

Reading for Test Success

Reading plays an important role in your child's life. While reading is fun, it is also essential for success in school. In particular, reading is critical for doing well on tests. And you can help your child become a competent test taker by practicing reading strategies right at home.

How can parents help?

As a parent, you should know about some important reading skills for test taking. You can encourage and help at home. With mastery of these skills, your child will more likely “read for test success.”

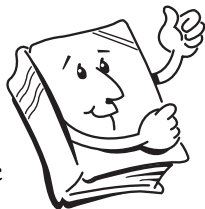
Strengthen your child's comprehension

Pretend reading is a train. Comprehension is the engine. Without good comprehension—knowing and understanding what he's read—your child can load up the train and get it ready to move, but it won't go anywhere. Take away comprehension and reading is just calling out words. They might as well be nonsense words.

Comprehension is the most important reading skill for doing well on tests. Your child can't give a correct answer if he isn't able to read and fully understand the question.

Here's how to help your child improve his reading comprehension:

- **Practice following written directions.** Failure to properly read and follow the directions is a top reason why children sometimes perform poorly on tests. Have your child read and follow directions for putting together simple crafts. Ask him to follow a recipe as you create meals together.
- **Make a mental picture.** Choose a page without illustrations in a fiction book (a book that is made up by the author). Ask your child to read it out loud to you. Then have him close his eyes and re-create what he just read as a picture in his head. Encourage him to “see” the character's red shirt, the dog's curly brown fur or the



peaceful beach the family is on. He could even draw what he sees.

- **Ask, “What do you think will happen next?”** Make a habit of asking this question when your child is reading. This will encourage him to make predictions.
- **Sum it up.** Each time you see your child complete a story, article or chapter of a textbook, ask him to tell you what he read, using his own words.

Encourage nonfiction reading

The older your child gets, the more she needs to read nonfiction (a book about real people, places or events). Sometimes your child will have to read a fictional passage and answer questions about it. However, most reading for testing is nonfiction.

You can help your child with nonfiction reading. Try these ideas to help her feel comfortable:

- **Point out how to read nonfiction.** Reading nonfiction is more than just reading the words. Nonfiction writers put critical information into captions, diagrams and maps, as well. Help your child become familiar with these.
- **Focus on current events.** Discuss together what is going on in the world. Then encourage her to learn more. Clip newspaper articles and leave them near her breakfast plate. If you have Internet access, show your child how to search for news online while you supervise.
- **Pair up fiction and nonfiction.** Show your child that nonfiction is the “story behind the story.” If she loves animals, read a story together about a fictional animal. Then follow up with a nonfiction book about how that animal really lives.



Don't forget about leisure reading!

Is "reading for fun" important to your child's test scores? You bet it is! Results from a nationwide study explain:

- **Students who read for fun daily** scored higher on tests than classmates who read less often.
- **Students who "never or hardly ever" read for fun** made the lowest scores.
- **Students who read 11 or more pages daily** for school and homework scored higher than students who read less.
- **Those who did no homework** made the lowest scores.

Having a variety of reading materials in your home—books, magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias—makes a difference!



Source: "Reading 2000 Major Results," National Center for Educational Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/results/>.

Help your child read to remember

Some tests let your child refer back to what he read to answer questions. But most others require that he remember something he read earlier. Study skills and strategies will always be a big part of reading for test success. After your child reads, have him:

- **Review in a different way.** Reading the material again is great. But he may learn it even better if he puts it to another use. He could write it down, tell you about it or draw a picture about it.
- **Use mnemonic devices or rhymes.** *Mnemonics* are memory aids. Countless children learn the planets by remembering My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas. (The planet names begin with the same letters as the words in that sentence.)

M = Mercury = My
V = Venus = Very
E = Earth = Excellent
M = Mars = Mother
J = Jupiter = Just
S = Saturn = Served
U = Uranus = Us
N = Neptune = Nine
P = Pluto = Pizzas

- **Look up words he didn't know.** As your child builds his vocabulary, he improves his ability to figure out other words in the text, as well as understand and remember the whole text.

What should your child do at test time?

While there are specific ways to approach different kinds of tests, there are some reading strategies that will help your child do her best on any test. Make sure your child knows and uses them. She should:

- **Read the instructions carefully.** Then she should *read them again* to make sure she knows exactly what she is supposed to do.
- **Look for direction words** that tell her what she is supposed to do. Direction words are words like *compare, list, describe, define* and *summarize*.
- **Read through all the questions quickly** before she starts. She should think about how much time she has and how much time she can spend on each question.
- **Read each question carefully** as she begins the test. She should understand exactly what the statement or question says. Then she should determine what she thinks the answer is before she reads any choices.
- **Skip a question** if she isn't sure of the answer. She should answer all the questions she knows first. Then she can come back to the others.
- **Allow time to go back** and check her answers. Do they make sense? Are sentences complete? Did she leave out any key words, such as *not*, that might change her intended meaning?
- **Look for qualifiers.** Words like *never* or *always* often indicate an answer is false.



Make sure your child remembers these two important questions:

Before reading:

"What do I already know about this?"

After reading:

"What did I learn?"