

## READING/ENGLISH/ LANGUAGE ARTS

Some tests assess students' reading comprehension skills. Others test student's knowledge and use of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Many tests now combine reading and language arts questions in the same section of the test. The integration of these two curricular areas is found in classroom instruction AND on tests.

1. Standardized tests are predominately reading tests, so practicing **READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS** prior to taking such a test is recommended.
  - ◆ To help students prepare for sections on a test where they are instructed to read a passage and answer questions about the passage, have them practice the skill of reading the test questions first so they can be aware of information that they need to respond to the questions. This is called 'reading with a purpose'.
  - ◆ 'Skimming' reading passages is a good test-taking tip. Examine words in dark, bold type and subtitles of each section presented in that section of the material.
  - ◆ Direction words are a clue as to how the question should be answered. Direction words call for higher order thinking skills to be used, so teach students what process the question is calling for by examining the words in the directions. For example;
    - ◆ "Illustrate the difference between a triangle and a circle." Illustrate means...
    - ◆ "Compare and contrast milk and water." Compare and contrast means...
  - ◆ Reading comprehension tests almost always have 'main idea' questions. These may be disguised as 'most important' questions or 'topic' questions. So when reading keep an eye out for key main ideas, especially at the beginning and end of each paragraph.
  - ◆ Answer questions based only on the information given, not upon general knowledge.
  - ◆ There is usually a direct correspondence between the order of questions following a reading passage and where the answers can be

found in the passage. Tests usually follow a logical and sequential order in presenting information and then asking questions about the students have just read.

- ◆ Always look back to check for clues to preceding questions. The answers to a reading selection will come from the information stated in the passage. The answer may be;
  - ◆ A fact stated in the selection
  - ◆ An idea inferred, or hinted at, by facts in the selection
  - ◆ The students own opinion, based on facts in the selection
  
- 2. VOCABULARY tests ask about the meanings of words and often check to see if the students can determine the meaning by using context clues. Some tests call for the student to identify synonyms, homonyms, and antonyms. Vocabulary skill development begins early. Learn those words!
  - ◆ A significant portion of performances on tests hinge on a strong emphasis on vocabulary. For the average student most vocabulary is learned in everyday contexts (books, magazines, movies, newspapers, radio, TV and conversation). Exposure to a wide-variety of resources will help to build a strong foundation in vocabulary and communication skills.
  - ◆ About 60% of words in the English language are of Latin and Greek origin. One strategy for building vocabulary is to teach commonly used prefixes, suffixes, and root words, then when a student encounters either new or familiar words they can determine it's meaning enabling them to select the correct answer on the vocabulary portion of the test.
  - ◆ Vocabulary skill development is much, much more than just knowing how to pronounce a word and spell it correctly. Students should be able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through usage and application.
    - ◆ Students use the words correctly in an oral presentation.
    - ◆ When students are decoding a word, they know how to use context clues to understand it's meaning.
    - ◆ Words are used correctly in sentences and paragraphs.
  - ◆ Choose the correct words. Certain tests ask for the correct words or phrases to complete a sentence. This kind of test item shows how well the student can use the English language. When writing the answer pay attention to:
    - ◆ Singular and plural subjects and verbs

- ◆ The verb tense (past, present, and future)
- ◆ The correct form for the pronouns.

3. GRAMMAR, USAGE, AND MECHANICS (GUM) are another knowledge base that is tested on reading and language arts tests.

- ◆ Regular practice with exercises such as 'DOL: Daily Oral Language' and 'DLP: Daily Language Practice' are a good way to prepare students to be able to identify correct and incorrect usage. When focusing on GUM, have students correct the mistakes that they are able to identify. Here are sample questions to ask when doing assessing students knowledge of language arts skills:
  - ◆ Is there a mistake in capitalization?
    - ◆ Some tests ask you to find words with mistakes in capitalization. As each question is read, think about the kinds of words that begin with a capital letter: 1.) The first word in a sentence and in a direct quotation, 2.) Special or important words; proper names, names of months, days, and holidays; official titles; titles of stories, books, magazines, poems, songs, plays, movies, and TV shows.
  - ◆ Finding wrong or missing punctuation
    - ◆ Correct punctuation helps you understand what is written. Some tests will ask for punctuation mistakes in sentences. Others will ask the student to decide whether a punctuation mark is missing or not. When you work on these kinds of problems, remember the basic punctuation marks that are used:
      - ◆ To end a sentence (.) (!) (?)
      - ◆ To separate items in a sentence (,) (;) (:)
      - ◆ To begin and end a conversation (")
      - ◆ To show a contraction and possession (')
      - ◆ To abbreviate (.)
  - ◆ Is there a spelling mistake?
    - ◆ Spelling tests ask the student if words are spelled correctly or not. The correct answer may be a word that is misspelled. While reading the test item, watch out for:
      - ◆ Words ending in (y): y + ed, y + es, y + s, y = l + es
      - ◆ Words with double letters: batter, follow
      - ◆ Words with silent letters: glue, stew
      - ◆ Different spelling patterns that have the same sound: peek/peak, bite/night

