



## Academics And Athletics

By  
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### I. The Relationship Between Academics and Athletics

Coaches on all levels have long recognized a direct relationship between academic responsibility and athletic responsibility. In academics, just like athletics, three areas must be recognized and evaluated.

#### 1. Identify one's skills.

What skills are brought to the field or to the classroom with which to compete? (Yes, the classroom is an arena of competition, especially when one reaches the collegiate level!) When skills are evaluated, it is important to be honest about both strengths and weaknesses.

**Ability** is different from skill. **Ability** is something that is innate, brought to the athletic field or the academic table with very little prior work. **Skill** is something that has been improved over time by constant attention and/or hard work. For academics, skills that need to be identified and evaluated are reading, writing, note taking, studying, and time management. All of these basic skills can be improved with a consistent effort.

#### 2. Identify one's habits.

Habits have a huge impact on one's **aptitude**. What are the habits that relate to athletic progress? Consider your habits. Do you work hard or are you lazy? Are you capable of focusing on a task until it is completed or do you fade in the middle? Do you have too many distractions that keep you from working hard at your skills?

Habits for success in athletic and academic endeavors are similar. The habits for athletic success can and do carry over to academic pursuits. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. A young person that has as a goal to be the best player he/she can be, generally has some idea what steps need to be made to reach that goal. Such a person will pay close attention to his/her work ethic, strength training, quickness and agility training, nutrition, and basic skills of the individual sport.

Many times the individual will pay for private physical and/or mental lessons from an expert. To reach similar high academic goals, the individual needs to take the same type of approach as for his/her sport. Habits that are basic skills for academic success are things like never missing a class, taking good notes and reviewing them often, doing homework on time, studying and reading, and preparing by staying ahead. If it helps to hire a professional "tutor" for athletic skills, why not hire a "professional" tutor for academic skills?

With the “Information Age” upon us, it is possible to access academic “training” on the Internet. There are numerous quality web sites devoted to everything from study and learning skills to preparation for the SAT or ACT. Take advantage of these sites!

Once habits have been honestly identified, it is then possible to change them for the better. It is important to work hard to rid oneself of habits that consistently get in the way of athletic or academic success.

3. Identify one’s **attitudes**.

It is a certainty that one’s **attitude** toward life is the most important thing one’s mind can create. Just like no coach likes a player with a bad **attitude**, no matter how good a player he/she might be, no teacher likes a student with a bad **attitude**, no matter how smart he/she may be. **Attitudes** that are the same in sport or in the classroom include being positive, having a “can do” outlook on any subject (i.e. instead of “I hate math” it is “I can do math!”), confidence, caring about and committing oneself to excellence. One **attitude** that coaches and teachers like least is that **attitude** which causes the disruptive behavior that keeps others from learning.

“Self-efficacy” is defined as the strength of belief one has to complete a certain task. The player or student who exhibits the self-efficacy necessary to improve is the player or student a coach or teacher most appreciates. Players or students who are centered upon individual improvement and the improvement of the team are the players or students who are the leaders of their respective groups.

Bring a great **attitude** to the field and to the classroom!

The farther one advances in athletics the better the competition. The farther one advances in academics the better the competition. Just like there is a “Pyramid” for each individual sport, a “Pyramid” for academic pursuits also exists. Therefore, it is easy to understand why it is desirable to apply similar techniques for striving toward athletic or academic success. In athletics or academics, if one does not have great **ability**, one can level the playing field by improving skills. To improve skills, one must have a good **aptitude** to improve quickly, a good **attitude** to work hard and stay positive while working the steep side of the learning curve!

## II. Working Toward Academic Success

In academics, just like in athletics, how one feels about oneself can clearly determine success or failure. The noted Stanford psychologist, Albert Bandura has stated that **self-efficacy** “is a situation-specific form of self confidence.” This means that every individual will have certain tasks that he/she feels comfortable attempting and certain tasks that he/she feels uncomfortable attempting. As self-efficacy increases, individuals feel better about the task they are doing and will stay with that task longer.

Self-efficacy is a very important ingredient in academic success. Numerous studies have shown that the following six criteria are critical to academic success on any level. Self-efficacy can help one improve in all six areas!

