

UNDERSTANDING THE “TESTING GENRE”: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PERFORMANCE

It makes sense to us that the strategies needed in test-taking would be better learned if they were part of daily curriculum.

—KATHE TAYLOR AND SHERRY WALTON

Being tested is part of being alive. Throughout history people have tested their skills against the forces of nature, in competition with other human beings, and against their own pain, fear, and fatigue. They cleared the land, sailed the seas, fought for food and freedom, and developed technology to expand their competitive edge. Survival depended on the ability to perform with a high amount of effort and concentration. Success often depends on knowledge and skills.

Students in school are tested continually, and their success is most often measured by their performance on paper-and-pencil tests. In addition to the standardized tests that have been used for decades, many states have instituted “high stakes” proficiency tests in grades 3 or 4, 9, and 12, the stakes being whether students will be permitted to move to the next grade or, in grade 12, to graduate.

Such consequences are extremely dangerous. Retention has been shown to have little benefit for those who must repeat the grade (Roderick 1994). Extra drill in summer school or after school can also drive students to give up and drop out. Once students drop out of school, it becomes even more difficult for them to achieve a quality life.

The stakes are also high for teachers because their performance is judged by how many students meet the criteria for success. The demand for accountability is intense and has the potential to reduce the language and literacy curriculum to a very narrow set of exercises. If we care about our students, we need to make sure test taking has positive outcomes.

While we cannot ignore tests, we cannot let them

control our lives and the lives of our students. We need to find ways to cope with the demands of the testing environment and still help our students have happy, productive, and satisfying literacy experiences. To cope with testing demands:

1. Analyze the genuine underlying skills that students need in order to be able to perform well on comprehensive proficiency tests.
2. Create an ongoing curriculum to help students develop the genuine reading and writing abilities that will provide a foundation for good test performance (as well as all the benefits of a literate life).
3. Analyze the ways of reading, writing, and displaying knowledge that tests require.
4. Familiarize students with the ways to display knowledge and skills that will be expected of them in test performance.

Without the first two steps, the others are ineffective. Being a competent reader and writer is basic to performing well on tests.

At the same time, we need to give students specific guidance on how to use their abilities in the limited and high-pressure situations they face. To help students develop test-taking skills, we need to look at testing as a genre—a particular kind of reading and writing. We must analyze the demands of tests, determine how to embed test-taking skills within the activities of the language and literacy framework, and recognize how to help our students learn the specific responses they need to call into play while being tested.

Standards-Based Testing

Standards-based tests are meant to determine whether students can meet standards based on the skills required to survive and succeed in society. Policymakers have set these standards to help schools implement the kind of instruction that ensures students will achieve. Standards, benchmarks, and tests are interrelated.

Standards and Benchmarks

A standard is a model, principle, measure, or example used to compare items within the same classification to determine their quality. It is agreed upon and, in general, followed by the majority. We can also think of a standard as a “banner” or an “emblem” used as a symbol to rally support. Both of these definitions relate to standards in literacy education today. The idea is to create a common vision for levels of achievement that will ensure that our educational systems achieve their goal—helping every citizen use literacy effectively. Standards establish performance targets toward which schools and students can strive.

Ideally, standards are based on research that reveals what students who achieve success know and can do over time. Establishing standards is, in fact, an imperfect science. A general procedure is to build on the consensus of experts as they are published by professional organizations such as the International Reading Association or the National Council of Teachers of English. These professional groups—or “learned societies”—include researchers and other experts who “pool their wisdom.” Experts make their best judgments about what research suggests students need to know at various stages of learning. The process is open to differences of opinion.

Standards are usually expressed as broad-based clusters or profiles of behaviors and competencies. Standards represent lofty goals. When a school, district, state, or nation adopts a standard, they commit to implementing a plan to achieve the criteria set forward for success. To that end, time and money are dedicated to implementing the plan; meeting the standards is the goal.

Benchmarks are specifically defined, measurable behaviors along a continuum of progress. Sometimes educators establish benchmarks as a way to assess whether students are making progress toward meeting the target performances defined by standards.

