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Dear Parents and Guardians,

As many of you are aware when a student reaches the third grade he will be tested through the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) each school year through tenth grade. Third grade students are assessed in reading and mathematics, fourth grade students are assessed in English Language Arts (ELA), including a long composition and mathematics and fifth graders are assessed in ELA, mathematics and in Science and Technology.

Their classroom teachers are using many different types of tests that include multiple choice, short written responses and longer writing samples to evaluate students' use of written language throughout the year. Teachers utilize common language within their instruction throughout the grade levels. They teach test taking strategies to help students feel confident to problem solve especially when confronted with a problem the student finds difficult or challenging whether it is on class work, a classroom test or the MCAS. In an effort to assist parents to better understand and support their student. Winthrop Elementary School developed and is proud to present to you its first ever MCAS Test Taking Tip Booklet. We all know how stressful MCAS time is for our students, families and staff. The purpose of this booklet is to help students along the way. Inside this booklet you will find some basic information, strategies, vocabulary that teachers are using with students, some general test taking tips, along with specific ELA, Reading, Math, and Science and Technology Tips.

The hope behind this MCAS Test Taking Tip Booklet is not for parents to teach their student the vocabulary or test taking strategies but rather to demystify the work that is being done at the school to support your student learner not only for MCAS but also for learning across all content areas. As part of the home school connection it is hoped that you will find this information valuable, review it with your student and use it as a tool when your student comes to you with a question about how to complete an assignment. Having a toolbox of strategies for test taking and an understanding of vocabulary will allow your student, when test taking, to have less anxiety and stress and create a positive testing experience.

Please take the time to read this booklet with your child. If you have any questions or concerns, please call the School at (781) 979-2280 or email your child's teacher or me at [bdavis@melrose.mec.edu](mailto:bdavis@melrose.mec.edu)

The Winthrop School Staff

**WINTHROP  
ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL  
MCAS TEST TAKING  
STRATEGIES  
BOOKLET**



## **General Test Taking Tips**

- Get a good night's sleep
- Eat a good breakfast
- Dress comfortably
- Read and follow the directions carefully
- Pace yourself, know how many questions are on the test
- Be prepared to work for the entire test session
- Skip problems you are having trouble with, BUT make sure you mark them to go back when you have finished the other test items
- Read all the options and choose the "best answer," don't choose the first answer that seems reasonable – read all the choices to find the best answer
- Mark your answers carefully
- If you aren't sure, guess wisely - eliminate as many answers as possible
- Check your accuracy
- Use any remaining time to check your work and go back to any difficult items

## **Types of Questions Used on MCAS Tests**

- **Multiple-choice questions** are included on all MCAS tests and require students to select the correct answer from a list of four options. Responses to multiple-choice questions are machine scored.
- **Short-answer questions** are included only on Mathematics tests and require students to generate a brief response, usually a numerical solution or a brief statement. Responses to short-answer questions are scored on a scale of 0-1 points.
- **Short-response questions** are included only on the ELA test and require students to generate a brief response to a reading comprehension question. Responses to short-response questions are scored on a scale of 0-2 points .
- **Open-response questions** are included on all MCAS tests and require students to generate rather than recognize a response. Students create a one-or two-paragraph response in writing or in the form of a narrative or a chart, table, diagram, illustration or graph, as appropriate. Students can respond correctly using a variety of strategies and approaches.

Responses to open-response questions are scored using a scoring guide and anchor papers (student work), for each question. The scoring guides indicate what knowledge and skills students must demonstrate. Open-response questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, with the exception of grade 3 Mathematics, which is scored on a scale of 0-2 points. Answers to open-response questions are not scored for spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Responses are scored by one scorer.

## **Strategies for Answering Multiple Choice Questions**

- Read all the answers before making a selection.
- Look at the verb in the question.
- Look for singular and plural words in the question that require answers in the same form.
- Eliminate answers that are obviously wrong.
- Always put something down (You'll get more points for an educated guess than skipping the question).

