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How Can I Help My Students Perform Well on Standardized Tests?

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Students that score well on standardized tests have content knowledge and are comfortable with the “language” of testing. Today’s standardized tests are completely different from those administered in the 70s, 80s, or even 90s. The days of strictly multiple-choice tests scored by scanners have disappeared. Teams of educators (known as readers, raters, markers, or judges) now analyze and evaluate added handwritten sections or portions of tests. As many as three scorers may evaluate students’ essays and short answers and then come to a consensus on a final score. Even if students know the content, they must be able to understand the terminology used in the writing prompts and then organize and present the information accordingly.



According to the grade-level’s curriculum objectives, teachers know the content the test will cover, but no one knows the types of questions the students will need to answer. Some educators argue that they are teaching the test. It’s not really a matter of teaching the test, but teaching students *how* to take the test. As soon as students enter school, teachers should begin using standardized test vocabulary and making it part of the daily classroom instruction and evaluation (at an appropriate level, of course). Teachers should use test-taking terms routinely during classroom activities, on homework assignments, and on quizzes in order to help students become comfortable using test vocabulary and their synonyms interchangeably.

From the early grades on, teachers should introduce and teach these terms using curriculum texts and other materials that are interesting and applicable to their experiences (novels, newspapers, magazines, etc.). Many of these vocabulary words are interrelated. For example, if a student can *sequence* items, *tracing* the steps of a process should not be a problem. *Compare* and *contrast* also go hand in hand. Most test-taking vocabulary terms are cross-curricular, therefore, underscoring the importance of their implementation across all subject areas.

The following words appear routinely on standardized tests from elementary through high school. Teach and use the following words during instruction, classroom activities, homework assignments, and quizzes across all subject areas when applicable. Some of their synonyms appear in parentheses.

Five W’s – Answer who, what, when, where, and why questions about a passage.

Describe – Write a response to help the reader visualize a clear picture of a person, place, thing, or idea – including details of color, shape, size, texture, taste, odor, or emotions – including any other unusual features and characteristics. (characterize, demonstrate, illustrate, recount, exhibit, show, suggest, draft, outline)

Explain – Write a response telling how to do something or how/why something happened or will happen. (clarify, demonstrate, illustrate)

Compare – Write a response as to how two or more things are the same. (equate, liken, associate, connect, couple, relate, match, parallel)

Contrast – Write a response as to how two or more things are different.

Define – Present a clear meaning and understanding of a term or event.

Infer – “Read between the lines” of a passage/statement and use the author’s clues to write an interpretation of what the author is really trying to say. The answer is not in the passage. (conclude, deduce, judge, reason, understand)

Trace –List the steps leading to a certain event or result. (outline, follow)

Summarize – Write a short version of a longer text and include only the most important details and/or events. (outline, recap, sum up, wrap up)

Analyze – Students break apart an item, document, or an event in order to comment and explain the nature and relationship of its parts. (assess, evaluate, examine, inspect, investigate, arrange, categorize, classify, sort, break down, dissect)

Formulate – Students express a formula (math) or state the necessary steps in order to create a plan. (cast, draft, draw (up), prepare)

Generalize –State in a more general form and infer from the facts.

Author’s Purpose – Determine the author’s reason behind his/her writing – to inform, entertain, or persuade.

Persuade – Take a stand and defend one side of an issue by giving facts, beliefs, opinions, and personal viewpoints. (argue, convince, satisfy, talk into, win over)

Demonstrate – Write and/or illustrate step-by-step procedures that tell or show how to do something. (establish, show, make known)

Interpret – Students write their understanding of a passage using the information they have (sometime supported by their own experiences). (explain, make plain)

Estimate – Conclude, determine, or judge the approximate value, size, or cost of something based on personal experience or observation rather than an actual measurement. (appraise, assess, evaluate, reckon)

Sequence – Arrange and write events or the steps of a process in order from beginning to end.

Interpret – Explain in more understandable terms.



Resources

Williams, Kechia. (2013)Scholastic. *Top 10 terms students need to know to be successful on standardized tests*. Retrieved online December 2013 from <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/top-10-terms-students-need-know-be-successful-standardized-tests> .

Test Taking Vocabulary Words. 2013. *Created by Died*. Retrieved December 2013 from <http://quizlet.com/7869149/test-taking-vocabulary-words-flash-cards/>

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Helpful Products

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Item #CRD-44](#)

[Core Curriculum Vocabulary First Grade Funsheets
Item #BKCRD-44](#)

[Core Curriculum Vocabulary Cards Second Grade
Item #CRD-56](#)

[Core Curriculum Vocabulary Second Grade Funsheets
Item #BKCRD-56](#)

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Item#CRD-58](#)

[Core Curriculum Vocabulary Third Grade Funsheets
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