Benchmarks are milestones; they tell us whether students are learning at satisfactory rates and whether they need intervention, extra instruction, or differentiated instruction. In Chapter 28, we discuss establishing benchmarks along the continuum of leveled texts as one way of making sure that students’ reading progress is on track. Benchmarks may be established in any area of knowledge.

Tests are designed to determine whether a student’s performance meets specific standards. Testing is also an imperfect process. Standards are far reaching. They may describe a piece of work, a specific performance, conceptual understanding, skills and tools, or an accomplishment based on effort. Just consider the reading and writing standards published by the New Standards™ of the Center for Education and the Economy.¹ The reading standard requires students to “go deep” and make connections in some area that interests them. The intent is to encourage readers to pursue themes, authors, and genres of their choosing. The student reads and comprehends at least four books (or book equivalents) about one issue or subject, or four books by a single writer, or four books in one genre, and produces evidence of reading that:

- Makes and supports warranted and responsible assertions about the texts.
- Supports assertions with elaborated and convincing evidence.
- Draws the texts together to compare and contrast themes, characters, and ideas.
- Makes perceptive and well-developed connections.
- Evaluates writing strategies and elements of the author’s craft. (Performance Standards, p. 22)

The standard captures the complexity of the ways readers make connections among texts. The specificity of the statement (e.g., four books) is meant to help educators assess students’ performance. We cannot

¹New Standards™ is a joint project of the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) at the University of Pittsburgh and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). It was founded by Lauren Resnick, director of LRDC, and Marc Tucker, president of NCEE, and is supported by a consortium of twenty-six state education departments and six additional school districts in other states. The standards above are from *Performance Standards: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Applied Learning, Volume 1: Elementary School* (Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy and the University of Pittsburgh, 1997).

imagine making a good assessment of students' performance relative to this standard without working with them over time, recording their reading habits, examining their writing in response to reading, and observing many of their conversations about books.

The writing standard is intended to ensure that students become familiar with report writing and to help them internalize criteria to review and revise their work. The student produces a report that:

- Engages the reader by establishing a context, creating a persona, and otherwise developing reader interest.
- Develops a controlling idea that conveys a perspective on the subject.
- Creates an organizing structure appropriate to a specific purpose, audience, and context.
- Includes appropriate facts and details.
- Excludes extraneous and inappropriate information.
- Uses a range of appropriate strategies, such as providing facts and details, describing or analyzing the subject, and narrating a relevant anecdote.
- Provides a sense of closure to the writing. (Performance Standards, p. 24)

As with the reading standard, we cannot imagine a real evaluation of students' writing against this standard without observing their investigations over time as they gather and categorize information about a topic, interact with others around the topic, consider different audiences and how to engage them, compose and revise the report, and present it orally or answer questions about it.

Measuring Performance

Can a test measure performance relative to a standard target? The obvious answer is no. By its very definition, a test can provide only partial information because:

- It is taken during a limited and defined period of time.
- The tasks are of necessity contrived rather than authentic.
- Students are required to work alone rather than with the support of others.
- Emotional factors may interfere.
- Students may or may not have the background experience required by a test that is designed to assess large populations.

These limitations mean that working toward achieving standards is a much bigger endeavor than working toward performance on proficiency tests. Again, developing a student's reading and writing is the key to student performance.

Tests as a Genre

It helps to think of testing as a genre—a type of discourse that is distinguishable by characteristics of form, style, and content. Students must learn how to understand and use these characteristics (Reardon 1990). Tests tend to follow this pattern:

- Typical "test vocabulary" includes words such as *selection, answer, what, which, why*.
- Selections are short; often they are excerpts from longer texts.
- Longer selections may feature one or two illustrations; many selections have no pictures.
- The text provides instructions about how to answer the questions, but the student must figure them out; they are not immediately evident. The puzzle of figuring out how to respond is part of the test.
- The selections on a test are not related to one another (as they would be in a cohesive informational text, a newspaper, or a novel).
- The text contains questions that must be answered.
- Questions may appear in several forms:
 1. Multiple choice: the student chooses the best among a limited number of answers.
 2. Short written responses: the student writes a concise, specific answer.
 3. Extended written responses: the student composes a longer, more complex answer.
- The print on the page is all the student has to answer the questions.
- On a writing test, students must address specific topics in a particular genre rather than choosing their own.
- Written responses are evaluated according to specific criteria.

