

TEST PREPARATION and TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES*

PARENT and STUDENT CHECKLISTS

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*For STAR / CAT 6, multiple choice, objective form of testing

PARENT CHECKLIST: TEST PREPARATION AND TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES*:

BEFORE TEST

1. PROMOTE "WHAT EVER IT TAKES" TO ENHANCE YOUR CHILD'S MOTIVATION FOR ACHIEVING ACADEMICALLY

- ∇ Motivation is the key to success in school
- ∇ Motivation happens within students; parents and teachers can only enhance student motivation, we cannot motivate students
- ∇ Students are ultimately responsible for their study habits, for seeking resources and assistance, and for managing their time
- ∇ Parents can help by setting boundaries, offering incentives, setting expectations, modeling desired behaviors that encourage children to want to put forth their best efforts

2. ENSURE YOUR STUDENT PREPARES ACADEMICALLY BY PROMOTING GOOD SCHOLASTIC HABITS

- ∇ Five major setbacks for students:
 - o Not studying regularly--cramming for tests or assignments
 - o Wasting time when studying
 - o Having trouble organizing for study
 - o Finding a good place for studying
 - o Using good learning strategies
- ∇ You can help your child avoid these problems by:
 - o Help your child set up a schedule for study
 - o Help your child work into their study schedule slowly.¹
 - o Help your child by encouraging short breaks; the average attention span for one task is approximately 20 minutes
 - o Reward your child for practicing good study habits enhancing their motivation to work harder
 - o Help your child find a good, comfortable location where they can concentrate clearly
 - o Help them use the same place for studying, helping them associate that particular location with studying will facilitate concentration
 - o Make sure their study location is quiet, and a well-lit place
 - o Help them eliminate obvious distractions from their study location (i.e. telephone calls, friends and family stopping by to chat, other reading materials, unfinished projects, even textbooks from another class)
- ∇ Anticipate that your child may disagree with most of the above guidelines, be ready to discuss the following principles with them:
 - o **MEMORY IS "CONTEXT DEPENDENT."** Studying in a physical situation similar to the one in which testing takes place increases your child's potential for recalling information
 - o **MEMORY IS "STATE DEPENDENT."** Studying in an emotional mood similar to the one your child will experience during tests increases the potential for recalling studied information. When studying, encourage your child to keep the same focus and enhanced attention they will need during testing. Being too relaxed during study time does not match the level of activation they need to reach during their testing
 - o Encourage your child to read often and with a strategy for increasing comprehension²

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_____ **3. ENABLE YOUR STUDENT TO PREPARE MENTALLY BY BEING POSITIVE; HELP THEM "PSYCH" THEMSELVES UP!**

- ∨ Help your child look positively at testing even if you both believe a test to be useless or unnecessary
- ∨ Boost their confidence by reminding them about their strengths and past academic successes
- ∨ Help them concentrate and block out all distractions during testing week
- ∨ Review their Testing Plan³ and strategies for completing the test with them
- ∨ Help them picture themselves completing the test and turning in their best work
- ∨ Offer a "no strings attached" fun outlet when testing is over
- ∨ Help your child to keep from getting overly psyched-up or tensed-up during testing; if this happens, they may not be able to recall the material because their test mood state will not match their "normal studying mood"

_____ **4. ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENT TO MAKE A "TESTING PLAN " AND PRACTICE SUGGESTED TEST TAKING STRATEGIES DURING THE TEST**

∨ **WORK QUICKLY**

- o STAR tests are timed or "speed" tests, meaning only the best students will be able to complete the entire test during the allotted time
- o Spend the same amount of time on each question (ex. if there are 30 questions in a section and you are given 60 minutes to complete the section, spend no more than 2 minutes on each question)
- o If you don't know the answer after reading the question once, mark it and move on
- o As time permits go back to all marked questions after you have looked over the entire section

∨ **ANSWER EVERY QUESTION**

- o STAR Tests are graded by adding up only the correct answers, so you are not penalized for wrong answers

