goal with this system is to eventually have your child apply these strategies independently, but many children will need significant help and practice with an adult before they can do this on their own. It might be helpful to contact your child's teachers for their input about which papers can be culled out of the working notebook, and which should remain for the next week.

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REFERENCE PAGES

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Plastic sheet protectors can be used to create a reference section in the Working Notebook for keeping information that your child needs to reference on a frequent basis. Some examples of items for reference pages include:

- A personal spelling list of commonly used words that are particularly difficult for your child
- A list of transition words and phrases that will improve the quality of your child's writing assignments (e.g., words such as however, for example, finally, therefore, in conclusion, another, first, second, etc.)
- Math facts
- Charts or graphs given in class (such as a time line of events for social studies or a periodic table for science)
- How-to lists (such as how to answer an essay question, how to organize your notebook) and templates (such as formats for science experiments)
- A copy of the class schedule

General reference pages, such as a class schedule, can be kept at the beginning or end of the Working Notebook. Reference pages that are subject specific can be kept in a subject section.

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