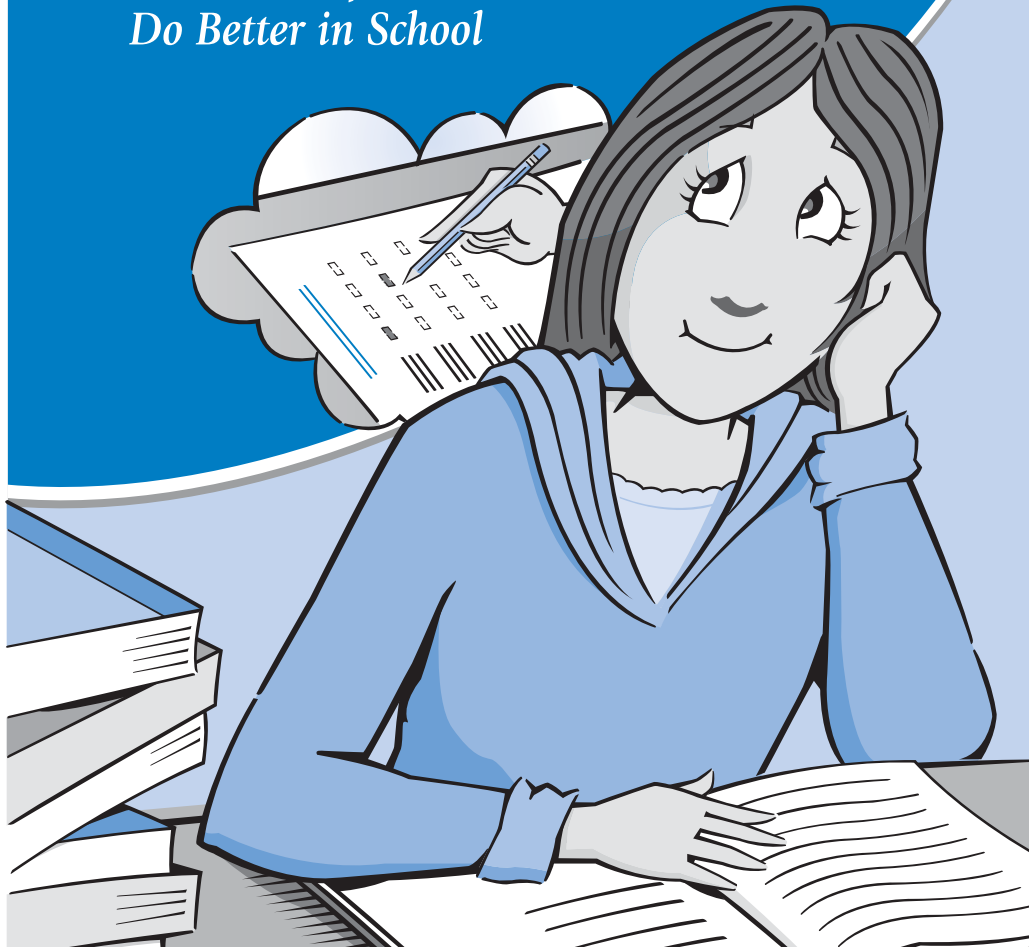


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Studying for & Taking Tests

*Ideas to Help Your Child
Do Better in School*



Homework & Study Skills Series

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

Why the Focus on Tests?

These days, students get tested a lot. There are school readiness tests ... placement tests ... standardized tests ... and regular classroom tests. Students are tested so much because tests reveal important things, such as:

- How much students are learning.
- How schools are performing.
- How groups of students (in districts, states, etc.) compare with one another.

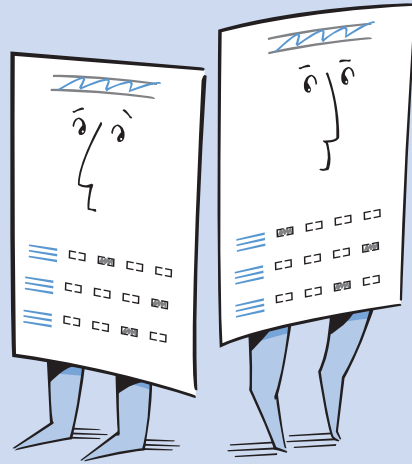
Ideally, students who work hard should do well on tests. But that doesn't always happen. Some students study and pay attention in class, yet still get disappointing grades. Improving their test-taking skills can help.

