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Tips for Successful Testing

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During the School Year

There are many practices teachers can implement during the school year to help students prepare for the annual standardized test. These can be woven into the daily curriculum in such a way as to provide ongoing reinforcement rather than detract from learning. They do not replace knowing the content, but can improve the overall validity of the test by making scores more accurately reflect what students really know. This is done by making sure students lose points only because they do not know the information and not for some reason unrelated to content knowledge.

- **Know the test.** Take time to review the objectives and be able to identify areas of overlap between the test, classroom practices, State Frameworks and Standards, and textbooks and other materials.
- **Use testing vocabulary in daily situations.** Build them into questions used with the students in formal and informal assessments. Make sure the students are aware of the particular meaning (for testing) attached to words that can be used in a variety of ways.
- **Simulate testing situations throughout the year** by **occasionally** setting time limits for tests, practicing transferring answers to a bubble-in sheet, and creating ongoing assessment items in the same format as the standardized test.
- **Provide multiple ways for students to interact with text.** Give them chances to summarize, paraphrase, and react to text, both orally and in writing.
- **Build students' stamina for long testing sessions:**
 - a. Practice attending to the task and work toward increasing the time students can work without being distracted from the task.

- b. Brainstorm appropriate ways to take short breaks during a timed session, such as deep breathing, stretching, etc.
 - c. Lead students in a discussion of other times when they've been able to concentrate for a long interval and see how those strategies could apply to testing situations.
- **Model your own thinking processes** as you approach questions in the text and various assessment situations. Let them see how you think through the reasoning process.
 - **Test questions are** often written in a language and/or format that is not commonly used elsewhere. Teach students to analyze and work with them.
 - Have students paraphrase the question—see if they can come up with the same idea as the original.
 - Identify types of questions.
 - Model your own analysis.
 - Develop questions that are in the same patterns, using classroom lessons.
 - Teach students to gain meaning from graphic organizers, particularly in content area material.
 - After completing a test, discuss strategies used and choices made and how valuable each was to the outcome of the test.
 - Teach skimming as a test-taking process.

Several weeks prior to the test

- **Teach students how test questions are constructed.** Test makers set traps. In a multiple choice question with four choices, consider the following:
 - Carefully read the stem before selecting an answer. For example, does it include the word 'not', i.e., "Which of the following was not a character in this piece of literature?" Is there a relationship indicated, i.e., the "hungry coyote" who is "stalking prey"?
 - A choice is most likely wrong if:
 - it contains the words 'none', 'all', 'never', or 'always'.
 - two or more are clearly similar, i.e., 'H₂O' and 'water'.
 - it's too absurd to make sense.
 - When in doubt:

- •look for correctness in grammar between the stem and the choices.
 - •a longer and more detailed choice often is correct.
 - •a word in a choice that also appears in the stem can be carefully considered as the correct choice.
 - •if two choices are direct opposites, one is likely the correct answer.
 - •a choice that includes one or more of the others is often correct.
 - •some' or 'often' used in a choice is likely to be correct.
 - •if 'all of the above' is a choice, determine whether all the other choices seem appropriate before selecting it.
 - •one response that is more precise or technical is likely to be more correct than a general response.
- **Teach them how to think through a question**, using sample questions and modeling your own thought patterns. Use the overhead and share your thinking verbally as you go through each possible answer.

During the test administration

As students begin the test, here are some tips for success.

- **Read the directions.** Sounds simple, but there may be a slight difference that could cause problems when answering questions.
- **To ensure proper recording of answers:**
 - Use some sort of marker on the answer sheet to keep from transferring answers into the wrong line.
 - a. Check every four or five answers to make sure the match is correct.
 - b. Every time a page is turned, check page number and sure the question and answer match.
 - c. Fill in blanks carefully and neatly and beware of stray pencil marks.
 - d. Fold test booklet so only one page is showing at a time.
- **It's better to guess** at an answer than leave it blank, but make sure it's an informed guess (see #1 in the section "Several weeks prior to the test".) **Guessing is not penalized on the SAT9.**

- **Rely on facts or the data** (graph, chart, quote) in the question and material, not personal preferences, when responding.
- **Ration time**, i.e., if there are 40 questions, about 20 should be done when the time allotment is half over.

References:

1. Calkins, Lucy. *A Teacher's Guide to Standardized Reading Tests*. Heinemann.,1997.
2. Johns, Jerry and Susan Lenski. *Improving Reading*. Kendall/Hunt, 1997.
3. Scruggs, Thomas and Mastropieri, Margo. *Teaching Test-Taking Skills*. Brookline

*** TRUSTWORTHINESS * RESPECT ** RESPONSIBILITY ** FAIRNESS ** CARING ** CITIZENSHIP ***

Character is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching!