



Tackling the Tests

By Becky Ramsey, Public School and Christian School Representative

Before the time for state testing arrives, each child goes through much preparation to show what he or she has learned. Teachers know that students must be motivated to take the test in such a way that they prove their knowledge! Getting students ready to do their best starts many weeks before the actual test.

What Can a Teacher Do?

1. Know what type of test your district is giving. If it is a computer-generated test, have your students work with computers throughout the year. Practice using some of the tools they need to use to answer questions, such as pulling down rulers to measure, typing a written response, or simply navigating through the test. Each state usually offers practice tests that will mirror the actual test. These tests are often previously published tests; but they will have similar formats of questions. If your students take a paper test, let them practice on classroom tests using an answer sheet where they must navigate from question booklet to an answer sheet. Have them practice using paper rulers or notecards to keep themselves on the correct line. A correct answer in the wrong box is not going to reflect their true abilities. For young test-takers, mastering the test process and format is half the battle.

2. Use and practice the vocabulary the test will use. Help the students understand what the words mean and how to respond to those types of questions. Some typical terms used for ELA tests are: compare, contrast, summarize, infer, conclude, and describe. For math questions, it is important especially for young students to know the key words that signal a specific operation: all together, create equal groups, how many fewer, or similar phrases that indicate whether they need to add, subtract, divide or multiply without using the actual operation term.
3. The part that even the best students need to practice is the written responses. Students must write a short essay response to a question or reading activity. Many times, students are most familiar with tests requiring a one-word answer. Those students often struggle when required to give an expanded response. Students need to practice turning the question into a topic statement, giving at least three reasons or ideas to defend an opinion, and then ending with a good concluding statement that is different from their topic statement. I always suggest that they think and state why these ideas or reasons are important. Make your conclusion state WHY what you just wrote is important. Doing several classroom essays and then individual essay answers with one-on-one critiquing will significantly help your students with the most difficult aspect of the state test—the written response.
4. The most important part of preparing students for state testing is to motivate them to have confidence. Helping students feel ready and confident is essential for success, especially for those students who struggle with day-to-day tasks. Teaching test strategies even before they take the practice tests is an important step. Jennifer Findley has some great materials with free downloads. I love her test strategy posters, which use clever names to remind students what to do:
 - Slash the Trash (Get rid of obviously wrong answers.)
 - Be Slick—> Predict (Think of an answer before reading choices.)
 - Jail the Details (Circle or highlight key words.)
 - Plug it in (Put the answer in the context and see if it makes sense.)
 - Tick Tock, Mind the Clock (Don't spend too much time on one question.)

Jennifer has these reminders on posters that you can download, print, and post around the room to remind students during the test. They would make an appropriate bulletin board content for testing month. She has several practice activities and other free resources, including some for sale.*

5. Another idea to help students remember what they know is a “Rock this Test” art project. I practiced this with my students. We brought smooth rocks to school and painted them with something they felt they needed to remember. Examples would be a check mark to remind them to check their answers, a backwards arrow to remind them to go back to skipped questions, the word “Why” to remind them that the best conclusion to an essay response is why these ideas are important, or the number 3 to remind them to give three good reasons in an essay response.

6. Provide daily test encouragers. They varied from water bottles labeled “Genius Water” that they used for test day to candy themed notes of encouragement. You can find many of these ideas for encouragement on the website Teacher pay Teachers for free or a small cost. Danielle Mastandrea also has many other great teaching and testing resources you could download for free or low cost on the Teacher pay Teachers website.**



7. To motivate students to do their best at test taking, show them their progress on different practice tests and reward that progress and effort. The reward could be as simple as lunch with the teacher, a free homework pass, extra recess time, or something they desire to do. My students would choose from a prepared list of items like a movie at lunch, a popcorn party, a pajama day, or similar fun, free, or low-cost activities. Our school provided school-wide activities for students who showed improvement when taking different school-wide tests. A number of factors will motivate a student to try to do better, but the best motivator is the success itself that is recognized and rewarded. When a student experiences progress and it is celebrated and acknowledged, the desire for more success becomes a priority.

If you follow these suggestions, the students may be better prepared for testing, which can help relieve much of your stress on days of testing.

Becky Ramsey lives in Reynoldsburg, Ohio. She has taught in public and Christian schools. Although she retired last year, she has gone back to the school to serve in volunteer ways. Her last position before retiring was a reading and math intervention specialist. You may contact Becky at ramseyfamily2771@gmail.com.

Resources:

*www.JenniferFindley.com

**<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com>