

# PREPARING FOR TESTS AND EXAMS

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## AGENDA

- Starter
- Studying: Getting Ready
- Test Day
- Showing Off What You Know: Game Show
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will recognize the importance of preparing for tests.

Students will identify strategies for preparing for tests and examinations.

Students will practice techniques for effective test taking.

### Materials Needed

- One copy of the “Test-Taking Self-Assessment” activity sheet for each student (Starter and Part I)
- One copy of the “Game Show” activity sheet for each student (Part III)

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**Starter (6 minutes)**

Tell students that you are going to give them an opportunity to reflect on something that they have been doing for years: taking tests. In your usual manner, tell students that they are about to take an important pop quiz. Have them clear off their desks. Distribute the “Test-Taking Self-Assessment” activity sheet. Once students have had a chance to read it, tell them that this exercise will not be graded. Have students complete the activity sheet, keeping in mind how they felt when you announced the pop quiz.

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**Part I Studying: Getting Ready (15 minutes)**

Purpose: Students recognize the importance of preparing in advance for a test.

**1. Students discuss their views on taking tests.**

Discuss student responses to question one on the activity sheet. Let students share their feelings about taking tests. Mention that people can improve their attitude toward test taking if they think of a test as an opportunity to demonstrate what they know.

**2. Students recognize the impact that preparing for a test has on their attitude.**

Talk about question two. Ask students why some of them might have felt anxious about taking this test. Ask, “Would your reactions have been different had you received advance notice?”

Point out to students that although the material on a pop quiz might be the same as on an announced test, a pop quiz often causes more anxiety because students don’t have an opportunity to prepare. Elicit from students the awareness that preparing in advance for an exam helps to decrease anxiety.

**3. Students recognize the impact that preparing for a test has on their performance.**

Discuss question three. Invite students to share how far in advance they usually prepare for a test. Suggest to students that they could prepare for a test as a runner prepares for a marathon: a marathon runner begins training well in advance of a race. Gradually, the runner builds endurance, running longer and longer distances. Finally, it is the day of the race. The runner is confident that they are ready and able to complete the race at peak performance.

Challenge students to relate preparation for a marathon with test preparation. Explain to students that just as with training for a marathon, people perform their best on exams when they allow themselves plenty of time to prepare.

**4. Students identify effective study practices.**

Talk about question four. Encourage students to share specific ways that they prepare for an exam. Write student responses on the board. (Students might respond: taking good notes in class, staying organized, making note cards or flashcards.)

Elicit from students that study sheets can be extremely useful when preparing for a major exam, especially the following two types of sheets:

- A “key terms” sheet, which contains dates, names, events, places, and other specific facts that need to be memorized
- A “general themes” sheet, which groups and outlines major ideas or recurring themes that must be reviewed

Point out that the key terms study sheet is useful when preparing for short-answer tests, while the general themes sheet enables students to organize information that might appear in essay questions. Suggest to students that they should prepare study sheets five to seven days before a major test.

Discuss with students the usefulness of mnemonic devices for remembering key terms. Explain that mnemonic devices are tricks to enhance memory. For example, some people remember the order of the planets with a sentence like “My very entertaining mother just served us nachos” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune). Elicit from students examples of mnemonic devices that have been helpful to them in the past.

Remind students that in the first lesson of this module they identified their learning styles and discussed techniques for studying that complement their learning style. Explain that mnemonics, study sheets, and even study groups are adaptable to various learning styles.

### **5. Students identify advantages and disadvantages of studying in groups.**

Take a poll of students who get together with friends to study. Elicit from students the advantages and disadvantages of this method. Write their ideas on the board. (Advantages include: learning from one another, in-depth discussions, steady studying schedule, makes studying more fun. Disadvantages include: lost time if friends are not prepared, panicky students spread test anxiety to each other, groups may use time more inefficiently than one person alone, more distractions in groups.)

Conclude with students that choosing the right people to study with is important.

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## **Part II Test Day (15 minutes)**

*Purpose:* Students identify effective test-taking strategies.

### **1. Students recognize that it is important to relax and sleep well the night before an exam.**

Ask students to imagine that it is now the night before an exam. Have students suggest useful pretest activities. Point out that they should have done most of their major studying already, and that, ideally, all they need is a brief review. Lead students to understand that the most important thing that they can do the night before an exam is to relax and get a good night's sleep.

## 2. Students brainstorm effective pretest strategies.

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Give students the following instructions:

- Each group needs a sheet of writing paper.
- At my signal, one student in each group will write down one pretest strategy. This can be anything you do from the time you wake up until the minute before the exam begins.
- That student then passes the paper to the student on their right, who adds a different strategy to the list.
- Continue to pass the paper around the circle.

Give the groups two minutes to list as many pretest strategies as they can. The paper can go around the circle more than once. (*Students might respond: eating a good breakfast, being on time, dressing in comfortable clothing, bringing all materials needed for the test [e.g., sharpened pencils, pens, scrap paper, calculators], bringing a watch, arriving a minute or two early to quickly review notes, avoiding talking to anxious students.*)

## 3. Students brainstorm effective test-taking strategies.

When two minutes have passed, instruct students to take two more minutes to write down as many test-taking strategies as they can. Groups should again pass the paper around the circle and include ideas from each member. (*Students might respond: looking over the entire test first, budgeting time, reading directions carefully, reading each question carefully, watching the time, circling difficult questions and coming back to them.*)

## 4. Students discuss the strategies identified by their groups.

When two minutes have passed, have the groups discuss the pretest strategies. Compile the groups' ideas on the board and add other ideas they might have missed.