Higher grades aren't the only rewards of being a good test-taker. Good test-takers realize that:

- Studying effectively for tests can mean studying less.
- Tests aren't as scary when you're fully prepared.
- Good test scores can get you into interesting, challenging classes.
- Test-taking skills help in many areas, such as sports tryouts, driving tests and employment tests.

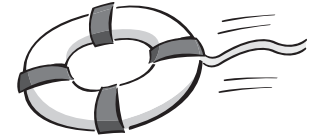
Many students are relieved to find out that kids who "ace" tests aren't necessarily smarter. They just know how to take tests successfully. That's a skill that can be learned, and this booklet will show how you can help. Soon, your child can be doing her* best on tests!

* Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate the use of "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.



How Can Parents Help?

Studying for tests is your child's job. But you can make it easier by following these suggestions:



- **Make school a priority.** Require homework to be done every day. Encourage good attendance. And keep in touch with teachers. They can recommend ways to help at home.
- **Don't put too much pressure** on your child. If you're overly worried about tests, he probably will be, too. That makes it harder to do well.
- **Judge your child's success** by his effort more than his grades. If he studies hard but fails, compliment him for trying. Help him learn from his mistakes.
- **Build your child's confidence.** Tell him you believe he can and will succeed. And show your pride when he does!
- **Review test terms** with your child, such as *match*, *list*, *compare* and *contrast*. These words appear on many kinds of tests.
- **Help with learning.** Go through flash cards with your child. Call out vocabulary words. Or let him teach *you* something.



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Studying Well Takes Time

Whose name would you remember more easily—someone you spent a little time with once, or someone you see regularly? Of course, it's the person you see often.

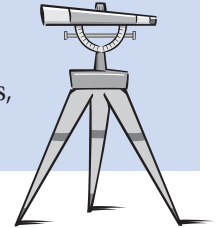
Studying for tests works the same way. It's better to study something repeatedly over time than to cram before a test. The keys to studying effectively are:

- **Organization.** Teach your child to use assignment notebooks and calendars to schedule study time. Daily to-do lists are also helpful.
- **Participation.** Expect your child to listen in class and take good notes. If she's confused, she should not be afraid to ask questions. Most likely, there are other kids in the class with the same questions.
- **Dedication.** Make homework part of your child's daily routine. Help her find a quiet, comfortable spot for studying. If she doesn't have any assignments, she can review what she's been learning.
- **Review.** Your child should spend a short time reviewing each day. Notes from recent classes are especially good to read over.
- **Correction.** It's important for your child to correct wrong answers on quizzes, homework and tests. This reinforces learning and prevents falling behind.

Suggest the 'SQ3R' Method

Usually, homework and tests cover the same topics. So doing homework is really a way of studying. There's a proven method that makes homework time extra productive: **SQ3R**. It stands for *survey, question, read, restate* and *review*. Here's how it works:

- **Survey.** Have your child quickly look over a reading assignment and notice what it's about. Some clues can be found in headings, pictures and bold type.



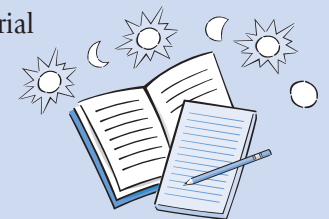
- **Question.** Next, she should think of questions about the material. It helps to turn headings into *who, what, when, where, how* and *why* questions.

- **Read.** Now it's time to read the assignment. Can your child find answers to her questions? Suggest that she take notes and highlight key sections as she reads.



- **Restate.** Your child can test herself by repeating what she's learned in her own words. She should focus on the lesson's most important points.

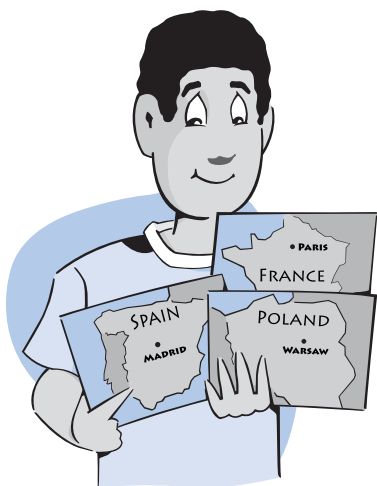
- **Review.** Glancing over the material again (both right away and days later) will make it easier to remember. Your child might also answer study questions, if the book provides them.



