

ADVANTAGE Test Prep

Grade

8

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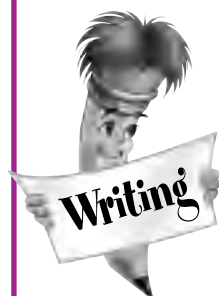
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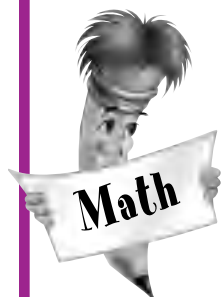
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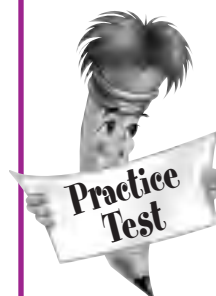
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Introduction

Testing in reading, writing, language, and mathematics have taken on a large role in education today. This workbook is designed to help students practice the skills and strategies that they will encounter on standardized and proficiency tests. Even if students don't have to take these tests, they will benefit from practicing the skills and strategies taught in this workbook.

Standardized Tests

Standardized tests are administered in the exact same way to hundreds of thousands of students across the United States. They are also referred to as *norm-referenced tests*. Norms give educators a common standard of measurement of students' skills and abilities across the country. Students are ranked according to their test scores and then assigned a percentile ranking. For example, a percentile score of 85 means a student scored higher than 85 percent of the students who also took the same test.

Proficiency Tests

Many states develop their own statewide proficiency tests. Proficiency tests are also known as *criterion-referenced tests*. This means that the test is based on a list of standards and skills (also called criteria). States develop standards for what students should know at each grade level. The proficiency test evaluates a student's mastery of set standards.

Standardized tests and proficiency tests look similar. However, their measurement is different. A proficiency test measures a student's mastery of set standards. A standardized test compares a student's achievement to others who took the same test.

Although the measurement is different, standardized and proficiency tests do have similarities in that they are used to:

- evaluate students' progress, strengths, and weaknesses.
- select students for remedial or achievement programs.
- tell educators where and how school systems can be improved.
- evaluate the success of school programs.
- help educators develop programs to suit their students' specific needs.

Both of these types of achievement tests are administered essentially the same way. They ask multiple-choice and open-response questions, and they have time limits. An important goal of this workbook is to teach test-taking strategies so that no matter which test your child is required to take, he or she will be successful.

Introduction

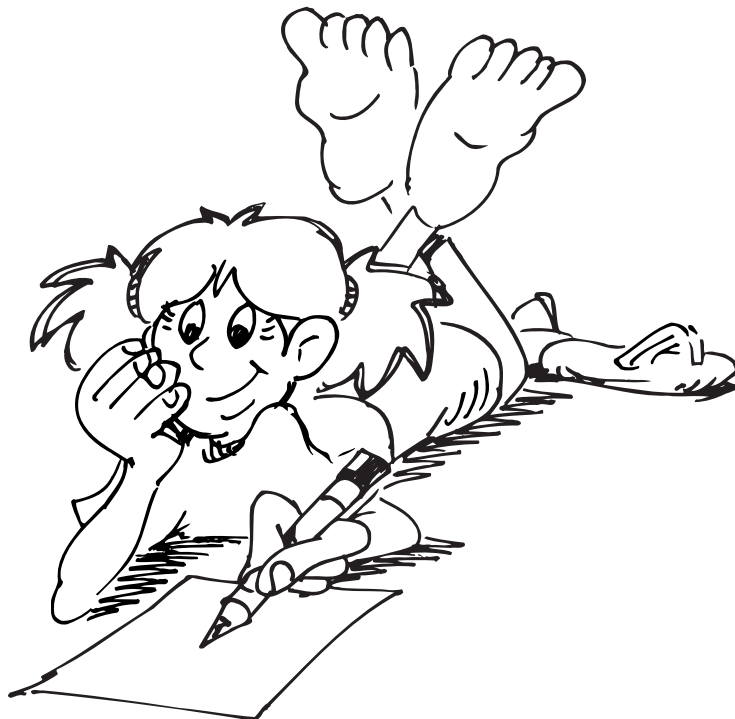
Preparing for Tests

The more students are prepared for taking standardized and proficiency tests, the higher they will perform on those tests. A student who understands the skills commonly measured and who practices test-taking strategies is more likely to be a successful test-taker. The more the student knows what to expect, the more comfortable the student will be in the actual test-taking situations.

