

Brought to you by the NAMS Guidance Department

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My Skills Portfolio

As you complete the exercises in the workbook, you will develop skills that can help you in your classes. In this section, you will be tasked to create a skills portfolio that will help you organize what you learned and allow you to have quick access to the information when you need it.

The answers to the portfolio questions are found in each section of the workbook. So, as you complete a section, come back to this page and record your answers. This is a working document, so use pencil. As the year goes on, you may find something else works for you. Write it in so you do not forget.

My CAN statement is:

When the “thrill is gone,” I will change it up by:

My learning style is:

Learning strategies I can use in the classroom are:

I can change my stinky thoughts by saying or writing:

--

My Academic Make-Over looks like:

Subject/Attitude:_____
Goal Area:_____
What I specifically need to do/learn:_____
My Plan of Action:_____
I will need the following help and resources:_____
Here is my timeline: _____

I will try to not procrastination by:

--

My preferred way of handling stress is

--

Success comes in a CAN not a can't

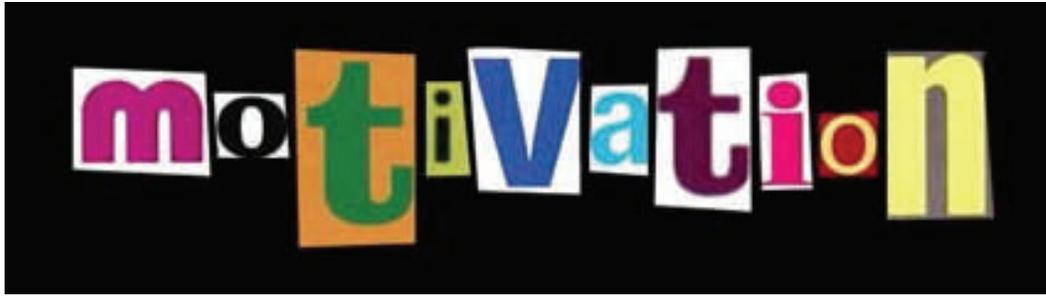
Choose your attitude. That is the first part of the CATCH it! philosophy because it is the most important. As you move through your middle school and academic career, you can choose to pay attention to those things that flatten you or you can adjust your attitude and retrain yourself to focus on those things that give you a little fizz. It is as easy as this. Rather than looking at the problem as something that is burdening you and complaining about it, you can look at it as a challenge. You can then put your energy into finding a solution rather than spending a lot of time and energy complaining. Here are a few steps to help you focus on the CANs rather than the cannots:

- Count the good things, not the negative
- Think positively about yourself
- Learn from your experiences
- Set realistic goals
- Be courageous
- Keep learning
- Live usefully
- Value simplicity
- Welcome change

What is your CAN statement? (example: I CAN Achieve!)

*List is adapted from the University of Buffalo: <http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/self-con.php>





Just do it.

Getting Motivated to do school work is very similar to playing a new video game. First, you are super excited to get it and to play it. Eventually, after you beat it or play it for a while you get bored of it. That is when we have to find a new way to play the game. Whether it is playing with a friend, online or on a different difficulty level, it makes the game fun and challenging again. The stages of motivation work the same way and look like this:

1. This is great—"Let's get started"
2. The thrill is gone
3. I am choosing to implement strategies—"Study with friends, change where you study, reward yourself, etc"
4. Renewed motivation—"I am ready to give it another try!"

*List adapted from The Center for Academic Success, Louisiana State University

Motivated students look like

Develop enthusiastic and motivating self-talk—"I can do this"

Set clear and achievable goals—"This trimester, I would like to spend 30 minutes a day reviewing my math notes."

Use strategies that support your learning style—"I am a visual learner, so I am going to color code my flash cards."

Are Proactive. They make things happen!

When the "thrill is gone" in my classes, what can I do to change it up:

i LIKe ★ my stYLe

I like my style

As you look around the classroom, you probably notice that no one looks the same (unless you have twins). Pretty obvious. However, what may not be so obvious is that each person may also learn differently. Understanding how you learn allows you to take control of how you study. Listed are some websites that you can visit to learn more about your learning style. Once you visit the site, complete the exercise below.