Make Memorizing Easier

No matter what kind of test your child is studying for, there's one thing he'll probably have to do: memorize. But there are many ways to do this. Tell your child to try some of these memorization tricks:

- **Acronyms.** Make a word out of the first letter of terms to be memorized. For example, HOMES can stand for the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- **Sentences.** Use the first letter of words to make a sentence, such as "My very excellent mother just served us noodles." (For the planets in order of their distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.)

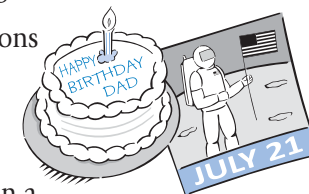


- **Flash cards.** Start by dividing the cards into small groups. Learn one group at a time, shuffling the cards occasionally. Keep them handy so studying can be done anytime.
- **Audio recordings.** Make a recording of notes and questions. Saying them out loud can improve memory. Playing them back is a fun way to review.
- **Grouping.** Study similar things together. For example, instead of memorizing every state or province in the country, divide them into geographic regions. Then memorize each region.

- **Recitation.** Repeating something out loud can help with memorization. Instead of reciting mindlessly, focus on the meaning of what's being said.
- **Rhymes.** Think of rhymes that describe facts, such as "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."

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- **Images.** Draw or imagine a picture of what's being studied, or find one in a book. Choose an image that includes many important facts. Mentally refer to it during the test.
- **Personalization.** Make personal connections to information. For instance, a relative's birthday might also be a famous date in history.



- **Alliteration.** Repeat the same consonant in a phrase, as in "Harriet Tubman helped hundreds of slaves."
- **Singing.** Remember the ABCs? They're proof that songs are a great learning tool. Make up a song or put new words to a familiar tune.
- **Representation.** To remember something long, like an oral presentation, pick one word to represent each section of it. ("Hello" might represent the introduction.)
- **Storytelling.** Imagine a story about what's being memorized. For example, what would it have been like at the Boston Tea Party? Who were all the characters? What was the sequence of events?

Study Groups Can Help

For many kids, participating in a study group can be a great way to share knowledge and learn from peers. If you think your child might benefit from it, here are some tips for setting up a study group:

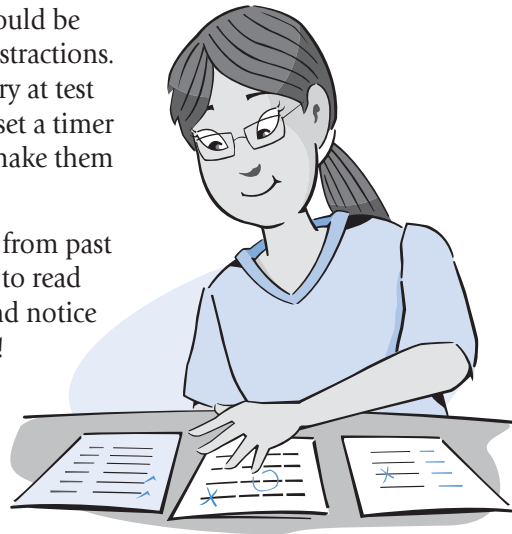


- **Choose participants carefully.** They should be in your child's classes and devoted to doing well in school.
- **Keep the group small.** Three or four members is usually best.
- **Be clear about the purpose.** Study groups are for studying. That can't happen if students are only socializing.

