

Table of Contents

Introduction.....6

TEST-TAKING SKILLS

Focus on Test-Taking Skills.....9	During the Test35
Becoming “Test-wise”10	Multiple Choice Tests.....38
Reasons for Poor Performance on Tests12	True and False Tests.....40
Test Anxiety...and How to Free Yourself13	Matching Tests42
Symptoms of Test Anxiety14	Fill-in-the-Blank Tests.....43
Strategies to Stop Test Anxiety15	Number Tests.....44
Preparation Before the Test.....17	Spelling Tests46
Test Review Sheet20	Spelling Rules.....48
Forming a Study Group.....21	Essay Tests.....50
Test-Taking Tools.....25	Interpret Essay Instructions.....55
List of “Qualifiers”27	Essay Answer Format58
Intelligent Guessing Strategies28	Open-Book Tests.....59
Cramming – Even Though You Shouldn’t.....33	Take-Home Tests61
Just Before the Test34	Steps to Test Taking.....63
	After the Test.....64



INTRODUCTION

Students of all abilities are often at risk when it comes to using successful learning strategies. Learning how to learn – applying successful techniques – is like mountain climbing with a backpack equipped with appropriate tools.

Throughout life, we are always facing new and challenging mountains, and we depend upon the tools we carry with us to help us reach the top and attain our goals. It is vital for us to stock our backpacks with both the right background experiences and the tools to achieve a successful ascent. Most students forgo learning basic climbing skills or carefully gathering learning tools because they don't feel the need for them. But then, when the mountain finally looms before them, they often cannot begin to climb (much less scale) the peak. They are lost.

For many, the big mountain appears overwhelming and the climb hopeless. They begin to doubt their abilities, intelligence and capabilities for learning.

Some potential climbers have natural ability and do not bother with extended practice, essential equipment and critical experience. They may succeed for a while, but they usually become lost when they need this combination of resources the most. All too often, students find themselves suddenly facing the stressful predicament of acquiring *unfamiliar learning skills* and *content* simultaneously. They find themselves out on a ledge with no tools to help them.

Learning and practising good, useful and appropriate study skills builds self-confidence so that when faced with the challenge, students can successfully conquer their own mountains. It is vital they *learn how to learn* along with what they learn. Learning to learn is one of the most basic and important lifelong skills we can acquire. Our lives of learning are filled with hills and mountains. It's simply not enough to know what to climb; we must also know how to climb.

Learning to Learn: Test-Taking Skills is a book intended for students who want a hands-on guide to taking tests in any subject. This book is not a book simply to read – it is a book to use, write in and tear apart. It is an interactive book filled with practical hints, methods, tips, procedures, resources and tools that will help students succeed in school and in life. Care has been taken to omit any “educational jargon” and to present the material in a straightforward manner.

The format of organised step-by-step procedures has been broken down into manageable blocks that can apply across the content areas. Throughout the book, the main concepts are stressed with a positive attitude, a feeling of accomplishment and self-worth and a sense of humour. Good ideas are easy to find, digest and put to immediate use.

Begin today to fill those backpacks with terrific lifelong learning skills and climb any “learning mountain” with confidence!



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BECOMING “TEST-WISE”

In order to do well on a test, you must know the subject matter as well as how to take the test. Knowing how to demonstrate your full potential and the knowledge that you have gained is called “test-wisdom”. Your intelligence and previous knowledge combined with new information that you learn in preparation for tests should result in your ability to perform well and succeed.

The following pages will give you numerous strategies to apply before, during and after taking a test. Research indicates that as many as twenty points can be gained simply by using good “test-wisdom” tools.

Using your study time effectively to prepare for a test is a key factor in taking tests. Your approach to studying will be determined by the type of test. Basically, there are two types of exams:

- (1) objective (multiple-choice, true/false, matching, fill-in-the-blank) and
- (2) subjective (essay).

Both of these “types” can be found in standardised as well as non-standardised exams.

Standardised tests are those that have established norms (the average achievement of a large group) which allow teachers to compare your score against the scores of other students. These tests often are given in booklet form to large groups and are used to predict your achievement and skills in certain areas.

Some examples of standardised tests are:

- 1. Achievement Tests or Standardised Tests** – measure skills, knowledge or your mastery of content in a specific subject area.
- 2. Aptitude Tests** – predict your success in a course or program; often determine entrance into certain university courses or jobs.
- 3. Diagnostic Tests** – show strengths and weaknesses in a specific subject area.

Non-standardised tests do not have norms and usually are the tests most teachers give to “gauge” a student’s knowledge. Such tests usually are constructed by the teacher and are taken by the student. The remainder of this chapter will deal with non-standardised tests and how to prepare for them and take them with success.