<http://ttc.coe.uga.edu/surveys/LearningStyleInv.html>

<http://www.edutopia.org/multiple-intelligences-learning-styles-quiz>

<http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

<http://www.njea.org/pdfs/LearningStyleInventory.pdf>—(printable version)

My Learning Style is: _____

After reading about your learning style(s), write several strategies you will do to improve your learning.



Check the bags at the gate.

As you enter the middle school, whether it is the first day or the 101st day, you need to begin to check your bags in at the gate. What does that mean. Well, it is common to have “stinky thought” (“I am dumb,” “I can’t do math,” or “I need to be perfect”) pop in from time to time. Like, if you score poorly on a quiz you may have one of those thoughts but it quickly goes away. But, when we dwell on one for too long it becomes a bad habit. Here is a trick to try and unpack some of the baggage and carry a lesser load. Remember, if you are having difficulty unpacking, as an adult to help you out.

Start by journaling. This sounds a lot like another homework assignment. But unpacking is work and not something we can day dream away. Once you journal your stinky thoughts it is time to change the way we look at the thought. Here are examples:

Stinky Thoughts	Change the way you view it
“I am a terrible student.”	“Although I have not done great in school so far, I know I can begin trying new ways of studying and learning
“I MUST get an “A” in this class no matter what.”	“I would love to get an “A” in the course, but I am going to release myself from the pressure of a grade, and focus my energy on learning the material. I also know that my worth is not based on
“I am not into school, but I am not really into life right now either.”	“I am definitely not enjoying school or life. But rather than dwell in this negative place, I am going to take some action—do something about it.





Extreme Makeover: Academic Edition

Sometimes, doing better in school requires us to “makeover” how we do things. It does not have to be as extreme as redoing everything about how you study, how you interact with your teachers, or even your attitude. It is finding a place to start and setting a goal. When we accomplish our goal we gain confidence to set new and sometimes more challenging goals.

Below is an exercise to help you start your academic makeover.

