

The Student Backpack

The Importance of Getting Essential Coursework to and from School

(Excerpted from *A-Academics' Simplified Organizational System*)

By *Mick Rosenblum*

Believe it or not, your backpack is yet another essential macro-organizational tool! Backpacks come in all shapes and sizes, so a student must look for one that is well constructed (not thin and flimsy) and large enough to hold *all* of his or her books and binders. If a student purchases a backpack that will not accommodate all of his or her materials, necessary textbooks and papers will reside either at home or in a locker.

The typical student carries only a few of his books in his backpack; the rest he stores in his locker. At the end of the day, while in a hurry to get home, he stops for a second or two to think about his homework assignments. He quickly decides that he has no homework for that evening and traipses home. After dinner our buddy suddenly remembers the huge Spanish test he has tomorrow! In a panic, he tells his parents that he must retrieve his Spanish book right away, because this test is his last chance to redeem himself in the course. Mom tells him to call all of his friends from Spanish class to see if any of them would be willing to loan him a Spanish book for a few hours (long enough for Dad to take it to the nearest copy center to Xerox seven chapters). True to form, the typical student does not know a single telephone number of any other student in his Spanish class. He does know, however, that Billy's last name is Jones and Tom's last name is Smith and that they live somewhere in the city.

Mom and Dad are left with no choice, but to skulk around the perimeter of the school (not unlike a small military reconnaissance unit) to find a section of fence that is scalable. Once on the school grounds, Mom or Dad must, in absolute darkness, locate our hero's locker, dial the correct combination, sift through a mess that makes Fibber McGee's closet seem tidy, and extract the desired textbook. After reading the scenario above, you probably think I am living in a fantasy world of exaggerated improbabilities...but you're wrong. This is a true story that took place several years ago; one that finally motivated two flustered parents to call me for organizational guidance. If you ask around, I bet you will discover that almost fifty percent of parents have gone through similar episodes as their typical student wades through his or her scholastic career. Maybe it has happened to you.

Lockers are also easy for others to break into and ransack. This happens at least once a year at many schools. Sometimes a locker partner simply forgets to close the locker door properly or spin the combination wheel. Years ago, when I worked at a Junior High School, I observed students walking along rows of lockers pulling on locks to see if any would simply "pop" open. For these reasons, it is absolutely imperative that a student keep all of his or her books in a backpack at all times, and keep a close eye on that backpack! I realize that many students have a great many books to carry with them and have come to rely rather heavily upon their lockers. I also realize that some students do not have lockers (indeed, my own two teenage daughters did not have access to lockers at their school) and must carry their books and materials in backpacks; they tend manage quite well, however, and seldom forgotten to bring a book home.

Some students have even purchased moderately sized pieces of luggage replete with wheels to cart their books from class to class . . . not a bad idea. Students must do whatever it takes to keep all of their materials with them at all times. Then they will never run the risk of failing that Spanish test, because they forgot to bring the book home!

I know what some of you are thinking, "why not simply purchase a second set of books to store at home, then the student can leave the original set in his locker." Although this may sound like a good idea, it is generally not. Buying second set of textbooks does not inspire the student to keep track of his own resources. It simply allows him to continue to assume little or no responsibility for his books, binders, and materials. Besides, no parent can make a copy of the hundreds of handouts the typical student receives and then stuffs into his locker. That is not to say, however, that in certain circumstances, I haven't suggested that parents purchase an additional set of books that will remain at home. If, for example, a student has so many large textbooks that he or she is unable to haul them around in one bundle, then it *may* be appropriate to secure an additional set of books for use at home, but the student must be responsible for both sets. I have known a number of students whose parents have bought them an additional set of books only discover that both sets are mysteriously unavailable for homework! The student has stored one set in his locker, and has loaned the all or part of the other set to any number of his friends who have managed to lose their books (the typical student is generous to a fault). It is time to scale the fences again!

Never forget that it is your job, as a parent, to prepare your child, one step at a time, to live on his own. Are you planning to buy him a second set of textbooks for college (one for his dorm room and one for his girlfriend's car)? And why not continue the process, beyond college, by giving him two brief cases for his fortieth birthday? You can bet he'll need them, because he will never have learned to be responsible and self-reliant in his formative years.

Mick Rosenblum has been teaching and tutoring for more than thirty years and is considered to be among the nation's most experienced private tutors and test preparation specialists. He is the owner of [A-Academics](#) and is the author of SAT Magic (first and second editions) along with many other educational publications.