

Part 1: What is “test preparation?”

In a general sense, test-preparation activities are actions that are being taken to promote a student’s readiness to take a test. These actions include teaching students the general content and skill areas covered by the test (e.g., reading comprehension, math problem solving), as well as practicing the skills that are needed for students to demonstrate their command of this content/skill when taking the test (i.e., test-taking skills).

Activities conducted in the name of “test preparation” vary in terms of their appropriateness. Some activities are always OK, some are never OK, and many more can be characterized as—“it depends.” Determining the “appropriateness” is best achieved by considering the negative consequences associated with the results of using the particular activity because many activities appear to be quite appropriate until a closer look reveals the potential harm associated with their use in a given context. For example, some practices that are appropriate for classroom assessments are inappropriate when used in conjunction with the *Iowa Tests*.

Examples of different types of test-preparation activities include:

- Practicing with exactly the same questions that will be on the test to be administered
- Practicing with questions from a previous version of the test
- Targeting instruction to cover only the content areas to be tested
- Reviewing content/skill areas with students before taking the test
- Using primarily multiple-choice questions on all classroom tests
- Having students complete practice tests in advance of testing (e.g., commercially developed/published or teacher made)
- Teaching test-taking skills (e.g., timing, completion of bubble sheets, strategies for answering multiple-choice questions)
- Providing instruction on the general content and skill areas covered by the test (e.g., reading comprehension, math problem solving)

At the completion of this module you should be able to explain why some of these activities are never appropriate and why at least one of these activities might always be appropriate. Furthermore, you should be able to summarize the factors associated with the remaining activities that contribute to whether their use is appropriate in a given context.

But before discussing the appropriateness of certain test-preparation activities, it is helpful to gain a better understanding about why educators feel that these types of activities are important (Part 2 of this module) and why educators should care about the appropriateness of these activities (Part 3 of this module).