

THANK YOU for downloading *Test Secrets*
that I created **FREE** for you.

It's only fair that you teach your students the Test Secrets. Shhhhh!
Teach them before taking a Benchmark Test or a test in your room. If you
use these strategies all year with normal reading assignments, students will
be in the habit of using them. They will apply them to taking tests easily.
It's not too late to teach them before your big test. Make your time together
a fun, relaxing, laughing time. You will see what I mean by reading Test Secrets.

In return, I ask that you...

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to email with questions**

**SINCERELY,
KAREN
HAAG**

TEST SECRETS! Shhhhh!

“Combined, these strategies may help you get to the next level. As Chef Emeril would say they could give you ‘BAM!’ power... Let’s cut to the chase: everything you do in your classroom is likely to have SOME effect on the brain. Brain-based education says, ‘Be purposeful about it.’ Now, go have some fun and make another miracle happen! (Jensen)”

Test days are good days ☺: Often we scare students by telling them that test makers are trying to trick them or our own fears surface as we face down the test. However, you must convince students that test days are a good days. They’ve worked hard all year and this is the day to show the state what they know. They will get extra recess time in the afternoon, they will get a new pencil, they will get time with their friends after the test - whatever you will be sharing, tell them now. “Most of all, dopamine is enhanced by looking forward to something very good... You can influence testing outcomes by "prepping" their brain for success. It has long been proposed that motivational responses that were subtle could serve as priming to effect academic performance (Jensen).”

Think of tests as games. Try to do the best you can instead of trying for a perfect score. Without even thinking about it, we may have sent the message that students have to get every answer right. They don’t know that they can miss some questions and still pass the test. This concept can be explained correctly and impact test results. If students don’t know an answer, they shouldn’t stress about it Students should try every question and not leave one blank. Guessing is not penalized on this test.

Mark the questions that are confusing in order to take a second look at just those when checking tests. We tell students to check their tests when they're done. Do they know what this means? For a struggling reader it doesn’t mean read every selection again and check every question and answer. They just won’t do it. It means, mark the questions that give you trouble as you read the test. For example, star the questions in the booklet. DON’T mark the tough questions on the answer sheet. When you’re finished, take a mental break, a deep breath, and then go back and check the ones that you marked. These tests are untimed and students will use the time effectively if shown how.

Writing what makes you nervous will help you pass a test. This tip comes directly from Eric Jensen: “One well-designed study showed that writing about testing worries prior to taking the exam boosts exam performance in the classroom. The study authors expected that sitting for an important exam leads to worries about the situation and its consequences that undermine test performance. What the authors tested was... whether having students write down their thoughts about an upcoming test could improve test performance. This simple intervention, a brief expressive writing assignment that occurred immediately before taking an important test, significantly improved students' exam scores, especially for students habitually anxious about test taking. Simply writing about one's worries before a high-stakes exam can boost test scores. It does it by more than 10% and it's quick and free (Beilock).”

Read the questions before you read the selection to help you set a purpose for reading. We teach students to set a purpose for reading before they read. When taking tests, the purpose is set for them. If students read the questions before reading the selection, they know the purpose for reading. They have time to read the questions before they read the selection, but they don’t know that. In addition,

if when reading they come across an answer they can mark that answer right away. In other words, students can mark the answers to questions out of order. This is not cheating, but students don't know that either unless we tell them.

Reword the questions into every day language. Lucy Calkins writes, "Most tests are written in a unique form of English because it is 'hyper-proper.' As a result, students may not know what information the question is asking them to find. Again, let them in on the secret: Tests are written in a language we probably don't use when we talk to our friends and families. Sometimes you will need to think about what the question wants you to find. Calkins suggests exercises in which the students rewrite questions in every day language. I used my test prep books to locate questions that were hyper-proper. After sharing the secret, I wrote one question on the board every day for a couple weeks and students rewrote them. Then, I included them periodically throughout the year or for a couple weeks before a Benchmark test. The students worked in teams to "interpret" the questions. At first, this was difficult. But with time, students got better at rewording questions. They even began to see patterns.

