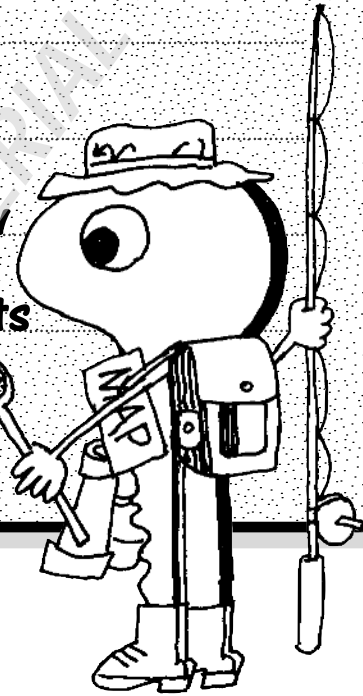


# KEY 1

## BE PREPARED

- ✓ **Forming Good Habits**
- ✓ **Asking Questions**
- ✓ **Finding Out What You Need to Know**
- ✓ **Studying for Different Kinds of Tests**

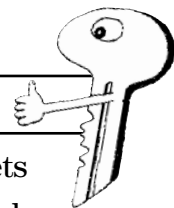
*When it comes to taking a test, it doesn't matter how many pages you read or how many hours you spend staring at your notes—if you don't know how to prepare yourself for success.*



**W**hen a football player scores a touchdown or a dancer hits all the right moves in a routine, they have prepared themselves by understanding the keys to success. Before you can do well on a test, you have to form good habits, ask the right questions, and find out what you need to know. After learning what kind of

test you'll be taking, you will be prepared to practice the skills needed for your own winning score.

## Forming Good Habits



Being a good student doesn't take magic. You'll find studying gets easier when you have a positive attitude, stay organized, and feel ready and willing to work. What can you do to make sure you're on the right path to forming good habits? Make sure to pay attention in class, take good notes, ask questions, do your homework, and review regularly. (For more detailed tips on effective study habits, read the Wiley Keys to Success Series book, *How to Study for Success*.)

### Pay attention and take notes in class

Paying attention in class seems like an obvious habit of good students. When you pay attention, you also should be thinking about what is important to remember and write down. Your teacher can say a lot during a class, but you don't want to take down every word your teacher says. A good note-taker is like a detective. Watch your teacher for clues about what topics are important. Does your teacher write on the board? That's probably a major topic. Is some information mentioned several times? Start writing in your notebook. Does the teacher hand out a sheet about the topic while discussing it? Does the topic appear on the overhead projector? Better get it down!

Now you have important information to put in your notebook. How do you write it down? Do you just scribble everything together? That makes important points hard to find at review time. Organizing your notes can help you study later. When something goes up on the board, use that for a heading. When your teacher makes a point, give that fact its own special line. Leave plenty of space between these points—then you can add your own notes and comments. Underline important phrases.

Some students think of their class notes as a first draft. After class they recopy what they scribbled down. This does more than make their notes neat and simpler to study. Rewriting in your own words can help you remember facts better. If you take clear notes and make mental connections as you listen, you'll have an easier time when it comes to reviewing for tests.

## Do your homework

When you do your homework consistently, you also are preparing for tests. You're reading up on and answering questions about what you learned in class. Often, homework shows the kinds of questions that might turn up on tests. Also, when homework is graded, you get a chance to find out what kind of answers your teacher prefers.