Just as you teach students to read and understand biography or fantasy, you can teach them to read and respond to the genre of tests. Testing reflects a kind of reading and writing that is similar to the reading and

writing that people do for authentic purposes. The major difference is that on tests readers are concerned about what the tester is looking for and about displaying their knowledge in a way that shows their competence.

Performing on Reading Tests

You can help your students perform at higher levels on reading proficiency tests in several ways:

- Ensuring that a range of authentic reading is occurring in your classroom.
- Providing as much literacy instruction as you possibly can.

- Embedding test-taking skills within every element of the language and literacy framework.
- Starting early to teach students the kinds of specific skills they will need to be successful test takers.

Differences Between Reading and Taking Tests

Figure 27-1 compares readers and test takers. Their purposes for reading texts are different, as are the time limits and text length. Readers read for a wide range of purposes, including pleasure and learning. They respond to the text emotionally and connect it to other texts. They remember important information, which they often discuss with others. They get to know characters and empathize with them; they connect the text to their own lives.

What Are the Connections Between Reading and Test Taking?

Readers

- ❖ Read for various purposes —enjoyment, getting information, etc.
- ❖ Process continuous text of various lengths.
- ❖ Actively search for and use a variety of informational sources—language, meaning, letter-sound relationships, visual information.
- ❖ Respond to the text in terms of feelings and connections with their lives.
- ❖ Remember details and make interpretations throughout the reading of a text.
- ❖ Connect texts to others they have read.
- ❖ Compare texts to others they have read.
- ❖ Construct, remember, and talk about the main idea and/or theme of a text after reading.
- ❖ Notice interesting words that extend meaning and start to use them in their own talk and writing.
- ❖ Get to know and empathize with characters and their problems.
- ❖ Use reading to understand life problems and situations and/or complex scientific or technical concepts.

Test Takers

- ❖ Read for the purpose of answering questions and/or performing in writing.
- ❖ Process a text of limited length within time limits.
- ❖ Display knowledge of text through writing.
- ❖ Identify and/or write down key information in texts.
- ❖ Identify and write about a sequence of actions in narrative text or descriptions of processes in informational texts.
- ❖ Identify or write interpretations of the text.
- ❖ Find or write key words from texts.
- ❖ Write or select statements that precisely summarize a text.
- ❖ Identify the difference between main and supporting ideas in an informational text.
- ❖ Identify words by their precise meanings within a text; evaluate the use of words in a text.
- ❖ Write about plot, problem, solution, or setting.
- ❖ Write or identify correct information from illustrations (diagrams, etc.).
- ❖ Write or choose among alternative endings, sequels, and problem solutions.
- ❖ Write about in list or text form the ways texts are similar and different.
- ❖ Use references and resources to help in understanding a text.

Figure 27-1. Readers and Test Takers

Some of those actions may also occur when readers take tests, but the similarities are limited. Test takers read to answer questions or to produce writing that displays their understanding of a text. They process a text within time limits, noting the information they need to answer questions or include in summary statements. They have to gather and select the right information and discard irrelevant details. They may have to choose among alternative endings or identify the correct information from illustrations. They need to show explicitly that they understand how items are similar and different. Test takers are reading in a particular context. They step back to use their reading and writing skills in ways that conform with expectations for certain kinds of texts at a particular time. Test takers are performing.

Familiarize your students with the test genre to help them understand the demands of tests. Students must be able to:

- Locate information in or beyond the texts.
- Understand what test questions require.
- Process a variety of texts effectively so they learn the characteristics and demands of different texts.

Teaching Students to Take Reading Tests

Before you can teach students how to demonstrate understanding and skills under testing conditions, you must be sure they can actually read the material and have the basic knowledge they need to perform. You can't teach them "techniques" for answering questions if the text material is beyond their reading ability.

