

Preparing for Tests

[Current Collection of Tips](#)



- **Continue teaching a rich, standards-based curriculum.** Tests measure a variety of content and processes, covering the spectrum between procedural and conceptual understanding. Stick to a balanced, comprehensive program that combines [understanding for a foundation for learning](#) facts and procedures, and uses the math in applications and problem solving situations. Help students develop proficiency in skills and procedures by integrating test preparation into a well-articulated curriculum instead of separating test preparation from routine learning

- **Become involved in writing state standards and developing state tests.** Often states and provinces involve teachers and other mathematics educators in the design and implementation of standards and tests. [You have a direct voice](#) in shaping the high-stakes tests for which your student preparation is held accountable. [Help ensure that the tests measure the important mathematics content](#) and processes that you and other teachers value.

- **Help students become acquainted with the format and grading schemes of tests by using them in your classroom on a regular basis.** Have students turn in writing activities, and score them as they would be scored on the upcoming tests. Give them detailed feedback so that they know exactly what they could have written to gain a higher mark. Familiarizing students with the format and grading schemes will reduce anxiety.

- **Review content every day.** Use problems from past chapters and even from past state tests as Daily Problems for students to work on for the first 5 minutes of each class. Also, [include review problems in homework assignments](#). This gives students the opportunity to review, refresh, and practice skills that they may otherwise forget. It takes minimal time away from teaching new material, yet allows you to review a past topic.

- **Involve students in creating questions for the review.** Assign each student to a specific date, and make him or her responsible in selecting a problem for review. As time progresses, give the student who selected the problem also the opportunity to display the solution to the class. This will not only help with review, but will also help students communicate mathematical ideas effectively.

- **Use a variety of approaches when teaching new content.** Each student has a unique preferred learning style, so to best benefit your students, be sure to show several ways of solving related problems. Include manipulatives and multiple



representations. It is easy to forget procedures, but being able to "see" how a problem works out is memorable.

- **Focus on solutions, not answers.** Foster number and operation sense over developing computational skills. We don't want our students to believe that math is a subject of static rules and procedures, so we shouldn't teach it that way. Ask students to estimate an answer before doing any computations. Force student explanations, and make them really think about if their answers make sense. Ask them questions like, "How are you sure that your answer is correct?"

- **Celebrate Improvement.** When you notice that your students are engaged and have been successfully reviewing or when they have made improvements on test scores comparatively, find a way to reward them. When you show that you care about their progress, students will tend to also have a better attitude about continuing to practice and work for you.

- **Be creative in how you are assessing understanding.** Encourage students to talk in collaborative groups about the mathematics. Assign writing activities often. Take the time to observe, interview, and respond to students' work. This will not only let you know whether or not the students are "getting it" but it will also show the students that you care about their learning, a crucial motivator to get students to increase effort. Review the tips on assessment for more ideas.



- **What's on the test?** Find out! What math content is being assessed? How much of the test is comprised of computation, word problems, and open-response? Look at copies of released items to get an understanding of what is needed to be successful. Share them with your students so that they can get a sense of the time constraint.