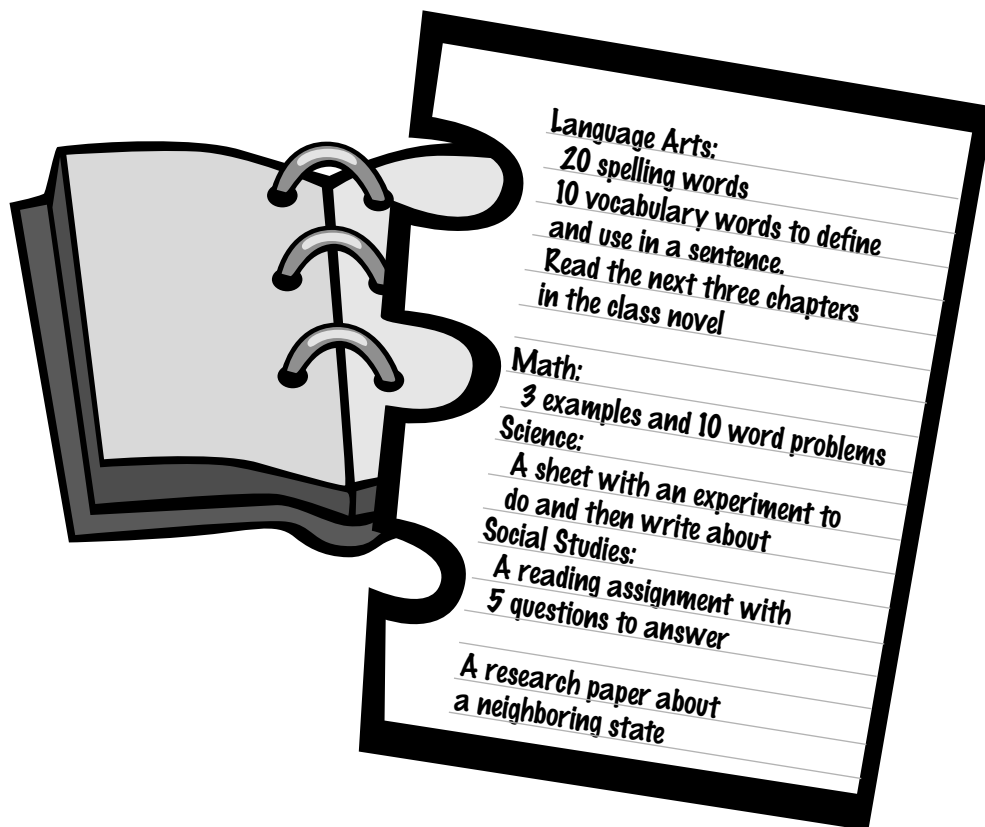
Good homework doesn't get done quickly. Good students learn *time management*, how to put their time to the best use. Suppose you end up with free time at school. Why not use it to tackle homework? For example, you could complete a reading assignment if the weather keeps you in for recess.

If you have after-school activities, hitting the books *before* you go to practice helps you make sure the schoolwork gets done. By using those often wasted minutes between school and late afternoon activities for homework, you may be surprised to find how much more time you've made for doing other, fun things in the evening.

Once you're aware of *when* to do your homework, it helps to know *where* to do it. It's important to avoid distractions when doing homework and studying for tests. Some people may say that music or TV "relaxes" them, but imagine they're taking an important test. Would they really want their favorite songs or TV programs on to take their minds off their work? The answer, of course, is "No." Everyone works better without distractions.

## If it's a big job, break it into easy pieces

Sometimes, you may look at your homework list and not know where to start. Does this look like a typical day of assignments from your school?



First, tackle the things that are due tomorrow while you're fresh and sharp. Next, work on a certain amount of a future assignment—for instance, the first five words in both the spelling and vocabulary lists. If you need to set something up for the science experiment, do that. Maybe you should let your parents know that you need some special materials. Then, you might want to look through a book or explore the state's website on the Internet to find preliminary information for your

research paper. Finally, you might read a chapter in the novel. With any luck, you'll still have time for your favorite TV show.