Anyone learning new skills needs to begin in familiar, comfortable territory with predictable outcomes. You don't give new drivers their first driving lesson in a downpour on a California freeway. Accordingly, teach test-taking techniques using material that students can read with only a little support.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Students who look at tests as a kind of problem-solving activity know that answering multiple-choice questions is an exercise in itself. They recognize that the conditions of timed, multiple-choice tests are different from authentic reading and writing, and they can set about learning how to demonstrate their knowledge under the rules that exist in that setting.

The task in multiple-choice questions is usually to select the best answer from a limited number of choices.

It requires literal comprehension of a text as well as going beyond the text. Students need to gather information that may be explicitly stated or clearly implied, and they may need to make inferences. Questions are more difficult when:

- There are two or more "right" answers but one is the best according to criteria that may not be explicitly stated.
- Selecting among alternatives requires interpretation of the text.
- Selecting among alternatives requires going back into the text to gather or compare information.
- Selecting among alternatives requires paying extremely careful attention to the wording.

Language frequently used in multiple-choice questions is listed in Figure 27-2. If you look at the multiple-choice tests (or "practice" tests) your students are expected to read and understand, you will no doubt be able to add to this list. To plan minilessons to help students understand these questions, determine exactly what the language requires of the reader. Then, in five- to ten-minute minilessons, show students what the question requires and walk through several examples.

Use an easel and chart paper or a projected transparency to display the language and principles. *It is not wise to spend long periods drilling on many questions.* A quick referral to one example a day will be sufficient over time to help students figure out the testing puzzle. The language-word study block is an ideal time for this quick, interactive whole group work.

Figure 27-3 presents some general suggestions for helping students do their best on multiple-choice questions. Focus a minilesson on each of these procedures and circle back for another minilesson on the principle if needed. Have students spend time using a pencil or highlighter to identify important information. Ask them to cross out the wrong answers after they have discussed why they do not fit. This physical act rivets students' attention and keeps the focus on specifics rather than generalities.

Many students will not understand the process of test taking unless you walk them through it. Encourage them to:

- Highlight important details in both questions and answers that can make a difference in which answer they select.

The Language and Demands of Multiple Choice Questions [and What It Means]	
Key Language	Demands on the Reader/Test Taker
Which sentence tells ...?	Keep a concept in mind while examining the precise language of several sentences. Select the sentence that answers the question or provides the necessary information.
Which sentence best tells ...?	Keep a concept in mind while examining the precise language of several sentences, more than one of which contains the answer. Select the sentence with the best language.
Choose the best answer.	Consider several answers, more than one of which may be right, and select the one that is most accurate or suitable. The choice may involve understanding word connotations or choosing whether details are necessary or superfluous.
Choose the sentence that tells about ...?	Match concepts with precision when selecting among alternative sentences.
This section is mostly about ...	Determine the main idea of a sentence and then select the alternative that most closely matches that idea.
According to the selection ...	Summarize information from the selection.
Who is telling the story?	Read a short or longer text and determine the narrator. The test taker must understand the difference between first and third person narrative.
The story is being told from the perspective of ...	Read a short or longer text and determine the point of view. In a third person narrative, the test taker is required to identify the character whose thoughts, actions, and perspectives are described as central to the plot.
_____ says "_____". This means ... or In the selection, "_____" means ...	Read a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or section of text, interpret it, and choose among alternatives the best statement of meaning. One or more of the alternatives may be accurate, so the test taker may be required to distinguish among subtle differences. Knowledge of word connotations may be required.