Subject/Attitude: _____

Goal Area: _____

What I specifically need to do/learn: _____

My Plan of Action: _____

I will need the following help and resources: _____

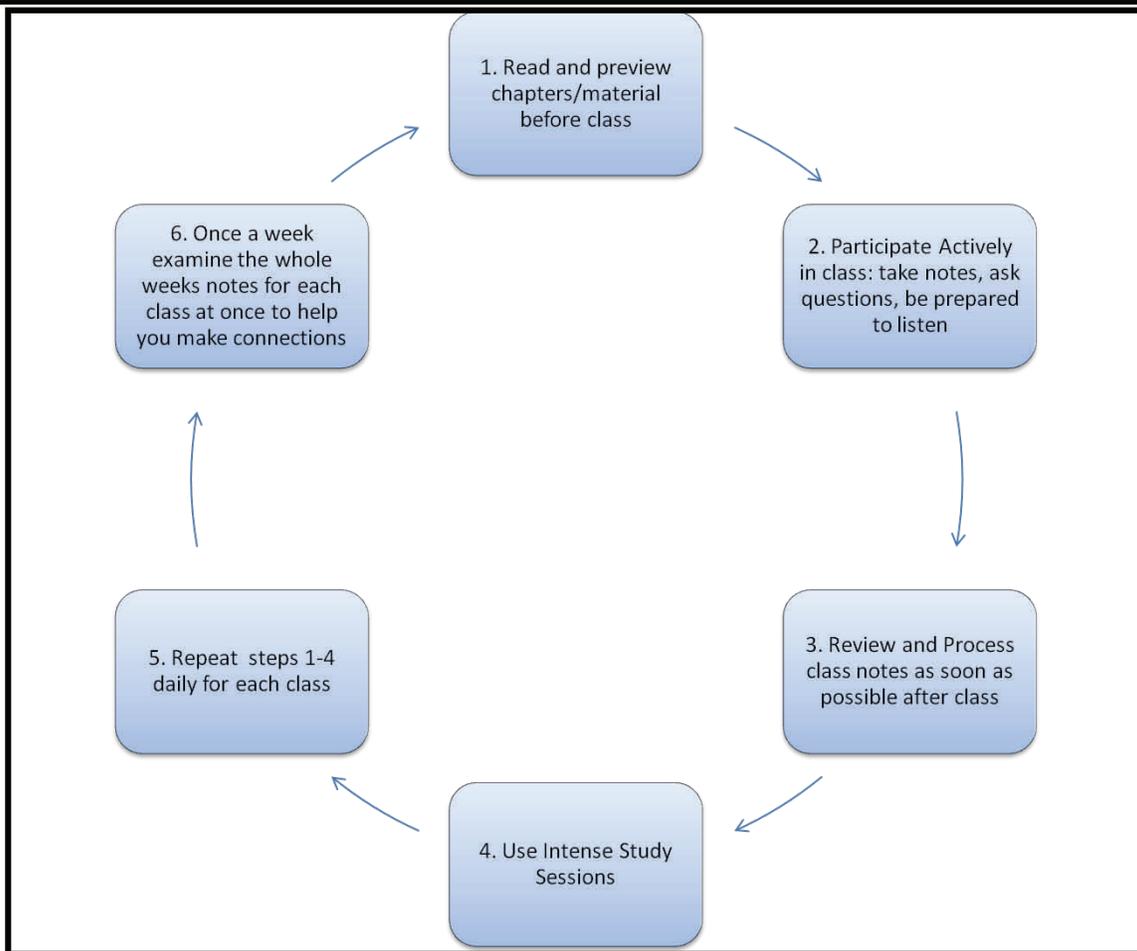
Here is my timeline: _____

Re-CYCLE your study habits



Two seconds left on the clock. Down by one and you're at the foul line. No problem. You have practiced for this moment and feel prepared.

School works the same way. We need practice to get better. Entering practice with a purpose and a routine allows you to get more out of it and actually save time in the process. Below is an example of what a routine may look like. You can always adjust it to meet your needs, but the basics should be consistent.



Intense Study Sessions

2-5 minutes - Set a Goal (ex. I am going to complete problems 1-5 in Math)

30-50 minutes - Study/Work with FOCUS and ACTION

(Read your text, create flash cards, create maps and/or outlines, work problems -without peeking at the answers, quiz yourself...) Achieve your goal!

5-10 minutes - Take a Break!

5 minutes - REVIEW what you have just have studied.

*adapted from The Center for Academic Success, Louisiana State University



Your Grades are Your Agenda

Planning to use to planner

At the beginning of each academic year, your are handed an assignment book and are expected to use it for the entire year. Sure, the teachers go over the expectations of using the planner, but how do you know you are using it right. Part of using an assignment book is making it work for you; you can use stickers, colors, rewards, what ever makes you use it. The other part is making sure you are using it correctly. Below is a rubric that you can use (along with a parent or teacher) to see how well you are using it.

Planner Usage Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Assignments with page numbers, titles of worksheets, questions to do, due date and materials needed	Consistently has planner completed with all information.	Usually has information with 1 or 2 components missing.	Occasionally has the planner completed.	Rarely has assignment notebook completed.
Long-term assignments	Consistently has long-term assignments listed each day until due.	Usually has long-term assignments listed at least 2 days before due.	Has long-term assignments listed on 1 day before due or on due date.	Rarely has long-term assignments recorded.
Test dates	Consistently has test dates listed each day until test.	Usually has test dates listed as least 2 days before test.	Has test dates listed 1 day before test or on test date.	Rarely has test dates recorded.
Extracurricular Activities (if applicable)	Consistently has scheduled extracurricular activities recorded.	Usually has scheduled extracurricular activities recorded.	Occasionally has scheduled extracurricular activities recorded.	Rarely has scheduled extracurricular activities recorded.
Scheduled homework time	Consistently has scheduled homework time in planner.	Usually has scheduled homework time in planner may be missing 1 or 2 days.	Occasionally has scheduled homework time in planner.	Rarely has scheduled homework time in planner.