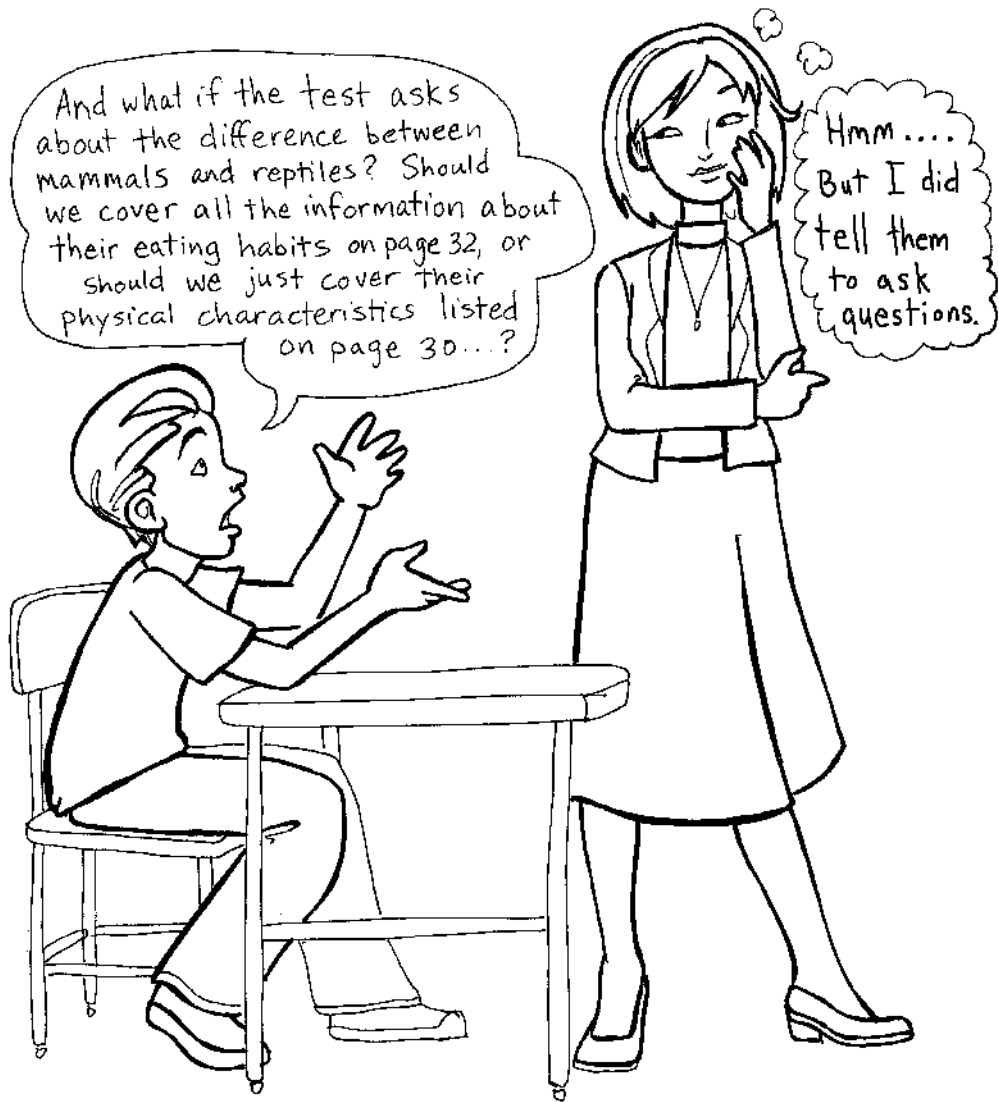
Making a schedule that allows you to do a little at a time helps shrink big jobs down into smaller ones. Some jobs, like memorizing, actually happen easily if you work in small bits. Five ten-minute memorizing sessions spread over a week help you remember more information than you would if you crammed lots of facts into one hour of study time in one evening. If you keep putting off the work, you may find yourself facing too much to do all at once. One night isn't enough to write a research paper, do a science experiment, finish regular homework, and study for a spelling test. Something is going to suffer, and so will you. However, if you do a part of each project every day—who knows? You might even finish your research paper or science experiment *before* it's due.

## Asking Questions



Have you heard this old saying: “How will I know if I don’t ask?” That’s twice as important when you’re in school. If you don’t understand something, ask about it. You’re not the only one who’ll learn. Other students benefit, too. No matter how much your classmates might groan, lots of kids may feel just as lost as you do. Plus, your teacher may see that this topic needs more work. Everyone can feel better about discovering a problem in a class discussion rather than on a test.