Figure 27-2. The Language of Multiple Choice Questions

Doing Your Best on Multiple-Choice Questions

1. **Read the question and all answers carefully.**
It's important to pay attention to the specific words in the question and the details in each possible answer.
2. **Select the answer carefully.**
Read all the options carefully even if one initially seems correct. Cross out the ones you are sure are incorrect. Then focus on the ones that are left to make your choice.
3. **Use what you do know in the answers.**
Even if you don't know very much about the question, focus on what you do know about a topic to make a reasonable choice.
4. **Do not always choose your first answer.**
Often the authors of the test include frequently made wrong answers. Always check your response.
5. **Make good use of your pencil and highlighter.**
Cross out answers you know are wrong so you have fewer to think about. Circle or highlight important information.
6. **Be careful of answers containing words like "always" or "never."**
Unless specifically stated in the reading passage, absolute answers are rarely correct.
7. **When a question requires the "best" answer, realize it may not fit exactly.**
It is simply better than the other answers.
8. **When asked to respond to the main idea, read the passage and determine the main idea for yourself.**
Then see if any of the answers fit. Often, all the answers contain ideas from the passage.
9. **When you don't feel comfortable with any of the responses, make a guess.**
You'll have some chance of getting a correct response if you have one answer instead of none.
10. **Spend a limited amount of time on each and go back if you have time.**
It's important to finish the test, so large amounts of time spent on a few questions will not be helpful. If you are not sure of a response, mark your best response and circle the question number so you can go back if you have time.

Figure 27-3. Doing Your Best on Multiple Choice Questions

The Language and Demands of Short-Answer or Extended-Response Questions	
Language	Demands on the Reader/Test Taker
Which sentence tells how...?	Identify a specific place in the text that provides information.
How do you know?	Identify evidence in the text or from your own knowledge or experiences to support your point.
Use the selection to explain why... Why was [did]...? Use the story to explain your answer.	Provide an explanation that is backed up by specific evidence from the text.
What does _____ mean? How do you know? Use the story to explain your answer.	Write the concise meaning of a word, phrase, or symbol; back up your answer with evidence from the text.
Retell the story.	Select important details and report them in order; the answer should provide enough information that someone who hasn't read the story can tell what happened.
This story is about.... The most important ideas in this selection are....	Select important details and provide a concise summary that includes only the main or important ideas.

Figure 27-4. The Language of Short-Answer or Extended Response Questions

- Share their “first responses” with each other and critique them, noticing how the test makers may have tried to mislead them.
- Use a highlighter to search through the text for words like always and never and discuss why they are misleading.
- Line up answers in order of best to worst and discuss why each one falls where it does along this continuum.
- Brainstorm what they know as a group and discuss how they can use even partial knowledge to make a strong attempt at answering a question. (Model this process for them so they will know how to approach such a challenge when they take tests on their own.)

There are many resources for finding examples of multiple-choice questions. While test-practice workbooks

and practice tests are useful, don't take too much of a “workbook” approach. In particular remember that:

- Explicitly teaching a limited number of examples is ultimately more powerful and helpful than hours of drill on vague workbook examples.
- Too much drill undermines the time for more meaningful curriculum, which deprives students of vital opportunities to build basic reading and writing strategies.
- Education is much more than test preparation; you want to communicate this important understanding to your students.
- Parents will appreciate the test preparation you do, but you want them to understand that your curriculum is much richer and broader than teaching to the test.

Doing Your Best on Short-Answer Questions

1. Read and be clear about the questions.

Read the question carefully, highlighting or underlining important words. Know what the question is.

2. Note important words or phrases.

In the margin or in blank space write key words or phrases you will want to use.

3. Organize in your head.

In your head, organize your answer. Be sure it is complete, logical, and detailed.

4. Write your response.

Using your margin notes, write your response.

5. Reread for sense and completeness.

Reread the question and your answer. Be sure your response makes sense and is complete.

Figure 27-5. *Doing Your Best on Short-Answer Questions*

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

Short-answer questions require students to compose concise responses that directly address the demands of the question. Therefore, it's critical that your students understand what the question is asking. Figure 27-4 contains examples of the language of short-answer questions, along with what is required of the test taker. (The same language is used for extended-response questions; the difference is the need to organize the more complex and elaborate response.)

You can use these question "stems" as a basis for minilessons and model responses or prompt the class to generate responses. You can also invite students to work in small groups and then compare their group responses as a class. They can compare their answers to the text, highlighting how they used evidence in the text to generate their answers. Help your students internalize criteria they can use to evaluate their own responses as they take tests alone.