*Rubric adapted from Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Programs: Linking School Success to Life Success

Candy Jar Time Management

This exercise is all about trying to get as much candy into a candy jar as possible. So think of the **biggest candy jar** you have ever seen and begin to fill it with candy. You can't just throw the candy in, you have to put it in a specific order (I don't know about you, but I like candy and I want as much as possible.). So we are going to start by putting in as many of the **super large jawbreakers** as possible. When you think it is full, try putting in a couple more. Next, grab a couple of handfuls of **sweet tarts** and put them in. Pick up your pickle jar, shake it up so they settle, then add some more. Finally, we are going to add some **nerds** until you can't possibly fit any more. Now we have to bund it all together. Take some **maple syrup** and pour it in until every nook is filled. Don't eat it all in one sitting...you'll get a belly ache.



Now, let's apply this little analogy to time management and see what each of those pieces of candy represents.

Candy Jar—the time we have each day

Super Large Jawbreakers—things that are large priorities in your life. School, Family,
Extra curricular activities

Sweet Tarts—things we have to do. Homework, chores, helping out with a sibling

Nerds—things we enjoy doing. Video games, Hanging out with friends,
Watching TV/movies

Maple Syrup—things that clutter our life. Drama, tardiness, daydreaming, gossip, etc.

When filling out your assignment book, schedule in those things that are large priorities first. When I truly pay attention to what is going on in class, it makes the assignments/studying easier. The next step would be to work on the sweet tarts, then the nerds and finally the maple syrup (because we all need a little syrup). If you spend the day focusing on the nerds and syrup, what have you accomplished. And, how much stress have you created for yourself by not focusing on what is truly important to you.

In the end, it is about prioritizing your day so you do what you have to do and still have time for the fun stuff.

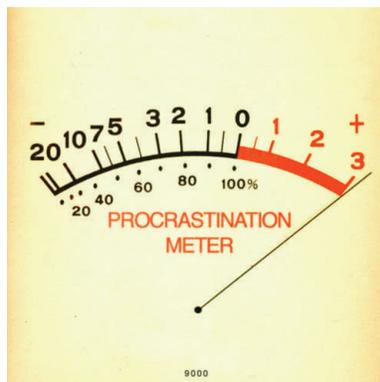
Procrastination Meter

You know what it is, and you probably have done it a number of times. But why do you procrastinate. Check out these reasons and see if any apply:

- **You Don't Understand What's Expected** – You may put off assignments or chores because you do not understand what to do.
- **You Can Get Away With It** – You understand when authority is bluffing. You put it off because there are no real consequences.
- **You're Afraid You'll Do it Wrong or Badly** – You may put off the assignment because you are afraid to start. Sometimes perfectionism plays a big part in this.
- **There's Something Better to Do** – Sometimes there is just something better to do

Once you understand why you procrastinate, you can begin to stop it. Below are some tips to help you along the way. As always, the best tip is to talk to a parent or and adult for help.

1. Put yourself in quiet time—when you feel rushed or pressured, it is hard to get it started. Slow things down and give yourself a chance to plan it out.
2. Take bites—when you eat a slice a piece, you take small bites. Same thing with projects. Complete small tasks and eventually you will consume the whole project.
3. Suffer for 15 minutes—Think about it. You can sit through 5 commercial breaks, or the previews at a movie. Sit through 15 minutes of a project. Just starting it can make it easier.
4. Get rid of the cell phones, computers, etc.—Remove those things that are distracting. If you phone is with in arms reach, it is too tempting to pick it up an text a friend.
5. Do it when your fresh—Find the time in the day when you have the most energy. When you are energized, it is easier to begin a project.

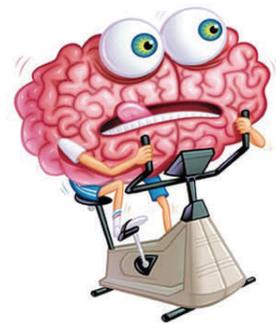




Fun with Flash Cards

Remember when flash cards were fun. Pictures. Colorful. Fun. Flash cards can still be that way. It just takes a little creativity.

- Use colored pencils/markers to help group items—Chunk your cards based on similarities and then choose a color that best fits the group.
- Add pictures to your cards—This can be a doodle or a clip art...anything that connects to the item on the card.
- Use PowerPoint—One slide is the word, the next explains it. You can be as creative as PowerPoint lets you.
- Use your smart phones—Many of these phones have apps you can use to help you study for a class. They even have ones to make flash cards.