- ◆ Eliminate wrong choices quickly. Look carefully at each word; don't waste time on words that you know are spelled correctly. If unsure about a word, say the word aloud. Hearing it may remind you of the correct spelling pattern.
  - ◆ Remember that unnecessary capital letters and punctuation, and incorrect spelling are mistakes. Finding the errors is one way to check students understanding and use of these skills.
4. Identifying a sentence and its parts is another skill that is tested. Some questions ask to identify parts of a sentence. Others ask students to tell whether a group of words is a complete sentence or an incomplete sentence, phrase, or run-on sentence. Still others have the students put the sentences in a logical and sequential order to construct a sensible paragraph.
5. Paragraphs formation is an essential skill for students to acquire, it becomes especially important when a test question calls for an essay answer:
- ◆ To remember a good rule of thumb for writing a paragraph, think of the following jingle: **"TELL-TELL-TELL" ... "TELL THEM WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO TELL THEM, THEN TELL THEM, THEN TELL THEM WHAT YOU JUST TOLD THEM."**
  - ◆ Even very young students, first graders, are taught how to write a paragraph. The minimum is three sentences: an opening, supporting details, and a closing. Older students are expected to be able to construct paragraphs of longer lengths, including a written response that is a series of paragraphs.

# SCIENCE

In assessing student's knowledge and understanding about science, tests focus on BOTH *process* and *content*.

- ◆ One way that science content is presented is in reading passages. Reading comprehension skills are required to perform well on these types of tests. The questions are asked at all levels of thinking – from fact and recall to analyzing and predicting, etc...
- ◆ Knowing key vocabulary words is very important. But knowing the process and the sequence of steps necessary that goes along with the words is where the teacher can truly determine if the students understand the material. (On the TerraNova test, specifically, it is divided 50/50% in terms of content and process.)
- ◆ Teach students the steps in the 'Inquiry Process', as well as other problem-solving strategies. Knowing what the strategies are is one piece of the puzzle, knowing which one would be best to use in a given situation is how a student can demonstrate true understanding.
- ◆ Higher order thinking skills are utilized to solve many science test questions.
  - ◆ For example, the directions state that a set of objects needs to be sorted and grouped according to specified attributes.
  - ◆ In multi-step directions, after the students complete the task of sorting and grouping the objects, then they would be asked to describe in writing how the objects are similar, the same, different, or unlike from each other.
  - ◆ In another type of problem, students might be called upon to use other skills learned in science class, they would be given a set of objects and a positive exemplar would be illustrated. Based on those criteria, students would have to identify which of the other objects would belong in the same set.
  - ◆ A common approach on standardized tests is to use negative exemplars. For example, questions would be worded such as; "Which \_\_\_ would not be the correct \_\_\_." This type of question is often difficult for students to figure out because we most often call on them to identify the one right (positive) answer. By asking them to find the

one answer choice, which is NOT the right one, they have to approach solving the problem in a different way.

- ◆ BOTH science and social studies tests require students to read and interpret tables, charts, graphs, maps, and other graphic illustrations. Data analysis is a skill used in all curricular areas at every grade level.
- ◆ Remember when creating tables, charts, and graphs, students are required to add title and label columns.

# Social Studies

Our social studies curriculum focuses on four major themes:

- ◆ 1.) Geographic Perspectives
  - ◆ 2.) Historical and Cultural Perspectives
  - ◆ 3.) Civics and Government
  - ◆ 4.) Economic Perspectives
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- ◆ Social studies concepts are presented in a variety of forms. The most common are tables, charts, graphs, time lines, illustrations, and maps. Students should become familiar with data display in many forms and then be able to analyze and interpret what is presented and answer questions about it.
  - ◆ Instruction in the classroom often integrates different subject areas and concepts into other areas of study. On tests therefore, it is only natural to see test questions imitate the same approach. It may be a social studies test, but one section may have temperature patterns (math/measurement) presented in a table and weather patterns (science) described for questions that pertain to topics of study in geography and regions and nations.