

# Standardized Testing Q&As

These days, children are taking more standardized tests, and the pressure to do well is often high. Here are answers to common questions about the testing environment, along with a collection of test-taking tips.



**Q** What's the purpose of standardized tests, and how will they help my child?

**A** A standardized test is intended to measure how much your youngster has learned in a school subject, such as reading or math. It's also one tool schools use to see how well their academic programs are working—and what changes they could make to help students get the best possible education. For example, if a lot of children struggle with essay questions, the school might make some adjustments to the way writing is taught.

**Q** How can my youngster prepare for standardized tests?

**A** Attending school, learning, and working hard all year are the best preparation for any test. Before a standardized test, your child can prepare by paying close attention during in-class reviews and by trying hard on practice tests. These will give him an idea of what material the tests will cover and what the test format will be. They'll also remind him of information about topics he has studied this year (or in previous years) that he may have forgotten about.

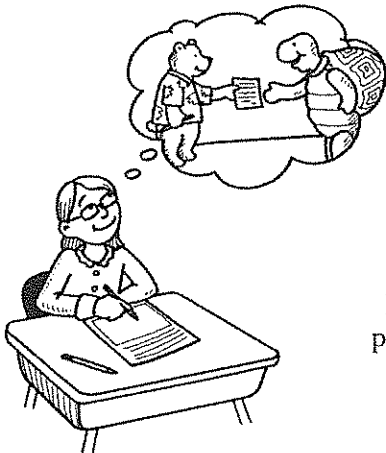
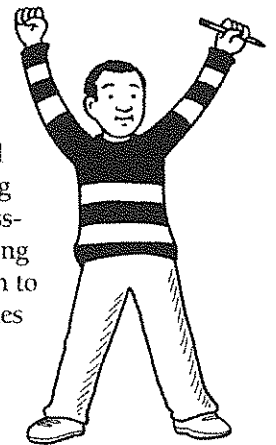
**Q** I've been hearing a lot about the Common Core State Standards. How will they affect tests this year?

**A** Your youngster may notice a few differences, such as more writing and more multi-step math problems. Common Core-aligned tests also include *performance tasks*—items that ask students to apply what they have learned and to use problem-solving and

critical-thinking skills. For example, instead of reading a passage and answering questions about it, your child might be asked to read two passages and write a letter from one main character to the other. Or rather than answering multiple-choice questions about a bar graph, she may be given data to create a graph of her own. *Note:* To find out if your state is one of those using new Common Core-aligned tests, ask your youngster's teacher.

**Q** My child gets anxious before big tests. How can I help?

**A** Reassure him that it's normal to feel nervous and that lots of kids are feeling the same way. Suggest that he use stress-relief techniques like stretching or taking a few deep breaths. It may comfort him to take a favorite book to read if he finishes a section early (and if it's allowed). Also, let him know that while you expect him to try his hardest, it's okay if he doesn't know all the answers or have time to answer every question. *Note:* Watch for complaints of stomachaches or headaches, and talk to your youngster's school counselor if you're concerned.



*continued*

**Q** What can I do to make sure my child feels her best on test day?

**A** A good night's sleep (10–11 hours) and a healthy breakfast are important every day—and especially on test day. To help your youngster stay focused and alert, she should eat both protein and carbohydrates, such as hard-boiled eggs, oatmeal topped with blueberries, and milk. Also, have her dress in layers so she can get comfortable in case she feels hot or cold.

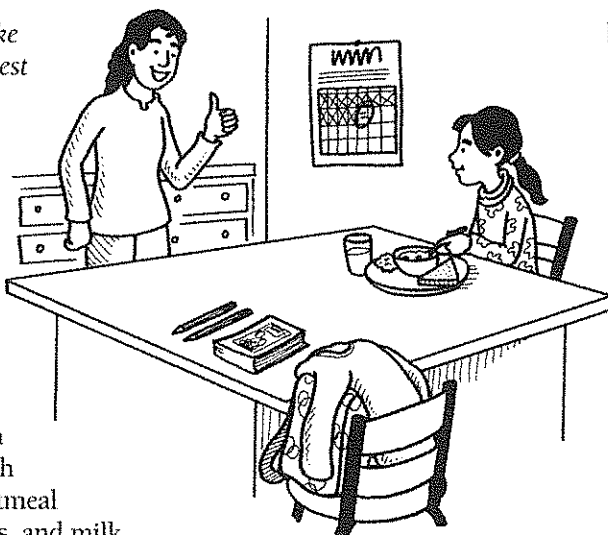
**Q** My youngster will take standardized tests on a computer this year for the first time. What's different about this method?

**A** Some computer-based tests give all students the same questions in the same order. Others give different questions based on whether a student's previous answer was right or wrong. Also, the test may include on-screen tools, like a calculator, a highlighter, and a ruler. A test may even give students the option of crossing out answer choices they know aren't correct. Your child can familiarize himself with the

procedure and any tools during practice tests so he's confident on test day.

**Q** Can you suggest some general test-taking tips to share with my youngster?

**A** The first thing is to read the directions carefully. She wouldn't want to answer all three essay questions if the instructions say to choose two. Also, encourage her to work at a steady pace and not to linger on questions she is struggling with. Instead, she can circle or flag the question, continue working, and come back to it. If she's filling in a bubble sheet that's separate from the test booklet, she should stop every few questions to make sure the number of the question matches the number on the answer sheet. Finally, suggest that she double-check her work if she has time.



## Types of questions

Different kinds of questions call for different strategies. This advice can help your child.

● **Multiple-choice.** Your youngster should read the question and try to come up with an answer before looking at the possible responses. Then, if his answer is listed, there's a good chance it's right. However, it's important for him to read and consider all the choices before picking the best one, since there may be one or more that are *almost* right. *Tip:* If he doesn't know the answer, he can narrow down his options by crossing out choices that are obviously wrong.

● **True/false.** Encourage her to read the entire statement carefully, since just one word can make a seemingly true statement false. Discuss words that tend to appear in false statements (*absolutely,*

*always, certainly, never*) and those that often indicate a true statement (*occasionally, usually, most, probably*).

● **Short-response.** Remind your youngster to focus on what is being asked and to address all parts of the question.

It may help him to highlight or underline key words in the question. *Example:* "Pick two Native American tribes, and compare and contrast their houses."

● **Essay.** Planning is key. Writing the essay will be easier if your child gathers and organizes her thoughts first. She might use a planning strategy that she learned in school, like making an outline or a web. *Note:* She should allow time to proofread her essay, since careless mistakes can cost her points.



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