

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

N. L. Dillard Middle School
Franchesca Gantt, Principal



March 2022

Simple test-taking strategies can help your child score higher

When your child is preparing *before* a test, her focus is probably on the material she's been learning. But it's also worth her time to review some general test-taking strategies that will help her do her best *during* the test.

Remind your child to:

- **Pay careful attention** to the directions. Suggest that she read them twice to make sure she understands exactly what she is being asked to do.
- **Underline key words** that call for specific actions, such as *compare*, *define*, *list*, *describe* and *summarize*.
- **Read all the questions** over quickly before she begins (if the format of the test allows). This will help her plan how much time she can spend on each question.
- **Reread each question** carefully as she comes to it. Then she should determine what she thinks the answer is before looking at any of the choices that might be provided.
- **Circle and skip questions** when she isn't sure of the answer. Answering all the questions she knows first will ensure that she gets every point she deserves. After she's done that, she can come back to the circled questions.
- **Allow time to double-check** her answers. Do they make sense? Did she follow all the instructions?



After-class tasks make class notes even more useful

Class notes are great tools for remembering what the teacher covered. But taking them is only the first step. To make the most effective use of notes, your child should also:

- **Edit them after class.** While the material is still fresh in her mind, she can expand and clarify them where necessary.
- **Study them every day.** Reviewing today's notes after school will reinforce your child's understanding and prepare her for the next class session.

Speak in encouraging words

Kids instantly perk up their ears when they hear their names, so when you talk about your child, choose your words carefully.

Avoid making negative comments about your child to others—especially family members—that he could overhear. Instead, praise things that matter: his determination, kindness, responsibility, etc.



Use strengths to tackle struggles

Children try harder when they feel capable of succeeding. So if your child is struggling in science, point out how well he's doing in another subject. Then help him figure out what's working for him in that and apply it to science.

To build on your child's strengths:

- **Ask what class** he thinks he is learning the most in. The key is to get him feeling positive about what he *can* accomplish.
- **Have him think** about reasons why that class or subject is a strength for him. What strategies does he use to learn the material?
- **Suggest a few reasons** you've noticed, such as his persistence or ability to concentrate on things that interest him.
- **Help him make a plan.** For example, "One of the reasons you earned a good grade is that you asked a lot of questions. What if you did the same in science?"
- **Get frequent updates.** Ask your child to tell you ways he used his strengths and what happened. Discuss future strategies.

Build a bigger vocabulary

The larger your child's vocabulary, the better she will be able to express herself. Reading widely is one of the best ways for her to learn new words. Encourage these other vocabulary builders, too:

- **Looking up** the definitions of unfamiliar words she reads.
- **Using new words** in conversation. Your child is more likely to remember the meaning of a new word if she uses the word often.
- **Speaking with adults.** Don't do the talking for her!





An assignment is turning my child off reading. What now?

Q: My son told his English teacher he didn't like the book they are reading. The teacher said he had to read it anyway. Should I talk to the teacher?

A: Many of the books teachers assign are not ones that students would choose themselves. The books may have been written in another century, or be focused on a different culture. They may be filled with difficult language.

Teachers choose the books they do because students can learn valuable lessons from them. For example, it can be helpful for middle schoolers to see how the characters face issues that they may be facing in their own lives. Students can also expand their vocabularies and critical thinking skills, and that helps them better understand the reading they will do in the future.

Your response to your child should relate to cause of the issue:

- **If the assigned book** is beyond his reading ability, talk with the teacher. Discuss options for getting help or testing for reading disabilities.
- **If his reading ability** is not the problem, help your child engage with the assignment. You might look for an audio version of the book. Sometimes, hearing a text makes it easier to follow. Or you could read the book too, and chat at the end of each chapter about what's going on.

Mastering this challenge can give your child confidence to face the next one.



Are you encouraging homework effort?

Larger workloads, including more homework, are common as students move up through the grades in school. Are you helping your middle schooler rise to the challenge? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child reduce distractions in her study area?
2. **Do you find out** about the teachers' homework policies and expectations?
3. **Do you tell** your child you expect her to turn assignments in on time and help her plan time to complete them?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to use available resources when she needs help—such as websites, videos, study groups and a class study buddy?

5. **Do you contact** the teacher if your child consistently struggles with homework?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are supporting your child's success with homework. For each no, try that idea.

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

—Robert Collier

Recognize growth while maintaining authority

Middle schoolers are maturing, physically and mentally. As they do, it's appropriate to give them more responsibility and more freedom. But this does not mean treating your child as an adult. Continue to:

- **Forbid rudeness.** Tell him you will respond when he speaks respectfully.
- **Maintain a short list** of important rules. Enforce consequences every time.
- **Acknowledge the difference** between you. Children lose respect for parents who act like children.
- **Base your decisions** on adult judgment, not on a wish to be a "cool parent."

Help your child think about what studying involves

Creating a study schedule before a test helps students use their time wisely. Encourage your child to block out her study time on a calendar. To help her decide how much time to allot and when, have her consider:

- **How well she knows** the topic—will it take relearning, or just a review?
- **What does she need time** to do besides reviewing—for example, making flash cards, taking practice tests or writing summaries?
- **When will she be able** to ask questions or get help if she is confused?

Give success its moment

Students need time to enjoy their successes. So if you are tempted to talk about the next big test or assignment when your child shows you an improved grade, wait. Help him savor his achievement. "You got your highest score yet! Let's celebrate with a pizza!"



Helping Students Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2022, The Parent Institute®,

a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021