

TEST-TAKING

Test-taking is a skill, one that can be learned just as well as the academic subjects that tests measure. Following are some good tips for helping you and your children develop this skill and some excellent resources on the topic. Not every approach mentioned below is appropriate for every testing situation and every age child, but you and your child will benefit from an overall knowledge of good test-taking. Go over these with your children and work together to adapt these hints to your children's individual learning styles and their situation.

Studying for the Test

- **Studying should begin soon after the school year starts.** Keep notes organized for review and keep up with homework.
- **Listen for hints from the teacher about what will be on the test.** Ask him for hints about where to concentrate your efforts.
- **Determine the most important information in your study materials and learn that first.**
- **Begin your intensive studying early in the afternoon or evening before the day of the test.**
- **Develop a practice test either alone or with a study mate.** You may want to write a list of questions that may appear on your test before you begin intensive studying, so the list can guide you through your studying. Or you might ask a friend to give you a practice test near the end of your studying in order to catch any final items you may have overlooked.
- **Use positive self-talk.** Research shows that students who study and work on their self-confidence perform better than those who study only. For example, thoughts such as "I am well prepared and will do fine on this test" can help maintain a calm and clear mind.
- **Gather all test-taking materials the night before.** Having to borrow a pencil right before the test can break your concentration and get you off to a bad start.
- **Don't stay up too late and eat a good breakfast.** On the morning of the test, you will perform better with a rested mind and an energized body.

Taking the Test

Phase 1: Review the Test

- **First and foremost, read the instructions very carefully and follow the directions exactly.** Missing something here can cost you dramatically. For example, your instructions might ask you to answer one of the following two essay questions; if you missed those instructions, you would waste half your test-taking time writing an unnecessary essay.
- **Quickly read through the entire test, noting which questions are most difficult, which count the most, and which you don't understand.**

- **Ask questions about anything you don't understand.** Shy children may need to practice how to ask for clarification.
- **Budget your time, allowing more time for essay questions.** (“I’ll spend 10 minutes on the true/false section, 20 minutes on the multiple choice, and 30 minutes on the essay.”)
- **Take a deep breath.** It will help you relax and think more clearly.

Phase 2: Take the Test

- **Answer the easiest questions first.** Not only is this good time management, but it will also build confidence.
- **Go back to the more difficult questions, but don't spend too much time on any one question until you have completed all of the others.**
- **Write clearly.**
- **Pay attention to clues and key words in each question.** For example, some choices in multiple choice questions may be eliminated because they would make the completed sentence grammatically incorrect.
- **Put something down for every question even if you don't know the answer.** You may know more than you think you know. Note: Children may be instructed while taking standardized tests that incorrect answers will cost them more deductions than answers that they have left blank. Make sure you know the exact instructions for each test.

Phase 3: Review

- **Review every item carefully before turning in your test.** You may catch a careless error or have a last-minute insight.
- **Use all of the time allowed.** The longer you review your answer, the more chances you have to discover mistakes.

Recommended Resources

Gilbert, Sara, *How to Take Tests*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1983.

Gruber, Gary, *Dr. Gruber's Essential Guide to Test Taking for Kids*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1986.