Don’t be shy. Speak up, and try to make sure your questions are clear. Just saying, “I don’t get this!” doesn’t help anyone. Instead, you might ask, “I don’t understand why we use the words, ‘Everybody knows.’ Isn’t ‘everybody’ a lot of people? Shouldn’t it take a plural verb?” Now you’re asking about something specific.



Keep in mind that while teachers want to answer your questions, they also want to cover a certain amount of material in each class session. If you have a lot of questions, you may want to save them for after class. Also, if you feel embarrassed about asking for help, you might find it easier to talk to your teacher privately. No teacher wants to see a student fail. Talking helps both of you do your jobs better—

# GETTING IT RIGHT



## Questions to Ask

- Remember that a good question gives the teacher a launching pad to discuss problems. Here are some ways to ask questions that teachers will appreciate:

"I'm not sure I understand this writing assignment. Could you explain exactly what you need?"

"Could you give us a hint on Problem 19?"

Or, even better, "Could you show us how to set up Problem 31?"

"I'm having a hard time with this part of the chapter. What does the author mean when she says, 'Love doesn't sit like a stone, it always has to be made new, like bread'?"

Bring up a math problem you didn't get right. "This is how I tried to work it out. Could you show me where I went wrong?"

If you have a Social Studies report that isn't going well, ask "How can I expand my ideas? Can you show me what I'm missing?"

learning and teaching. Even if you're not doing well in a class, asking questions shows that you're trying.

If you don't have time to talk after class, write your question down and put it on the teacher's desk. The teacher may give you an answer later or give the whole class a review on the topic. Most importantly, when a teacher gives you help, *write the information down*. When the time comes to review the trouble spot, you'll have the explanation that clears it up right there in front of you.

### **Review every day**

People are always on the run these days. Homework, activities, life in general can make you feel that you have no time at all. Why should you take time to sit down with your notebook and reread what you already wrote down? For one thing, you get a chance to fill in any words or ideas you might have missed while your teacher's words are still fresh in your mind. (Now you can see why it's a good idea to leave lots of space as you write notes in class.)

Daily reviews also help you remember the day's work. Experiments have shown that people begin to forget information within 24 hours. The more material you hold onto, the easier time you'll have studying for tests. Rereading your notes helps the information stay in your mind. In fact, the more often you see this information, the more likely you are to remember it.

Be critical as you read your notes. Do you understand what's written there? If not, check your textbook. Still confused? Write some questions for the next class. Even when your notes make sense, you can still add comments from what you read in your textbook. That way, your notes are clearer when you go back to study them next time.

## Finding Out What You Need to Know



As test time comes closer, you must concentrate on learning what you *need* to learn. Many students do this by continually asking, “Will this be on the test?” Teachers hear this question over and over again, year after year, and have learned how to avoid simply giving you the answer on a silver platter. You do have other ways to get the information, however. Here are some helpful hints on how to get some helpful hints.

### What will the test cover?

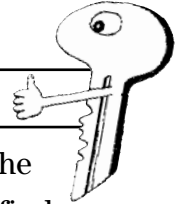
While teachers don’t hand out the questions and answers for an upcoming test, they do give clues. You already know to pay attention in class. In the days before the test, listen especially carefully to what your teacher has to say. What points does he or she stress or repeat in class? Are any of them different from topics in your textbook? You may want to ask your teacher whether this is important information that was overlooked in the text, or whether it is not as crucial as information that’s taught in the book. This is another way of asking, “Will this be on the test?”

Many teachers set aside class time for a pre-test review. Keep your eyes and ears open during these run-throughs. They’re a gold mine of test information! Sometimes a teacher may schedule a special study session during lunch or after school. Join the group and pay special attention to anything you don’t already know. Some teachers hand out study guides or worksheets with review material. Read them carefully. Are you comfortable with all the topics? If you spot unfamiliar information, ask about it so you can avoid any surprises during test time.