### **Other Strategies**

- If you are using an answer sheet, make sure you have marked only one answer for each question.
- Erase changes or other markings completely.
- If you decide to skip a question, be sure to skip it on the answer sheet.
- Generally, your first impression is the correct one.
- Neat work scores higher than sloppy work—Write Legibly!

### **Strategies for Reading Passages**

- Read the directions and underline what you need to do.
- Read the passage to understand the general content.
- Reread the passage and highlight important information, including words in italics.
- Find the main idea and put it into a sentence.

## **Answering Multiple Choice Questions for Reading Passages**

- Read the question.
- Read all answers to the question.
- Go back to the reading selection and highlight important details.
- Eliminate any incorrect choices.
- Check to make sure that you are marking the correct number on your answer document.

## **Answering Open Response Questions for Reading Passages**

- Take a deep breath before you read the open response question.
- Read the question to get the main idea.
- Reread the question and ask yourself, “What is it that I must answer?”
- Look for the five “W’s” who, what, where, why, when and how to determine how to answer the question.
- Make sure that you underline the question and answer all parts of the prompt.
- Look for specific vocabulary words that tell you what you are supposed to do, such as: **analyze, cite, compare, contrast, decide, describe, draw, explain, express, generalize, illustrate, interpret, list, paraphrase, point out, respond, review, show, state, summarize, support, and tell**
- Restate the question carefully and include the title and author if necessary.
- Make sure that your response has enough evidence to back up your answer.
- Make sure that your answer does not contain unrelated details.
- Proofread your answer and make any necessary corrections, such as: spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
- Be sure to use quotations if you are taking sections directly from the passage.
- Clear your mind and follow the tips given and you will be able to answer the question.

## **Answering Long Comprehension Prompts**

- For the MCAS exam, you will only have time to write a rough draft and a final draft.
- Read the writing prompt carefully and figure out what you are being asked to write.
- Plan your essay carefully before you begin to write.
- Brainstorm ideas and choose the idea that you will be able to strongly support.
- Decide how many paragraphs are needed.
- An essay is well organized when it has a clear beginning, middle and end and when its ideas are logically organized.
- BACK IT UP - use examples to explain your answer.
- Remember to answer all parts of the prompt.

## **Common Vocabulary used in MCAS Testing**

**Analyze:** to separate into parts and explain  
**Argue:** to prove points by using facts  
**Cause and Effect:** to tell what happened and why  
**Cite:** to quote as an example  
**Compare and Contrast:** to find the similarities and differences  
**Convey:** to carry out or transfer information  
**Criticize and Evaluate:** to find the strengths and weaknesses  
**Decide:** to make a choice  
**Define:** to explain exactly what something means  
**Describe and Discuss:** to tell all you know  
**Draw:** to come to a conclusion  
**Explain:** to tell how and why  
**Express:** to make your opinion or feelings known  
**Generalize:** to summarize without going into details  
**Identify:** to recognize and explain  
**Illustrate:** to give examples  
**Interpret:** to explain the meaning in your own words  
**Justify:** to argue in support of something  
**List:** to write a series of names or numbers in a row  
**Paraphrase:** to restate the meaning in your own words  
**Point out:** to show an exact detail or meaning  
**Prove:** to show correctness by using fact  
**Respond:** to give an answer  
**Review:** to reexamine the main points or highlights of something  
**Show:** to give information  
**State:** to express in words  
**Summarize:** to pull together the main point  
**Support:** to provide evidence  
**Tell:** to say or make known in words  
**Trace:** to list chronologically in order

## Answering Multiple Choice Questions for Mathematics

- Read the question.
- Read all answers to the question.
- Go back to the problem and underline/highlight important details.
- Graphic: The use of charts and pictures instead of words.  
If there is a graphic: LOOK OVER THE GRAPHIC
- Eliminate any incorrect choices.
- Check to make sure that you are marking the correct number on your answer document.