Physically Remember It

Learning actively can involve your whole body. You can stand up and talk aloud as you study, using your arms, legs, eyes, ears and voice. Getting your body involved in the study process puts energy into the study process and makes it less boring. Maybe you have already used this strategy when preparing for a class presentation; however, it can work for learning other materials as well.

The M is silent

'Mnemonic' is another word for memory tool. Mnemonics are techniques for remembering information that is otherwise quite difficult to recall: A very simple example is the '30 days hath September' rhyme for remembering the number of days in each calendar month or remembering 'Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally' saying for the order of operations. When creating these, make them vivid and fun. Here are some tips for making lasting mnemonics:

- Use positive, pleasant images—why remember something negative
- Use vivid, colorful, sense-laden images—these are easier to remember than drab ones.
- Use all your senses to remember the information or dress up an image. Remember that your mnemonic can contain sounds, smells, tastes, touch, movements and feelings as well as pictures.
- Give your image three dimensions, movement and space to make it more vivid. You can use movement either to maintain the flow of association, or to help you to remember actions.
- Exaggerate the size of important parts of the image.
- Use humor! Funny or peculiar things are easier to remember than normal ones.
- Symbols (red traffic lights, pointing fingers, road signs, etc.) can help you remember complex messages quickly and effectively.



Ears Open

“WAH, WAH, WAAH.” Sometimes teachers sound like that. But what can you do to turn those sounds into words again. Below is a list of ideas you can try to become a better listener. For each tip, there is both an example and a non-example of the behavior. As always, don’t try to change everything at once. Pick on or two to start off with, master it and then move on.

	Example	Non-example
Choose to find the subject useful	choose to listen to discover new information	dismiss most classes as dull and they turn off quickly
Concentrate on the words and message	strive to pick every teacher's brain. Ask questions.	notice faults in a teacher's delivery or presentation
When you hear something you're not sure you agree with or do not understand react	don't jump to conclusions and then disengage. They keep conclusions tentative while getting more information	stop listening to the speaker and start listening to themselves
Identify the "big ideas"	They grab key ideas and use them as anchor points for the entire lecture	They say, "I listen only for facts." They may retain a few of those facts, but the information is usually garbled
Adjust your note taking system to the teacher's pattern	adjust their note-taking to the teacher’s style—adapt to what the teacher gives you	attempt to outline everything, believing an outline and notes are the same thing. They cannot keep up.
Stay attentive	remain focused and actively try to absorb material	let their minds to wander
Aggressively tackle difficult material	find a challenge in grasping the meaning of what is being said -- no matter how difficult the subject.	encounter a tough topic, they stop absorbing and let things start bouncing off them
Get to know the teachers	the more interesting you find your teacher, the easier it is to listen	see professors as talking heads

TAMING THE BUTTERFLIES

You've participated in class, done all of your homework, studied hard, and you think you have a grip on the material. But then the day of the test comes. Suddenly, you blank out, freeze up, zone out, or feel so nervous that you can't get it together to respond to those questions you knew the answers to just last night. If this sounds like you, you may have a case of **test anxiety** – that nervous feeling that people sometimes get when they're about to take a test.

It's pretty normal to feel a little nervous and stressed before a test. Just about everyone does. And a touch of nervous anticipation can actually help you get revved and keep you at peak performance while you're taking the test. But for some people, this normal anxiety is more intense. The nervousness they feel before a test can be so strong that it interferes with their concentration or performance.

Test anxiety is actually a type of **performance anxiety** – a feeling someone might have in a situation where performance really counts or when the pressure's on to do well. For example, a person might experience performance anxiety when he or she is about to try out for the school play, sing a solo on stage, get into position at the pitcher's mound, or step onto the foul line at a basketball game. Test anxiety can come in two forms: 1) when you are worrying about the test before you take it (anticipatory) or 2) feeling anxious when you are taking the exam (situational).

