



## Last-Minute Tips

It's that time of year again. Kids all over the country are sharpening their #2 pencils and sweating in nervous anticipation. Whether your child has a standardized test coming up in a few days or a few weeks, these last-minute, test-prep tips and strategies will help him relax and do his best.

## How to Prepare

Your child's teacher has most likely been doing some test preparation in school, so don't worry -- your goal is not your child's worth of learning into a few days, but to familiarize your child with the test. At this point in the test-prep game, what you can really do at home is help your child become familiar with the format of the test he's going to take and the day. Here are some prep activities you can try:

- Buy a practice book that imitates the actual test as closely as possible. Most practice books indicate which tests they imitate on their covers.
- Have your child take one or more of the timed practice tests in the book so that she becomes comfortable with the length and design of the actual test.
- Go over the answers with your child. If time and patience allow, go over all the answers -- right and wrong. Have your child review some of the questions so he understands why he got the question right, or what he needs to do to get it right the next time.
- Look for weak spots in your child's test and then concentrate on those areas in the test prep book.

If your child's test is less than a week away, forgo reviewing his answers in detail and concentrate on helping him learn some test-taking strategies.

## Test-Taking Strategies

Here are the answers to kids' most common questions about test-taking strategies:

**Q:** Should I guess if I don't know the answer?

**A:** In many cases, the answer is yes. Most tests don't take off points for answering incorrectly; they just don't add any! However, there are tests that do penalize students for giving a wrong answer. One such test is the SAT1 College Boards.

If you aren't sure about whether this applies to your child's test, ask her teacher, school counselor, or principal. It's a good idea to know this before the test is given and to make sure your child knows as well.

**Q:** What should I do if I'm stuck on a question?

**A:** Skip it. Your child can always return to the question once he's answered those he's more sure about. But advise your child to be careful about filling in the answer sheet. It may seem obvious to skip that line on the answer sheet when you skip the question, but in the more intense atmosphere of a testing situation, it's easy to forget to do this.

**Q:** How can I avoid skipping a line on the answer sheet?

**A:** Too often, kids find themselves at the end of a test, with two or three answer choices left to fill in on the answer sheet! It can be a nightmare for kids to go back and see where they went wrong, while keeping an eye on the ticking clock.

Here's how your child can avoid this situation: If your child is given blank pieces of paper to use as scrap, she can use the straight edge of one of those papers to keep her place on the answer sheet. Have her practice bubbling in an answer sheet before the test, so she can get used to moving the paper down a line with every question answered. If your child is not given scrap paper, she can use her extra (unsharpened) pencil to perform the same task.

## **Easing Pre-Test Jitters**

It's normal for kids to get nervous before a significant test. This is actually a good thing. That adrenaline boost can be helpful, but it can be hard to obtain and *maintain* that perfect level of nervousness. If your child is overly worried in your opinion, try these tips:

### **Reassure your child**

Tell your child that the test will be used to evaluate how well a school or school district is educating its students. It's important for kids to have a sense of the broader context.

### **Put the test in perspective**

Explain that test scores are looked at along with many other pieces of information in determining your child's achievement level. Her grades and progress over time, for example, are also very important. This may be a big test, but it is still just *one* test!

### **Take a deep breath**

If your child is a very nervous test-taker, have her do deep breathing exercises before the test. She can take a deep breath and count to ten. Then have her take shorter deep breaths in between passages or sections of the test -- counting to three only. This exercise is fast and simple, but it really works!

### **Discuss what to expect**

Go over with your child when and where the test will be given. Make sure she knows what will generally be covered on the test and roughly how long it will take to finish it. Your child's school will probably send home a letter before the test with much of this information.

### **Make sure he gets his rest**

Make sure your child will be comfortable and alert on the day of the test. He should get a good night's sleep the night before and a light breakfast the morning of the test. (A heavy breakfast can make you sleepy.)

### **Dress in layers**

Have your child dress comfortably in layers so that he can take clothes off or put them on, depending on the

temperature of the room.

**Pack a snack**

Even if your child doesn't normally have a snack time during the school day, he may be allowed to have one if there's a break during the test. Pack him a light nutritious snack, but avoid salty foods that may make him thirsty later in the testing session.

Finally, tell your child that the test will have some difficult questions on it. All of the questions are not supposed to be easy. Explain that he may not be able to answer all of the questions, and that's expected. All he can do is try her best, and that's okay!