"Oh, this is a main idea question."

"They want to know what detail is missing from the graphic organizer."

"I better go back and reread to see what this vocabulary word means."

Cover the answers, determine your answer, and find the answer that matches what you think. I learned this strategy from a good test taker. Besides scanning the questions before reading the selection, he used this test secret. When working on the questions you haven't answered yet, cover up the answers before reading the question with your scrap paper. Think about what the answer could be. Look back at the passage and find a reference that proves you're right. Then, look at the answers and find the one that matches. Mark it in the booklet. Read the other answers to see if they are definitely wrong. By thinking through the answer logically first, it helped him avoid falling into the trap of choosing the answer that sounded right. This is one of those strategies that I teach to everyone but don't require. They try it and see if it works for them. It works especially well in math, we've found. On some reading questions, it works better to look at all the answers and then choose the best one. This is a secret that kids can experiment with or have in their hip pocket when they land on a tough question.

You have time to overview the selections. Making connections to text before reading preps the brain to be ready to receive new information. I teach this strategy all year long so it is not a stretch to use it on tests, too. What students don't know is that they have time to preview tests, too. I ask them to look at the title, the author, the text structure, the length, and read the questions before they read the selection. By overviewing, the brain then knows where to park the information so that it can be retrieved. Students find out if the topic or author is familiar or new and whether the genre requires slow, careful reading (poetry, nonfiction, graphs, charts), an average pace (fiction), or very little reading at all (recipes). If the length is daunting, I teach them to use their scrap paper to cover it up and read it in small bites. Overviewing also gives the brain a break from just reading. We warm up to exercise so why not warm up to read each selection, also?

You have time to code the test. All year, we've been coding our selections to prepare for discussion. Students can use the same strategy when preparing to answer test questions as well. Again, they might not know they have time. The codes are different. Whereas for book clubs, the readers mark

words they don't know, underline key phrases, and think about how the text affects them, thinking about these ideas in the same way won't work on tests. For tests, I suggest circling 1-2 words per passage that they think the test maker will ask them about - just so they can find the context quickly. Students are looking for a word that is written with context clues because this is a reading test. Only words that are explained will be tested because the test maker wants to see if the test taker can use the clues to figure out the meaning of the word. It may even be a word the student knows. It may be bolded or italicized. Also, I suggest students highlight phrases that the test maker may ask questions about - again just enough so they can find the reference quickly. Finally, I ask that the students write 1-2 words in the margin to summarize each section or important paragraphs - just so they can find the information when they need it.

There will be above grade level passages on your test. Treat them like any challenging text.

Students don't know that there will be some easy, some just-right, and some challenging passages on texts. What will they do when they hit that hard text if they don't know it's coming? Give up? One thing I can do is make sure everybody reads challenging texts during the year and show them how to apply different strategies to difficult reading.

With tests, I use the game analogy again. I connect taking tests to what they know. When playing video games, they blast right through the easy guys coming at them. But, when the big monster comes for them, do they just quit and start crying? Of course not. They give the guy everything they've got. Sometimes they win. Sometimes, they lose. If they think of the passages as the big guys and the little guys, they know what to do. But if they think that every selection is the same, they're surprised that they have to face down the big guys.

Some teachers tell students to complete the easy passages first, mark what they skipped in their booklets, and come back to those questions at the end. Some students may get offline if they skip around. For some students, this is a good strategy. Again, you have to teach what you are comfortable with.

