

Studying & Test-Taking 101

Your tween can do her best on test day by studying and being prepared. Share these techniques with her so she learns and remembers the material—and feels confident on test day.

Create a study plan

A study plan is a great way for your middle schooler to get organized—and to make tasks seem more manageable. To allow enough time for review, she can prepare her plan as soon as a test is announced. Here's how:

- **Pay attention in class.** Your child should listen carefully when the teacher states which sections or chapters an exam will cover. That way, she'll know what to focus on when she studies.
- **List review items.** Creating a list of what to study helps your middle grader stay on track. *Example:* Chapter 4 notes, vocabulary words, lab results. As she reviews each item, she could mark it off—giving her a sense of accomplishment and keeping her motivated.



- **Gather supplies.** Have your tween pull out materials she needs for studying. She might gather handouts, graded homework, quizzes, notes, and textbooks.
- **Be flexible.** Encourage her to update her study plan as she goes. If she needs to review a difficult chapter a second time, she can work it in before the test date.

Develop study techniques

Your middle grader can get the most out of the time he spends studying by using these proven strategies:

- **Make information easy to find.** Your child might write topics (“Rules for commas,” “Metric conversions”) on sticky notes



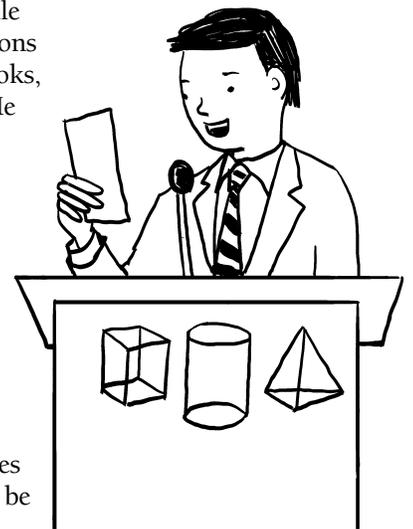
and use them to mark information in his textbook or notebook. Or he could condense key information into a study guide.

- **Combine study methods.** Encourage your tween to learn information in more than one way. For example, if he's studying the solar system, he could read his notes first and then make a model with marbles. Afterward, he can reinforce both activities by creating flash cards with vocabulary terms like *galaxy* and *asteroid*.

■ **Review old assignments and quizzes.** Reading through answers he got right reinforces the information in his memory. Correcting wrong answers helps him avoid repeating mistakes.

- **Quiz yourself.** Your middle grader can make up questions using his notes and textbooks, then try to answer them. He could also answer practice questions or problems at the end of textbook chapters.

■ **Clear up confusion.** If your middle schooler doesn't understand something, encourage him to ask for extra help before or after school or during a study period. Teachers' aides or other students may also be available for tutoring.



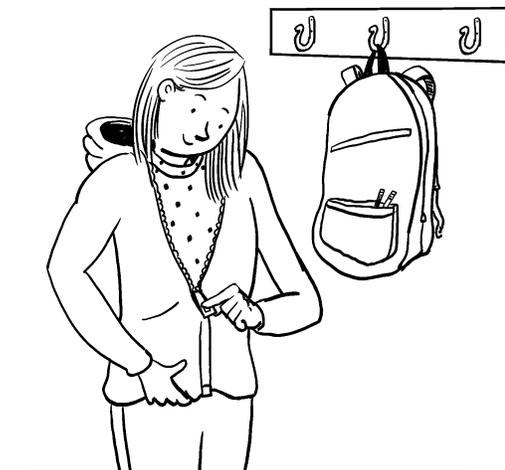
Prevent exam anxiety

Because tests often carry so much weight, many students feel nervous about them. Kids might have trouble concentrating, forget what they know, or even experience a rapid heartbeat, upset stomach, or sweaty hands at test time. Share these tips to help your child handle anxiety at test time:

■ **Visualize doing well.** Your tween might imagine confidently tackling test questions and receiving a good grade. Seeing himself this way can boost his confidence and inspire him to keep preparing even when he doesn't feel like it.

■ **Focus on yourself.** If one of your middle grader's friends talks about how hard the test will be, your child could remind himself of what *he's* doing to get ready. Or if another student took the test earlier in the day and says it was tough, your middle schooler should keep in mind that it may not be hard for him—because he is so prepared!