∨ **STUDY SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

- o STAR provides sample question from past tests, ask your instructors or STAR Program Site Coordinator for samples
- o Look for how questions are written, how answer choices are worded and how answers are to be marked on student answer sheets

∨ **PREPARE FOR READING COMPREHENSION TESTS**

- o Three strategies for improving performance on reading comprehension passages like those on the STAR test include:

1. **Knowing typical reading comprehension questions like:**

A. Questions based on the entire passage usually target...

- the main point of the text
- the author's intention
- the passage's main ideas
- the passage's content

B. Questions based on sections of the passage usually targets the test-takers ability...

- to identify and understand the main points in each paragraph
- look for cue words (i.e.. advantages, disadvantages, similarities, differences, in contrast with, in comparison to, most importantly, primarily, and on the other hand)
- to deal with inferences, applications, and implications of the information

C. Questions based on particular words, phrases or sentences usually target...

- the reasons for using the information
- the meanings of the information

2. Reading the passage before the questions

[CAUTION: Looking over the questions before reading the passage does help to focus your attention on specific information; however, on timed standardized tests this practice is probably a waste of time. On timed tests, therefore, it is more important to move through the passages and questions efficiently. If you are familiar with the common types of questions asked on standardized tests, as described above, you will already know what to expect. If you read the questions first, you will be tempted to move too quickly through the passage looking for the answers. As a result, the intentions and tone of the author may be missed. It is likely that you will misunderstand the general theme of the passage.]

3. Practicing reading skills

One of the best ways to prepare for reading comprehension tests is to practice. It is relatively easy to find reading materials appropriate for standardized test preparation. You might also team with a friend, finding passages and making up questions for each other. Locate passages of text about three to six paragraphs in length from the following sources: newspaper stories, newspaper editorials, newspaper political columns, essays and columns in news magazines (i.e. Time or Newsweek), science fact magazines, encyclopedia articles, nonfiction books, and general interest magazines (i.e. Reader's Digest). Read a passage, keeping in mind the common types of standardized test questions discussed previously. After completing the reading, make up questions based on the entire passage, on sections of the passage, or on specific words or sentences. Then answer your own questions.

v OTHER STRATEGIES FOR STAR READING TEST PREPARATION

- o underlining key words and numbering the main ideas or key points as you reads a passage⁴
- o write very brief annotations ion scratch paper while reading (The key to these two strategies is to keep it brief so available time is not wasted.)
- o easier passages are usually given first, so don't skip them
- o don't skip questions after reading a passage since this wastes time
- o don't add your own interpretations and facts to the passage in order to answer questions
- o your answers should be based only on the information presented in the text, even if you disagree with the material
- o check each answer after selecting it to see if:
 - > all parts of the question are answered
 - > the answer is contained in the text

v STAR TESTS ARE MULTIPLE CHOICE OBJECTIVE TESTS

- o learn, practice and use all the strategies listed in the "DURING TEST" section for:
 - > "reading each question and all answers carefully "
 - > "making logical, educated, reasonable answer choices"

STUDENT CHECKLIST: TEST PREPARATION AND TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES*:

ONE WEEK PRIOR TO TESTING

- _____ 1. REVIEW YOUR CHILD'S "TESTING PLAN" WITH THEM
- _____ 2. CHECK WITH YOUR STUDENT'S SCHOOL TO FIND OUT DETAILS ABOUT THE SCHEDULED TESTING TIMES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

DURING TESTING WEEK

- _____ 1. MAKE SURE THEY HAVE THEIR NEEDED SUPPLIES
 - ∨ Soft lead #2 pencil with a few spares
 - ∨ White gum eraser works best
 - ∨ A high protein mid-morning snack and a piece of fruit
- _____ 2. MAKE SURE THEY GET 8 + HOURS SLEEP EACH EVENING
- _____ 3. MAKE SURE THEY EAT A WELL-ROUNDED BREAKFAST
- _____ 4. TALK WITH THEM ABOUT THE DAY'S TESTING EACH EVENING
Reviewing what went well or was difficult

