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What are criterion-referenced tests (CRTs)? You won't often hear about these assessments in schools, even though they are used regularly by teachers in both special education and mainstream education classrooms. Unlike standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests assess specific skills students learn about in class. Read about these tests and how they can serve students with learning disabilities in particular with this review. Teachers use criterion-referenced tests to determine which specific concepts, such as parts of speech or adding fractions, a child has learned in class. Some tests are commercially produced and sold as part of a curriculum. The Brigance system is an example. Other teachers develop specific tests to complement their unique lesson plans. Because criterion-referenced tests measure specific skills and concepts, they tend to be lengthy. Typically, they are designed with 100 total points possible. Students earn points for each item completed correctly. The students' scores are generally expressed as a percentage. Criterion-referenced tests are the most common type of test teachers use in regular classroom work. So, while parents and students may not hear the term "criterion-referenced test" often, they're certainly familiar with this popular form of assessment. Most assessments administered in schools are criterion-referenced. Teachers create these tests based on the school's curriculum and learning expectations in a given subject area. In addition to providing scores to measure progress, these test results give specific information on skills and sub-skills the student understands. They also provide information on the skills the student has not yet mastered. Both types of information are useful in determining what type of specially designed instruction the student needs and what the instruction should cover. Educators use these tests to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching programs, to determine students' mastery of concepts and skills and to measure progress toward a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives. These tests, whether designed by teachers or commercially produced, may reveal if a student has a learning disability that school officials haven't diagnosed. On the other hand, the tests can reveal how students are managing known learning disabilities. Do they continue to struggle in specific areas or have they made progress? Perhaps their performance has remained static. A criterion-referenced test can give teachers an idea of how a student is advancing in class. Results from a series of such tests can be used to help students with learning disabilities set goals both on and off their IEP. While criterion-referenced tests may reveal how well students have mastered certain concepts, they alone don't tell the whole picture about what a student has learned in class. Student work, projects, essays, and even participation in class discussions, can give parents and teachers a comprehensive look at a student's performance. After all, many students, especially those with learning disabilities and special needs, don't always perform well on tests. If your child's performance on criterion-referenced tests is underwhelming, speak with her teacher about how they're doing in all aspects of the class. Determine your child's academic progress using multi-dimensional measures for a more well-rounded assessment. Throughout their academic career, high school students take a lot of tests. Not counting final exams and in-class tests and quizzes, the average student in America's public school system takes about 112 mandatory standardized tests between kindergarten and 12th grade. That's a lot of study time, and a lot of stress. While pre-test nerves and jitters are normal, some students experience more test anxiety than others. Effective study and test-taking strategies can help students feel more at ease, and also boost their performance. So whether you are preparing for finals, the SATs, or another standardized test, here are 10 test-taking hacks from academic experts. 1. Get to Class Early Make sure you get to class early the day of your test. You don't want to lose any precious test-taking time, but also, you don't want to feel rushed or stressed. According to findings from scientists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson, the Yerkes-Dodson law shows that when your stress level is too high or too low, your performance suffers. Also, keep in mind that some teachers won't let you take the test if you show up late to class. Do yourself a favor and get there early. 2. Pack a Bag of Essentials You may find yourself scrambling to do some last-minute studying, or get some food before your test. When this happens, you're more likely to forget important materials like pencils or pens, a calculator, or books (for an open-book exam). ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ ↪ Lindsay Bressman from Privateprep, a private tutoring company, recommends packing a bag of essentials that includes snacks, a bottle of water, a test-approved calculator (with fresh batteries), and #2 pencils (and erasers). Consider packing your bag the night before your test so you can feel confident that you have everything you need when it's time to leave in the morning. 