

IMPROVING TEST SCORES

Teacher Issues & Concerns

or

*How Do I Teach and Still Maintain
My Professional Credibility?*



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ACTION AGENDA TEACHER EDITION

HOW TO USE THE STUDENT AGENDA WITH YOUR CLASSES

◆◆◆ *READ OVER AND DISCUSS THE TEST-TAKING SKILLS SUPPLEMENT WITH YOUR STUDENTS.*

Read each section on a separate day:

- ◆ *Why are study and test-taking skills so important?*
- ◆ *How to study better and get higher test scores*
- ◆ *How to succeed on a multiple choice test*
- ◆ *How to succeed on a short or long essay test*
- ◆ *Getting into the studying place*
- ◆ *Making your body help your test scores*
- ◆ *A studying checklist*

◆◆◆ *THE KEY IS TO RELATE/ADAPT THE MATERIAL TO SPECIFIC ITEMS IN YOUR CURRICULUM.*

*Use your textbook, class notes, tests, etc., as examples
of how to implement these concepts into your students'
study and test taking habits.*

◆◆◆ *RELATE THE MATERIAL TO THE STUDENTS' LIVES WHENEVER POSSIBLE.*

Ask questions such as:

- ◆ *"How have you felt in this situation . . .?"*
- ◆ *"Have you ever experienced this at home . . .?"*
- ◆ *"What is it like when you . . .?"*



HOW CAN I ENSURE THAT MY CLASSROOM CURRICULA COVER

THE MATERIAL THAT WILL BE TESTED, WHILE MAINTAINING MY TEACHING INDEPENDENCE?

Advance Planning

Advance planning allows you to see and plan your curriculum holistically over the course of the year. With advanced planning, you can manipulate your teaching time so as to fit in all of the required (i.e. "tested") components of the curricula, simultaneously locating slots in which to teach additional material that you personally and professionally feel is important for the students. This can be accomplished through creating a Personal Pacing Plan and prioritizing concepts and standards.

Creating a Personal Pacing Plan

Have you ever found yourself in May with about three months of curriculum left to cover, wondering how the year got away from you? A Personal Pacing Plan can help keep even the most experienced teacher on track—a rather important feat in today's testing environment.

You can create a Personal Pacing Plan by simply taking a calendar and a list of all of the topics that need to be covered during the school year, along with those additional areas you want to have covered. Map out the year, assigning perceived amounts of time for each subject. However, remember the following:

- **This is only a guide!** *Some subjects will take less time than you originally planned, some will take more.*
- **The standardized tests will most likely fall within the ninth month of school.** *Therefore, all important to-be-tested topics need to be covered before this point within your plan.*
- **Plan by the week, not the day.** *Too often things happen that change your plans day by day. Planning by the week, versus the day, will lead to greater flexibility and less frustration.*

See page 3 in *Improving Test Scores* for a model and detailed description of a Personal Pacing Plan.

The material in this supplement is directly adapted from the book, *IMPROVING TEST SCORES: A PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS*, Scott Mandel, Zephyr Press, 2006. For detailed explanations and additional material in the areas covered, please refer to that book.

Prioritize Concepts and Standards

It is critical for the teacher to accept the fact that it is virtually impossible to cover everything to be tested at a level in which you achieve student proficiency. It's just not practical. Either you will cover *all* topics superficially and the students will have familiarity, but little proficiency, or you will go into depth on some topics and skip others, leaving your students scores to chance in those neglected areas.

The key to curricular test success is to list all of the basic topics to be covered on the standardized test and then prioritize them. Priority goes to the areas which count the most. (All standardized tests' teachers' or administrators' editions offer percentages of how much each topic is covered). Those that count the most have the greater priority.

For example, the grammar portion of the test involves these topics and percentages:

Sentence structure	35%
Clauses	10%
Parts of speech	25%
Punctuation	20%
Phrases	10%

Based on this analysis, you should ensure that "sentence structure" is taught very well sometime during the year, and that you cover "parts of speech" and "punctuation" at some point. "Clauses" and "phrases," the least tested pieces, are covered only if you have time.

All curricular topics on your list should be marked with an A, B or C:

A = must be taught to mastery level

**B = students must be exposed to;
teach to mastery level if time allows**

C = expose students to only if time allows

In this fashion, you will prioritize your teaching so that your students have the greatest chance of succeeding on the standardized tests.

See page 4-5 in *Improving Test Scores* for a model and detailed description of how to prioritize concepts and standards.



HOW CAN I ENSURE THAT I COVER THE CURRICULAR MATERIAL

FOUND ON THE STANDARDIZED TESTS EVEN IF MY CLASSROOM TEXTBOOKS ARE INADEQUATE?