■ **Limit commitments.** A few days before a big test probably isn't the best time to sign up for a new activity. Keeping commitments under control will help your child stay focused and stick to a study schedule.



Prepare in advance

Getting organized the night before a test will make your middle grader feel calm. Here are ways to make sure test day gets off to a good start:

■ **Plan breakfast.** It's important for your child to eat a healthy breakfast on test day (and every day). To save time in the morning, talk about what she wants to eat for breakfast before she goes to bed. Remind her that a well-balanced breakfast, such as eggs, toast, and a banana, or oatmeal or cereal with berries, will help her stay alert and focused.

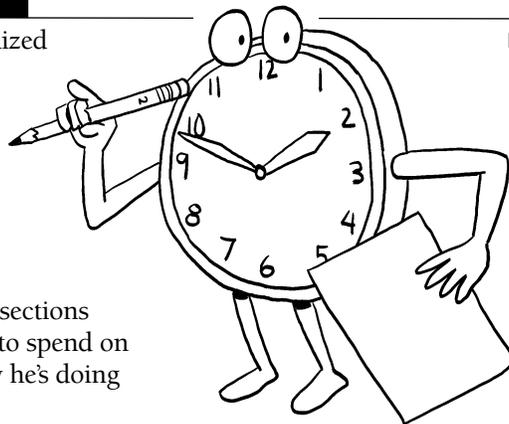
■ **Pack supplies.** She should ask the teacher what she's allowed to have on hand and make sure she has everything ready—sharpened pencils, erasers, calculator with working batteries, scrap paper.

■ **Decide what to wear.** Choosing layered clothing (like a T-shirt under a zippered sweatshirt) will allow your tween to add or remove layers if she gets hot or cold during a test.

Taking standardized tests

Help your child prepare for standardized tests with strategies like these:

- Read the instructions word for word. Paying careful attention to directions will help your middle grader complete problems or answer questions correctly the first time so she won't have to redo them.
- Skim the test. He can see how many sections there are and estimate how much time to spend on each. As he works, he could check how he's doing against the clock.



■ Check to make sure answers are written on the correct line or typed into the right section. If your tween skips a question on a paper-and-pencil test, she should be sure to skip that line on the answer sheet, too.

■ Use all the available time. There are no extra points for turning a test in early. Your child should use any time he has left to go back over his answers or fill in answers to questions he skipped.

Middle Years

Understanding Your Tween



Middle graders push boundaries and shift moods quickly as they seek more independence and deal with changing hormones. This guide offers insight into typical tween behavior to help you navigate (and enjoy!) these years of your child's life and send him off to school ready to learn.

Stay connected

It's normal for tweens to spend time with friends and want privacy. While it's good to give them some space, letting them know you're still there makes them feel secure and loved. Try these tips for keeping in touch with your tween.

Plan ahead. Put family meals on your calendar. Children who eat with their parents on a regular basis are less likely to take risks like trying drugs and alcohol. If you can't have dinner together one night, plan a family breakfast or lunch that day instead. Also, add your tween's school events and activities to the calendar. He'll be happy for you to attend his art show or basketball game—even if he acts like he doesn't care.

Find new ways to talk. Your middle grader might be more apt to open up when she's relaxed or if she's not looking at you directly. Stop by her bedroom to say goodnight and chat for a few minutes. Or invite her to run errands with you, and talk in the car. To start a conversation, try sharing something about your own life—she may share something about hers. If she mentions a concern, such as a test she's nervous

about, listen quietly and ask if she'd like suggestions, rather than jumping into problem-solving mode.

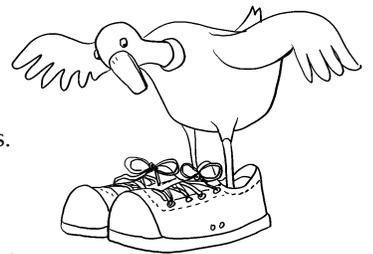
Offer tween-approved affection. Show your child you love him in ways he's comfortable with. He probably won't want hugs or kisses in public, since kids this age worry about looking grown up and tend to be easily embarrassed. Instead, give him a pat on the back or simply wave. Another way to express affection is by leaving messages for him to find, like a sticky note on the bathroom mirror saying, "Looking forward to a fun weekend with you. Love, Mom."

