

# Volunteer Insights

*Inspiring Catholic Faith and Principles While Encouraging Academic Excellence*

Spring 2009

## Ten Standardized Test Taking Tips

Tests make some kids very nervous, even though they know the answers. But whether it is a child or an adult, there is something about the quiet, the white paper and blank spaces, the number two pencil and the ticking of the clock that makes our heart race, our palms sweat and our minds draw a blank! So, we all need all the help we can get. The following tips may help the test taker reach his/her maximum potential when taking a test.

1-The night before, get a good night's sleep. Go to bed early. You will perform better if you are wide awake and well rested (so will your brain!)

2-Eat a good breakfast, don't skip it! You wouldn't drive your car with no gasoline. Food is brain power! And if you get hungry during the test, it will be harder for you to concentrate.

3-Listen to or read ALL of the directions BEFORE starting. It won't matter if you get the answer correct, if you didn't do it in the manner the directions stated.

4-Take a deep breath and focus, put everything else out of your mind. Take ONE question at a time, so you don't feel overwhelmed.

5-Work the questions in order. If you come to one you don't know the answer to, then skip it and you can come back to it if you have time. Don't spend too long on it, if you don't know it right away or within a few seconds. Don't spend too much time on one question.

6-Read the entire question and all of the answers BEFORE you answer. Especially if it says pick all of the correct answers, the BEST answer or one of the answers is "all of the above". These are sort of tricky.

7-Don't be afraid to guess. If you have a feeling that you know the right answer, then use your instinct. Chances are, you are right. And it is better than leaving it blank!

8-Relax. Have confidence in your ability and what you have learned and studied!

9-Use the process of elimination. If you don't know the correct answer right away or, you are torn between two answers, then eliminate the ones that you know, definitely are NOT the answer, then work your way back.

10-Pay close attention to wording. Some words like NO, NOT, NEVER, and ALWAYS, can change the whole meaning to the question.

## Turn Off the TV With Little Ones

A Wake Forest University study has found that toddlers learn their first words better from people than from TV shows--no matter how entertaining the TV shows might be.

Marina Krmar, author of the study and associate professor of communication, evaluated the ability of children between the ages of 15 and 24 months to learn new words when the words were presented on a *Teletubbies* program. She also evaluated their ability to learn the new words from an adult in the same room with them. She found that children younger than 22 months did not accurately identify an object when taught a new word by a TV program, but they were able to identify the object when taught by an adult standing in front of them.

"With the tremendous success of programs such as *Teletubbies* that target very young children, it has become important to understand what these youngsters are taking away from these programs," Krmar said. "We would like to think it could work, that *Teletubbies* and other programs can teach initial language skills. That is not true."

"We have known for years that children aged 3 and older can learn from programs like *Sesame Street*," Krmar said. "However," she added, "it's becoming clear that younger children under the age of 2 do not benefit in terms of vocabulary building and language acquisition."

## Writing Is Important Too

All parents are thrilled to hear their children read for the first time. But oftentimes, parents don't pay as much attention to the writing skills of the very young.

Jane Kostelc, early childhood specialist at Parents as Teachers National Center in St. Louis, says that no matter what your child's age, he or she is learning to write. "When your baby uses her index finger and thumb to grasp objects, it is called the pincer grasp. This skill forms the basis for holding a pencil in a mature writing position."

Kostelc suggests that there are many ways to develop the writing skills of children. Babies should have lots of tummy time to build strong backs, shoulders, and arms for crawling and writing. Being able to control a pencil depends on the stability of the shoulder and arm, and the strength and dexterity of the fingers.

She recommends that parents let their toddlers play with materials of different textures and consistencies--such as shaving cream or playdough. This provides

great stimulation for fine motor skill development. Unscrewing lids or turning doorknobs helps the toddler's wrists become strong, yet flexible.

Sitting beside your child and drawing helps him or her associate writing with comfort and joy during the preschool years.

Preschoolers also show a big interest in writing during pretend time. They scribble grocery lists or restaurant checks while playing store. They begin to display an understanding of the spoken word and realize words can be written down and read the same way every time. Kostelc suggests giving your preschooler old calendars, notebooks, or address books to write in. Point out letters as you see billboards or street signs while out and about.

"Sit with your child and let him or her enjoy the process of learning to write without pressure to make the letters right. That will come with time," she said.



## Encouraging Brain Growth Over a Lifetime

In the last decade, scientists have discovered that people generate new brain cells and new connections between these cells throughout life. Building these mental reserves can serve you well both now and much later in life.

P. Murali Doraiswamy, chief of biological psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center, says it's like having more cell phone towers to send messages along. The more towers you have, the fewer calls you'll miss.

The late neurologist Lawrence Katz came up with the term "neurobics" for activities that challenge the brain. These activities can be as simple as brushing your teeth or dialing the phone with your nondominant hand to strengthen pathways in the opposite side of the brain.

Learning to play a musical instrument or speak a foreign language stimulates the brain, as do common

games like chess and bridge and board games like Stratego or Napoleon's Triumph that require thinking and socializing at the same time. The brain likes novelty.

Exercise is known to be beneficial in boosting brain health. It improves blood flow to the brain, which encourages neural growth and connectivity for people of all ages.

Getting enough sleep is also vital. It is during REM sleep that we consolidate memory in the brain, says Marianne J. Legato of Columbia University. Quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, she says untreated sleep apnea can be harmful.

These strategies are good for your overall health, are good for your brain, and may increase your defenses against cognitive decline in later life.