Textbook publishers and test makers are usually not related. Although, theoretically, both should be following state educational standards exactly, such is not always the case. Very often, your textbook may not cover material which is to be tested.

How do you supplement your curricula without expending too much time, energy and money? By using the Ultimate Teacher Resource Center—the Internet.

Advance planning is once again the key. You need to study the topics to be tested, and ensure that your textbook covers each of them adequately. Three possibilities may arise:

How can you locate this material quickly and efficiently? The easiest way is to bookmark a general education portal where you can turn to immediately when you need additional curricular material.

An easy-to-use, teacher-created general education site is the Educational Resources page of Teachers Helping Teachers (www.pacificnet.net/~mandel). This site lists dozens of general sites in every major subject area. Each site is subsequently linked to hundreds of specific sites. Within a few clicks, you can locate anything you need. Within just minutes, you can have supplemental curricular material in every area.

For example, say you wanted to locate the primary source document Thomas Payne's *Common Sense* for your American History class. This critically important Revolutionary War document is sure to be asked about on the test—but is usually not included in your textbook. You can quickly and efficiently locate it by following these steps:

- 1. Go to the Educational Resources Page of Teachers Helping Teachers.**
- 2. Scroll down to the History/Social Studies Resources Online section.**
- 3. Scan for pertinent sites listed in this section. Pinpoint a listing for a site titled The Historical Text Archive.**
- 4. Click on the link to this site.**
- 5. Follow the trail to your document: click on "Links," then on "United States," then on "Revolution," then on "Thomas Payne, Common Sense."**
- 6. Print the appropriate parts of the document and make copies for your students.**

taken from Improving Test Scores, page 18

This process works for any area, in any subject. Curricular material is all over the Internet, and using a general education portal such as Teachers Helping Teachers puts it at your fingertips within minutes.

YOUR TEACHING SITUATION

Your textbook covers all of the material to be tested, and provides adequate practice material for mastery.

Your textbook covers all of the material to be tested, but is lacking in providing adequate practice material for mastery.

Your textbook is missing some of the material to be tested.

YOUR SOLUTION

Nothing—use what you have and enjoy!

Use the Internet to supplement your textbook in locating practice material for your students.

Use the Internet for locating curricular material to substitute for the textbook in the areas which are lacking.





HOW CAN I MOTIVATE MY STUDENTS TO DO THEIR BEST

ON THE STANDARDIZED TESTS?

When it comes to the relationship between students' attitudes and their test-taking success, students may be grouped into three categories:

- **Those that do poorly because they are stressed out as a result of the pressure to do well**
- **Those that do poorly because they consider the test irrelevant or unimportant, and put little effort into it as a result**
- **Those that do well because they see the importance of the test and seriously attempt to do their best.**

Improving Test Scores, page 52

Unfortunately, too many students fall into the first two categories. The following are some ideas to address these students and help them improve their test scores.

◆◆◆ **Motivating Students**

Intrinsic motivation works with some students; some need extrinsic. What works for a middle school student will most likely not work for a high school students.

Discover what works for your particular students and use that method! There is no one correct answer or solution.

Consider the following:

Buying into the importance of the test—Discuss with your students the repercussions of good and poor efforts on the test. These include getting into special high-level classes if they do well, or double-period/after-school remedial classes if they do poorly. For students in their last year at the school, this is especially important to comprehend. They need to understand that their performance on the test will directly affect their placements in their next school.

Perfect attendance incentives—special prizes can be given to those students who are present every day. It can be a class/school-wide raffle for a store-bought item or something as simple as a “free pass” from running one day during P.E. Whatever motivates your particular students. Friendly competitions between homerooms is also a great peer-driven motivator.

◆◆◆ **Student Stress Reduction**

Often students who want to do well are stressed by either the pressure that they place on themselves, or the pressurized atmosphere of the school during testing. Therefore, helping them reduce their stress will directly help them perform better. Here are a couple of ideas:

Encourage test preparation—Test-taking is a skill. The more it is practiced, the better they will do. The student section of this agenda provides them with many tips which you can review with them. As a teacher, give them similar types of “standardized” tests throughout the year. Even if you despise these, even if they are difficult for your students, you are doing them a disservice if the first time they see “standardized”-type tests is during the end-of-the-year testing period.

Teach relaxation techniques—Providing students with simple techniques to reduce mental and physical strain will directly assist these students with reducing their stress. The direct result is higher test scores. (See *Improving Test Scores*, page 58, for a couple of these easy-to-use techniques).





Notes ◆◆◆

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