Figure 27-5 offers some suggestions to help students do their best on short-answer questions. Teach students to highlight or circle important words that will help them understand the task required and to organize answers in a way that precisely addresses the questions.

Asking students to write appropriate test questions

for a specific text also helps them comprehend the requirements of a test. Groups can write questions, trade them with another group, and then explain how the responses do or do not answer the questions. Designing their own questions leads students to the inner structure of the test and helps them analyze it from the point of view of the examiner.

EXTENDED-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Extended responses require much more time and thought on the part of the test taker. It is critical that students learn how to organize their responses before writing the final text (see the suggestions in Figure 27-6). Students will need to read the selection carefully; show them how to highlight important ideas or make marginal notes. Many students will be distracted by details that are important but are not directly relevant to the question at hand. Organizing the final response will be easier if students look back at their notes and number them in a logical order.

Students also need to have some criteria in mind for evaluating their responses:

- Is the response complete? Or is an important piece of information missing?

Doing Your Best on Extended-Response Questions

1. Read and be clear about the question.

Read the question carefully, highlighting or underlining important words. Know what the question is so you can be sure that what you write answers the specific question.

2. Note important ideas, phrases, words.

Use the margin or blank space to write notes as you read.

3. Reread to highlight and add to notes.

Reread or skim the passage to underline or highlight important parts that relate to the question. Add these to your notes.

4. Organize your notes by numbering.

Number your notes in a logical order so that they can be an outline of important ideas or words for your written response.

5. Write your response.

In your own words, write your response, giving the important ideas and details. Be sure you have answered the question.

6. Reread for sense and completeness.

Reread the question and your answer. Be sure your response makes sense and is complete.

Figure 27–6. *Doing Your Best on Extended-Response Questions*

- Does the order of the sentences make sense?
- Does the response answer the question? Is a response to any part of the question missing?

Teach students to reread their responses, making sure they make sense and answer the question in full.

Embedding Test Reading into Daily Reading Instruction

The activities described here are designed to teach students specific test-taking skills that can make a difference in their ability to understand what the test requires and to shape successful answers. These test-taking skills work very effectively when students are reading texts that are within their control. The real key to test performance is the high-quality reading instruction that students

experience daily throughout their elementary years.

Reading in the Classroom and Reading Required by Tests

The reading workshop offers challenging and productive reading experiences that help students develop the very same strategies they will need to know to do well on tests. To some extent, reading is reading. Whatever the milieu, readers:

- Adjust their reading to take into account characteristics of different genres.
- Gather information in a way appropriate to the way the text is organized.
- Notice and use illustrations and graphic features that provide different kinds of information.
- Solve words by decoding and/or understanding their meaning.

- Use background knowledge, summarize information, and keep facts and events in mind in order to synthesize information.
- Reread to be sure they understand.
- Make notes to organize their ideas.

At the same time, there are quite a few differences between classroom reading and test reading (see Figure 27-7). For example, in the reading workshop, students select texts that interest them and read them over time until they are finished; letters in their reader's notebooks represent their own thoughts and feelings about the texts they have selected; and they work collaboratively with others and benefit from the support and assistance of their peers. In contrast, on tests they read an assigned text, usually short, within a designated amount of time; write responses to specific prompts or questions; and work alone without talking. Although some tests do give students as much time as they need, and those with open-ended responses allow for some flexibility, most reading proficiency tests are highly restrictive.

Reading Workshop Activities to Support Students' Test-Taking Skills

As a natural part of reading workshop, you can involve students in specific activities that promote ongoing learning and help them perform better on tests. We caution you not to use these activities as exercises; they are effective to the extent that students encounter them repeatedly during their reading of a variety of texts. Some general activities are listed in Figure 27-8. These general approaches can be used for many different purposes as students read fiction and nonfiction. For example, just about every activity would support content area reading as well as a deeper understanding of fiction. See Chapter 26 for additional tools to support students' understanding and analysis of text.