Many tests were reviewed in developing the material for this workbook. They include the following:

- **California Achievement Tests (CAT)**
- **Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)**
- **TerraNova**
- **Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)**
- **Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT)**
- **Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT)**
- **Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)**

It is important to remember that standardized and proficiency tests are only one measure of student achievement. Teachers use many other methods to gain insights into each student's skills, abilities, and knowledge. It is a good idea to speak with your child's teacher to discuss and understand all the methods used in evaluating your child.



Introduction

How Can Parents Help Students Take Standardized Tests Successfully?

The following list includes suggestions on how to help prepare students to do their best on standardized tests.

Tips for Parents

- Monitor your child's progress.
- Get to know your child's teacher; find out what he or she thinks you can do to best help your child at home.
- Be informed about your state's testing requirements.
- Motivate your child to prepare.
- Help your child structure a quiet place and time away from distractions to do homework.
- Find learning experiences in everyday life such as making change, reading signs, preparing food, or walking outside.
- Make sure your child is getting the sleep and nutrition he or she needs to succeed.
- Always nurture your child's curiosity and desire to learn.
- Encourage your child to learn about computers and technology.
- Encourage your child to take tests seriously, but to value learning and giving one's best efforts.
- Notice academic efforts your child is making and support and acknowledge what you see.

Where Can I Learn More About Testing?

National Center for Fair and Open Testing, Inc. (FairTest)
342 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
<http://www.fairtest.org/>

Visit the Web site of the Department of Education for your state. Most states post information about standardized and proficiency tests that they administer to students.

Introduction to Reading



Reading is a skill that will help you do well in school as well as in life. The more you read, the *better* you will read—it's that simple. And the better you read, the more you'll enjoy it and the higher you'll score on standardized tests. Read as much as you can. Choose many different types of reading materials. Read by yourself or with others. Read aloud or silently. When you read stories, think about how they develop and progress.

Nearly every standardized or proficiency test includes a section on reading. The reading passages may be fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. They may also include graphic information, such as maps, graphs, charts, or time lines, or reference information such as indexes or dictionary entries. You will be asked to recall, interpret, and reflect on what you read.

The following pages give a review of reading skills. You will practice the skills with questions just like the ones on standardized tests. Practicing these skills now will help you perform better on test day. In this workbook section, you will learn to:

- use **context** clues to find the meaning of words or examine **roots, prefixes, and suffixes**.
- interpret **figurative language**.
- **summarize** texts.
- **classify** information.
- **compare** and **contrast** information.
- examine **denotative** and **connotative meanings**.
- make **predictions**.
- distinguish between **relevant** and **irrelevant information**.
- identify **transitional words**.
- identify **persuasive techniques**.
- distinguish between **fact** and **opinion**.
- analyze literary devices such as **setting** and **point of view**.
- read and understand **forms, tables, charts, and maps**.
- use a **table of contents**.
- read a **dictionary entry**.

An Early River Civilization

The world's first civilizations grew up in river valleys. River valleys were attractive to early peoples for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the water from the rivers could be used to irrigate crop fields, as well as provide water for drinking and other purposes. The fish and other animals found in rivers offered a ready source of food. Rivers also attracted wildlife such as birds and animals, which were also good sources of food.

Yet another advantage of settling near rivers was the ease of transportation. Traveling over land could be slow and dangerous. Water transportation, however, could be fast and relatively easy. When danger threatened, rivers offered a means of escape.

Many great early civilizations are associated with rivers. Think of Egypt and the Nile, Mesopotamia and the Tigris and Euphrates, and India and the Indus and Ganges. In ancient China, the river that saw the dawn of its civilization was the mighty Huang He, or Yellow River. Along its banks, in the northern part of the country, the first of China's many dynasties, or groups of related rulers, took root.

