GENERAL

test taking strategies for elementary students

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Test Taking Strategies for Elementary Students

Every child who enters the elementary classroom has a unique set of strengths, curiosities, and learning styles. When it comes to tests, however, the stakes feel higher, the questions feel trickier, and the clock can seem relentless. Teachers, parents, and students themselves often wonder: *How can a young learner navigate a test with confidence, focus, and success?* The answer lies not in a single magic trick but in a collection of practical, age appropriate strategies that build skills, calm nerves, and promote a love of learning.

Why Focus on Elementary Test Taking?

Elementary tests differ from high school or college exams in several ways:

- Shorter duration – tests are usually 10–20 minutes long.
- Concrete content – questions rely heavily on facts, basic math, and straightforward reading.
- Higher emotional impact – a test can feel like a big event for a six year old.
- Limited study time – many elementary students have less time for independent review.

Because of these differences, strategies must be simple, repeatable, and supportive. Below, you'll find a comprehensive guide that covers everything from pre test preparation to the moment the student walks out of the classroom.

1. Building a Strong Foundation: Study Habits for Young Minds

Good study habits form the backbone of successful test performance. They help children develop self discipline, organization, and confidence.

1.1. Create a Consistent Review Routine

Set a specific time each day for a quick review session. Even 5–10 minutes of focused practice can reinforce learning. Use a calendar or a sticky note chart to track progress.

1.2. Use Visual Aids

Children respond well to pictures, charts, and color coding. For example, a math fact chart in bright colors can help students remember addition or subtraction facts.

1.3. Practice Active Recall

Instead of simply re-reading notes, ask the student to recite or write down what they remember. This active engagement strengthens memory retrieval.

1.4. Incorporate Playful Learning

Turn study time into a game: use flashcards, educational apps, or "quiz and reward" systems that provide small incentives for correct answers.

2. Managing Test Anxiety: Calm Minds, Clear Thinking

Even the most prepared student can feel nervous. Teaching coping strategies helps them stay calm and focused.

2.1. Teach Deep Breathing Techniques

Show children how to take a slow, deep breath in for four counts, hold for four, and exhale for four. Practice this during calm moments and before the test.

2.2. Use Positive Self Talk

Encourage phrases like “I can do this,” “I am ready,” or “I will try my best.” Repeating these statements builds confidence.

2.3. Visualize Success

Ask the student to close their eyes and picture themselves answering questions confidently. Visualization can reduce anxiety and boost performance.

3. Reading Comprehension Strategies

Reading passages are common in elementary tests. These strategies help students understand and answer questions accurately.

3.1. Preview the Passage

Teach students to read the title, bold words, and any pictures before diving into the text. This gives them a mental roadmap.

3.2. Highlight Key Information

Using a highlighter or colored pencil, students can mark names, dates, or main ideas while reading.

3.3. Summarize in Their Own Words

After reading, ask the child to say or write a short summary. This confirms understanding and aids recall during the test.

3.4. Question the Text

Teach students to ask themselves questions like “What is the main idea?” or “Why did the character do that?” This active reading improves comprehension.

4. Math Test Strategies

Math in elementary school often focuses on facts, word problems, and basic operations. These techniques help students tackle each type efficiently.

4.1. Master Mental Math

Encourage mental calculations for simple addition and subtraction. Use everyday scenarios, such as counting snacks or toys, to practice.

4.2. Use the “Step by Step” Approach

For word problems, teach students to write down the known numbers, the question, and the operation needed. Breaking down the problem reduces overwhelm.

4.3. Check for Reasonable Answers

After solving, students should quickly verify if the answer makes sense in context (e.g., “Does 12 look like a realistic number of apples?”).

4.4. Practice with Timed Drills

Short, timed drills help students build speed and accuracy. Keep the drills fun by turning them into a race against the clock.

5. Science Test Techniques

Science tests often involve matching, labeling diagrams, or answering simple questions about concepts.

5.1. Visual Learning with Diagrams

Encourage students to draw or label diagrams before the test. This reinforces memory and makes recall easier.

5.2. Use Mnemonics

Short, memorable phrases help remember lists (e.g., “I before E except after C” for spelling). For science, create simple rhymes for key terms.

5.3. Relate to Everyday Life

Connect concepts to real world examples (“The water cycle is like a soap bubble that travels around the Earth”). This contextual understanding aids recall.

6. Time Management on Test Day

Even a short test can feel rushed if students don’t manage their time wisely.

6.1. Read the Instructions Carefully

Teach students to read each instruction once before starting. Skipping this step can lead to mistakes.

6.2. Allocate Time per Question

For example, if a test has 10 questions in 15 minutes, aim for about 1 minute and 30 seconds per question.

6.3. Skip and Return Strategy

If a question feels too difficult, move on and come back if time allows. This prevents getting stuck.

6.4. Double Check Answers

When time permits, review answers. A quick scan can catch simple errors.

7. Test Day Preparation Checklist

Getting ready the night before and the morning of the test reduces stress.

7.1. Pack Essentials the Night Before

- Student’s ID or name tag
- Approved pencils, erasers, and colored pencils
- Calculator (if allowed)
- Snack and water bottle (if permitted)

7.2. Review a Summary Sheet

Provide a one page cheat sheet that lists key facts, formulas, or vocabulary. Reviewing it once can boost confidence.

7.3. Arrive Early

Getting to the test location early allows the student to settle in, find a comfortable seat, and take a few calming

breaths.

8. Parent and Teacher Support

Adults play a crucial role in reinforcing strategies and creating a supportive learning environment.

8.1. Encourage Consistent Practice

Parents can help by setting a short daily study time, using flashcards, or practicing math drills.

8.2. Model Calm Behavior

When parents stay calm during test preparation, children learn to emulate that composure.

8.3. Collaborate with Teachers

Teachers can share classroom strategies, provide extra practice materials, and offer feedback on progress.

8.4. Celebrate Effort, Not Just Results

Focusing on the hard work and improvement helps students develop a growth mindset.

9. Resources for Continued Growth

Below are a few tools and resources that can complement the strategies discussed.

- Quizlet – Create flashcard sets for math facts or vocabulary.
- Khan Academy Kids – Interactive lessons in math, reading, and science.
- ReadTheory – Adaptive reading comprehension practice.
- Printable worksheets from Education.com or Understood.org.

Conclusion

Test taking strategies for elementary students are less about memorizing answers and more about building habits, managing emotions, and applying clear, step by step techniques. By weaving consistent study routines, anxiety reduction practices, and subject specific tactics into everyday learning, children can approach tests with confidence and curiosity. Parents, teachers, and the students themselves are partners in this journey—each role reinforcing the other to create a supportive environment where young learners thrive.

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