

Top 25 Test-Taking Tips, Suggestions & Strategies



1. Get a good night's sleep, and eat a good breakfast. Eat protein that morning—for the brain benefits.
2. When feeling anxious, take 5 deep breaths every once in a while. Know that guessing doesn't count against you.
3. Plan fun socialization after, kids can focus on the test without worrying about missing out on time to make friends. Otherwise, some will try to hurry the test along to have fun time with these interesting "potential" friends in the group.
4. Bring water bottles for each student. Studies have shown improvement in testing when students have water bottles available throughout.
5. Bring candies that enhance brain awareness, such as mints, lemon drops, and dark chocolate.
6. Understand the difference between achievement tests and these state assessments. Discuss with your education specialist.
7. Teach children how to process the whole testing concept. Help them get inside the brain of a test creator. For example: "The test is not an effort to trick anyone; it is an attempt to see how well students understand important concepts. If you were writing a test question about this concept, what would the correct answer be? What might be common mistakes a student could make while trying to figure out the answer? What possible answers would you include as the *wrong* choices—in order to be sure the student understands the concept?"
8. Use feedback from previous assessment results and focus on problem areas using the test assessment booklet and tested indicators.
9. When faced with a reading passage followed by a series of questions, teach student to read the questions first and then read the passage.
10. Listen carefully to directions: Make a point to listen closely to any test directions that are read aloud. Read through written directions at least twice before starting on a test section to ensure that you do not misinterpret them. Hint: If you are confused or unsure of the test directions, ask the teacher or test proctor to explain or clarify them. It is better to seek help to clear up any confusion that you may have than to run the risk of misunderstanding the directions and completing test items incorrectly.
11. Perform a 'brain dump'. At the start of the test, write down on a sheet of scrap paper any facts or key information that you are afraid that you might forget. This 'brain dump' will help you to feel less anxious about forgetting important content. Plus, you can consult this sheet of information as a convenient reference during the test.
12. Multiple-choice: Don't rush. On multiple-choice items, force yourself to read each possible choice carefully before selecting an answer. Remember, some choices appear correct at first glance but turn out to be wrong when you take a closer look. When in doubt...guess! If the test does not penalize guessing, be sure that you write in a response for each test item, even if you don't know the answer.
13. Skip difficult items until last. On timed tests, you should avoid getting bogged down on difficult items that can cause you to use up all of your time. Instead, when you find yourself stumped on a tough test item, skip it and go on to other problems. After you have finished all of the easiest test items, you can return to any skipped questions and try to answer them.

14. Use leftover time to check answers. If you finish a test early, use the remaining time to check your answers. On multiple choice items, check to see that you answered all questions. Reread each written response to make sure that it makes sense, uses correct grammar, and fully answers the question.
15. Help child to make a personalized checklist of test-taking techniques to remember while taking the test, such as remembering to look back to make sure he didn't miss any questions or remembering to answer all parts of the questions. Checklists can be subject-specific as well. The following is a sample personalized checklist for a math test: (from www.Schwablearning.org)
Math Test Checklist
 - a. Did I copy the problems correctly?
 - b. Did I remember to label my answers?
 - c. Did I use the right operation?
 - d. Did I check my answers to see if they make sense?
16. Help Kids with Mnemonics or silly sayings to memorize:
Example:
Long Division
Dad – divide
Mother – multiply
Sister – subtract
Brother – bring down
Sometimes Rover – sometimes remainder
17. Keep track of where you are with filling in the bubbles... every 10 questions... check... or at the beginning of each page, make sure you are on the right number.
18. When skipping questions box the number and go back later.
19. Cover up the answers and see if you can answer the question on your own first.
20. Use a hi-lighter to highlight KEY words in the directions. Verbs and descriptive words that follow the verb are usually important key words. Underline question.... circle key words....
21. Use the process of elimination when you do not know the answer for sure. Eliminate 2 alternatives quickly and then make the decision between the two remaining which may increase your probability to 50/50 of getting the answer correct.
 - a. In each multiple choice problem, there usually are 2 that are completely wrong. One is way out there; the other is out there.
 - b. There are 2 that could be right, but one is correct and the other may be close to the correct answer but not quite right.
 - c. Use multiple choice sample problems to practice eliminating unlikely answers and narrowing choices down to at least 2.
22. Math word problems can be taken and glued on index cards and put on rings. Have the student identify the operations that need to be used. You can also put the answer on the back to self check, but sometimes the practice can be just identifying the appropriate operation. This can be started at the beginning of the year adding 1 question from each lesson either taken directly from the lesson or bump it up the taxonomy and have the student create a relevant word problem from that day's lesson.
23. QAR—Question, Answer, Relationship is a strategy that helps kids identify what the question is really asking them to do...The basic idea is that there are four types of questions and they fall into one of the following two groups— Questions where the answer is... 1)"In the Book" or 2) "In my Head. I copied the following explanation from an article on the internet—I really liked the way they suggested color coding them with the green, yellow,

and red. I had never heard of this and I think it really helps simplify the strategy...to the point parents may even use it...? Copied from Scholastics Teacher website, "No Pain, High Gain" by Nell K. Duke and Ron Ritchhart:

Cover All Kinds of Questions

To prepare students for the kinds of items they'll see on the test, we ask them a variety of questions about their reading. Our questions are meant to enhance comprehension and promote a range of interpretations – literal, inferential, personal, and so on.

However, just asking the right kinds of questions isn't enough; it's important to explain them as well. Acclaimed educator Taffy Raphael suggests teaching these question-and-answer relationships that are common in standardized reading tests.

