

Testing 1-2-3



It's test day! Is your teenager ready? Here are answers to questions parents often have about test taking in high school. Share this advice with your child to help him feel confident and perform well on test day.

Q What does my high schooler need to keep in mind as he prepares for tests?

A The first order of business is to know what will be on a quiz or an exam. Your teenager should pay close attention during class reviews and take any practice tests the teacher or textbook offers.



To review notes, your child might type highlights from each day's material into a computer file. Typing his notes will help him remember them better, and he can use the file as a study guide.

Encourage your teen to pace himself. Cramming is stressful and usually doesn't result in real learning—only a temporary (and often spotty) memory of the material. Instead, he should start preparing for tests as soon as they are announced.

Q Besides studying, what else should my child do before a test?

A Urge her to get ready the night before. She can load up her bag with any necessary test gear, such as pencils and

eyeglasses. If permitted, she could bring a calculator (with extra batteries), a healthy snack, and a water bottle.

Also, eating a good breakfast will give your teen energy and keep her from feeling anxious or shaky. Remind her that caffeine could cause her to feel nervous and jittery during a test.

Suggest that your high schooler get to class early. She'll have a few extra minutes to take out supplies, look over notes one last time, and get focused.



Q How can my teen feel confident before and during an exam?

A Teach him relaxation techniques he can do during the test. Deep, slow breaths and positive thoughts can increase his confidence. *Example:* "I am going to do well because I am prepared."

Help your child avoid distractions by suggesting that he keep his eyes on his own paper and not worry about students who finish before he does. Remind him that faster doesn't mean better.

Finally, encourage your teen to stay active by making time for 30–60 minutes of exercise each day. That will give him more energy and help him feel less stressed.

Q What test-taking strategies can I share with my high schooler?

A Help her budget her time. When she receives the test, she should do a quick survey of the entire exam and consider how long she will need for each section. She'll want to allow more time for harder portions or those that are worth the most points.

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Advise your child to read all directions carefully. She should never assume that she knows what the instructions say. For instance, some questions may have more than one correct answer.

Your high schooler can use any extra time to go back to skipped questions and look for careless mistakes. She might redo math calculations or double-check dates on history quizzes, for instance.

Q What special advice can I give my child for different test formats?

A For true-false tests, it's helpful to circle key words in the question. If any part of a choice is false, the whole thing is false. Encourage your teen to watch for tip-off words like *never*, *always*, *all*, *none*, or *only*—they often indicate a “false”

answer. Words like *usually*, *sometimes*, and *generally* may be clues that a “true” choice is correct. He should answer every question—there's at least a 50 percent chance a guess will be right.

When taking a multiple-choice exam, your child might read the question and try to answer it before looking at the options. Then he can read the choices, eliminate those that are clearly wrong, and select the one closest to his initial idea.

Remind him not to leave any answers blank (if there's no penalty for wrong answers). Even if he doesn't know the answer, he has a 25 percent chance of success when there are four choices.



For essay questions, suggest that your teen make an outline of main ideas and supporting facts. All of his points should be backed up with examples, and he shouldn't stray from the topic. Encourage him to reread the question halfway through and at the end to make sure he has answered all parts. Finally, he should go back and proofread carefully—spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors can lower his score.

SAT and ACT success

Are you hoping your teen will go to college? Here are valuable hints for helping her prepare for college entrance exams.

Q Which test should my child take?

A She should check requirements at the colleges she might want to attend. Many students take both the SAT and the ACT and send in their best scores. Your teen can also get advice from her school counselor.

Q What do the tests include?

A The SAT has three parts: critical reading, math, and writing. It includes essay, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. The ACT has four multiple-choice sections: English, math, reading, and science. There's also an optional writing portion on the ACT (your child can check at act.org to see which colleges require or recommend it). *Note:* The SAT essay is only required by certain colleges.



Have your teenager find out whether the colleges he's applying to require it.

Q How should my high schooler get ready for these tests?

A Have her start early! As a sophomore and junior, your teen can take the preliminary SAT (PSAT). In her junior year, she might take a test-prep course at school, the library, or a community center. She can also take practice tests to familiarize herself with the format and questions. These are available online (collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat for the SAT and actstudent.org for the ACT) and in SAT or ACT manuals (available at libraries and bookstores).

Q How can I help my teen have a positive attitude toward the exam?

A Encourage him to think of the SAT or ACT as a final leg of his high school career. He should look forward to the pride and relief he'll feel when the test is over—and the results that can help him get into the college of his choice.

High School Years