

TEST TAKING STRATEGY: PIRATES

CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

| Verbal Skills | Grade Levels | Cognitive Level | Areas Addressed |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Verbal | <input type="checkbox"/> PK <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle/High | <input type="checkbox"/> Classic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Functioning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional |

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The test-taking strategy known as PIRATES (can be used to improve the test test-taking skills of children and youth with autism.

DESCRIPTION

PIRATES was originally developed to teach test-taking skills to children and youth with learning disabilities and those at risk for learning problems (Fatata-Hall, 1997; Hughes, Deshler, Ruhl, and Schumaker (1993); Hughes, Schumaker, Deshler, & Mercer, 1993; Hughes, Schumaker, Deshler, & Mercer, 2002) at the Center for Research and Learning.

The *Test-Taking Strategy Instructor’s Manual* (Hughes et al., 2002) is used to provide the test-taking instruction. The manual contains scripted lessons organized into eight instructional stages (i.e., pretest, describe, model, verbal practice, controlled practice, advanced practice, posttest, generalization). Each instructional stage includes a description of lesson goals and materials needed for the lessons (e.g., cue cards, score sheets, progress charts). The manual also includes scoring instructions, evaluation guidelines, and instructional suggestions for teachers. The instructional materials were developed to be used with secondary students with disabilities who read on at least the fourth-grade level.

STEPS

The steps of the strategy are:

1. *Pretest.* A pretest to determine student knowledge level is administered.
2. *Describing the strategy.* The components of the strategy, its purpose, benefits and expectations are identified.
3. *Modeling.* The students are shown how the strategy can be used with a sample test.
4. *Verbal practice.* The students learn the mnemonics and what they stand for. In addition, they engage in rapid-fire practice to memorize the steps.
5. *Controlled practice.* The students practice taking test using the strategy under controlled conditions. Feedback is provided.
6. *Advanced practice.* The students use the strategy on a test that they had previously taken.
7. *Posttest.* The students are administered posttests on the strategy.
8. *Generalization.* Students use the strategy with actual tests.

| Mnemonic and Description for the PIRATES Test Taking Strategy | | |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| Letter | Step | Substep |
| P | Prepare to succeed | Put your name and PIRATES on the test Allot time and order to sections. Say affirmations. Start within 2 minutes. |
| I | Inspect the instructions | Read instructions carefully. Underline what to do and where to respond. Notice special requirements. |
| R | Read, remember, reduce | Read the whole question. Remember what you studied. Reduce the choices. |
| A | Answer or abandon | Answer the question. Abandon the question for the moment. |
| T | Turn back | |
| E | Estimate | Avoid absolutes. Choose the longest or most detailed choice. Eliminate similar choices. |
| S | Survey | Survey to ensure all questions are answered. Switch an answer only if you're sure. |

From: Hughes, Schumaker, Deshler, & Mercer (2002).

BRIEF EXAMPLE

Three seventh grade students with high functioning AU participated in group instruction to improve their test taking skills. Their resource room teacher taught the PIRATES strategy over four 50-minute weekly sessions. Students then participated in controlled practice until they scored 90% on one controlled test. Then they were administered recently completed tests until they achieved 85% accuracy. Following this stage the students took a posttest and then used the strategy in their general education and resource room classes. All of the students' test grades improved over a nine-week period.

TIPS FOR MODIFICATION

The instructional procedures are subject to change according to the dynamics of the group and participants' skill levels. For instance, if the group needs more practice, the teacher can provide additional instruction in small groups. Generalization improves if students are given prompts and supports to use the writing strategy across academic subjects.

SUMMARY

PIRATES uses the strategic instruction model developed by the Center for Research on Learning. This generic test-taking strategy can help students improve their grades across course subjects.

RESEARCH TABLE

| Number of Studies | Ages (year) | Sample Size | Area(s) Addressed | Outcome |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|---------|
| 1 | 12-17 | 4 | Test-taking skills | + |

STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE

1. Songlee, D., Miller, S. P., Tincani, M., Sileo, N. M., & Perkins, P. G. (2008). Effects of test-taking strategy instruction on high-functioning adolescents with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 23*, 217-228.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of teaching the Test-Taking Strategy to high-functioning adolescents with AU through an intensive after-school program. Four secondary students participated in the study (i.e., one 11th, one 10th, one 8th, and one 6th grader). The results of this study showed that individuals with AU can successfully acquire, generalize, and maintain the use of a comprehensive test-taking strategy in that the percent improvement on their tests ranged from 87% to 124%. In addition, both participants' and their parents' satisfaction related to the test-taking instruction was high.

REFERENCES

- Fatata-Hall, K. (1997). *Acquisition and application of study skills and test taking strategies with English grade leaning disabled students failing social studies*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Davie, FL.
- Hughes, C. A., Deshler, D. D., Ruhl, K. L., & Schumaker, J. B. (1993). Test-taking strategy instruction for adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 1*, 189–198.
- Hughes, C. A., Schumaker, J. B., Deshler, D. D., & Mercer, C. D. (2002). *Learning strategies curriculum: The test-taking strategy* (6th ed.). Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprise.
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