

# Shore up your Skills for College

By Mick Rosenblum

As a high school student, you are probably looking forward to graduating and then moving on to a college or university, right? But when you finish high school, will you really be college-ready? Sadly, I have found that most high school students are ill-prepared for both the coursework and the pace of university studies.

Believe it or not, most high school and college students have poor reading skills. Not only are their vocabularies stunningly limited, but no one has taught them to read aloud with appropriate emphases and inflections. This translates directly into a limited focus and comprehension when the student reads silently. Unfortunately, one cannot look to the school systems to correct this deficiency, because schools often stop monitoring students' reading skills after the fifth or sixth grade level, and fail to teach many of the most important reading skills during the elementary school years.

Mathematics is another set of skills for which most high school grads are sorely limited. Receiving good grades in all of his or her high school math courses does not mean that a student has acquired the skills necessary for college-level coursework. Notice that I used the term "received" rather than "earned." I did so to emphasize the importance of your not relying on grades to measure your skill level. Both public and private high schools often embellish students' grades, resulting in a false sense of accomplishment that reveals itself all too abruptly in college math courses.

Writing is yet another skill in which high school and college students are remarkably deficient. In my more than thirty-five years of teaching students of all levels (including graduate students), I have very rarely encountered a student who could write well without proper private tutoring and concerted practice!

Other essential student skills that high schools do little or nothing to improve upon are note taking, test taking, study skills, and organization. Students are expected, however, to perform efficiently but are left to do so without any such training. While they may be able to muddle through at a high school pace, when those same students enter a college environment, in which courses are one-semester rather than an entire school year in duration, they are often unable to excel, simply because they have not been trained to work efficiently.

The first step in correcting these issues is to recognize that they exist. Parents must resist the temptation to simply accept high school coursework grades and grade-point-averages as indicators of skill acquisition, and instead, should monitor and test students to verify those skills. Students, in turn, must avoid the urge to seek the "easy" courses and instructors and, instead, strive to learn as much as they can in their high school years.

The next step is to get some help, outside of school, in order to learn, develop, and enhance these essential skills. Consider carefully evaluating and then hiring a private tutor who both recognizes and is specialized in such training. Naturally, if you would like any help in assessing your particular situation, just give me a call.