

# Studying for & Taking **Tests**



*Ideas to Help Your Child Do Better in School*



# Why the Focus on Tests?

**T**hese 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 studying and test-taking skills can help.

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

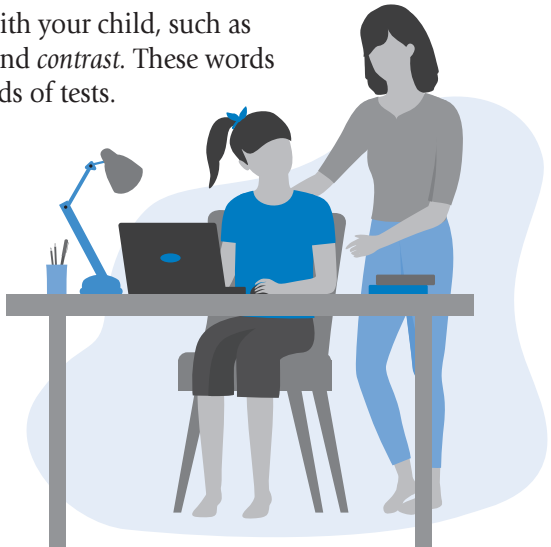
- **Studying effectively for tests** can mean studying less.
- **Tests aren't as stressful** when you're fully prepared.
- **High test scores** can get you into interesting, challenging classes.
- **Test-taking skills help in many areas**, such as sports tryouts, driving tests and employment tests.

Many students are relieved to find out that people who "ace" tests aren't necessarily smarter. They just know how to study and take tests successfully. Those are skills that can be learned, and this booklet will show how families can help.

# How Can Families Help?

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

- **Make school a priority.** Make sure that assignments are done on time. Require regular 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, your child probably will be, too. That makes it harder to do well.
- **Judge your child's success** by effort and progress more than grades. If your child studies hard but earns a disappointing score, compliment effort. Help your child learn from mistakes.
- **Build confidence.** Say you believe your child can and will succeed. And show your pride when that happens!
- **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 together. Call out vocabulary words. Or ask your child to teach *you* something.

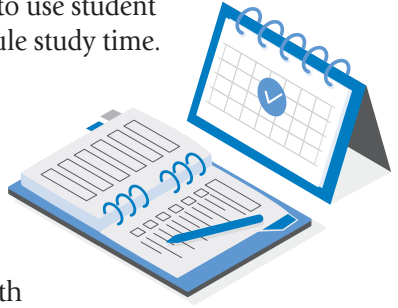


# Studying Well Takes Time

**W**hose 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 student planners and calendars to schedule study time. Daily to-do lists are also helpful.
- **Participation.** Expect your child to listen in class and take notes. If something is confusing, your child should not be afraid to ask questions. Most likely, there are other students in the class with the same questions.
- **Dedication.** Make studying part of your child's daily routine. Provide a quiet, comfortable spot for working. If your child doesn't have any assignments, suggest reviewing material or reading ahead.
- **Review.** Your child should spend a short time reviewing each day. Notes from recent classes are especially helpful to read over.
- **Correction.** It's important for your child to correct wrong answers on quizzes, schoolwork and tests. This reinforces learning and prevents falling behind.



## Suggest the ‘SQ3R’ Method

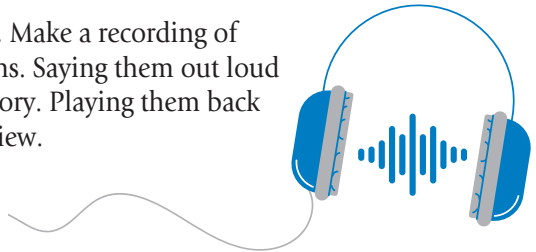
Usually, schoolwork and tests cover the same topics. So doing assignments is really a way of studying. One proven method that makes study time productive is **SQ3R**. It stands for *survey, question, read, restate* and *review*. Here’s how it works:

- **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, your child 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 the questions? Suggest taking notes on key sections while reading.
- **Restate.** Repeating material in their own words is an effective way for students to monitor understanding. Your child 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 can also answer study questions, if the book provides them.

# Make Memorizing Easier

**N**o matter what kind of test your child is studying for, there will be some memorization involved. But there are many ways to do this. Tell your child to try some of these memorization techniques:

- **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.”