China's first dynasty is known as the Shang. The Shang rulers lived from about 1750 to 1122 B.C. Their capital was a city in the Huang He valley called Anyan. Shang society was basically agricultural and depended on the bounty of the great river. As it flowed toward the Yellow Sea in the East, it deposited a rich yellow soil along its valley. This soil, called *loess*, helped the land remain fertile. The Huang He was not always a good neighbor, however. Sometimes, heavy rains caused it to overflow its banks. The result was terrible floods that took a dreadful toll on the Shang people.

In addition to farming, the Shang people also became very skilled in casting bronze weapons, pots, masks, and other objects. Smaller bronze objects were often used in religious services and rituals to honor ancestors. Bronze objects were frequently buried with important people, perhaps to help them in the next life. Today, collectors eagerly seek Shang bronzes.

Much of what we know about these ancient people comes from an unusual source. The Shang believed they could communicate with supernatural beings. In particular, the Shang people thought that these gods could give them advice on worldly affairs such as how to run the government, whether to go to war, or how to cure the ruler's illness. To get their questions to the gods, Shang priests invented the first Chinese writing. The priests then scratched their questions onto animal bones. Heated metal rods were stuck into the bones, known as oracle bones, causing a series of cracks. The priests studied the patterns of cracks, interpreting them as answers from the gods. The bones were carefully stored. Many have survived to our time to speak to us. Through them we have been able to learn about these ancient people and the society they created.



VOCABULARY

KNOW THE SKILL: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Some test questions ask you to figure out the meaning of a word. Often you can guess the meaning of the word by thinking about the word's context. **Context** is the meanings of the other words and phrases around an unknown word. Context determines or influences the meaning of words.

DURING THE TEST

To learn from the context what a word means, look for the verb or subject of the sentences around it. These words will give you clues about the unknown word.

TEST EXAMPLE

- 1 Read the following sentence from the selection.
Heated metal rods were stuck into the bones, known as oracle bones, causing a series of cracks.
Which answer is a synonym for *oracle*?
- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| (A) ancient | (C) supernatural |
| (B) religious | (D) fortune-telling |

THINK ABOUT THE ANSWER

The correct answer is option D, *fortune-telling*. The subject of the paragraph is how priests used the bones to look into the future. Option A, *ancient* is incorrect because the text tells us that the bones were from dead animals, not old sources. Options B and C make sense, because the bones were used in religious ceremonies to contact supernatural beings, but they do not mean the same thing as *fortune-telling* and *oracle*.

NOW YOU TRY IT

- 2 Read the following sentence from the selection.
Shang society was basically agricultural and depended on the bounty of the great river.
Choose the word that means the same thing as *bounty*.
- | | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| (F) gifts | (H) fertility |
| (G) water | (J) agriculture |

Check your answer on page 109.



Get Outta Here!

When answering context vocabulary questions like these, plug each choice into the sentence and ask yourself if it makes sense. Some will not, and you can eliminate these right away.



VOCABULARY

KNOW THE SKILL: **INTERPRET FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Figurative language is words used in a way different from their literal meaning to create variety or interest. Consider this sentence: *The shadows of the night crept up on the campsite.* In this example, the night's shadows do not literally take steps. The author is using the word *crept* figuratively to compare the night's shadows to an animal stalking, or creeping up on, the campers.

DURING THE TEST

Be on the lookout for words used in a way that departs from their literal, or exact, meaning. If asked to identify or explain figurative language, think about how the use of the nonliteral meaning adds interest and variety to the text.

TEST EXAMPLE

- 1 Which sentence from the selection uses figurative language?
- (A) The priests then scratched their questions onto animal bones.
 - (B) The fish and other animals found in rivers offered a ready source of food.
 - (C) Bronze objects were frequently buried with important people, perhaps to help them in the next life.
 - (D) Along its banks, in the northern part of the country, the first of China's many dynasties, or groups of related rulers, took root.