The test has been field-tested and is written correctly. If something doesn't make sense, use your fix-up strategies. I've watched students "fix" the spelling on tests, capitalize words that they thought needed a cap, and raise their hand to say that the author of the test "made a mistake". Students need to know what field-testing means to avoid this trap. Yes, there are mistakes on my tests and there may even be mistakes on district tests, but there are no mistakes on standardized tests. If the student thinks something is wrong or doesn't make sense, they should use the fix-up strategies you've taught them. The best strategies are rereading or reading on until the text makes sense. But, students! Students! Please don't fix the test. It doesn't need fixing.

You can take silent breaks during the test.

If students get tired or bored, they can take silent, mental breaks or mini-vacations. Rubbing your ears, stretching your arms beside you, opening and closing your hands, looking out the window a minute, and stretching your head up and down can help students re-focus. They can use any mental break that does not distract the other test takers. However, they might not know that.

"Although you can't get inside your students' heads and shake up their brains, there are some activities that you can do to make their brains more alert and to help improve learning. Vigorous physical activity gets the blood flowing and releases stress (Feldman)."

Remember to use breaks during your teaching so that students know how to use breaks during the test (if your state provides them). Their brains will work better if they move during the break. It's not

a sit back and relax kind of break. It's a stretch, bend over, run in place, and cross-lateral movement kind of break. "Cross-lateral movements are those in which arms and legs cross over from one side of the body to the other. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and the right side of the brain controls the left side. Both sides are forced to communicate when arms and legs cross over. This "unsticks" the brain and energizes learning (Feldman)." However, if you don't prepare them for breaks, they won't use them effectively.

http://www.drjean.org/html/monthly_act/act_2006/03_Mar/pg04.html

Move back and forth between the questions and the passage when answering test questions. We are including a checklist so that you can assess what test strategies students use. When students take any kind of test, use your test checklist to analyze their behaviors and report back to them. Eventually, you'd like 100% understanding about how to use test-taking strategies. This will only happen if you let them know ahead of time what they should be doing on tests, you give them feedback, and they reflect. "Debbie Barber, a sixth grade teacher at Ackerman Middle School in Canby, Oregon says, 'My kids have a chance to improve their scores by doing a test autopsy. They correct their mistakes and then write a half page reflection on why they did so poorly and what they should have done differently. They earn a half point for each corrected answer. Not only do the parents love it, the test scores have improved and the students are really taking ownership of their work!' (Jensen)." The highest-level readers move back and forth between the questions and the test questions to see if there are references to provide evidence for their answer choices. You want to watch for that and highlight the behavior when you see it during a reflection time you build in after every test.

Explain to students is that they do not have to prepare by memorizing any thing for this test. Their job is to find clues! They must locate references to make decisions about answers. Often this is news to students: everything you need is on the test somewhere! Your job is to find it!

Play Games and Celebrate!

[The chemical] dopamine can be strengthened by voluntary gross motor repetitive movements like marching, relays, playing a game. It is enhanced by strong positive feelings like reunions and celebrations. Most of all, it's enhanced by looking forward to something very good (Jensen). Jeopardy, Password, Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? are included in your packet.

Relaxed But Ready

Norepinephrine is enhanced by 1) risk, like a student speaking in front of his/her peers, 2) urgency, like serious deadlines for compelling tasks, and 3) excitement, like theater, competition, comedy, the arts (Jensen).

Take the Test in the Room Where Learning Took Place or Show Students the Room

"In short, if your students can't be in the test-giver's room to learn the material, at least, bring them into the testing room and do a review there days before the event." In addition, we found that if students were to be tested out of the room, it was helpful if they met the teacher and the proctor who would be running the tests a couple days ahead of time. It goes without saying that students with test modifications should be using them all year long.

Chant, Sing Songs and Raps, Read Poetry

Students become confident by reciting raps like the one I provided. What's even better is when students create their own raps or poems or songs. I included some URL addresses where you and your students can view other raps to inspire you to create!

Rock This Test! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1xJHYJ75Ok&feature=related>

Test Taker Face: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1xJHYJ75Ok&feature=related>

My Pencil: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufB9xj1IFQ4>

Sources

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