

Succeed on Tests

Reading skills for test success

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 five 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 or a summary at the end of a chapter.
5. **Point out how important reading 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.

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Listening and following directions for test success

Did you know that one of the biggest reasons many children do poorly on tests is that they fail to carefully read, or listen to, the test directions—and then follow them exactly? Like any other skill, students can become better at listening and following directions with practice. Here's how to help at home:

1. Be a good listening model for your child.

If children are listened to, they learn how to listen. Show respect when your child is speaking. Give her your full attention. Encourage her as she is talking by nodding or saying things like “I see.” Tell her if you don't understand what she is saying.

2. Practice “active listening” together. It's a fun, yet powerful, listening technique. Here's how it works:

- *Speaker #1* talks about something.
- *Speaker #2* listens and concentrates on what the first speaker says, then summarizes what was said.
- *Speaker #1* approves the second person's summary.
- *Speaker #2* can now express his opinion.



3. Play the “10 Questions” TV game.

Choose a television program to watch together. As you watch, think of questions about the program that you can ask your child. (That requires careful listening!) Have your child make a list of questions for you at the same time. After the program, each person can ask the other 10 questions about the show: “Why did Sarah say she wanted to go to the party?” “Who first mentioned the letter?” See who can get the most questions right.

4. Use the magic of “car time.” Try bringing up something you want to talk about with your child while just the two of you are riding in the car. Turn off the radio. Then bring up the subject. Or ask your child if there's anything he wants to talk about. There is something about car time that makes it easier to listen and really hear what the other person is saying.

5. Give more complicated directions than your child is used to. If a one-step direction, such as “Take off your coat,” is easy for her, add another step, such as “Take off your coat and put it in the closet.” When she's ready, add a third step like, “... then come back to me.”

6. Play “Simon Says.” It's an old game, but it's fun and effective at teaching careful listening. Your child should follow the directions only if the words “Simon Says” come first. If he doesn't hear those words, he should keep still. He'll have to listen carefully.

7. Use hobbies to practice following directions. Find an inexpensive model airplane at a toy store. Have your child read and carefully follow the directions provided. Or try cooking together with your child following the step-by-step directions to make cookies or something else good to eat. (Be sure to supervise your child carefully.)

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Questions parents should ask about standardized tests

Standardized tests are an essential part of education today. To find out what this means, how it affects your child—and how you can help, it's important for you to do your homework. Here are some questions to ask your child's teacher:

Before the test

- **When will the test be given?**
 - Date? Time? First thing in the morning? After lunch?
 - How long will the test last?
 - Will everyone in my child's grade be taking the same test at the same time?
- **What will the test cover?**
 - What can you tell me about the content of the test?
 - What is the class learning to prepare for the test?
 - How much class time is devoted to preparing for the test?
- **What is the format?**
 - Will the test be multiple choice? Essay? True or false?
 - Are students familiar with the format?
 - Do students use practice tests in class?

- **What if ...**
 - My child is feeling anxious about the test?
 - My child gets sick the day of the test and needs to stay home?
 - My child needs special accommodations?

After the test

- **What about the results?**
 - When will the results become available?
 - Will someone help interpret the scores?
 - What are the consequences for my child?
 - What if there is a major difference between my child's standardized test scores and school grades?
- Will my child be held back if the scores are low?
- Could my child be eligible for a gifted program if the scores are high?
- What if my child fails the test?
- How do my child's scores stack up?
- What changes can I expect based on the test results? For the school? For my child?

During preparation

- **What can I do at home?**
 - What can I do to help my child prepare?
 - Are there activities we can do at home? Extra reading?
 - Are practice tests available to use at home?