3. Don't Cram It can be easy to lose track of time in the days leading up to a test, and as a result, a lot of students resort to cramming the night before a test, but this isn't the most effective way to study. Discipline yourself to spread out your study time. Parenting expert and children's book author Julia Cook says, "Don't cram...It's hard on your brain! Instead, spread out your studying time over a few days or weeks. Practice doing sample problems and look over your class material every day until you take the test." 4. Create a Test-Like Study Environment Students often make the mistake of studying in a relaxed, comfortable environment. While you want to de-stress before a test, being too relaxed while studying can actually hinder your performance. Try to time yourself when you study and keep study aids (notes, books, etc.) to a minimum while attempting actual problems or questions. ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ According to USA Test Prep, "Students often practice with far more assistance than they will have on the test. Stress to them that EVERY problem should be attempted - at least to begin with - as though it were being done on a test." The more you can simulate a test-taking environment, the better you will do when it comes to the real thing. 5. Create a Routine Having a routine or some sort of familiarity prior to a test can help ease stress and anxiety. "I have seen that test anxiety can be managed by having a plan in place that you follow every time you have to take a test," says parenting expert Varda Epstein from Kars4Kids. "Just having that plan and sticking to it makes you feel calmer and like you're more in control of the situation." Epstein recommends the following tips for your pre-test routine: Eat a good dinner the night before that includes complex carbohydrates. The morning of the test, eat breakfast to improve your memory, mood, and concentration. Whole grains will give you energy and keep you satisfied for a longer period of time. Give yourself a pep talk before the test. Research proves kids who do this perform better on their tests than kids who don't. 6. Read and Re-Read ALL directions Students have a tendency to skip over test directions, either because they feel they're unnecessary, or because they think it will save time. If you skip the directions, you may not be answering questions in the correct way, or you may miss out on important clues that could help you on the test. According to TestingMom, "Many kids skip directions and go right to the questions, which may lead to them answering every question in a set wrong." Don't skip the directions, and if you're unsure about something, ask the teacher. ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ Tests are made up of a lot of different types of questions, and some are more challenging than others. When students approach a test, they need to control the things they can control, like understanding the basics. "Many students stress about all of the things they may not know, but the reality is there will be less of those concepts - likely the harder problems - on the test," says Ralston Medouze, a private tutor from Strive Academics. "For this reason, it's important that students focus on the basics. Thoroughly understanding the basics of any subject does not only mean that they will get more questions right, but it will allow students to get through the easier problems faster, meaning they can spend more time working on the truly difficult problems." 8. When in Doubt, Choose "None of the Above" or "All of the Above" Multiple choice questions can be very confusing, but you can usually rule out certain outliers and narrow down your choices. Turns out, if you're unsure, your best bet may be selecting "none of the above" or "all of the above." According to Business Insider, William Poundstone, author of Rock Breaks Scissors: A Practical Guide to Outguessing and Outwitting Almost Everybody, says, "none of the above" or "all of the above" were correct 52% of the time. Choosing one of these answers gives you a 90% improvement over random guessing." 9. Take the Test Backward This may seem counterintuitive, but there's a logical method to this madness. "Take the test/exam backward," says Sarah Tippett, Homeschool Base editor. "If you work backward, your brain has to think a bit more. The more thinking it does, the better recall you should have. Lots of the hardest questions are at the end of the exam and it's best to tackle these when your brain is fresh." ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ ↪ Scroll down to continue reading article ↪ Plus, questions toward the end of the test can often give you clues or hints for previous questions; go ahead and give it a try and see how it influences your performance. 10. Write Down the Important Stuff First On test day, you most likely have lots of facts and figures or formulas (i.e. Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally) swirling around in your brain. Former teacher and counselor Julia Cook says, "Write down the important stuff that you need to memorize (formulas, facts, definitions, etc.) at the top or on the side of your test paper so they don't clog up your brain and you don't forget to use them." These are important and you want to remember them, but it may help to write them down before you start your test. Try these test-taking hacks to ease your anxiety and boost your performance. Which test-taking hacks have you found are successful? Let us know in the comments below!



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