

5. Writing Exams

The first hurdle in helping your teen study is persuading them to allow you to participate (positive reinforcement and perseverance are key). The second thing you can do is find out when quizzes and exams are to take place—no junior high school teacher has surprise major exams. Major assignments and exams have been assigned and scheduled long before the due date or writing date. Students should have had plenty of time to prepare for exams and even quizzes.

Tips for Preparing for Tests

Studying is one area in which literacy skills are revealed. A good student with strong literacy skills will have a combination of text, notes, tests, exams, handouts, lab notes and lists of definitions on hand from which to study.

Your teen should:

- Review the chapters in the text by skimming and making a list of topics that might be on the exam.
- Make a list of the headings and vocabulary that are highlighted in the text.
- Check the end of each chapter to be sure that concepts are clear and that the answers to all questions are known.
- Review notes, adding any missing terminology, vocabulary and/or definitions to the study notes.
- Skim handouts, summarizing the content of each in a sentence or two, and adding any additional terminology to the review list.
- Review old tests and exams – (major exams often include a review of what was previously taught).
- Make a list of questions that the teacher will most likely ask or questions about the topics that the exam will cover.

How can I help my teen to prepare for an exam?

- Quiz your teen on terms and vocabulary. They can also verify answers by showing you the correct definitions from the content material.
- Administer a spelling quiz. Students often need to be able to spell terms and vocabulary words correctly, and a quiz is a good way to begin.
- Be the examiner by asking the questions at the end of chapters or the questions your teen has prepared as part of their study (review) plan. Encourage them to explain by asking, “Why is that?” or “How does it work?” or just by saying, “Go on. This is interesting.”
- Encourage your teen to diagram or draw relationships between words and ideas to show a visual understanding of a concept. Sometimes the act of explaining something to a parent by drawing it is enough to clarify the idea.

Tips for Taking Tests

Mention the word “test” and many students will cringe! Preparing for a test is important, but it is also important to understand that there are some very easy techniques to apply during the actual writing of the test. Here are some simple tips to share with your teen. Encourage them to:

- **Read all directions carefully.** Be sure that what is required is clear.
- **Look over** the test or test section **BEFORE** answering any questions. Understand **how the test is laid out** and **how many questions** there are.
- **Check** to see if any test questions or sections are worth more **marks** than others are. Spend extra time on these questions.

- **Decide** how long each question or section will take. If there are 40 questions and 50 minutes to answer, for example, do at least one question per minute to finish on time and still have time to review answers.
- **Do the easy questions first.** Devote more time to those that are more difficult or require long responses.
- If it is a **multiple choice test, read through each question first and think** of the possible **answer** before actually checking the choices given to you.
- **Use thinking strategies** to figure out an answer. **Eliminate** those choices that do not fit or are not appropriate by **physically crossing them out**, so they do not draw the eye.
- If an answer is not obvious, mark it and **come back to it later.** Don't forget to go back!
- Answer all **written questions completely and thoroughly.** The keywords in the question, such as describe, compare, explain or justify will tell what kind of information is required.
- Be sure to fill in an answer sheet very carefully, making sure the answers fit the questions.
- Always save some time at the end to check and review answers.
- If frustration sets in, stop, take some deep breaths and try to calm down.

Remember that your teen has been taught literacy skills since Grade 1. How a student uses these skills and related strategies is what makes the difference in achievement. Helping your teen apply these skills and strategies in a systematic way can make all the difference!