

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



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## Quizzes and practice tests help students study for the real thing

Research shows that some ways of studying for tests work better than others. One of the most effective techniques is taking practice tests. In order to answer a question, your child must recall the information, and this reinforces it in her mind.

Practice testing can occur in several ways, including:

- **In-class quizzes.** Help your child understand that quizzes are opportunities to practice recalling material. After taking a quiz and learning her score, have your child correct any wrong answers and save the quiz to use for future studying.
- **Working with others.** You can help your child study by calling out questions from her worksheets or class handouts. Or she can call a study buddy from her class.
- **Independent study.** Your child can work with flash cards. Or she can create her own practice tests. Help her look at notes, vocabulary words and review questions in her class materials, and think of questions the teacher might ask about them. Then she can practice answering.

Encourage your child not to stop at one quiz. Research shows that quizzing several times reinforces learning even more!

Source: E. Kang, "5 Research-Backed Studying Techniques," Edutopia, [niswc.com/practice-test](http://niswc.com/practice-test).



## Refresh your child's resolve

January is a time for new beginnings. Ask your child about how she thinks the school year is going. Together, think about ways she can improve it. She could resolve to:

- **Commit** to study and sleep routines.
- **Turn** assignments in on time.
- **Take** specific steps to master a new skill.

## Prevent misbehavior before it happens again

Does your child frequently misbehave in the same way? Since you can predict his behavior, you can think about ways to prevent it before it happens.

If your child tends to be distracted and crabby during study time in the late afternoon, for example, he may be hungry. Let him munch on a healthy snack before he works.



If he pitches a fit when it's time to go to bed, he may need a longer bedtime routine to transition from playing to sleeping.

## Optimize read-aloud time

Reading aloud is a great way to boost your child's vocabulary and interest in reading. So don't stop when she can read to herself. For the best results:

- **Read aloud** every day.
- **Preview the text** before reading.
- **Read books you like.** Your enjoyment can increase your child's.
- **Emphasize the first sentence.** Use it to grab your child's attention.
- **Read with expression.** Use voices for each character. Add facial expressions, too.
- **Stop for the day** while your child still wants more.



## Use toothpicks to develop math skills

With a box of toothpicks, you can help your child learn serious math skills such as reasoning, pattern recognition and even basic geometry all while having fun. Here are some simple games to play together:

- **Last one wins.** This is a great game for two people. Lay 12 toothpicks on the table. Take turns removing one or two toothpicks. The player who takes the last toothpick wins. (Try to leave three toothpicks on the table to guarantee a win on your next turn.)
- **Can you copy this?** Using five toothpicks, create a design. Let your child look at it for three seconds. Then cover it and see if he can recreate it from memory.
- **Tricky triangles.** Give your child seven toothpicks. How many triangles can he create?

For some more fun, visit [niswc.com/toothpick](http://niswc.com/toothpick) and tackle some brain-teasing puzzles from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.



## How can I shift my child's focus from games to school?

**Q:** My son would rather play online games than do anything else. He rushes through his schoolwork so he can get back to gaming, and his grades show it. I'm glad he has something that makes him happy, but I'd like him to do better in school. What should I do?

**A:** Online games can be a fun way for kids to relax. Some can even promote physical activity and build academic skills. But with fewer recreational outlets, many kids are spending a lot more time with them, and game designers know how to create games that keep players coming back.



Since the amount of time your child spends playing games is interfering with his learning, it's time to provide some balance. Here's how:

- **Let your child know** that improving in school matters more than leveling up in a game. Say that you will be limiting the amount of time he spends on digital gaming so he'll have enough time for studying well.
- **Offer alternative recreation.** Plan enjoyable activities like reading aloud, playing board games, making art and getting exercise.
- **Set screen-free times** for the whole family, such as meal time, study time and at least 30 minutes before your child's bedtime.



## Do you promote academic responsibility?

Completing assignments is part of a student's responsibility. But too many parents take it upon themselves to see that the work done. Are you encouraging your child take responsibility for schoolwork? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you remind** your child that her assignments are her responsibility?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you have** a regular time set aside each day for your child to do assignments?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you allow** your child to decide which subject to tackle first?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you review** your child's work each day to make sure it is complete?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** the teacher know if your child regularly struggles with schoolwork?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to meet responsibilities. For each no, try that idea.*

*"What we instill in our children will be the foundation upon which they build their future."*

*—Steve Maraboli*

## Build study skills that help your child read to learn

After learning to read, your child needs to understand how to read to learn. In order to retain material from the text, students must study as they read. Show your child how to:

- **Scan the text** to find important themes and points. He should look first at headings and subheadings. Then he can look for words in **boldface** and *italics*.
- **Make notes of key facts** and ideas in his notebook as he reads.
- **Pay attention to illustrations**, graphs, charts and tables. These often clarify central concepts.

## Chores are worth doing

Chances are, there will be a lot of things in school that your child will need to do even though she won't want to. Life is like that. Assigning her chores at home will help her learn the self-discipline she'll need. Doing a chore also reinforces the connection between effort and results. If she is doing her laundry, a stack of clean shirts is an accomplishment she can take pride in.



## Ask, 'How do you learn?'

Kids learn more and stay more motivated in their schoolwork when they think about *how* they learn. When you discuss assignments with your child, ask questions like:

- **What do you need** to know to do this work?
- **What do you already know** about it?
- **What questions could you ask** in order to learn more?
- **Which aspects** of this work do you think you do really well? Which are hard?
- **Does this get easier** as you go along?

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