

Learning Coach Series

Module 7

Understanding and Preparing for Tests

Introduction

Tests are a fact of life in schooling. There are things you can do as a parent to help your child be more successful with test-taking. Remember, the best preparation for tests is to be sure you know the material!

There are things you can do as a parent to help your child be a more confident test taker.

Why does the state legislature require big high-stakes tests at the end of the year?

1. The state government is responsible by law for education.
2. The state legislature passes laws and then directs state government offices, in this case the State Office of Education, to carry out those laws and policies.
3. State officials are very interested in knowing whether their laws and policies are providing for a high quality of education.
4. To do this, they have tests written that allow them to make a number of important comparisons. Using these tests they can compare the performance of students:
 - in their state to those in other states,
 - in one part of the state (for example, cities) to students in other parts of the state (for example, small population country areas);
 - across different income levels, languages, races, etc. to see if one group is not getting the same outcomes as another; and
 - from one year to another.
5. They can also compare, but usually with less reliability, how one school is doing compared to another. With this information the state can direct resources to schools in which students seem to be performing at a lower level than others.
6. They can also compare, although with even less reliability, how one student is doing compared to others in the same subject or grade.

Before the Test

1. Tests are a fact of life in education. The older the learner, the more likely there will be high-stakes tests, all the way through university education.
2. Help children understand that tests are just one way that teachers and schools gather information about how each student is progressing. Getting data about your child will help you make good decisions and understand their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Make sure your child knows that your love for and confidence in him is not based on his test scores!
4. Long before the test, have a good sense of how well your child is prepared. Do not let a test score be the first time you realize she does not know the content. Check assignments and grades often. Talk to the teacher as needed.
5. Help your child plan and carry out a careful, comprehensive study effort. Knowing you have learned the required content is the best preparation for the test!
6. Be sure your child has a good place to study.
7. Preparing for tests in small study groups is *very* effective. Have group members write test questions for each other and practice taking them. Each person takes a turn explaining why answers are correct.
8. Have your child practice taking sample test questions so the task is familiar. You can write your own practice questions or find samples on the internet. Find out what format the test questions will be in, and practice doing items in that format.
9. Make sure your child is well-rested before tests. This means more than just the night before! Several days in a row of adequate sleep is important. Scientists believe that your brain does most of the work of storing and organizing information while you are asleep!
10. Make sure your child eats breakfast an hour or two before the test. Do not let them enter a test too hungry or too full. For long tests, bringing a little snack might be useful. Check to be sure this is approved.
11. Don't let your child focus on test-taking "tricks" (such as "How to beat multiple-choice tests") or gimmicks. They do not work and can distract her from considering the question properly.



During the Test

1. Listen to the instructions carefully.
2. Make sure you understand the time limits.,
3. Most people find it helpful to skim the test before starting.
4. Don't worry about how or what others are doing during the test. Don't try to keep track of whether others are moving more quickly or less quickly than you. Concentrate on your own paper and keep an eye on the clock.
5. Stretch and change positions a little bit once in a while.
6. Depending on the kind of test you are taking, you may want to do an "information dump" as soon as you get the test. You can't bring notes into the test, of course, but you can make notes during the test. On the back of the test, or on a piece of scratch paper (if allowed), write out information you have studied and think may be on the test.
7. Self-monitor. If you recognize that you are taking too much time on an item, move on. Go back to it if you have time.



Test Anxiety

Feeling a little anxious before taking a test is normal. For most people, it may even lead to better test performance! A little anxiety helps us give our full attention to the task at hand; it helps us do our best. Too much anxiety, however, can cause a person to not perform as well as they normally can.

1. **Most people have test anxiety because they, in fact, do not know the material well enough!** Help your child prepare by successfully completing assignments and studying on a regular basis. *The best preparation for test anxiety is to actually know the material!* Good preparation is the best way to help with test anxiety.
2. **Don't talk about the test with others in a negative way.** This negative self-talk interferes with your ability to think. Think positive thoughts. Science is showing that thinking positively actually relaxes your mind and helps you think more clearly. Perhaps talk about something fun you are going to do after the test.

3. **If you feel stressed or anxious, take a couple of long, deep, slow breaths.**
4. **Remember, tests do not cause anxiety—you do!** You can learn to control it. Learn to use it to your advantage.



Module 7

Understanding and preparing for tests.

Help your child prepare for tests by teaching them:

Before the Test

1. Tests are a fact of life in most educational settings.
2. Prepare to do your best, but do not give the test more meaning and importance than it deserves.
3. Make sure your child knows your love for them is not based on their test scores!
4. Nothing takes the place of preparation. Help your child learn to study and prepare.
5. Preparing for tests in small study groups is *very* effective.
6. Practice taking sample test questions.
7. Be well-rested before tests, and do not enter a test too hungry or too full.
8. Don't spend time trying to learn test-taking tricks or gimmicks. They don't work.

During the Test

1. Listen to the instructions carefully, including time limits.
3. Skim the test before starting.
4. Don't worry about what others are doing or whether they are finishing before you.
5. Stretch and change positions a little bit once in a while.
6. You may want to do an "information dump" after you get the test. And lastly,
7. Watch the time and monitor your progress; don't get caught worrying about one item too long.