FREE DIAGNOSTIC AND ACTION GUIDE

# The 5-Minute Study Leak Diagnostic

Find the hidden reason studying is taking too long - and decide what to fix first.

**For teenagers and the adults supporting them**

**Lourens Breytenbach**

SmartStudySystem.com

**START HERE**

# Your teenager may not have a motivation problem

A learner can sit with books open for an hour and still do very little learning. The problem is often not laziness, intelligence or attitude. The problem is a leak in the study process: difficulty starting, weak focus, passive methods, unrealistic planning or poor examination preparation.

This diagnostic is designed to identify the biggest leak quickly. It is not a medical, psychological or educational assessment. It is a practical conversation starter and a way to choose the first useful action.

### How to use it

The learner should answer first. A parent or teacher may then add a second view. Do not argue over individual answers. Circle the section with the highest score and begin there.

## The promise

In five minutes, you will identify the area most likely to be wasting study time and receive one small action to try tonight.

**THE DIAGNOSTIC**

# Score each statement

### Use the following key:

0 = rarely true

1 = sometimes true

2 = often true.

### Record the score in the last column.

| Statement | 0 / 1 / 2 | Score |
|---|---|---|
| **A. STARTING** | | |
| I delay starting even when I know what needs to be done. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I spend too long arranging, choosing, scrolling or preparing before real work begins. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| The work feels so large that I avoid choosing a first step. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I often wait until pressure or panic forces me to begin. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| **B. FOCUS** | | |
| My phone, messages, games or tabs interrupt study sessions. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I move between subjects or tasks without finishing a clear block. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I sit for a long time but cannot explain what I achieved. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I study in a place where interruptions are normal. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| **C. METHOD** | | |
| Most of my study time is spent rereading, copying or highlighting. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I recognise information when I see it but struggle to recall it without notes. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I make beautiful notes but rarely test myself afterwards. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I am not sure which method suits each subject or type of task. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| **D. PLANNING** | | |
| My study plan contains more work than I can realistically complete. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I plan by subject name rather than by a specific, finishable task. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I leave difficult subjects until there is very little time left. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| When one session goes wrong, the rest of the plan often collapses. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| **E. EXAM READINESS** | | |
| I begin serious preparation only a few days before a test or examination. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I do not use questions, past papers or timed practice early enough. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I cannot tell which topics are secure and which still need work. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |
| I repeat familiar work because it feels safer than facing weak areas. | [ ] [ ] [ ] | ____ |

## SCORE AND CHOOSE

# Add each section (A, B, ...)

| Study leak | Your score | What it usually means |
|---|---|---|
| A. Starting | ____ / 8 | The first step is unclear, emotionally heavy or too large. |
| B. Focus | ____ / 8 | Attention is being divided or the study block has no boundary. |
| C. Method | ____ / 8 | Time is being spent looking at information rather than retrieving or using it. |
| D. Planning | ____ / 8 | The plan is vague, overloaded or too fragile for real life. |
| E. Exam readiness | ____ / 8 | Practice and feedback are arriving too late. |

## Your first target

The highest score is the first study leak to repair. A tie is normal. Choose the leak that causes the earliest breakdown in the process. For example, method advice will not help much if the learner never starts.

## A useful parent response

**Say:** “That makes sense. Let us fix one part instead of trying to fix your entire life tonight. Which small experiment feels possible?”

**Avoid:** “I have been telling you this for months.” The purpose of the diagnostic is to open a workable conversation, not to win an old argument.

## YOUR RESULT

# A. The Starting Leak

The learner knows the work matters but cannot convert a large, uncomfortable task into a first action. Repeated reminders may increase pressure without making the first step clearer.

**Try this tonight**

Choose one task that can be finished in 15 minutes. Write it as a visible action: “Answer questions 1-3” rather than “Do Science”. Put the required book and page open before the timer starts.

**Starting is a skill. Make the doorway smaller.**

## One question to discuss

What makes the first five minutes of studying difficult?

**YOUR RESULT**

# B. The Focus Leak

The learner may be working in fragments: checking messages, moving between tabs, answering family questions and restarting the same paragraph. Time passes, but the mind never remains with one task long enough to make progress.

### Try this tonight

Create one protected 25-minute block. Put the phone outside reach or activate a genuine focus mode. Write one task on paper. During the block, capture unrelated thoughts on a "later" list instead of following them.

**A focus block needs a boundary, not heroic willpower.**

## One question to discuss

Which interruption causes the most damage to a study block?