Get Specific With Studying

Keeping up with classwork and homework is the most important way to prepare for tests. But as a test approaches, there are things your child can do. Encourage her to:

- **Seek information.** She should ask the teacher about the test. What subjects will it cover? What kinds of questions will be asked? Will students be allowed to use aids, such as books or calculators? If books are allowed during testing, remind your child to mark important pages as she studies.
- **Organize materials.** Have your child divide notes, homework, handouts, quizzes and other information into logical sections. They'll be easier to study this way.
- **Make a study plan.** Have your child schedule time to review for the test. Spread the work over several days. Then make to-do lists for each study session. Include time for study breaks!
- **Take a practice test.** While reviewing, your child should make up practice questions about the information. Study until she can answer the questions confidently.
- **Study under "test" conditions.** In other words, there should be no music, TV or other distractions. This can improve memory at test time. Another idea is to set a timer during practice tests to make them more realistic.
- **Look at old tests.** Learn from past mistakes, such as failing to read instructions carefully. And notice what was done correctly!



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Get Rid of Test Stress

It sounds like advice from a doctor: Eat right, exercise and get enough rest. Actually, it's what education experts recommend before a test. They say that in addition to studying, students need to prepare physically and emotionally for tests. This reduces anxiety and increases success.

Kids should follow these guidelines:

- **Don't stay up late.** If your child has planned ahead, there's no need to cram all night. Being active earlier in the day (not right before bedtime) can help your child get to sleep.
- **Eat healthy meals.** This will provide energy at test time. But eating a large meal right before the test is risky. Students need their bodies to focus on thinking, not digesting!
- **Wear a favorite outfit.** Your child should pick one that makes him feel confident and comfortable. Dressing in layers is also a good idea.
- **Learn to relax.** Some kids find it helpful to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths before a test. Others like to imagine a peaceful place, such as a meadow.
- **Be positive.** *Expecting* to do well helps kids do well. Encourage your child to think positive thoughts, like "I can do it!" Also give compliments, such as "I'm proud of how hard you have studied. I'll bet your teacher will be, too!"
- **Face fears.** It's normal to be worried about tests. But if your child seems too anxious, ask what he's afraid of. You may be able to reassure him. The teacher can also help.





It's Test Time!

The big day has arrived. Your child has the test in front of her, pencil in hand. Is there anything she can do to improve her grade now? Yes! She can use these tips:

- **Scan the test before starting.** Notice how long it is and what kinds of questions are asked. Then choose the right working pace.
- **Read carefully.** This applies to directions, questions and answers. Watch for changes in instructions. Ask for help if something isn't clear.
- **Start with the easiest questions.** Getting them right can boost confidence and grades. Mark the hard questions and go back to them last.
- **Look for clue words.** Sometimes one word will give away the answer. Also, clues may be found in other test questions.
- **Ask about penalties.** If an answer is left blank, is it considered incorrect? If so, guess on hard questions when time is almost up. Experts say the first guess is often right.
- **Don't spend too much time** on any one question, unless most of the test is already complete.
- **Save time to look over the test.** Were the instructions followed? Are the answers neat and correct?

Expect and Encourage Honesty

Students give many reasons for cheating. Some feel pressure from parents, peers and others to get good grades. Others don't think it's wrong.

What can you do?

- **Check your expectations.** Make sure they are realistic. Explain to your child that you'd rather she do her best and earn a lower grade than score higher by cheating.
- **Point out the consequences.** Students who get caught cheating on a test usually earn zero points. One zero can drastically affect her grades.
- **Offer support.** If your child feels pressured to cheat, it may mean that she doesn't understand what's being taught in class. Talk with her teacher.
- **Share your values.** If your child says, "Everybody does it!" simply say, "But our family isn't 'everybody.'"



Not All Questions Are Alike

Many students have a favorite kind of test question. This may be because they know how to answer it best. Share these hints with your child:

Essay

- Make an outline before answering the question.
- Ask if spelling and grammar will be graded.
- Write neatly.
- If time is running out, include an outline or brief answer.



Matching

- Read the directions carefully.
- Notice whether one column is longer than the other. If so, some answers may not get used. Others may be used twice.
- Match the easiest items first. Then the remaining ones may be less confusing.