Physical Signs of Test Anxiety

During an exam, as in any stressful situations, you may experience any of the following bodily changes:

- Perspiration
- upset stomach
- sweaty palms
- rapid heart beat
- headache
- tense muscles

Effects of Test Anxiety

- Having difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper.
- Having difficulty organizing your thoughts.
- Having difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions.
- Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material.

What Can You Do?

Test anxiety can be a real problem if you're so stressed out over a test that you can't get past the nervousness to focus on the test questions and do your best work. Feeling ready to meet the challenge, though, can keep test anxiety at a manageable level.



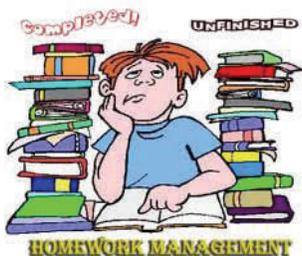
1 Use a little stress to your advantage. Stress is your body's warning mechanism – it's a signal that helps you prepare for something important that's about to happen. So use it to your advantage. Instead of reacting to the stress by dreading or complaining, take an active approach. Let stress remind you to study well in advance of a test. After all, nobody ever feels stressed out by thoughts that they might do **well** on a test.



2 Use your resources. Although a little test anxiety can be a good thing, an overdose of it is another story entirely. If sitting for a test gets you so stressed out that your mind goes blank and causes you to miss answers that you know, then your level of test anxiety probably needs some attention. Your teacher, your school guidance counselor, parent, or a tutor can be useful resources to talk to if you always get extreme test anxiety.



3 Be prepared. There's much more to learning than just hoping to soak everything up in class. That's why good study habits and skills are so important. Many students find that their test anxiety is reduced when they start to study better or more regularly. It makes sense – the more you know the material, the more confident you'll feel. Having confidence going into a test means you expect to do well. When you expect to do well, you'll be able to relax into a test after the normal first-moment





impossible=I'M POSSIBLE

Watch what you're thinking. If expecting to do well on a test can help you relax, what about when people expect they **won't** do well? Watch out for any negative messages you might be sending yourself about the test. They can contribute to your anxiety.

If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts ("I'm never any good at taking tests" or "It's going to be terrible if I do badly on this test"), replace them with positive messages. Not unrealistic positive messages, of course, but ones that are practical and true, such as "I've studied hard and I know the material, so I'm ready to do the best I can."

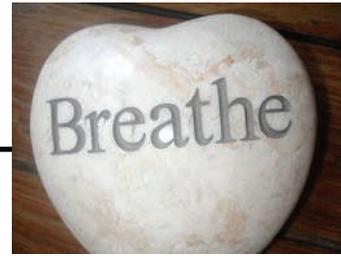
no
negative
thoughts
allowed



Accept mistakes. Another thing you can do is to learn to keep mistakes in perspective – especially if you're a perfectionist or you tend to be hard on yourself. Everyone makes mistakes, and you may have even heard teachers or coaches refer to mistakes as "learning opportunities." Learning to tolerate small failures and mistakes – like that one problem you got wrong in the math pop quiz – is a valuable skill.



Take care of yourself. It can help to learn ways to calm yourself down and get centered when you're tense or anxious. For some people, this might mean learning a simple breathing exercise or trying guided imagery. Practicing breathing exercises regularly (when you're not stressed out) helps your body see these exercises as a signal to relax. In addition, taking care of your health – such as getting enough sleep, exercise, and healthy eats before a test – can help keep your mind working at its best.



Try this simple breathing exercise!

- Close your door, set a timer for 3-5 minutes, and find a comfortable place to sit.
- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- As you inhale, think about your lungs inflating, your ribs expanding, and the breath moving through your nasal passages.
- As you exhale, think about your lungs deflating and the breath rushing out of your nasal passages.

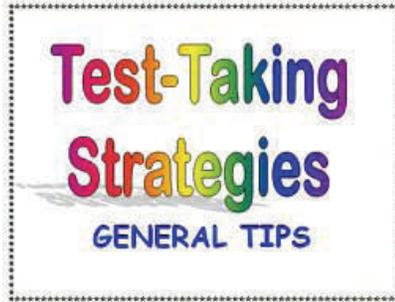
If your mind starts to wander, calmly say to yourself "thinking" and then turn your attention back to your breath.