If the teacher doesn’t review before the test, then go over your class notes carefully. Make a list of every topic you consider important. Skim through the textbook chapters and do the same thing. Pay special

attention to headings within the chapters. Compare these two lists and combine them. Before the test, find a chance to show this super-list to the teacher. Ask if these topics cover what's important for the test. Listen carefully. If the teacher suggests additional topics, write them down! If they seem totally unfamiliar, ask where you can get more information. You still have time to study them.

## Studying for Different Kinds of Tests



Almost as important as knowing the answers is understanding the questions. What types of questions will be on the test? Will you find matching columns, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple-choice questions? Will you have to write essays?

Your study plans may change depending on the kinds of questions you'll face. Short-answer questions demand that you know lots of facts. You must fill your memory with names and dates, parts of speech, or math formulas. Writing essays demands a broad grasp of a subject. You must know how different topics, events, or ideas come together.

Often, tests mix both kinds of questions. So you'll have to fine-tune your studying style. If you memorize only facts, dates, and names, will you know how to tie them together to answer an essay question? If you concentrate on "the big picture" to cover the essay, will you know all the supporting details needed to answer the shorter questions?

There are no correct answers to these questions—you have to find the balance that's right for you. If you have a hard time memorizing, at least 60 percent of your time (and maybe more) should go into studying the short answers. If essays are a challenge for you, spend more time preparing for them.

### What if it's a standardized test?

More and more states have begun tracking how students and schools are doing with standardized tests. These exams test what students have

learned in their past several years in school. For instance, tests might be given in the fourth and then the eighth grades. The scores can affect the jobs of teachers and principals, the amount of money that goes to running a school, and the requirements a student may need to meet in order to graduate with the rest of his or her class.

Mostly, these tests feature multiple-choice questions, which are answered by filling in a special test form, often called *bubble forms* because you mark your answers in small circles that cover the page. Getting familiar with the style of the questions and practicing the correct way to answer them is an important part of what you need to study when preparing for these tests. You can find sample questions for standardized tests in Appendix A at the end of this book.

### **How long will it be?**

The longer the advance notice you receive about a test, the bigger it is likely to be. A pop quiz may only have five questions and take fifteen minutes. A final exam may go on for several hours. The quiz might cover only last night's reading, while the final reviews your whole year's work. Knowing when a test is coming allows you to plan your preparation well ahead of time. Here's a quick rule to remember: the longer the test, the more time you'll need to study for it.

When the test actually comes, you'll also have to consider how much time you have in which to finish the test. Whether you have fifteen minutes or two hours, remember to pace yourself. Often, doing well means matching the right test-taking strategy to the amount of time available. You'll learn more about test-taking strategies later in this book. For now, start by focusing on what it takes to become the best student you can be.



1. Many students complain about how much time they spend on homework. How much time are you spending? For the next week, take a sheet of notebook paper and jot down the times when you begin and end homework sessions. If you have to break off to go somewhere or to eat dinner, subtract the time when you're not doing homework.

After a week has gone by, you'll have a rough idea of how much of your day goes into doing homework. In the next exercise, you can put that information to good use.

2. On another sheet of notebook paper, make a chart breaking down the time from when you get home from school until you go to bed. Each line can represent fifteen minutes. If you get home at 3 p.m., write that on the first line. The next line reads 3:15, the one after that 3:30, and so on. Now comes the hard part. Use an alarm clock or kitchen timer to keep track of what you are doing during each of these fifteen-minute periods. Write down *exactly* what you were doing during each of them. Were you eating a snack, listening to music, catching a glimpse of what was on TV, talking on the phone, or daydreaming? Or were you doing homework?

After filling out this chart for three days, you'll have a better picture of how you use your homework time. How many minutes did you actually spend working? How many minutes did you put into other things? If you find blocks of wasted time, think of ways to eliminate them. Maybe you need a schedule. You might get more done by breaking your hour into fifty minutes of working time with a ten-minute break than just taking short breaks whenever you feel like it. After all, four short breaks of five minutes each end up taking twenty minutes out of your study or homework time.