

Test-Taking Strategy

*Developed by Sixth-Grade Teachers at
Miramonte Elementary School (Mountain View School District)*

Purpose: To help students perform better on tests by learning to think differently about test-taking.

This strategy is designed to:

- *provide students with a test-taking strategy that accesses their knowledge and skill acquisition;*
- *support students to “back up” their thinking as they answer test questions; and*
- *develop and support students’ metacognitive skills.*

Materials: For this activity, you will need:

- *Copies of the reading comprehension sections of past tests (e.g., SCOE, OCR) or test practice materials like the CDE released questions. Include the reading selection and the comprehension questions with the answer choices blanked out with white-out or Post-It tape. One copy per student.*
- *Copies of the questions with the answer choices. One copy per student.*

Instructions:

1. Give each student the reading selection and the questions with answer choices blanked out.
2. Students read the passage and write their answers to each question in the blank space where the multiple-choice answers would have been.
3. Students share their answers in pairs, discussing why they think their answers make sense and pointing out where they found the answers in the passage (either written or inferred).
4. Give students the questions with the multiple-choice answer options. Students work in pairs or teams comparing the answers they wrote with the answer choices provided and looking for an answer that is closest to the one they wrote. Their written answers may not be exact matches with the choices provided, so instruct them to pick the answer they feel is the closest match.
5. Lead the whole group in a discussion of the answers. For each question, tally how many students chose each suggested answer. Invite students to explain the reasoning behind their choices and the evidence they found to support their answer. Then reveal the “correct” answer to find out how closely their collective reasoning mirrored the

way the test-makers understood the question. To make this kind of thinking very public, spend some time having students talk about why each “right” answer is right, and why some of the wrong answers seemed “right” at first.

6. Share actual scores from the past benchmark tests with students. Questions to ask students:
 - *How did you score this time?*
 - *If your score was different this time, what caused the difference?*
 - *How can you use this strategy when you take next SCOE or CST?*

Next Step Questions for Teachers:

- *How can we provide students with sufficient practice using this strategy so that they will be able to use it effectively during CST?*
- *How can students modify this strategy for the CST since they will not be able to pair share with other students?*
- *How can we encourage students to use this strategy during the CST?*
- *How can we modify this technique for use with other sections of the CST, such as vocabulary (e.g., looking for antonyms and synonyms), math word problems, social studies and history, etc.?*

Sixth-grade teachers from Miramonte Elementary School (Mountain View SD) commenting on their use of this approach:

[This strategy] "really empowered the students. They wanted to see what they got and how it worked." —**Laura Gaber**

"With this strategy, students are keying in and focusing on the question. They can compare their own answers with the tests' [multiple choice] answers. When they see answers on the test that are similar to theirs, it gives the test more meaning. They feel better about themselves." —**Jon Tai-Lin**

"It was wonderful to see [SCOE] scores in reading comprehension and vocabulary jump up to benchmark or higher. Since students are figuring out their answer first, they were able to distinguish between the 'fake' answers and the 'real' answer. They are not minding doing the tests, because they are successful." —**Bruce Rhodes**