BECOMING “TEST-WISE”

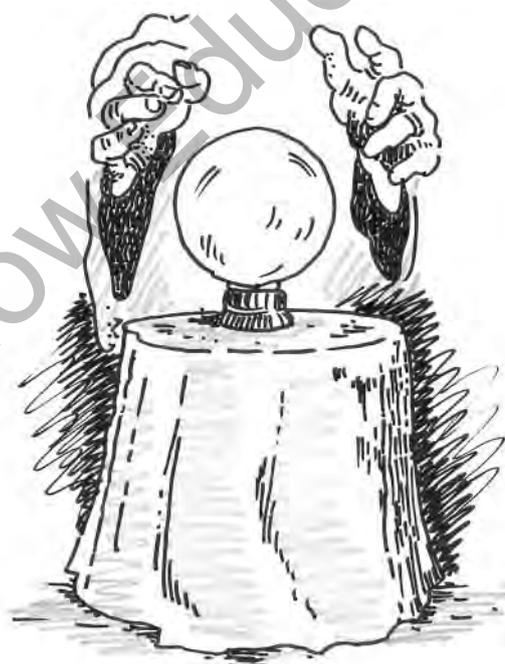
There are many important and critical aspects that lead to good test scores. Probably the most important are an intention to do well on the test and to have a positive mental attitude before the test. Believing that you are capable of achieving the score you want is half the battle.

If you can understand that testing is an essential part of the learning process and that you actually can learn from tests, then you will be that much ahead of the game. This also can aid in learning how to control test anxiety and change negative energy into positive energy. Recognising that tests do not always measure what you learn, and that some teachers make poor tests, should help you to be kinder to yourself when results are lower than you anticipate.

If you rely on thorough knowledge of the subject matter, common sense and using test-taking skills, you can relax and expect success when taking a test!

Studying, understanding and applying the following information about how to become “test-wise” could possibly raise your test scores for years to come. It definitely will make you a more relaxed and successful student! As you review these test-taking techniques, focus on the elements that best fit your learning modality: visual, auditory or kinesthetic. You can learn more about learning modalities in *Learning to Learn, Learning Styles and Memory Techniques*.

A few suggested test-taking aids for the three modalities are:



VISUAL:	AUDITORY:	KINESTHETIC:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use “cue” words. • Use graphic organisers. • Form pictures in your mind. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to yourself to reduce stress. • Repeat mnemonics to yourself. • Read all directions twice to yourself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relax muscles in body. • Stretch in your chair. • Breathe slowly.

TEST ANXIETY...AND HOW TO FREE YOURSELF

Marks, marks, marks! A mark on a test reflects how well you did on one particular test – it doesn't necessarily measure your intelligence, how much you learnt, your creativity or your worth as a person. It's important to keep this in mind and to view your scores in proper perspective with the rest of your life.

If you have “butterflies” in your stomach before a test, don't be disturbed. Most people get them. A little extra “charge” of adrenaline can help you perform at your best. Turning that extra bit of energy into a positive attribute actually can increase your test score. However, real test anxiety can block your memory and prevent you from doing well. By understanding and accepting test anxiety – then applying successful tools to conquer it – you can overcome this barrier and apply effective test-taking strategies.

Carefully consider the test anxiety information on pages 14–16 and try some of the suggestions the next time you find yourself becoming anxious before, during or after a test.



INTELLIGENT GUESSING STRATEGIES

The intelligent guessing strategies on pages 29–32 should be used only as a last resort if you don't know the answer and if you will not be penalised for guessing. If the test scoring system does not deduct points for wrong answers, it is always better to guess than to leave questions unanswered. Be sure to find out if guessing is penalised before taking the test.

Always choose an answer or “fill in” the answer and flag it (circle the number, draw a star or question mark beside the question, etc.) so you can quickly determine the questions that need special attention when you are checking/reviewing your test.

Fill in the answer the first time instead of “skipping” it with the intention of returning. It is very possible that time might run out and you won't have the opportunity to return to the question. Use any extra time to double-check flagged questions. Think carefully before changing your first answer. Odds are that your first response is the correct one.

Research indicates that appropriate and correct application of intelligent guessing techniques can raise test scores significantly. Learn the following strategies well and use them with care. Remember to apply them only as a last resort if your recall fails or if you are totally unfamiliar with the material.



INTERPRET ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

If you are instructed to:	You will need to:	Sample Instruction:
Analyse	Separate the issue, problem or question into its component parts. Draw conclusions about the relationships among the parts.	Analyse the author's use of dialogue in the story.
Argue (or Persuade)	Investigate an issue or question and present evidence to defend a position.	Present an argument for or against the premise that the internet does more harm than good.
Classify	Place ideas into groups based on some commonly shared characteristics. Name or title each group.	Classify the following titles according to genre.
Compare	List similarities and differences and think critically about them.	Compare the book and film versions of <i>The Hunger Games</i> .
Contrast	Appraise differing ideas, items or events in respect to differences.	Contrast the processes of transpiration and respiration.
Critique	Give a judgment based on merit, using examples to support your interpretation.	Offer a critique of the new city ordinance banning skateboards on city footpaths.
Defend	State an idea or position clearly, giving reasons to show why the idea is valid. Address and argue against opposing claims.	Defend the idea that students should be allowed to bring mobile phones to class.
Define	Determine the meaning and explain it well.	Define the idiom, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush".
Describe	Use words to paint a vivid image in the mind of a reader. Or, give an outline or account of the structure.	Describe the blastoff of a rocket heading into space.
Diagram	Use a drawing to show an arrangement of components and the relationships among them.	Diagram the structure of the United Nations.