## Answering Open Response Questions for Mathematics

- Take a deep breath before you read the open response question.
- Read the question to get the main idea.
- Reread the question and ask yourself, “What is it that I must answer?”
- Look for the five “W’s” who, what, where, why, when and how to determine how to answer the question.
- Make sure that you underline the question and answer all parts of the question.  
Keep reading the question as you are solving the problem.
- Look for specific vocabulary words that tell you what you are supposed to do, such as: **compute; answer; find the sum/difference/product/ area/perimeter ; create a chart, table, tally chart or graph; estimate; round; represent; list; mark; show...**
- Restate the question carefully.
- Make sure that your response shows your work to back up your answer.
- Make sure that your answer does not contain unrelated details.
- Proofread your answer and make any necessary corrections, such as: spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
- Be sure to label each part of your answer.
- **Be sure to use formulas correctly.**
- Clear your mind and follow the tips given and you will be able to answer the question.

## **Mathematics Problem Directions Vocabulary**

**Answer** – the solution to a problem.

**Compute** – to find an answer by using mathematics; to calculate.

**Draw** – 1.) to figure out by using your power of reason. 2.) to make a picture with a pen or pencil.

**Explain/Tell** – to make something clear so that it is easier to understand.

**Label** – 1.) a word or phrase that describes something; a number or word that acts as a unique identifier. 2.) to attach a label to something as identification.

**List/Make a list** – a series of items, names, numbers, etc., often written in a particular order.

**Mark** – to show something clearly (Mark an X next to the correct answer).

**Show** – to explain or demonstrate to someone.

**Use the chart, ruler, or information, graph, etc.** - the ability to use the chart, ruler, information or graph, etc. supplied.

**Use pictures, numbers, or words** – the ability to use pictures, numbers or words when figuring answers.

**Write** – to put down letters, words, or numbers on paper or another surface, using a pen, pencil, etc.

## High Frequency MCAS Math Vocabulary

**Acute Angle** – an angle measuring less than 90 degrees

**Add** – to join two or more numbers (or quantities) to get one number (called the sum or total).

**Amount** – quantity, number of, total, sum, size or extent

**Area** – the size a surface takes up. Measured in square units.

**Arithmetic** - area of mathematics that includes: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers, decimals and fractions.

**Balance** – 1.) having the same weight(mass) on either side. 2.) a weighing device using a beam.

**Cents** – one hundred cents make a dollar

**Centimeter (cm)** – a metric unit for measuring length, equal to one hundredth of a meter.

**Chance** – the likelihood that a particular outcome will occur.

**Chart** – information represented in the form of graphs or tables.

**Compute/Computation** – to calculate an answer or result, especially using a computer.

**Cost** – to calculate the price or expense of something.

**Cube** – a solid shape that has 6 square faces, all equal in size; 8 vertices (corners) and 12 equal edges.

**Diagrams** – a drawing or plan that explains something.

**Different/Difference** – difference between two numbers (subtraction).

**Division/Divide** – sharing or grouping a number into equal parts.

**Earned** – to receive payment for work done. To work to achieve a result.

**Estimate** – (to make) an approximate or rough calculation, often based on rounding.

**Exactly** – perfectly correct and accurate.

**Feet** – Imperial units for measuring length. 1 foot = 12 inches; 3 feet = 1 yard

**Figure** – a written number.

**Figuring** – the process of understanding or solving something.

**Fraction/Fractional part** – any part of a group, number or whole.

**Graph** – drawing or diagram used to record information.

**Greater than** – more than – shows relationships between numbers.

**Grid** – a set of straight lines that cross each other at right angles to form a regular pattern of squares.

**Hundreds** – the whole number, written 100, that is equal to  $10 \times 10$ .

## High Frequency MCAS Math Vocabulary Continued

**Hundredths** – one part something that has been divided into 100 parts, written  $1/100$ .

**Inches** – Imperial unit for measuring length. 12 inches = 1 foot

**Input** – information fed into a computer.

**Length** – distance from one end to the other. How long something is.

**Likely** – probable.

**Multiply** – (multiplication) a mathematical operation where a number is added to itself a number of times.

**Multiples** – a number that is the *product* of a given number and a whole number.

**Number** – describes quantities or values.

**Number Sentence** – mathematical sentence written in numerals and mathematical symbols. Often used instead of the word equation in primary schools.