Your goal is to prompt students continuously in a way that will help them understand the kind of thinking that helps them comprehend texts. To guide students to specific information, use statements like these:

- Give an example . . .
- Give three examples . . .
- Give an example from each selection . . .
- Give examples that show . . .
- Using examples from the text, explain . . .
- Describe and explain why . . .

- In the text, what is meant by . . .
- Use evidence from the text to support . . .
- Why do you think . . .
- Explain in your own words . . .
- Describe and use information from the story . . .
- Explain how the author . . .
- How can you tell . . .
- What is meant by . . .

Many reading proficiency tests make a distinction between assessing two learning outcomes:

1. Constructing meaning from texts.
2. Examining and extending the meaning of texts.

The goal is to help students understand the overall meaning of what is read and demonstrate that understanding.

HELPING STUDENTS CONSTRUCT MEANING

To support students in constructing meaning:

1. *Teach students to summarize the text.* Summarizing requires students to produce concise lists of major ideas and to discard unnecessary details. In summarizing, they need to know that they cannot add topics, ideas, or details from their own experience. They need to learn and use criteria for selecting the "best" summaries—those that have main ideas, important events, and reasons for characters' actions. In non-fiction texts, summaries should focus on major and supporting ideas and the relationships between or among them. By writing and evaluating their own summary statements, students will also develop criteria for selecting summary statements in multiple-choice items.
2. *Teach students to use graphic aids and illustrations.* Give explicit attention to how students can use graphic displays and illustrations to provide information. Often, students need demonstrations of how to connect the text information with these sources of additional information.
3. *Teach students to retell the text in writing.* To retell a narrative or informational text, students need to provide major points and supporting details in correct sequence and in their own words. Teach them how to reread and check for anything that the test

Reading Workshop		Reading Test	
Different	Same	Different	
<p><i>Students:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Read books daily over indefinite time period. ❖ Read at own rate. ❖ Choose texts on basis of interest or with guidance of teacher. ❖ Usually read longer texts. ❖ Write their own responses according to factors they notice; sometimes write responses as assigned by teacher. ❖ Work with others. ❖ Talk with others. ❖ Get feedback from others. ❖ Request help if needed. ❖ Receive encouragement and suggestions to complete tasks. ❖ Use a dictionary or other resources. ❖ Recommend books to others. 	<p><i>Students:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adjust to type of text (fiction vs. nonfiction). ❖ Decode words. ❖ Understand words. ❖ Use reading strategies. ❖ Note author's purpose. ❖ Think about author's message. ❖ Note how text is organized. ❖ Attend to the text type. ❖ Use context to understand unfamiliar words. ❖ Use background (prior) knowledge. ❖ Read to understand the author's precise message for comprehension. ❖ Collect important information. ❖ Predict what's going to happen. ❖ Keep the sequence of events in mind. ❖ Reread to understand or be sure the response is clear. ❖ Notice and use graphic features. ❖ Make notes or organize ideas on separate paper. ❖ Connect text to self, previous knowledge, and other texts. 	<p><i>Students:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Are expected to read a designated amount of text within a specific time period (sometimes not timed). ❖ Read assigned texts. ❖ Usually read a paragraph or page instead of a longer text. ❖ May read a section of a longer text that they do not know. ❖ Write own response to specific questions or prompt (or choose best response). ❖ Underline, highlight or make notes in margins (if allowed). ❖ Work alone, without help. ❖ Monitor pace and productivity without teacher support. ❖ Evaluate and revise without assistance. ❖ Cannot use a dictionary or other resources. 	