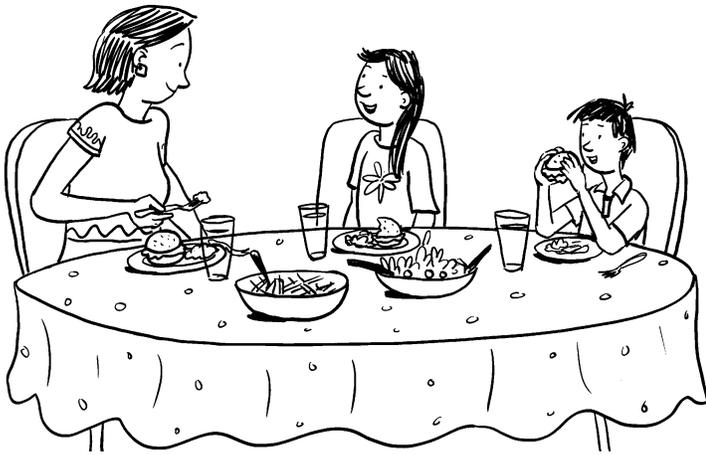
Emphasize empathy

The part of the tween brain that's responsible for reasoning is still developing, so kids this age may not think through the consequences of their words and actions. Tap into your child's sense of empathy, or ability to consider and understand others' feelings, with these ideas.

Imagine being in someone else's shoes.

Ask your middle grader to think about how another person might feel in specific situations. Say she doesn't want to attend her little brother's awards banquet. How would he feel if she stays home—and how would she feel if her brother wasn't there to support her at an important event? Also, let her see other people's perspectives by exposing her to their worlds. You could volunteer together at a homeless shelter or an assisted-living facility.





Use “face” time. Empathy is learned in person, so encourage face-to-face interactions. For example, if your tween is having a disagreement with a friend, suggest that they talk in person rather than texting. They’ll pick up on each other’s tone of voice and facial expressions—and increase their chances of patching things up. At home, set limits on electronics so family members can communicate in real life. Have him keep devices off during meals and when you’re in the car together, for instance.

Point out the power of words. If your child says something hurtful to you, tell her how she made you feel. (“When you say ‘whatever’ or ‘so what,’ I feel like you don’t respect me.”) You’ll help her understand how her words affect others. Then, ask her to think of a more respectful way to express herself.

Boost self-control

Your tween’s ability to control impulses is a work in progress—in fact, this process continues well into young adulthood. In the meantime, middle graders can use strategies like these to keep from acting on impulse. *Bonus:* Kids who demonstrate self-control do better in school and are usually happier overall.

Set yourself up for success. Have your tween adjust his environment in ways that help him stay in control. For instance, he could keep his phone in another room so he’s not tempted to look at it while he does homework. Or maybe he will eat a healthy snack before going out so he’s not likely to get candy from the vending machine.



Practice responses. Suggest that your child think about situations that make her angry, upset, or frustrated. Then, she can plan ways to react. Maybe she gets annoyed when you remind her to practice piano every day. She could set a daily alarm, then politely let you know she’s “got this.” Or if she normally flies off the handle when a younger sibling repeats everything she says, she might decide to just quietly walk away next time. Other strategies include singing her favorite song in her head or silently counting to 10.

Stick with goals. An important part of self-control is thinking about the big picture rather than just the here and now. Say your tween needs to bring up his science grade, but he’d rather hang out with friends than study for a test. He could tack his last report card to his bulletin board and circle the grade he wants to improve. He’ll have a visual reminder to keep his eye on the goal.

Middle Years

Be a Good Digital Citizen

Your middle grader probably started learning about good citizenship in kindergarten—but what makes a good digital citizen? Actually, many of the same real-life rules apply to the digital world. This guide contains advice that can help your tween make positive choices, be well informed, and interact with fellow online citizens in safe, respectful ways.



Create a positive digital footprint

Every time your middle schooler goes online, she leaves a digital footprint, or a trail of her activity. It includes her comments, photos, and videos, all of which paint a vivid picture of who she is. Her footprint is easily accessible to friends, relatives, teachers, and coaches—and eventually to colleges and employers. Help her create a positive image with these ideas.

