

Reading Skills For Test Success



There's a good reason reading is the first of the traditional "three R's" of education (Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic). If a student can't read well, he won't learn much in class, he'll struggle with homework, and he'll do poorly on tests, since tests are designed to measure what students learned in class and on assignments.

Students who do well in school also do well on tests—it's just that simple. And research shows that when parents get involved and work as a team with the school, kids do better in school—and on tests.

Here are some tips for ways you can build your child's all-important reading skills at home:

1. **Control the TV set.** Don't put a TV in your child's room. It will rob your child of time he could spend reading. Make a weekly TV viewing plan as a family. Decide in advance what your child will watch and mark it on a calendar.
2. **Make sure your child sees you reading.** If she sees you reading, she knows you think it's important—and she'll be more interested in reading, too.
3. **Make sure your child finds interesting things he really wants to read.** What does he love to do? Does he like animals? Does he have a favorite movie star or recording artist? No matter what his interests are, there's sure to be a lot to read on the subject in magazines, books, newspapers or even catalogs and advertising fliers. The librarian at your local library can help you find good materials.
4. **Help your child read for meaning.** Here's how:
 - ♦ Read something interesting together. Then ask each other questions such as: What is the main point of the article? What did you learn from it? What surprised you?
 - ♦ Encourage your child to look for the "Big Idea" as she reads. Have her ask herself: What is the main idea of the paragraph? What is this page about? What is the point of this chapter?
 - ♦ Discuss ways she can spot the important points in what she is reading. Have her look for:
 - Headlines or words in bold type.
 - Pictures and charts.
 - Information presented in special boxes.
 - A summary at the end of a chapter.
5. **Point out how important reading for meaning is in everyday life.** Read the newspaper together. Have your child help you when you use the phone book. Have him read food labels with you.



It's been proven again and again that children who can read well—and understand the meaning of what they read—will learn more in school. And that school success becomes test success as well.

One of the greatest gifts you can give your child is the love of reading—and the ability to find meaning in what she reads. And it's one of the few things you can give your child that will help her succeed in school, on tests—and in life.

Ways Busy Parents Can Build Vocabulary



A good vocabulary is one of the keys to your child's success on standardized tests. You can help build your child's vocabulary skills at home.

Try these ideas:

- **Keep reading materials on hand.** The best way to build vocabulary is to read ... and read ... and read some more! So keep plenty of interesting reading choices on hand—books, magazines and newspapers. And don't forget your local library, a great source of free reading material.
- **Have a "word of the day."** Ask each family member to bring a new word to the supper table. Then have them tell what their words mean, where they found them and how they were used. Have everyone try using the words in sentences. Then choose one word to be the "word of the day." If you have alphabet refrigerator magnets, use them to post the word.
- **Create vocabulary flash cards.** Give your child a pack of 3" x 5" index cards. When your child learns a new word, help her write the word on one side and the definition and a sentence using the word on the back. Your child can take out her vocabulary flash cards to review while you're waiting in line or at the dentist office or whenever she has a few extra minutes.
- **Make a memory game.** Use index cards again, but this time write the word on one card and the definition on another card. When your child has a set of ten word and definition cards, place them all face down on a table. Then take turns turning up two cards. When a player turns up a word and its definition, he gets to keep those two cards. When all the cards are taken, the player with the most cards wins.
- **Use context clues.** Context clues use the text around a word to help the reader figure out its definition. To help your child find context clues, have her look at:
 - ♦ **Punctuation.** For example, a comma or a colon can indicate that a definition is coming. "In the microscope he saw an amoeba: a tiny one-celled organism."
 - ♦ **Key words.** Phrases such as "that is" or "for example" can indicate that a definition will follow. "He was a paleontologist, that is, a scientist who studies fossils."
 - ♦ **Surrounding sentences.** For example, your child can define *frugal* by reading the other sentences. "Mary was frugal. She saved all her money and planned for purchases. She always looked for sales."
- **Keep a dictionary handy.** Ask your child's teacher to recommend one that is appropriate for your child. Then keep it nearby so your child can look up new words he encounters as he reads. (And get a thesaurus, too!)
- **Play word games.** Two favorites include SCRABBLE® and BOGGLE®. You can also find word games and vocabulary building activities on the Internet. And don't forget your newspaper. Do the crossword puzzle with your child once a week.
- **Keep a vocabulary journal.** Give your child a spiral notebook where she can record new words. Keep it near the TV. When she hears a new word, have her write it down and then look up the definition during the next commercial.



Building your child's vocabulary will not only improve his test scores, it will build his self-confidence and prepare him for success throughout his life. So be enthusiastic, make it fun, and get started—TODAY!

Frequently Asked Questions



Standardized testing has become a fact of life in most schools. You've learned that your child will be taking at least one such test this year. You've also heard that these standardized tests are "high-stakes tests." If it's been a while since you had to get out your number two pencil, you may have questions about what this means and how it affects your child. Here are the answers to some frequently-asked questions that you may find helpful.

Q: What are standardized tests?

A: *Standardized tests* give educators a common standard by which to measure student performance. Standardized tests are designed to see how students from one class or school system compare with other students across the city, the state or the country. Standardized tests present the same tasks and objectives to all test-takers. They are administered and scored according to standard procedures.



Q: How do standardized tests differ from teacher-made tests?

A: *Standardized tests* are usually developed and scored by national test publishers. They are designed to measure the achievement of thousands of students in a state or nationwide in specific broad subjects. *Teacher-made tests* are developed and scored by a classroom teacher. They are designed to measure the achievement of students in lessons taught by the teacher.

Q: What are the "high stakes" involved?

A: Because standardized tests are tied to accountability, the stakes can be high. Test results can be used to determine a student's placement, promotion or even graduation. They can be used to evaluate schools and allocate resources. They can be used for decisions about school programs. Some systems link teacher raises to test scores.

Q: What do standardized tests measure?

A: Some tests measure a student's *aptitude*—the ability to learn. They test a broad range of skills and abilities that can help students do well in school. They might measure verbal ability or mechanical ability, for example. Other tests measure *achievement*—how much students have already learned. They can be used to measure whether students have mastered the information presented in their math or science class, for example.

Q: How are standardized tests used?

A: Tests can help the *school*:

- Evaluate a school program.
- Report on a student's progress.
- Diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses.
- Design an instructional program to meet an individual student's needs.

Tests can help *parents*:

- See how their child's school achievement compares with other students locally and nationwide.
- Learn more about their child's aptitudes and interests in various areas.

Tests can help *students*:

- Better understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- Consider options for further education and career choices.



Q: Where can I learn more?

A: For more information, go to the U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov) or visit your state's department or board of education website.