

# **Keeping Students Skills Sharp During Time Away From School**

- **Read for pleasure.**

Whether your child is in the mood for holiday stories like *The Night Before Christmas* or the newest installment from his favorite series, winter break provides the perfect opportunity to stash schoolbooks and read for fun. Encourage relatives to give books as holiday gifts or gather in front of the fire (big kids too!) to take turns reading from classic tales.

- **Cook up an easy lesson.**

Invite your child into the kitchen to help you whip up a special dish — from Christmas cookies to potato pancakes. All of those half-tablespoon and quarter-cup measurements are great practice with fractions.

- **Write thank-you notes.**

Penning notes of appreciation to gift-givers teaches gratitude and helps polish writing and spelling skills. Not sure what to say? Check out our thank-you note template for wording. One final tip: a mug of hot cocoa can make this task feel more festive!

- **Make the most of car rides.**

Turn the drive to or from a holiday get-together into an opportunity to practice letters and numbers. You can look for license plates from different states, try to find the alphabet on the license plates, or count the number of red (or white or green) cars you see. For another take on this fun idea, you can have your kids play license plate bingo with this free printable.

- **Maintain reasonable bedtimes.**

With no school to get up for in the morning, it can be tempting to let kids become night owls. A few days before school starts up again, ease back into the regular bedtime schedule so your child can start the year bright-eyed.

- **Ask for grocery list assistance.**

Have your child help choose what to buy, decide how much you need, check your supplies to see what you've already got, write or draw pictures on the list, and sort coupons.

- **Let kids help with online shopping.**

Need a last-minute gift for Grandma or Uncle Joe? Log onto your favorite shopping sites and let your child help you select presents. This helps children work on their computer and research skills.

- **Have a family game night.**

Chances are many of your family's favorite board and card games reinforce skills such as counting, reading, and drawing. Gather the group to play games you usually don't have time for on school nights.

- **Science in the Kitchen**

You don't need to pull out your recipe books or get into dicing onions to cook a meal with kids. Cooking offers a range of choices – from baking with older kids (a muffin pan, eggs, flour, sugar and a couple of

basic recipes you find online to get them started) to teaching the young ones how to butter a slice of bread, roll out *dough* or cut a soft fruit like a banana with a non-sharp knife. Expect a mess at the end!

- **Grandparent Biography**

This is another good activity for teenagers, although 10 year olds can do it too. Do you live in a joint family, with parents or uncles and aunts? Grandparents are often lonely but full of memories of their childhood. Children love listening to their stories. Here are a few questions to get them started on an interview with grandma:

1. *What are the names of your parents and brothers and sisters? Did you have a nickname?*
2. *When and where were you born? When and where were your parents and brothers and sisters born?*
3. *What kinds of things did your family do together when you were young?*
4. *Who were some of your friends? What did you do with your friends?*
5. *What schools did you attend? What were your favorite subjects? Who were your favorite teachers?*
6. *How did you meet Grandfather?*

- **Indoor Bowling Game**

You can make a very addictive indoor bowling game using a wooden board or flattened cardboard box laid out on a flat surface. Use pencil erasers or fat crayon stubs for bowling pins. And marbles or a ping pong ball as the bowling ball. Keep score and have fun!

- **Balloon Volleyball**

When you need to keep the kids active but it's too hot to play outside, string up a rope or two *dupattas* tied together across your hallway. Then hand the kids a balloon each and have them play balloon volleyball. Add a couple of rackets or paddle boards and it becomes balloon badminton!

- **Bull's Eye**

A couple of sponges (for small kids, to prevent against injury) or bottle caps, and some chalk are all you need to turn a reasonably large indoor or outdoor area into a target practice zone. Join in with the kids for some fun.

- **Car Racing Track**

Put colored tape on the carpet or floor to make roads for your kids' cars. You can add signals and stop signs to make the activity more creative. Make a special zone for parking where the cars have to come to a standstill after play is over. This will prevent you from tripping over toys lying all around the room. The tape will come off easily when you are done.

- **A-Z Scavenger Hunt**

Give the children a big box and send them off on a scavenger hunt indoors (if you don't mind your home being turned upside down) or outdoors to a park. Give them a time limit and have them compete against each other if they want. Ask them to collect in the box any items they can find starting with different letters of the alphabet. So your kids may pick up an apple from the kitchen (starts with A), or a safety pin (starts with S) from your sewing box, or a ballpoint pen (starts with B) from your work table. All letters of the alphabet must be covered. And all items must fit in the box provided. The kids can play this in teams with their friends too. A single kid can go on a solo scavenger hunt.