

# Back to School...A Dozen Tips for Balancing School with Gymnastics

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One of the more remarkable things gymnasts do is balance on a four inch wide beam, performing skills that most would not even think doable on a floor.

But each September, many of these young athletes face a different kind of balance challenge: balancing school with practice.

Gymnastics does not need to be an impediment to excellence in education. To the contrary, [study after study shows](#) that children who participate in sports actually perform better in school than their peers who do not do sports.

Gymnastics, in particular, may have a positive effect on school achievement. [In one study](#) it was discovered that despite the many hours competitive gymnasts trained, those students who were involved in gymnastics training were more likely to maintain or improve their grades once they joined a team. In fact, the study revealed that the more time students spent training for gymnastics, the better their grades were.

While that may seem counter-intuitive, it may be that the discipline developed in the gym translates to other areas of a gymnast's life.

This academic achievement does not happen by accident, however. But with a solid plan, excellent time management strategies and communication between the student-athlete, coaches, parents and teachers, these kids can be successful both in the classroom and the gym.

Here are a dozen of my suggestions that students can implement to maintain their excellence in the classroom and the gym :

1. **Set priorities.** While each family gets to make their own rules, in my home and at my gym club, school is the priority. That doesn't mean that there won't be times when a school absence happens to attend an important competition but it means that on the whole, school comes first.
2. **Talk to all of the stakeholders.** The student (with the help of the parent if she is not yet in high school) should explain her gymnastics commitment to her teachers and explain her academic expectations to her coaches. This way, everyone is aware of what the child is trying to manage and all can be sensitive to supporting her and making sure that she isn't under too much stress.
3. **Have a plan (and a planner).** There is a saying in time management: if you don't plan your day, it will plan you. It is essential that there is a plan in place and that plan is recorded in a planner. When all of your time that is scheduled (commuting time, class time, and gym time as well as other obligations like physical therapy, faith-based activities and social engagement) is marked out in a planner, you can actually see where you have gaps for your homework/study time. If you prefer an electronic version, check out [Trello](#).

4. **Record due dates for schoolwork and projects and work backwards to set small deadlines.** Just as you make a plan in the gym for how you will master a new skill in time for season by choosing a goal date and working backwards to how you will get there, the same needs to happen with your school projects.
5. **Use your time wisely.** Plan how you can use study halls, time after you eat your lunch and travel time to school, practices and competitions. A lot of work can be accomplished in 10 to 15 minute chunks. And absolutely take advantage of your study halls at school. Another tip: use audiobooks or study recordings you made yourself while traveling if reading in a moving vehicle makes you feel sick.
6. **Use your nights off and weekend wisely.** If homework is given weekly, perhaps you can get your assignments on Fridays instead of Mondays to get a jump on the week. Even if that isn't possible, it is often possible to do things like reading or long term projects when you have a day away from gym.
7. **Do not procrastinate or fall behind.** If you think you can wait until the last minute, you are wrong. Busy people cannot afford to procrastinate. And will result in you in falling behind which makes a large hole from which to have to dig. Stay ahead of your schoolwork!
8. **Remove all distractions when you are doing your work.** Turn off all notifications on your cell phone or computer. Block yourself from Facebook or other forms of social media. [It has been shown that it takes 25 minutes to recover from an interruption!](#)
9. **Set short deadlines for yourself.** [Parkinson's Law](#) says that the time you give yourself to complete a task is the time it will take. So, set a goal to write the rough outline of a paper or to read a chapter of your novel in 20 minutes. You might not get it done that quickly but by tightening your deadlines you are more likely to stay on task and limit your distractions.
10. **Give yourself a bedtime, and stick to it.** Not getting sufficient sleep has been shown to [lead to health problems and can impair your learning.](#)
11. **Get help as soon as you need it.** If you are struggling with a concept in a class or a subject in general, go ask the teacher for help immediately. Too often high achieving kids think asking for help is a sign of weakness, it's not!
12. **Have a plan for when things go wrong.** Ask your coaches in advance how they would prefer you approach coming to workout on days you have too much work. Some are open to athletes attending practice at the beginning and leaving early to do schoolwork. Others would rather that athlete come late to practice after the work is done. Still others would prefer that athlete to come to practice and take off a certain rotation where she requires less practice to do homework. And still others would prefer the athlete take the entire practice off.

Parents, teacher and coaches, your job is to help these student athletes implement these ideas as well as to keep a watchful eye on their stress level. If a student experiences a decline in grade, a loss of enthusiasm for the sport or is overly sad or irritable, it may be necessary to intervene