**Ordered Pair** – a pair of numbers where order is important, for example (4,6) is different to (6,4). Often used to indicate a point on a coordinate (Cartesian) plane, graph, or map.

**Output** – an amount produced; product or yield. Any information produced by a computer.

**Parallel/Parallel lines** – lines that are the same distance apart.

**Pattern** – repeated design or recurring sequence.

**Perimeter** – distance around the outside of a shape.

**Pictograph** – graphs that use pictures to show numerical data; the key of the pictograph tells what one picture represents.

**Pounds** – standard Imperial unit for measuring weight –  
16 ounces = 1 pound

**Pyramid** – a solid shape with a polygon as a base and triangular faces that taper to a point (vertex).

**Rectangle** – a quadrilateral with four right angles and two pairs of opposite equal parallel sides.

**Represent** – to stand for; be a sign or symbol of. To show in a picture; give a likeness of; portray.

**Right Angle** – an angle measuring 90 degrees.

**Rule** – a mathematical procedure for performing an operation or solving a problem.

**Set of Data** – a collection of data.

**Set/Sets** – collection of items. Members of a set are called elements.

**Shape** – form or outline - pattern of objects.

## **High Frequency MCAS Math Vocabulary Continued**

**Small/Smaller** – (smaller) reduced in size

**Spin/Spins** – to rotate or turn around, as if on an axis.

**Symmetry/Line of Symmetry** – an object is symmetrical when one half is a mirror image of the other half.

**Table** – mathematical information organized in columns and rows.

**Tally/Tally Chart** – using marks to record counting – count by 5's to get the total.

**Tens** – the whole number, written 10, that comes after 9 and before 11.

**Total (amount, cost, number, or price)** – the sum or whole amount – the result of adding.

**Trapezoid** – quadrilateral with one pair of parallel sides.

**Triangle** – polygon with three angles and three sides.

**True/True statement** – agreeing with the facts; not false; accurate.

**Unit** – another name for one. **Place value** – the units column is the ones column.

**Value** – numerical worth or amount.

**Weigh/Weight** – the weight of an object changes according to gravity a brick would be weightless in space, even though it still has the same mass as on earth.

**Width** – breadth – distance across from side to side.

## Answering Multiple Choice Questions for Science & Technology

- Read the question.
- Read all answers to the question.
- Go back to the question and highlight important details.
- Graphic: The use of charts and pictures instead of words.  
If there is a diagram or graphic: LOOK OVER THE DIAGRAM/GRAPHIC
- Eliminate any incorrect choices.
- Check to make sure that you are marking the correct number on your answer document.

## Answering Open Response Questions for Science & Technology

- Take a deep breath before you read the open response question.
- Read the question to get the main idea.
- Reread the question and ask yourself, “What is it that I must answer?”
- Look for the five “W’s” who, what, where, why, when and how to determine how to answer the question.
- Make sure that you underline the question and answer all parts of the question.
- Keep reading the question as you are answering the question.
- Look for specific vocabulary words that tell you what you are supposed to do
- Label all answers. Don’t forget your units. Make sure labels make sense. Ex. Mass answers in grams or kilograms, not liters or meters.
- **Be sure to use formulas correctly.**
- Clear your mind and follow the tips given and you will be able to answer the question.

**D = m/v - means - Density = mass divided by volume**

**S = d/t - means - Speed = distance divided by time**

**Be sure to use formulas correctly.**