"Right There" Questions: The answer to these questions is right there in the passage. To find it, students recall information from or refer back to one place in the passage. Example: "Who gave John the dog?"

"Think and Search" Questions: Students can also find the answer to these questions by using their memories or looking back at the passage. However, the answer is usually in more than one place. Students need to assemble information for the answer. Example: "What was the same about every dog in the story?"

"Author and You" Questions: These questions are often the toughest because they can't be answered just by reading the passage. Students need to use what they already know, plus what they learn from the passage, to answer. Example: "How did John probably feel when he found the dog?"

Teaching Tip: You can build awareness of these questions by having students use different colored pens on practice tests. Students should circle...

- Right There questions in green. Green means go directly to the passage to find the answer.
- Think and Search questions in yellow. Yellow means use caution — look in more than one place to find the answer.
- Author and You questions in red. Red means stop and think about what the passage says and what you already know before you answer.

24. Following Directions - Here's the simple little idea for making a point about following directions. There are many sites with activities and worksheets on following directions if people want to "Google" it. Try this with students:

Name _____

Date _____

Directions: Please read all 12 directions below first before writing anything.

1. Write your name at the top of the page.
2. Write the date under your name.
3. Draw a small square in the middle of the space below.
4. Draw a cross inside the square.
5. Draw a large rectangle around the square.
6. Draw a large triangle on top of the large rectangle.
7. Draw a small circle in the top right corner of the space below.
8. Draw a boy in the picture.
9. Draw 3 flowers beside the boy.
10. Draw a tree beside the large rectangle.
11. Color the picture.
12. Complete only numbers 1 and 2 on this page.

25. The Test-Taking Strategy

By, Helen Barrier

Hughes, C., Schumaker, J. Deshler, D. and Mercer, C. (1993). The Test-Taking Strategy. Lawrence, KS; Edge Enterprises, Inc.

No matter how much we like giving them or not, many of our students just don't like them and even more are unsuccessful at passing TESTS! A large part of our students' grades are derived from test scores. On average, secondary tests include 32 test questions, which require 40 responses, and 3 sets of directions, all to be completed in a 50-minute time frame. Knowing these statistics, there's not much time to loose...

The Test-Taking Strategy, researched and developed by *The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning* provides a sample strategy to improve student performance on classroom tests. Its design includes a six-fold purpose:

1. Students will allocate time and order to each section of the test.
2. Students will read and focus on the instructions.
3. Students will either answer or abandon each test question.
4. Students will make informed choices (Guesses) on the questions they don't know.
5. Students will feel in control of the test and self-talk and "test-wisness" can help.
6. Students will utilize any and all of their study strategies as they take the test.

An integral part of this strategy is the active role the students take while engaging in the test. It is empowering for students who are test-phobic and/or low achieving. Teaching students a strategy to pass classroom tests is very powerful since passing the course relies on it. Many students feel passing a test is "out of their hands" and there is nothing they can do. Their fears can be calmed and confidence boosted as they see significant gains in their test scores. Quick and obvious gains can be expected as students learn this strategy.

This strategy (and every strategy and routine from CRL) has a set of linking steps represented by a mnemonic. The mnemonic for the Test-Taking Strategy is "PIRATES". Students are encouraged to visualize a pirate who gets aboard a ship, goes for all the gold and quickly leaves. The same should be true for them when they enter a testing situation; go into the test, get all the possible points and exit! Below are listed the steps of the strategy and what they are all about.

Step 1: Prepare to succeed: Students begin taking the test using the steps *PASS*:

- P: Put your name and PIRATES on the test,
- A: Allot time and order to the sections of the test,
- S: Say your affirmations and
- S: Start within two minutes

Step 2: Inspect the instructions: Students are taught to use the steps *RUN*:

- R: Read the instructions,
- U: Underline what to do and where to do it,
- N: Note any special requirements.

Step 3: Read, Remember, Reduce: In this step they begin to answer the questions using the techniques of

- READ the whole question,
- REMEMBER what you've studied, and
- REDUCE your choices, marking out the choices that you know aren't applicable.

Step 4: Answer or Abandon: Students have a choice to either *answer* the question or *abandon* it to make the best use of time. If they *abandon* it they must place a mark next to it to indicate they'll come back to it. They recycle through this step answering everything they know on the test and then turning back to the ones they are unsure of.

Step 5: Turn Back: When they get to the end of the test they *turn back* to those abandoned questions using the ACE guessing techniques described below.

Step 6: Estimate: Using the ACE guessing techniques students follow the sequence of:

- Avoiding absolute words,
- Choosing the longest and most detailed answer and
- Eliminating similar choices.

Step 7: Survey: Now that they have completed all the steps the student must look over the test one more time to *survey* if they have answered all the abandoned questions and only change an answer if they are positively sure it is right. Usually their first choice is the correct one.

This strategy is taught to students using the SIM model (Strategic Instructional Model) which is based on good and sound teaching practices. The model begins with a pretest to determine what strategies, if any, students use when taking tests, and gain their commitment to learn it. Then the teacher describes each step of the strategy to them, models how it would look when they would use it and the student in turn verbalizes each step to 100% accuracy. They are then given controlled practice tests to use the strategy before you move them into their own classroom tests. It is your intention for them to generalize this strategy on not only your tests, but all other classroom tests in the future.

No matter how much we like giving them or not, many of our students just don't like them and even more are unsuccessful at passing them... TESTS! Here's a strategy to help our students on the road to becoming lifelong and successful learners! For more information on this strategy go to The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning website @ <http://www.ku-crl.org/>