BEFORE A TEST / DURING TESTING WEEK*

- _____ **1. TREAT YOURSELF WELL**
 - ∨ Get at least 8 hours of sleep the night before
 - ∨ Eat a, healthy, and well-balanced breakfast
 - ∨ Wear clothes that are comfortable and lift your spirits
- _____ **2. ARRIVE ON TIME**
 - ∨ Set an alarm clock or two to make sure you arrive on time
 - ∨ Arrive early enough to get a good seat and relax your mind
- _____ **3. BE PREPARED**
 - ∨ Bring a jacket in case the testing room is uncomfortable
 - ∨ Have a good supply of writing paper, pencils⁵, pens, a calculator⁶, and an eraser
 - ∨ Bring a high protein snack, a piece of fruit, and some water; ask the teacher or proctor ahead of time if these are allowed in the testing room
 - ∨ Bring a watch with correct time to pace yourself as you take the exam
 - ∨ Use the restroom and get a drink of water before the testing session begins
 - ∨ Organize your testing materials and clear your desk of all other materials
- _____ **4. REVIEW KEY CONCEPTS WITHIN 24 HOURS OF THE TEST**

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DURING A TEST*

1. UNDERSTAND AND FOLLOW TEST DIRECTIONS CLOSELY

- ✓ Listen to the teacher/examiner giving the test
- ✓ Work out all practice problems

2. REGARD A LAPSE OF MEMORY AS NORMAL

- ✓ Do not let it throw you into a panic; if you "freeze-up" while answering a question, leave it for awhile and return to it later

3. READ EACH QUESTION AND ALL ANSWERS CAREFULLY

- ✓ Break down complicated questions into more manageable parts
- ✓ Look for key words like: always, and, or, never, have to, may, best, correct, none, except, most, least
- ✓ Ask the instructor for help in interpreting an unclear or ambiguous word or question you don't understand
- ✓ Don't over interpret the questions or look for hidden meanings
- ✓ Decide what the answer to the question should be before looking at answer choices
- ✓ Be wary of "all of the above " and "none of the above " responses
- ✓ Never pick an answer without first reading all of the choices
- ✓ When the answer is not clear, look for clues (context, tense, word type, grammar) in the questions and the answer choices

4. MARK THE ANSWER SHEET CAREFULLY

- ✓ Check to be sure that the number next to the circle on your answer sheet* is the same as the number next to the question you are answering (you may wish to use the edge of a paper as a marker)
- ✓ Be sure all questions have an answer*
- ✓ Erase all changes carefully and completely, especially if the test will be graded by machine

5. MAKE LOGICAL, EDUCATED⁷, REASONABLE ANSWER CHOICES

- ✓ Eliminate obviously wrong answer choices
- ✓ Eliminate choices that are only partly correct
- ✓ Eliminate items that are correct but don't answer the question
- ✓ Lengthy or highly specific answers are usually correct answers
- ✓ If two answers are opposites, one of them is probably correct
- ✓ Answers with the following words are usually incorrect: always, never, all, none, only, must, completely⁸
- ✓ Answers with the following words are usually correct: seldom, generally, most, tend to, probably, usually
- ✓ If two choices are very similar, differing only in degree, the one expressed in more general terms is probably correct
- ✓ With numbers and dates, one choice is usually too small or too early, and one too large or too late; these choices may be eliminated
- ✓ Even simple math problem should be worked out on scratch paper
- ✓ Use the content of other questions as additional clues
- ✓ Making educated choices increases your chance of answering correctly to 75%; random guessing is only 25%
- ✓ Don't just guess

6. BUDGET TIME APPROPRIATELY

- ✓ Use your time wisely
- ✓ Work quickly; but don't rush
- ✓ Check the clock or blackboard during the test or bring a watch with correct time to pace yourself as you take the exam
- ✓ Position your answer sheet next to your test booklet* in order to mark your answers quickly