Think before you post. Ask your tween what kind of digital footprint she wants. Point out that she's in control—this may encourage her to make smart decisions. Before she posts a comment or photo, she should consider whether it will help or harm her reputation. Retweeting a picture of a lost pet, for example, is positive because it shows she cares about animals and their owners. *Tip:* If she's ever hesitant about posting something, have her ask herself, "Would I want the principal or my grandparents to see this?" If the answer is no, she shouldn't post it.



Treat others with respect

Good character matters online *and* offline. Your child should treat others the way he'd like to be treated by being respectful. A good rule of thumb? If he wouldn't say something to someone's face, he shouldn't say it online.

It's also important for your middle grader to respect others' opinions online, even if he doesn't agree with them. Often, the most respectful response to a post he disagrees with is no response at all. That's because online debates can sometimes become hateful and escalate to personal attacks.

Note: Talk to your tween about cyberbullying, or using technology to bully others. This includes spreading rumors, making threats, or encouraging others to harm themselves. If he sees posts that fall into this category, or if he is targeted, he should tell an adult right away.



Be a detective. To show your tween what a digital footprint looks like, play detective using a celebrity as a case study. Let her pick an actor, a musician, or an athlete, then hop on a social media site and scroll through that person's photos and comments. What is your child's impression of the celebrity? Which posts helped her form her opinion? Then, encourage her to Google her own full name as well as any screen names she uses. Is she proud of what she sees?

continued

Evaluate online information

A good citizen is well informed. When it comes to digital citizenship, that includes figuring out whether information is accurate and credible before using it or sharing it with others. Here are tips to help your middle schooler read critically.



Distinguish between fact and opinion. When your tween reads an article, encourage him to look for language like “It seems to me that...” or “That’s probably a good thing...” These are clues that the author is expressing an opinion rather than reporting straight facts. Also, an opinion piece will often be labeled “opinion” or include a disclaimer from the owner of the website.

Rely on multiple sources. Suggest that your middle grader read stories about the same topic on at least two news websites. How are they similar and different? One may include details that the other leaves out, or they might quote different people. He’ll discover that it’s best to read more than one source to get the full picture.

Know the author. When your child does research for school assignments, he should use sources written by experts. For example, sites created by government agencies (ending in .gov) and schools and universities (ending in .edu) tend to be more trustworthy than those made by private individuals or companies.

Determine the purpose. A site that’s trying to sell a product may be biased. Say your tween is researching energy drinks for a report. He can probably trust a health agency’s website over that of the company that makes the drinks.

Note: If your child isn’t sure whether a source is credible, he could ask a teacher or librarian for help.

Protect privacy

Obeying a few important privacy rules can keep your tween safe online. Share these guidelines with her.

Stick with people you know. Create a rule that your child can interact online only with family members and friends she knows in real life. Let her know that this rule applies to everything, including social media sites, apps used for chatting, and online gaming.

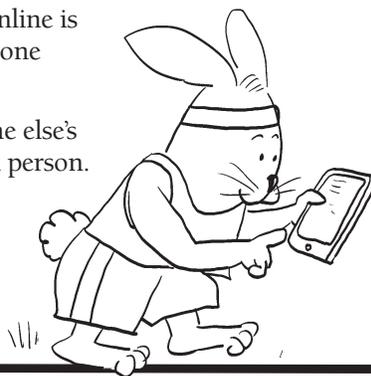
Use privacy settings. Help your middle grader adjust settings on any sites and electronic devices she uses. Doing this will prevent strangers from seeing her posts or contacting her.

Keep passwords private. Explain to your child that she should never tell anyone her passwords—not even close friends. Anyone who knows her password could log in and post as her.



Five tips for being a good digital citizen

1. Consider the fact that anything you post online is there forever. Even if you delete a post, someone may have already copied and shared it.
2. Avoid plagiarism. When you share someone else’s words, photos, or artwork, give credit to that person.
3. Refrain from swearing or using any language that could be offensive to others. Also, make a good impression by checking for correct spelling and grammar before you post.



4. Obey the law. Don’t download movies, music, or games from sites that share them illegally. Instead, use only streaming sites and cable services that your family subscribes to. It’s also illegal to hack into others’ social media accounts and websites.
5. A healthy dose of skepticism comes in handy online. If you read something that seems really far-fetched or just “off,” there’s a good chance it’s not true—and you shouldn’t share it.

Middle Years