1. The ability to understand what one reads.

It is not necessary to be a great reader, just methodical and capable of comprehending.

2. The ability to clearly express oneself in writing.

Includes spelling, punctuation, grammar, and neatness.

3. The ability to clearly express oneself orally.  
A minimum of “uh’s” and “you know’s”!
4. The ability to organize oneself and one’s work.  
Learn time management for greater efficiency.
5. The ability to set clear, concise goals.  
Set goals that are measurable and attainable.
6. The ability to make a commitment to a great attitude.  
A “can do” approach to any academic subject!

As coaches and athletes, we realize that in everything we attempt there is a **process** and a **product**. The **process** is how one goes about accomplishing a task. The **product** is the final outcome of the task. A good example of the **process-product** relationship is when a hitter is only concerned about getting a hit. In this situation, the outcome of an at bat is the goal. First, getting a hit is not a very good goal because getting a hit is not something a hitter can control. Once the ball leaves the bat, the defense is in control! So a better goal would be hitting the ball hard. Second, when only concerned about getting a hit the most important part of the **process**, seeing the ball, is forgotten.

When the **process** of completing a task is most important, then one is centered upon the effort and learning necessary to improve. When this occurs, the individual recognizes that mistakes will happen, that they are not to be feared, and that mistakes are a necessary part of learning. When **product**, or outcome, is most important, then mistakes are not tolerated and the learning **process** is inhibited. Reading, writing, and communication skills will improve with hard work and attention to detail. One is never too young to start being a **process-oriented** individual and working toward academic excellence!

### III. Looking Beyond High School

The first day of the freshman year in high school, a student-athlete can begin receiving questionnaires from colleges and universities. The student-athlete has either been identified as a “prospect” by the four year school, or has written to the school requesting to be considered as a “prospect.”

The vast majority of the questionnaires sent by the colleges and universities ask for academic information. The academic information required is grade point average, PSAT/SAT/ACT score(s), core curriculum, rank in class, and academic interest. A freshman in high school does not have much information to provide, but as one progresses through high school the information accumulates.

When a college coach receives a questionnaire from a prospect who has begun his/her junior year in high school whose academic qualifications fall below those required by the college or university, the coach will delete that student-athlete from the recruiting list. The superior Athlete will get the benefit of the doubt in the recruiting process, but if his/her academic qualifications are not good enough, it will not matter how great of an Athlete he or she is, he/she will not remain on the recruiting list.

When communicating with four year colleges, high school coaches will often classify young players within one of the following three categories.

1. The Athlete is a physically gifted individual identified early as a “prospect” in his/her sport. This individual could have a great **attitude** or a poor **attitude**, be intelligent or not so intelligent, be a great student or a poor student, a good human being or a less than good human being, highly

motivated or not motivated to be the best at his/her sport. These individuals seem to receive the benefit of any doubt in their sport, in their school work, or in their social life just because of their God-given athletic ability.

2. The Sports Rat. To this individual everything is secondary to his/her sport because he/she eats, drinks, sleeps, breathes the sport. This individual is generally not an Athlete although he/she could be. These individuals have a great **attitude**, a great work ethic, and are always trying to improve in their sport. They are often above average students, but they often will allow their schoolwork to suffer because of their obsession with their sport.
3. The Student does well in school as he/she balances athletics and academics. He/she can be intelligent or not so intelligent, but does work hard to do well in school. This individual can be an Athlete but generally is not a Sports Rat. In general, he/she is internally motivated toward learning and academics and understands the long-term benefits of being well educated. Often the motivation of this individual to do well academically carries over to motivation to do well on the athletic field.

A team will generally have at least one player from each category. Coaches would love to have an entire team with characteristics of all three types. But knowing this is not possible, the coach will want those players that never have to worry about their academic progress. It is rare for an individual that is dedicated and responsible in the classroom to be irresponsible on the field. When a player does not have to worry about his/her academics, then the coach does not have to worry either!

Every college freshman student-athlete must be “certified” by the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse. If the academic qualifications do not meet the NCAA minimum requirements of grade point average, SAT/ACT score, and core curriculum, the student/athlete will not be certified eligible for competition. Therefore, if competing in a sport in college is a goal, then to make that goal realistic, the student-athlete must dedicate himself/herself to doing well in school.