- **Images.** Draw or imagine a picture of what's being studied, or find one online. 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 enslaved people."
- **Singing.** Remember the the alphabet song? It's proof that songs are an effective 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 students, participating in a study group can be a worthwhile way to share knowledge and learn from peers. 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

**K**eeping up with schoolwork is the most important way to prepare for tests. But as a test approaches, there are additional things that can help. Encourage your child to:

- **Seek information.** Ask the teacher about the test. What subjects will it cover? What kinds of questions will it ask? Will students be allowed to use aids, such as books or calculators? If books are allowed during testing, mark important pages while studying.
- **Organize materials.** Divide notes, assignments, handouts, quizzes and other information into logical sections. They'll be easier to study this way.
- **Make a study plan.** 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, make up practice questions about the information. Study until answering the questions becomes automatic.
- **Study under "test" conditions.** In other words, there should be no music 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.
- **Review old tests.** Learn from past mistakes, such as failing to read instructions carefully. And notice what was done correctly!



# 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.

Children 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.** Suggest choosing clothes that are comfortable and make your child feel confident. Dressing in layers is also a good idea.
- **Learn to relax.** Some students 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 the beach or a forest.
- **Be positive.** *Expecting* to do well helps children do well. Encourage 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's going on. You may be able to offer reassurance. The teacher can also help.



# It's Test Time!

The big day has arrived. Your child has the test open, pencil in hand. Is there anything that can improve your child's grade now? Yes! Share 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 challenging questions when time is almost up. Experts say a student's first instinct 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.** Did your child follow the instructions? Are the answers neat and correct?

## Promote Academic Honesty

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

What can you do?

- **Check your expectations.** Make sure they are realistic. Explain that you'd rather see your child's best effort and a lower grade than a high score as a result of cheating.
- **Point out the consequences.** Students who get caught cheating on a test usually earn zero points. One zero can drastically affect your child's grades.
- **Offer support.** If your child is struggling in class and feels pressure to cheat, talk to the teacher.
- **Share your values.** If your child says, "Everybody does it!" simply say, "But our family isn't 'everybody.'"



# Not All Questions Are Alike

**M**any 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

- Think about what the answer is before reading the choices.
- Read all the answers before choosing one.
- Cross out wrong answers. This narrows down the options.
- Review the test to make sure answers are properly marked.

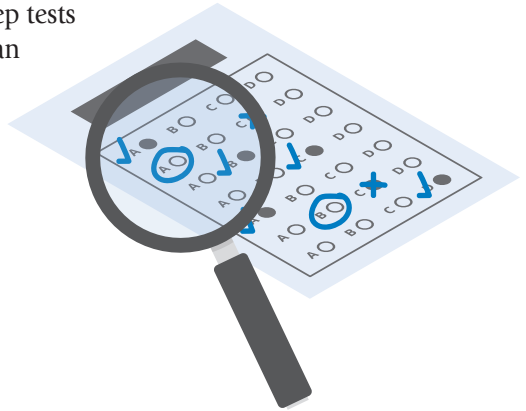
## True/False

- 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

**N**o matter what score your child brings home on a test, something can be learned from the experience. Review graded tests with your child and discuss:

- **What went right.** First, notice the well-done answers. Encourage your child to keep up the good work!
- **What went wrong.** Figure out why answers were incorrect. Did your child misread the question or forget to study something? Was the answer messy? Did time run out?
- **How to improve.** Think of ways your child can avoid making similar mistakes. Have your child correct the test and practice skills that are challenging. Encourage your child to take a make-up exam if one is 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 about anything that's unclear.
- **What to do with it.** Keep tests and study materials in an organized file. This keeps them handy for review, especially if there's a final exam.



## Special Tips for Standardized Tests

**W**hen children take a “standardized” test, they’re 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 standardized tests will be given. It’s a good idea to find out what the tests will cover, and make sure to keep up in these areas. Your child should also ask the teacher if practice tests are available.
- **Find a sample** at the library or online if your child has never taken a standardized test. This makes the real thing less intimidating.
- **Have your child build vocabulary** through reading, conversation and word games. A large vocabulary will help with tests.
- **Practice reading comprehension.** If your child reads a book, for example, ask questions about it, such as “What was the main idea?”
- **Put standardized tests into perspective.** Remember that these tests rarely measure other school success factors, like creativity and self-discipline.



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

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