

The Literacy Link

Connecting home to school

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Intermediate Edition

Test Taking Strategies

Families can be a great help to students in both long and short-term test preparation. Tests can tell families how well their students are doing in school, how well they are performing against educational standards, how they compare to other students in their grade, and in what areas they need assistance to improve achievement. In general, tests can show children's strengths and weaknesses to demonstrate where extra support is needed.

Long term strategies

- ♥ Show interest and ask questions about school work
- ♥ Ask children how they come up with ideas or answers
- ♥ Practice vocabulary words in conversation

- ♥ Encourage writing, and have your child start a journal
- ♥ Encourage reflection about reading, especially through a journal
- ♥ Talk about effective note taking skills
- ♥ Plan study time and space
- ♥ Encourage use of assignment calendar
- ♥ homework-review



Quick tips before testing—April 21-May 2

- ◆ Set realistic expectations
- ◆ Make sure children are well rested
- ◆ Promote a positive attitude
- ◆ Serve healthy meals because the brain needs fuel
- ◆ Help children relax
- ◆ Be encouraging

Tips for Improving Your Child's Performance on the CATS Reading Test

◆ Read, read, read!

Reading, like any other skill, takes lots of practice. Therefore, one of the best and simplest steps to improve the reading ability of children is to provide sustained periods of time for children to read at home—at least 30 minutes a night.

◆ Help your child to read like a writer

A good way to improve reading comprehension is to teach children to read from the point of view of the writer. Even in the early grades, students can begin to notice an author's writing techniques, or writing craft. Reading as writers improves both the reading and writing ability of children.

◆ Read a variety of books and magazines

In the world outside of school, students need to be able to read a wide variety of texts, from road signs to restaurant menus, from comic books

to classics, from tennis shoe ads to computer manuals. The CATS reading test contains both literary and informational selections. To help your child become skilled in many reading situations, provide them with abundant reading opportunities.

◆ Build your child's reading stamina

One of the problems children face with reading generally, and with reading tests in particular, is they often give up. Reading tests usually use a collection of passages of varying difficulty. To build stamina, you may want to encourage your child to gradually increase the amount of reading time at one sitting, set individual reading goals and take short breaks, such as stretching or closing their eyes for a minute.

◆ Teach your child that visuals are part of the text

Students are likely to be expected to gather information from photos, captions, drawings or charts and graphs. You can teach your child to look at all of these features as part of the total text when you are reading informational text at home.

◆ Help your child know how to use text-based support in writing responses

In many Open Response reading questions students will be expected to support their answers with specific details from the passage. You can help your child by asking them to identify specific details from the passage that support a main idea when you are reading together at home.

◆ Talk to your child about the importance of reading the test questions first

Reading in a testing situation is clearly different from reading for pleasure. Emphasize to your child that the purpose is to find answers to the specific questions being asked. Looking at the questions first simply makes more sense in a testing situation.

<http://www.pppctr.org/maptesttaking.asp>

Tips for improving Your 5th grade Child's Performance on the On Demand Writing Test

In fifth grade all students take an On Demand writing test. In addition to a multiple choice test of writing skills, they will be given a timed test in which they choose one of two prompts. Each prompt will include a **SITUATION** which sets the context for the writing and a **WRITING TASK** which gives the purpose and form for writing. The forms that 5th graders are expected to write are letter and article. The purposes for writing are:

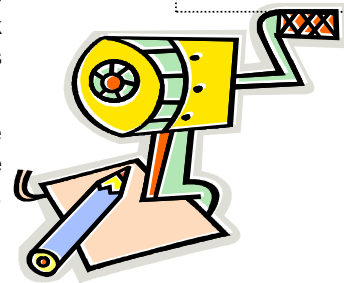
- ◆ **Narrate for a specific purpose:** writer tells a short story in order to inform or persuade
- ◆ **Inform:** writer provides information and ideas to help readers understand something or accomplish a task
- ◆ **Persuade:** writer seeks to convince readers to take action or accept his/her idea about a topic.

During this test students are able to use a thesaurus and dictionary to help them with their word choice and spelling. However,

they are not allowed to conference with their teacher or peers as they did when completing their 4th grade writing portfolio.

How you can help:

- ◆ Encourage your child to tell you stories for the specific purpose of either informing you about something or persuading you.
- ◆ Ask questions about how your child would write a letter or an article to different audiences, for example:
 - “How would writing a letter to your principal differ from how you would write to a relative?”
 - “How would writing an article for a school newspaper differ from writing an article for a published magazine?”
- ◆ Encourage your child to persuade you to do something and talk about what persuasive techniques he or she is using.
- ◆ Encourage your child to analyze the persuasive techniques that are being used in TV advertisements, magazine ads, billboards, etc.



Find opportunities for your child to be involved in writing.

Clark County Schools, Winchester, KY

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The Dr. Musgrove Moment

As each child progresses through the grades he/she develops interests in topics more suited to his/her unique needs. For some children it is a very individualized process, whereas for other children they look for ways to share these burgeoning interests with friends or other family members. That is why the adults in each child's life must key into which method or mode he or she has selected. Everyone knows that I often use my grandchildren as my reference point, but each of them is entirely unique and looks at reading and learning differently just as I described in my introductory sentences. Paige, the six year old wants everyone in the house to know she is reading or learning; whereas, Blake, the more reserved middle school student wants to get as far away as he can from others to read. I use this analogy to make just one point. The adults in the household must be attuned to these unique differences and should not force the child that seeks a more private environment to “join in” just for the sake of doing something together. However, it can be a powerful and motivating experience for any child if he or she is asked to share those interests at common family events such as around the kitchen table or maybe in the car on the way to a ballgame. It is during these opportunities to share with others that children learn the important skill of reducing to writing (performing) what they are thinking (knowledge) and explaining (how and what) to others. See, getting ready and taking the annual state test is not so hard after all.

The Testing Schedule

Grade	Core Content Area
3	reading, mathematics
4*	reading, mathematics, science, practical living/vocational studies
5	reading, mathematics, social studies, arts & humanities, on demand writing
6	reading, mathematics
7*	reading, mathematics, science, practical living/vocational studies
8	reading, mathematics, social studies, arts & humanities, on demand writing
10	reading, practical living/vocational studies
11	mathematics, science, social studies, arts and humanities,
12*	on-demand writing (Fall Testing window)

* Grades 4, 7 and 12 will submit a Writing Portfolio in the spring, which is a component of CATS