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- ✓ Avoid re-reading questions over and over
- ✓ Answer easier questions first, mark harder questions for later consideration as time allows
- ✓ Allow time for checking answers or filling in blanks*
- ✓ Plan to use the entire time period, persist to the end

7. CHECK WORK CAREFULLY

- ✓ Edit, check, and proofread your answers
- ✓ You will not be allowed to go back to any other test* or mark answers to a test after time has been called on that test SO, check your work while you can
- ✓ Check first, the questions that were marked the first time through the test
- ✓ After you have attempted all of the questions, when the pressure to finish the test is reduced, double-check and change correct answers
- ✓ Double-check any math calculations, using a different method if possible⁹
- ✓ Don't be afraid of changing an answer, research has shown that changing answers improve students scores¹⁰
- ✓ Be sure all questions are answered, check to be sure that you marked only one answer for each question
- ✓ Make sure all answers are legible and in the right place¹¹
- ✓ Erase any stray marks

8. DON'T GIVE UP

- ✓ Resist the temptation to become frustrated, bored, or anxious
- ✓ Move quickly through the test
- ✓ Look for material that you do know
- ✓ Apply that information to questions you don't know
- ✓ Use relaxation techniques to fend off anxiety
- ✓ Use the entire testing period to complete the test and check answers
- ✓ REMEMBER, extra points are NOT given for quick completion

9. BE CAREFUL NOT TO GIVE ANY IMPRESSION OF CHEATING

10. TAKE YOUR TIME

- ✓ Do not be disturbed about other students finishing before you
- ✓ If you don't panic, you will do much better on the test
- ✓ If a question seems too hard, look for the next question you can answer, sometimes in answering another question, a phrase or thought will jog your memory

AFTER TESTING WEEK

1. MAKE A NOTE ON YOUR CALENDER FOR WHEN TEST RESULTS WILL BE AVAILABLE

- ✓ Check with the school site testing coordinator to see when results will be available
- ✓ Sometimes results are mailed home*
- ✓ Sometimes school, district, county and state results are posted on the
- ✓ Internet* (individual results are not posted)
- ✓ Individual results can always be found in your student cumulative folder at school

2. MAKE AN EFFORT TO SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL AS THEY PREPARE TO IMPROVE THEIR SCHOOL WIDE CURRICULAR PROGRAMS BASED ON THIS YEARS TESTING RESULTS

- ✓ Consider becoming an active supporter by participating on school advisory counsel member or joining the PTO/PTC

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SUGGESTED STUDY METHODS

SQ4R METHOD for improving reading effectiveness:

SURVEY: Briefly survey the chapter. Read the authors' headings. The aim here is not to go into detail but to develop a general idea of the structure. This will prepare you for what you are going to read and grasp a general understanding of the chapter. Read any summary. This will remind you of what is important throughout the chapter. This step helps you to get acquainted with the chapter.

QUESTION: Think about the material as you are reading. Ask yourself questions about it. These questions will serve to keep you more involved with what you are reading. This will keep you focused on the more important material without becoming over-whelmed by details. Try formulating questions as if you were the professor making up the test. This accomplishes 2 tasks; one, it facilitates concentration and two, it helps you prepare for the test.

READ: Read carefully and try to answer questions you have asked yourself. Remember you read a text differently than you read a novel. A novel is read passively. Textbook reading requires more concentration and retention. Read actively with involvement. This increases your understanding of the material. If you become tired or distracted, stop reading. Remember, your job here is not to cover a number of pages, but to "dig in". During this step, avoid reading aloud to yourself. Instead, read silently as this is much faster.

WRITE: After you have answered a question, write the answer down. Sum up information in your own words. Restructure the information so that it makes the most sense to you.

RECITE: Recite to yourself what you have read. Recall main headings and ideas. Be sure to put ideas in your own words, as this will improve your ability to retain the material. Answer questions aloud and listen to your responses to see if they are complete and correct. If they are not correct, reread the material and answer the question again. This form of rehearsal increases the likelihood that you will retain the material.