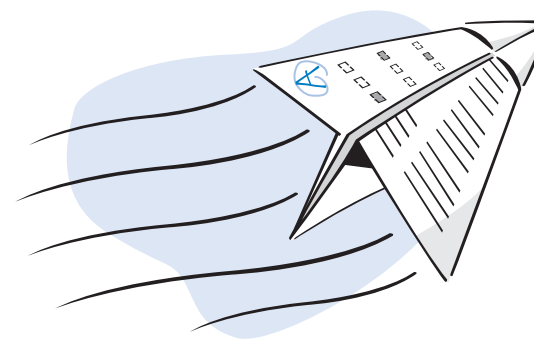
Multiple choice

- Before reading the choices, think about what the answer is.
- Read all the answers before choosing one.
- Cross out wrong answers. This narrows down the options.
- When reviewing the test, make sure answers are properly marked.



True/False

- For the answer to be true, ALL of the statement must be true.
- Beware of absolute terms, such as *always* or *never*. These words are more likely to be in false statements.
- It's usually better to guess than to leave a question blank. There's a 50 percent chance of being right!



What to Do When It's Over

No matter what score your child brings home on a test, something can be learned from the experience. Review tests with your child and discuss:

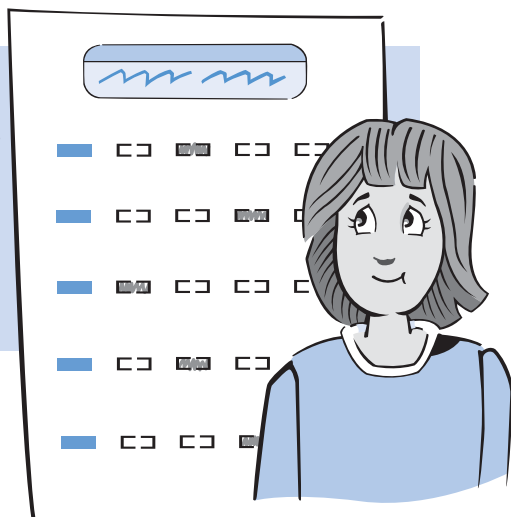
- **What went right.** First, notice the things your child did well. Encourage him to keep up the good work!
- **What went wrong.** Figure out why answers were incorrect. Did your child misread the question? Did he forget to study something? Was his answer messy? Did he run out of time?
- **How to improve.** Think of ways your child can avoid making similar mistakes. Have him correct the test and practice skills that are hard for him. If he failed the test, have him ask if a make-up exam will be offered.
- **How it was graded.** Make sure the right and wrong answers were counted accurately. Even teachers make mistakes!
- **The teacher's comments.** These are especially useful. Have your child ask her to explain anything unclear.
- **What to do with it.** Keep tests and study materials in an organized file. This will help your child review, especially if there's a final exam.

Special Tips for Standardized Tests

When a child takes a “standardized” test, she’s taking the same exam as many other students, probably at the same time. This helps schools learn more about children as individuals and in groups. It also shows how schools compare with one another. Here are some standardized-test tips:

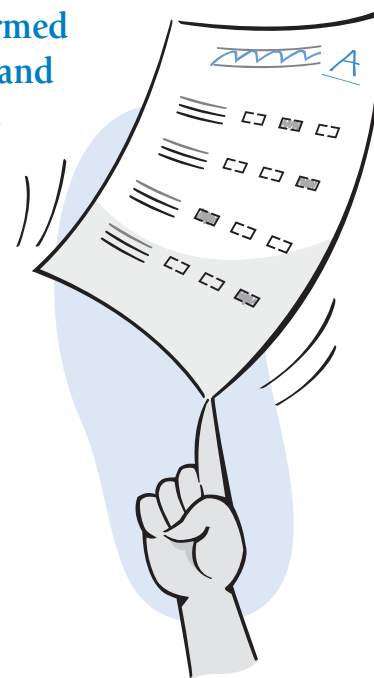
- **Have your child ask** when she will be taking standardized tests. Have her find out what the tests will cover, and make sure she is keeping up in these areas. Also, ask the teacher if practice tests are available.
- **Find a sample** at the library or on the Internet if your child has never taken a standardized test. This makes the real thing less intimidating.
- **Have your child build her vocabulary** through reading, conversation and word games. A large vocabulary will help her understand tests.
- **Practice reading comprehension.** If your child reads a book, for example, ask her questions about it, such as “What was the main idea?”

- **Put standardized tests into perspective.** Remember that they rarely measure other important things, like creativity and self-discipline.



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When kids are armed with knowledge and test-taking skills, they're ready for test success!



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