THINK ABOUT THE ANSWER

Option D is correct. By using the word *root*, the writer compares the beginnings of Chinese civilization to a tree putting down roots.

NOW YOU TRY IT

- 2 Which sentence from the selection uses figurative language?
- (F) Many have survived to our time to speak to us.
 - (G) Yet another advantage of settling near rivers was the ease of transportation.
 - (H) Through them we have been able to learn about these ancient people and the society they created.
 - (J) Smaller bronze objects were often used in religious services and rituals to honor ancestors.

Check your answer on page 109.

COMPREHENSION



KNOW THE SKILL: **SUMMARIZE**

Some test questions will ask you to summarize part or all of a selection. To summarize a text means to restate or paraphrase the important points using your own words.

DURING THE TEST

If you are asked to summarize a selection, you may find it helpful to make check marks near or underline the important points. That way, you can go back and easily see which information to include in the summary. A one-sentence summary might be very similar to a topic sentence of a paragraph.

TEST EXAMPLE

- 1 Write a one-sentence summary of the first paragraph of the selection.

THINK ABOUT THE ANSWER

You could have written something like this: *For a variety of beneficial reasons, early peoples decided to build their civilizations near rivers.* The paragraph is a discussion of reasons why rivers offered early peoples a good place to settle.

NOW YOU TRY IT

- 2 Write a summary of the last paragraph of the selection.

Check your answer on page 109.



Just the Main ideas

Keep this suggestion in mind when answering a question that asks you to summarize; your summary should contain few, if any details, and must include all the important main ideas.



COMPREHENSION

KNOW THE SKILL: **CLASSIFY INFORMATION**

Some test questions will ask you to classify different kinds of information in a text. To classify information means to divide it into different groups or categories based on how it is used in the text or what kind of details it provides. Being able to classify will help you divide large amounts of information into smaller, more manageable categories.

DURING THE TEST

Questions may ask you to name the general categories of a selection and then classify details into each. As you read, underline words and phrases that seem to belong to one or another major category of information. Then you'll be able to go back and skim for details to classify into the categories.

TEST EXAMPLE

- 1 What two elements of Shang culture are discussed in the selection?
- (A) river transportation and the use of oracle bones
 - (B) agriculture and the importance of river wildlife
 - (C) the use of oracle bones and the casting of bronze objects
 - (D) the casting of bronze objects and flooding of the Huang He

THINK ABOUT THE ANSWER

Option C is correct. The selection's information about Shang culture can be classified into two categories: *oracle bones* and *bronze casting*. Much of the information in the text consists of details about these two main ideas.

NOW YOU TRY IT

- 2 What is the best category name for this information from the text?
provided water, served as a source of food, easy transportation, and means of quick escape
- (F) why the Shang settled near the Huang He
 - (G) why early people settled near rivers
 - (H) Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India
 - (J) the Shang civilization

Check your answer on page 109.



Like an Outline

It may be helpful to think about classifying as a kind of outline. The category name is a general, major head, while the details under it must be related and more specific.

COMPREHENSION



KNOW THE SKILL: **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

Some test questions will ask you to compare and contrast different information.

Comparing things means telling how they are similar. **Contrasting** means telling how they are different.

DURING THE TEST

A question might ask you how two ideas, people, objects, or other things are the same or how they are different. Word clues in the text that signal a comparison are *like*, *same as*, and *similar*. Those that signal a contrast are *on the other hand*, *however*, and *but*. Look for these words in the selection when you are asked to compare or contrast on a test question.

TEST EXAMPLE

- 1 Write two sentences to explain how Shang bronzes and oracle bones were similar.

THINK ABOUT THE ANSWER

A correct answer could have made these points: both were used for religious purposes; both tell us about how the Shang people lived.

NOW YOU TRY IT

- 2 Write two sentences to explain how Shang bronzes and oracle bones were different.

Check your answer on page 109.



Have a Positive Attitude

A positive attitude helps in all you do. Have self-confidence and think positive thoughts.