Figure 27-7. Reading Workshop and Reading Tests

Suggestions for Embedding Test-Taking Skills in Reading Workshop

1. Involve children in reading and discussing a variety of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction.
2. Use a variety of graphic organizers to help students understand the structure of fiction and nonfiction texts.
3. Teach students to identify the genre and text structure in reading selections and to select a text structure for a written response (e.g., retell, summary, comparison/contrast).
4. Engage students in thinking about the text and talking about it in read aloud, literature study, guided reading, and independent reading.
5. Attend to students' reading level. *When they are beyond their appropriate level, they are not able to develop effective strategies.*
6. Provide numerous opportunities for rereading texts for different purposes (1-2-3 strategy).
7. Include numerous opportunities for pairs or triads to discuss and evaluate oral and written responses.
8. Consistently require students to provide evidence from the text to support their thinking.
9. Use the language (vocabulary and phrases) that are frequently used in tests as part of instructions for oral and written response to reading.
10. Teach students to distinguish when information comes directly from the text or requires thinking beyond the text.
11. Provide students with highlighters and teach them how to use them as a part of classroom instruction.
12. Teach students how to highlight key words and phrases in questions, directions, and reading selections.
13. Teach the children to organize their thoughts in writing quickly (phrases, lists, web diagrams) before writing their responses.
14. Provide numerous opportunities for timed short writing (e.g., one paragraph) and long (e.g., one page) written responses to reading. Have students talk about and evaluate their responses.
15. Teach students that when reading selections are preceded by a boxed headnote, the information is essential. Show them how to read headnotes and look at the examples carefully.

Figure 27-8. Suggestions for Embedding Test-Taking Skills in Reading Workshop

how to reread and check for anything that the test evaluators would interpret as copying. As with summarizing, they should not give new details, create new beginnings and endings, or offer opinions.

4. *Identify and interpret vocabulary (words, phrases, expressions) critical to the meaning of the text.* In guided reading and literature study, you can ask students to notice and identify key words that:

- Reveal meaning.
- Describe a character.
- Tell about the setting.
- Indicate cause and effect.
- Summarize a story or an informational piece.
- Discriminate between two interpretations of a fact or story.

They can also evaluate the ways in which words are used to communicate meaning in sentences, paragraphs, and stories and notice how they are used figuratively rather than literally.

HELPING STUDENTS EXPAND AND EXTEND MEANING

Many students find it more difficult to examine and extend meaning than to identify the literal meaning. The goal here is to help students move beyond the text to make inferences. To begin:

1. *Help students respond to the text.* As part of independent reading, have students routinely explore their responses to the text in writing. In addition, engage them in oral discussion throughout the reading workshop. Students need opportunities to state orally and in writing the explicit connections they make with their personal experiences, their feelings, and local, national, or world events. Given these connections, they need to provide their own opinions, backed up by a clear rationale; they also need to show that they understand a variety of perspectives in interpreting text.
2. *Help students make inferences from the text.* Show students how to grasp important ideas that are implied but not directly stated in the text. For fiction texts, they might predict what characters will do, interpret actions/motivations, and weigh alternative solutions given specific actions. For nonfiction texts,

students can interpret observational or other data as well as descriptions of processes and apply them.

3. *Help students compare texts.* Students are often expected to respond to a series of questions that require reading several different texts, sometimes of different genres. Because your students are reading many different texts in guided reading, literature study, and independent reading, you can easily guide them to compare and contrast those texts. They can compare characters' appearance, actions, motives, points of view, and so forth; plots or events; and settings. They can compare fiction, nonfiction, and poetic texts on the same topic or with the same setting (geographic or historical). Comparing texts helps them delve into the deeper meaning of complex concepts such as "heroism" or "voyages."
4. *Help students analyze the text.* In guided reading, literature study, and individual conferences, you can encourage students to articulate the characteristics of fiction and notice and connect action sequences; for nonfiction texts, they can identify particular structures—compare/contrast, problem/solution, description, and so on.
5. *Help students choose materials related to purposes.* As part of a reading test, students may be asked to identify reference materials or resources, either fiction or nonfiction, that would be appropriate sources for information. As part of content area reading, you will be teaching students to choose or identify reference resources to locate specific information. You can also help them develop these skills in writing workshop as they work on investigations. Guide them to choose appropriate resources and materials to solve problems and make decisions.

Performing on Writing Tests

Proficiency tests that include students' writing are a real testing breakthrough. These tests usually require students to respond to a prompt, and evaluators mark the writing based on the students' ability to compose and develop a topic. The rubric in Figure 27-9 is an example of the kinds of guides used to assess writing competency. Be sure to teach your students the important factors related to idea development and use of conventions that are spelled out in your state and district rubrics.