making MATH tests fun?

It can be done! Using new technologies can engage students and cut down test anxiety while preparing students for standardized math tests.

By Rachel Amstutz

Almost every math teacher has been there: You spend innumerable hours throughout the year preparing and presenting dynamic math lessons, only to have an end-of-year high-stakes test spike your stress level. All you can do is hope your students tap their long-term memories and demonstrate their understanding of content you covered long ago.

But there is something you can do: Reinforce test-taking strategies and content likely to be found on tests by integrating *unitedstreaming* with a variety of technologies and fun activities. A huge component of doing well on high-stakes tests is entering the test feeling prepared and armed with a variety of strategies to use. Training students to use their time wisely and figure out what to do when they are stumped will ensure that they are able to complete the items they know and help them deal with the stress of not knowing an answer.

What's more, these activities can be used year after year, so spending some time now developing them can ultimately be a time-saver. Here are four ways to make the most of your technology resources and expand your collection of review activities for tests.

Punch Stock

1. Model test formats regularly. Open or close your lessons with questions that model a standardized-test format. For example, if your students will be writing constructed-response answers, they should practice them in class. Show students a *unitedstreaming* clip and then ask an open-ended question related to that clip. Give students the same amount of time to craft a written response as they would have on a test. Once done, allow students to score their peers' work and to be exposed to exemplar work.

If your students will encounter multiple-choice questions, end your class with a multiple-choice question to assess their skills. For quick, full-class responses, provide students with index cards they fold in half to write A, B, C, D on each section and display the correct answer choice. For individual practice you can monitor, *unitedstreaming*'s Quiz Center allows you to enter custom questions and have students log in to take a practice test.

2. Create a quiz about test-taking strategies. Using Quiz Center, PowerPoint, or even just photocopies, get students to think about and discuss test-taking strategies. Highlight the importance of entering the test fully rested and confident, and reduce anxiety by describing the test as a tool for teachers and parents to better understand what students need. You can include multiple-choice questions such as these:

On the night before a test, which of the following should you do?

a. Stay up very late reviewing all your notes
b. Get plenty of rest
c. Stress out and worry
d. Watch a late-night movie and eat lots of popcorn and candy

When you don't know the answer to a question,

a. Continue working on the problem until you solve it
b. Close your eyes and point to an answer choice
c. Skip the problem and return to it after you have completed the rest of the section
d. Take your best guess

To make this more fun—and less stressful—have all students voting A stand, then B, etc. After, you can discuss why each strategy works or why some strategies may not be best.

3. Use interactive games to make practice tests fun. Several Internet sites offer PowerPoint templates that resemble popular game shows. These templates are easy to adapt with your own questions and they provide a meaningful review for students in a fun, competitive environment. (See Resources at right for useful links.) For example, just as TV game shows often use video clips to introduce a question, using a few *unitedstreaming* clips can set up math situations that students have to solve to show their understanding of concepts. Combining these with interactive wireless response-pad technology, such as eInstruction's Classroom Performance System (CPS), will further increase the excitement.

4. Set up Learning Centers to review targeted content. Student learning centers are a fantastic way to provide individualized content review so students can focus on the areas in which they need additional help. Learning centers can be used on a daily basis when students finish their assigned work, or they can be part of your weekly classroom routine. Learning-center activities can include one-computer activities, card games, critical-thinking puzzles, mock grading stations (where students correct problems completed by you or another adult with mistakes planted), and websites with math-practice activities that students can complete in a short amount of time. (See Resources below for a few suggestions.)

You can also use the power of *unitedstreaming* to make your learning centers vibrant, multisensory, and meaningful. As part of a learning center, students can view a clip that you have downloaded, then complete an activity or answer a test-like question. For example, prior to center time, download a relevant math clip, open a new PowerPoint slide show, type an opening slide with directions, embed the downloaded clip into the next slide, and add a third slide with your question or follow-up activity. When students arrive at this station, have the PowerPoint file open and set students loose! In addition to practicing math skills, this kind of activity is a great way to hone language arts skills, such as finding the main idea or supporting details, outlining, or identifying fact vs. opinion.

Technology can facilitate a meaningful review of content just prior to tests and help students to feel comfortable in a testing environment. Consistently recycling previously taught skills into your instruction, providing frequent formal and informal assessment opportunities that mirror standardized testing, and crafting meaningful review activities that target strengthening individual skills will ensure student success when it's time to take those tests.

Do you use games for test prep? Discuss these ideas at www.discoveryeducatornetwork.com

About the Author

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Resources

Game-show Templates & Examples

jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games

teach.fcps.net/trt10/PowerPoint.htm

www.vickiblackwell.com/ppttemplates.html

Websites for Math Practice

Maryland Public Television's Thinkport: Villany Inc. Webquest
villainyinc.thinkport.org

Shodor Educational Foundation Activities
www.shodor.org/interactivate/activities

National Library of Virtual Manipulatives
nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html

eInstruction's Classroom Performance System
www.einstruction.com