VISUALIZE IT

Have you ever been in the middle of a stressful situation and wished you could be somewhere else-like lying on a tropical beach? Guided imagery helps you use your imagination to take you to a calm, peaceful place.

- Because of the way the mind and body are connected, guided imagery can make you feel like you are experiencing something just by imagining it.
- You use all of your senses in guided imagery. For example, if you want a tropical setting, you can imagine the warm breeze on your skin, the bright blue of the water, the sound of the surf, the sweet scent of tropical flowers, and the taste of coconut so that you actually feel like you are there.
- Imagining yourself in a calm, peaceful setting can help you relax and relieve stress.





- ✓ Preparation for your test should begin in class; this includes paying attention during class, taking good notes, studying, completing homework assignments, and reviewing study materials on a regular basis.
- ✓ Budget your time, make sure you have sufficient time to study so that you are well prepared for the test. Do not procrastinate.
- ✓ Pay attention to hints that the teacher may give about the test. Take notes and ask questions about items you may be confused about.
- ✓ Go over any material from practice tests, HW's, sample problems, review material, the textbook, class notes...
- ✓ Eat before a test. Having food in your stomach will give you energy and help you focus.
- ✓ Get at least 6 hours of sleep before the test (normally 8 hour is recommended)

Short Answer Test Tips

- ✓ Try to anticipate questions that will be asked on the test and prepare for them. Usually what your teacher emphasizes in class will be on the test.
- ✓ Try not to leave an answer blank. Show your work/write down your thoughts, even if you don't get the exact answer, partial credit may be awarded.
- ✓ If you don't know the answer, come back to it after you finish the rest of the test and make an educated guess. Other parts of the test may give you clues to what the answer may be.
- ✓ Read the question carefully and make sure that you answer everything that it asks for. Some short answer questions have multiple parts.

True-False Test Tips

- ✓ If there is no guessing penalty, then guess. You have a 50% chance of getting the right answer.
- ✓ Read through each statement carefully, and pay attention to the qualifiers and keywords.
- ✓ Qualifiers like "never, always, and every" mean that the statement must be true all of the time. Usually these type of qualifiers lead to a false answer.
- ✓ Qualifiers like "usually, sometimes, and generally" mean that the statement can be considered true or false depending on the circumstances. Usually these type of qualifiers lead to an answer of true.
- ✓ If any part of the question is false, then the entire statement is false but just because part of a statement is true doesn't necessarily make the entire statement true.



Multiple Choice Test Taking Tips

- ✓ Read the question before you look at the answer.
- ✓ Come up with the answer in your head before looking at the possible answers, this way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.
- ✓ Eliminate answers you know aren't right by drawing a line through them.
- ✓ Read all the choices before choosing your answer.
- ✓ Don't keep on changing your answer, usually your first choice is the right one, unless you misread the question.
- ✓ In "All of the above" and "None of the above" choices, if you are certain one of the statements is true don't choose "None of the above" or one of the statements are false don't choose "All of the above".
- ✓ In a question with an "All of the above" choice, if you see that at least two correct statements, then "All of the above" is probably the answer.

Essay Test Tips

- ✓ Read the directions carefully. Pay close attention to whether you are supposed to answer all the essays or only a specified amount (e.g. "Answer 2 out of the 3 questions).
- ✓ Make sure that you understand what the question is asking you. If you're not, ask your teacher.
- ✓ Make sure that you write down everything that is asked of you and more. The more details and facts that you write down, the higher your grade is going to be.
- ✓ Budget your time, don't spend the entire test time on one essay.
- ✓ If the question is asking for facts, don't give your personal opinion on the topic.
- ✓ Make an outline before writing your essay. This way your essay will be more organized and fluid.
- ✓ Don't write long introductions and conclusions, the bulk of your time should be spent on answering the question(s) asked.
- ✓ Focus on one main idea per paragraph.
- ✓ If you have time left at the end, proofread your work and correct any errors.

For more information, visit some of these websites:

Education.com

pbskids.org

Testtakingtips.com

kidshealth.org



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