

TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

Des Moines Public Schools
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Purpose

- Through testing, students demonstrate their skills and understanding of the curriculum
- We can assist students in minimizing the gaps between true understanding/skills and demonstrated understanding/skills by:
 - Reducing anxiety related to testing
 - Providing clear directions and expectations
 - Building student ability to focus for extended periods of time
 - Providing test taking strategies

Reducing Anxiety/Providing Clear Expectations: Before the Test

- Let students know what to expect:
 - Expose students to multiple choice questions before the test
 - Talk through the process of testing with students the days leading up to the test (but don't over emphasize)
- Help student relax:
 - Model a relaxed and positive attitude about testing for students
 - Teach students how to belly breath: Practice taking 5 deep breaths with students when they start to feel anxious or overwhelmed

Reducing Anxiety/Providing Clear Expectations: The Day of the Test

- Model a positive attitude for students
- Talk through the day's testing schedule/process with students
- Allow plenty of time for logistics before testing—don't rush

Reducing Anxiety/Providing Clear Expectations: The Day of the Test

- Set student expectations and post them in the room
 - Do your best
 - Read the directions carefully
 - If you have a question, raise your hand
 - If you finish early, you may review your answers
 - Once you are done with a test, put the answer sheet inside the test booklet and sit quietly (optional: you may read)
 - Respect your classmates: do not distract others who are testing

Building Student Focus: Sample Reading Passage

“Jerry, are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Bryan asked.

I was bent over his T-shirt, needle and thread in hand. “How hard can it be?” I answered. “I’ve seen Grandma do this hundreds of times.” Finally I knotted the thread and cut it. All that was left of the long tear just below the neck was a jagged line of stitches. I tossed Bryan his shirt. “Put it on. No one will ever know there was a problem.”

The apartment door opened, and Mom came in carrying a basket of clean laundry. She smiled at Bryan over my shoulder. “It looks like you two are inventing a new kind of shirt that can keep someone’s head warm, too. But I do see one problem!”

→ What was she talking about? I looked at Bryan. His arms were through the sleeves and thrashing wildly, but his head was stuck. I had stitched the front and back of his shirt together! Mom and I burst out laughing, and from inside the shirt Bryan joined in.

Building Student Focus

- Practice timed reading passages and timed math problems
 - Ask students to monitor their thoughts
 - What distracts them? How might they limit distractions?
 - In order to focus, students must be aware of when they are distracted and re-focus attention
- Slowly increase the length of timed exercises
- Incorporate timed exercises into daily activities
 - Use as a bell-ringer or exit slip to check for understanding

Focus is not only a test taking strategy, but a life skill

Test Taking Strategies

- Read the directions carefully
- If you come across a difficult item, skip it and come back to it
 - Write the question number on your scratch paper
- Review your test to make sure that you
 - Answered all questions
 - Did not mis-mark answers
 - Did not make simple mistakes
- Change answers to questions if you make a mistake or misread the question

Test Taking Strategies: Changing Answers

- True or False:
 - Changing answers tends to hurt test scores
- **False.**
- Statistically, changing answers increases test scores. However, how can we assist students in determining answers to change?
 - Self-explanation: if a student goes back a question and asks why the correct answer is correct, the student is more likely to uncover a flaw in their original thinking

Multiple Choice Question Strategies

- Read the whole question carefully and try to decide what the answer is before reading any of the options
- Read all of the answer options, then choose the one that most closely matches your answer
- When unsure, eliminate answers that are clearly incorrect
 - Try reading the question stem with each answer option
 - Chose the answer that appears to be the most true
 - Mark this question to review at the end of the test

Multiple Choice Question Strategies

- Which is the best strategy for answering multiple choice questions based off of a reading passage?
 - A. Skim the passage for key words, then look for those words in the question
 - B. Read the entire passage, summarize the passage, and then answer the question
 - C. Read the question answers, read the passage, and then the question
 - D. Read the question, then look for the topic of the question in the passage

Summarizing is not only a test taking strategy, but a reading comprehension strategy and life skill

Does not interrupt the flow of reading like underlining and taking notes (which can also take up valuable time)

Recap

- We can minimize the gaps between true student understanding/skills and demonstrated understanding/skills by:
 - Reducing anxiety related to testing
 - Providing clear directions and expectations
 - Building student ability to focus for extended periods of time
 - Providing test taking strategies
 - Reading directions
 - Skipping difficult questions and coming back to them
 - Review questions when finished and self-explaining answers
 - Summarizing reading passages before answering questions