**YOUR RESULT**

# C. The Method Leak

The learner is doing activities that feel familiar and busy - rereading, highlighting and copying - but is not practising recall, explanation or application. Recognition creates the feeling of knowing, while tests require information to be produced without the page in front of you.

> **Try this tonight**
>
> Study one small section, close the material and write everything you can remember. Check the source in a different colour. Turn gaps into questions. Repeat the questions tomorrow.

**Do not merely put information in. Practise getting it out.**

## One question to discuss

How do you normally check whether you can remember something without looking?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**YOUR RESULT**

# D. The Planning Leak

The plan may look impressive but contains vague subject labels, unrealistic time estimates and no room for delays. When one block is missed, the learner feels behind and abandons the whole plan.

> **Try this tonight**

Plan only the next three study blocks. Give each block one finish line and one time limit. Add a short catch-up block later in the week instead of expecting perfection every day.

**A useful plan survives real life.**

### One question to discuss

Which part of your current plan is least believable?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**YOUR RESULT**

## E. The Exam-Readiness Leak

The learner postpones questions and past papers until the end, so weak areas remain hidden. Familiar topics are repeated because they feel comfortable, while uncertainty grows around the difficult work.

**Try this tonight**

Choose ten questions from the next assessment area and attempt them without notes. Mark each answer as Secure, Shaky or Missing. Use the results to decide the next session.

**Practice should reveal weakness early enough to repair it.**

### One question to discuss

Which topic are you avoiding testing because you suspect it is weak?

_____

THE 20-MINUTE RESCUE

# Do this before you make a giant plan

1. Choose one small section of one subject.
2. Write a finish line that can be reached in 15 minutes.
3. Remove the main interruption for one short block.
4. Study briefly, close the material and retrieve what you remember.
5. Check the gaps and write the next two questions to practise tomorrow.

### What success looks like

Success tonight is not finishing the syllabus. It is completing one honest learning cycle: choose, focus, retrieve, check and plan the next return.

## My experiment

The subject and section I will use:

The one task I will finish:

The interruption I will remove:

The time I will begin:

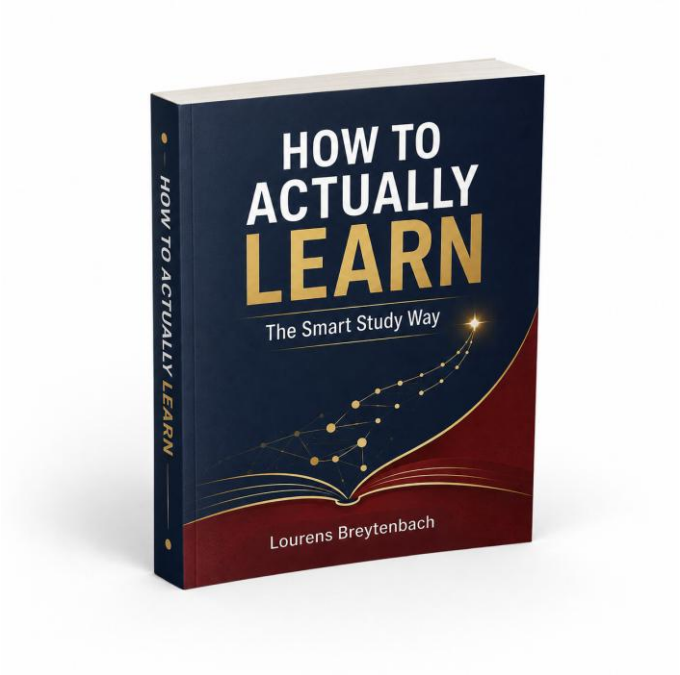
**THE NEXT STEP**

# Now learn how to actually learn

The diagnostic tells you where the leak is. The next resource shows the learner exactly how to replace passive study with methods that produce recall, understanding and usable practice.

### Recommended next resource

How to Actually Learn: A study-methods guide for teenagers who are tired of pretending highlighting is working. It includes the three tests of real learning, retrieval practice, spacing, subject-specific methods, a 45-minute study block and a seven-day action plan.




**SmartStudySystem.com/actually**

## About the author

Lourens Breytenbach is an experienced South African educator, English and Mathematics teacher, and school leader. His **Smart Study System** translates sound learning principles into practical tools that teenagers and parents can use without turning every study conversation into a battle.

# Visit SmartStudySystem.com for your Next Step




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