REVIEW: Reviewing is the key to figuring out what you know and what you need to concentrate on. The best times to review are right after reading while the material is still fresh on your mind and again before the test. Try to summarize major points in the chapter. And answer questions you posed to yourself while reading.

PQ4R METHOD for improving reading effectiveness.

PREVIEW: Survey the chapter to determine the general topics being discussed. Identify the sections to be read as units. Apply the next four steps to each section.

QUESTIONS: Make up questions about the section. Often, simply transforming section headings results in adequate questions.

READ: Read the section carefully trying to answer the questions you have made up about it.

REFLECT: Reflect on the text as you are reading, try to understand it, to think of examples, and to relate the material to prior knowledge.

RECITE: After finishing a section, try to recall the information contained in it. Try answering the questions you made up for the section. If you cannot recall enough, read the portions that you had trouble remembering.

REVIEW: After you have finished the chapter, go through it mentally recalling its main points Try again to answer the, questions you made up.

IMPROVING YOUR MEMORY

Some students find that using particular memorization tactics can improve their memory. Here are a few of the popular memorization strategies.

Acrostics: Acrostics are phrases or poems in which the first letter of each word or line functions as a cue to help you recall the words that you are trying to remember. One popular example is the phrase "Every good boy does fine". This acrostic is used to remember the order of musical notes on a musical scale.

Acronyms: Acronyms are words formed out of the first letters of a series of words you are trying to remember. A popular acronym is "Roy G. Biv" which is used to remember the order of colors of the spectrum (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet).

Narrative: Some find making up a story with the lists of words throughout the narrative aids retention.

Rhymes: Remember the phrase "i before e except after c"? You probably remember this well because it is a rhyme. Rhyming can enhance retention as well.

Imagery: There are two methods of imagery, which enhance retention of material.

One involves **LINKING** items together visually in your mind. For example, if you have a list of groceries such as cereal, milk, toilet paper and tangerines, you might try visualizing a dairy cow eating cereal under a tangerine tree wrapped in toilet paper. Believe it or not the more bizarre the image, the more likely you are to remember it.

The second method is called the **METHOD OF LOCI**. This involves taking an imaginary walk in your mind through a familiar path along which you associate items you are trying to remember. For example, you may take the same grocery list and place the items (visually in your imagination) throughout your room. The tangerine may be the doorknob as you open the room, the cereal appears on the TV, the milk is hanging from the ceiling fan and you may envision a large roll of toilet paper in place of the chair at your desk.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Most study skills programs suggest reading for 10-15 minute increments and building up to an hour over time.
- 2 Two methods worth encouraging your child to develop are called the SQ3R and the PQ4R included at the end of the checklist.
- 3 A suggested Testing Plan follows in item #4.
- 4 Not allowed on STAR tests.
- 5 Bring the right kind of pencil (#2 soft lead) for machine graded tests, and a white gum eraser (they work the best).
- 6 If allowed on the test. They are not allowed on the STAR tests as of this time (2/02), however, rulings like this change quickly.
- 7 Making educated choices involves eliminating all weak, incredible, shaky, unbelievable, flimsy, improbable, inconceivable, unconvincing, and unsubstantial answers first and looking for clues in the question and answers.
- 8 These are usually the wrong answers since there are many exceptions to rules. These are extreme words, which are more than likely to be the wrong choice.
- 9 Using multiplication to check division problems, etc.
- 10 Research has shown that changes from a wrong answer to a right answer outnumber changes that go from a right answer to a wrong answer by a margin of approximately 3 to 1.
- 11 Circled, written on blanks, on an answer sheet, bubbled or gridded in, etc.

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Resources Used

< http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/test_take.html>
<<http://www.smc.maricopa.edu/sub1/lac/asset04strategies.html>>
<<http://www.mxctc.commnet.edu/clc/6tststrt.htm>>
<http://www.shsu.edu/~counsel/test_taking.html>
<http://www.shsu.edu/~counsel/study_skills.html>
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