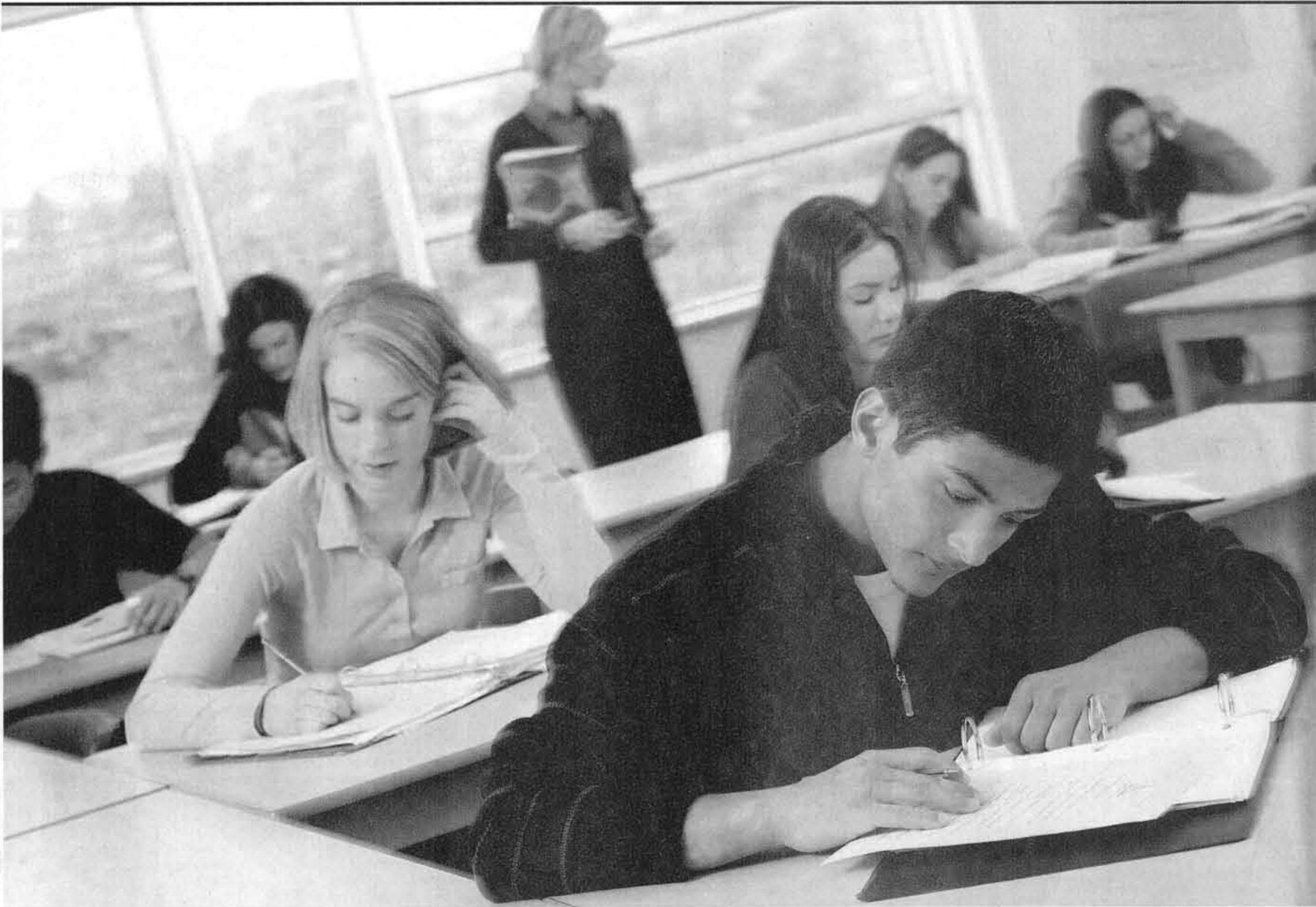


EDUCATION



CRAMMING FOR THE BIG TEST

Procrastinating leads to bad study habits

To cram or not to cram, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous procrastination, or take arms against a sea of fortune and get your work done on time — ay, there's the decision to be made.

The act of waiting until the last minute to accomplish required tasks is best known as procrastinating. The behavior of cramming is a popular outcome of procrastination. There are both positive and negative aspects when trying to complete work under tight time constraints.

Students are not alone when it comes to procrastinating, as adults are also guilty of committing cramming crimes too.

This column is a perfect example. I thought about this topic for approximately three weeks, gained valuable input from friends and even wrote notes while eating chili after skiing on a Sunday afternoon. My initial intent was to write this piece two weeks ago, but at the suggestion of community members, I decided to write about Measure A. Then I planned on writing it this past Friday, but for whatever reason, it didn't happen. Here I am the night before

my deadline ... cramming.

Working under pressure is an environment that works for some people but fails for others. Knowing there are literally moments left to complete an assignment or project forces the worker to get it done. Similar to athletes, musicians and actors, the pressure and intensity of a situation, or deadline, actually promotes productivity. These people are able to perform well due to their countless hours of training and rehearsing. For some, quality work is a consistent outcome of cramming. However, there are many who are only capable of producing a mediocre quality when waiting until the last minute to accomplish a task worthy of more time and effort.

Failure, low self-esteem and a poor work ethic are accomplished by those who cram so hard that they wind up giving up altogether in attempting their work.

By Vicki Isacowitz

ON THE CHALKBOARD

So, does the quick fix of cramming provide support for long term memory?

The short answer is no. The chances for retaining information increase when more time and energy are put forth. When students spend adequate time

preparing for an assessment, there is a greater likelihood they will perform well. Trying to cram loads of information into memory within a short amount of time usually proves unsuccessful. Although it might seem helpful for the moment, the knowledge is not necessarily ingrained in the mind of the crammer.

Situations do arise when it is unknown to a student that a quiz, test, or assignment is due. If additional time is not granted, it is to the student's advantage to try to get as much last minute studying in as possible. In these cases, cramming works as a quick fix, and potentially saves a student from possible failure. However, let it be known that cramming is not a

good habit and should generally be avoided.

Stress, anxiety, tense muscles and the thought, "If only I had not waited until the last minute" are common side effects of procrastination. To reduce the onset of these unpleasant situations, it is best to allow sufficient time when attempting to finish required assignments.

To answer the question of whether or not to cram, it is best to not engage in such activities in the first place. When the situ-

ation of finding oneself in a bind arises and cramming is the only method of avoiding failure, permission is temporarily granted.

— Vicki Isacowitz is a secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of Clever Minds Educational Services, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. Call 582-1707 or e-mail vicki@cleverminds.org.