

Making the Most of Reading Tests



Reading tests and your child

Your child's teachers measure literacy skills by classroom observation, as well as by evaluating class work and homework. They will meet with you and your child to

review progress, and they will also administer formal and informal reading tests.

In many countries, governments make schools accountable for student performance on standardized tests. These so-called "high-stakes" tests are used to determine how much progress a student, teacher, or school has made, with direct—and sometimes serious—consequences for falling short of expectations.

These tests can be valuable tools, but sometimes too much importance is placed on the results. Dr. Peter Afflerbach of the University of Maryland, the author of *Understanding and Using Reading Assessment, K-12*, says that many people don't realize the severe limitations of using any single test to tell the whole story of a child's reading ability.

As a parent or caregiver, you need to learn all you can about the testing your child undergoes, as well as how to help him or her prepare for all kinds of tests.

Multiple measures of achievement

Standardized tests score student performance on a specific task or a limited range of tasks. That score can then be compared to those of other individuals or groups who have taken the same test.

Classroom-based tests measure a range of skills and understandings across a group of students. The results are used to identify areas in which additional instruction would help the class as a whole, or individual students.

Neither of these tests provides a detailed picture of an individual's overall reading skill or an "objective" measure of a particular reading skill against a broader standard of performance.

To get around the "blind spots" in any single type of test, many reading teachers favor an approach called *multiple measures of achievement*. They use a number of different tools (including standardized test results) to assess student progress, including

- Sitting one-on-one with a child who reads aloud from a book and responds to questions about the text
- Observing a child read silently on his or her own and then evaluating the child's written response to a series of questions
- Grading written class work or homework
- Having the child do "cloze tasks," which require filling in the blanks in a text by using context clues to determine missing words
- Reading aloud to the class and having children form written or oral responses (this tests a child's listening comprehension, as opposed to reading comprehension; both are important)
- Testing a child's ability to hear different phonemes (parts of words broken down into individual sounds), such as the difference between *thin* and *fin* or *her* and *hear*

Teachers use information gained from these sorts of informal reading tests to shape daily instruction in a way that addresses each child's specific weaknesses and strengths.



“While standardized tests measure accountability, it is the other regular daily association that helps us *achieve* accountability,” says Afflerbach. “A teacher who asks good questions and closely monitors student progress is working every day in the classroom to make teaching as excellent as it can be.”

Preparing for reading tests

Reading tests are a part of your child’s educational experience, and there are a number of ways you can help him or her prepare to do well:

- Talk to your child about the upcoming test. Encourage him or her to prepare, but explain that a set score isn’t as important as doing one’s best.
- Make sure your child’s sleeping and waking schedule is regular in the days leading up to the test. A well-rested child will be better able to follow directions, focus on required tasks, and feel more confident.
- Be positive when asking your child how the test went. If you act worried, your anxiety will be noticed. Treat the test as just one component of your child’s educational achievements.



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Talking to your child’s teacher

Your child’s teacher is familiar with each student’s literacy level, as well as with the tests required by your school district. Talking to the teacher will help you learn more about test content and methods and gain a better understanding of your child’s score.

Before your child takes a standardized test, ask the teacher or a school administrator

- Which tests will be administered during the school year and for what purposes?
- How will the teacher or the school use the results of the test?
- What other tools will the teacher or the school use to measure your child’s performance?
- Are there ways you can help your child work on reading and writing skills?

After your child has taken a standardized test, ask the teacher

- What do your child’s reading test results reveal about his or her skills and abilities?
- Are the test results consistent with your child’s performance in the classroom?
- Will your child’s test score change the way he or she is taught in the classroom?
- Are there things that you can do at home to help your child strengthen particular skills?



Making the Most of Reading Tests is one in a series of brochures produced in response to questions that parents frequently ask about their children’s reading instruction. Single copies may be downloaded free at the Association’s website, www.reading.org. Bulk copies may be purchased online or by telephone at 302-731-1600.

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- Establish and strengthen national and international alliances with a wide range of organizations
- Encourage and support research to promote informed decision making about reading practice and policy
- Provide leadership on literacy issues around the world

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