



Understanding Standardized Tests

Types of standardized tests:

- **Achievement tests:** measure development in academic content areas
- **Competency tests:** measure specific content that has been taught
- **Intelligence tests (IQ):** measure potential
- **Aptitude tests:** measure strengths and weaknesses

The Iowa Assessments, administered by Homeschool Idaho, are nationally standardized **achievement tests**. The test administered in Idaho public schools is a **competency test** based on the Common Core Idaho state standards.

Standardizing, Scoring, & Norming

For a test to be nationally standardized, the publishers must examine state course objectives and textbooks from all 50 states. They then select 100 or more learning objectives for each test level.

- **Example:** The student capitalizes proper nouns

Many questions are written for each objective and then tested by statistical means for accuracy in measuring the stated objective. The best two or three questions per objective are then included in the group of subtests.

After the test items are written and finalized, a norming group is established. To do this the test is administered to a statistically random sample of school districts across the nation. Care is taken to include demographically representative socioeconomic groups, sizes of school districts, and a mixture of public and private schools. The results are then plotted to determine the scoring of the test.

Preparing for Achievement Tests

Many things lower performance on achievement tests. Be aware of these potential weaknesses, and take measures to help your student do his or her best!

Minimize four main areas of weakness:

- **Test anxiety:** concern about scores causing students to perform below their ability levels
- **Carelessness:** under-motivation or poor test-taking skills
- **Confusion:** unfamiliar with procedures and item formats
- **Poor use of time:** overly meticulous or not rechecking answers

Maximize six features of standardized tests:

- Multiple choice items
- A wide variety of item formats
- Time limits
- Separate answer sheets
- Circles that the student must fill in
- More difficult items

Students should work to develop the test-taking skills of skipping difficult items, returning to them later, and checking their work as time allows.

Parents should be careful that their own test anxieties are not transmitted to their children by subtle attitudes and actions.