On a separate list, compile students' test-taking strategies and add any that are missing. Duplicate the lists and distribute them to students for their future reference.

## 5. Students discuss strategies to reduce anxiety.

Ask students how many are anxious before or during a test. Explain that test anxiety is very common but that there are some simple things that they can do to combat it. Encourage students to offer suggestions. (*Students might respond: being well prepared, taking deep breaths, thinking calm thoughts.*)

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### Part III Showing Off What You Know: Game Show (12 minutes)

*Purpose:* Students learn and recall pretest and test-taking strategies in a game-show style activity.

#### 1. Students participate in a game-show style activity.

This activity provides an opportunity to reemphasize strategies that might be particularly important to your students. Use the questions and answers on the “Game Show” activity sheet as you facilitate the game.

Divide the class into two or more teams. Tell students that you will read questions out loud. The teams should raise their hands as soon as they know the answer. Call on the first team to raise their hands.

Begin the activity.

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### Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to identify three strategies that they use to prepare for and take tests. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Preparing in advance for an exam helps to decrease anxiety and increase the likelihood of success.
- Study sheets are useful when compiling notes in preparation for a major exam.
- Specific test-taking strategies can be applied during an exam to improve performance.

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### Student Assessment

1. What are your usual strategies for test preparation in the week leading up to a test? What can you do to make your preparation more effective?
2. List three mnemonic devices that you find effective.
3. List five test-preparation techniques that can help you get ready the day of a test.

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

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“No man ever became wise by chance.” —Seneca the Younger

Discuss the meaning of this quote. Have students create their own sayings with similar meanings.

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

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Distribute a magazine or news article to students. In small groups, have students devise 10 test questions (four true/false, four multiple choice, two essay) on the article.

Discuss how students arrived at the points they included on the test as well as the process for writing each question. Chart the groups' questions to see the overlap in what they included on the test.

### Writing in Your Journal

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Have students complete this sentence: “The worst test-taking experience I ever had was....”

Have students share their work with a partner and brainstorm ways to improve future test-taking experiences. Have them keep a list of suggestions in their journals.

### Using Technology

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Have students use software to create outlines, flowcharts, and study guides to help them review for tests. Have them visit <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker> to make custom crossword puzzles for vocabulary review.

Have students create study guides, at least a week in advance, for an upcoming exam. After the exam, have them discuss which tools were most helpful.

## Homework

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Have students review the U.S. Department of Education’s “Helping Your Child with Test-Taking,” found on <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html>. Students may want to show this page to their parents or guardians.

Have students take notes on new information or tips they find especially helpful.

## Additional Resources

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Assign groups selections from *Test-Taking Strategies* by Judy Kesselmann-Turkel.

Ask the groups to present strategies for taking different kinds of tests.

# TEST-TAKING SELF-ASSESSMENT

1. How did you feel when the teacher said that you were going to take a quiz?
2. Why did you feel this way?
3. How far in advance do you usually begin studying for a test?
4. Name three study tools that help you prepare for a test.



# GAME SHOW

1. **What kind of study sheet helps you to compile notes, such as names and dates?**  
A key terms sheet
2. **How far in advance should you begin to study for a test?**  
Five to seven days
3. **Complete the sentence: It can help your attitude to think of a test as \_\_\_\_\_.**  
An opportunity to show what you know
4. **Why does a pop quiz often cause more anxiety than a quiz announced beforehand?**  
Because you don't have an opportunity to prepare
5. **Name two effective study practices.**  
Any two of the following: taking good notes in class, staying organized, making note cards or flash cards, compiling notes into a key terms sheet or a general themes sheet, mnemonic devices, studying in groups, scheduling study time, reviewing notes after class, or finding a quiet place
6. **True or false: You should spend as many hours as possible studying the night before a major test.**  
False—you should relax and get a good night's sleep
7. **What kinds of people should you avoid on the day of an exam?**  
People who make you nervous
8. **Name two advantages of studying in groups.**  
Any two of the following: lets students learn from one another, in-depth discussions, steady studying schedule, moral support, makes studying more fun, teaching others increases your own retention of facts
9. **Name two disadvantages of studying in groups.**  
Any two of the following: lost time if friends are not prepared, lost time going over things you already know well, panicky students spread test anxiety, groups use time less efficiently
10. **Name two things you should do the morning of a test.**  
Any two of the following: eat a good breakfast, dress comfortably, bring a watch, arrive early, make sure you have all the materials you need
11. **True or false: You should eat a very big breakfast the day of an exam.**  
False—you should eat a healthy breakfast, but not more than you usually eat
12. **Name two important strategies to use during a test.**  
Any two of the following: look over the entire test before you begin, budget time (based on point values), read directions carefully, read each question carefully, watch the time and pace yourself, circle difficult questions and come back to them
13. **Name one anxiety-reducing strategy.**  
Any of the following: be well prepared, take deep breaths, think of a peaceful place