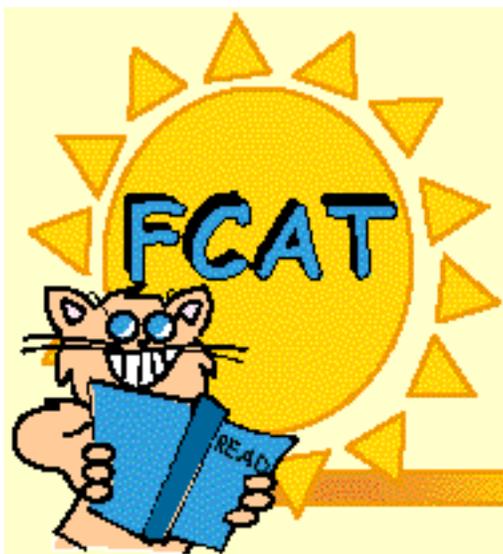


# FCAT Tips for Parents



## I. General Information on the FCAT Reading



### Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information and examples that could assist children to get ready for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

### What is FCAT?

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is a standard-referenced assessment. The results provide a snapshot of what children know and what they can do according to your

child's own ability as he or she works to meet the expectations of Florida's educational standards. These expectations are outlined in the Sunshine State Standards.

Your child will be receiving a backpack with books and activities. In order to facilitate the use of these materials in preparation for the FCAT Reading test for third graders, this booklet presents activities that address each of the Language Arts Benchmarks that are tested on the FCAT.





## FCAT Reading

The test questions on FCAT measure benchmarks from the Sunshine State Standards that identify what children are expected to know and be able to do.

The purpose of the FCAT Reading test is to measure your child's level of achievement in understanding meaning from what he is reading. Reading tests at grades 3 through 10 contain passages taken from magazines, books, and other publications that children are expected to be able to read at their grade level. Reading selections are reproduced in the test books along with the kinds of pictures, captions, and graphics. Each FCAT Reading test consists of 2-3 literary passages (poems, novels, short stories) and 4-5 informational passages (magazine and newspaper articles, biographies) . Passage length varies from an average of about 400 words to an average of 900 words at grade 10. The average number of words per passage is 700.

The table below lists the eight Benchmarks that 3rd grade students need to know for FCAT Reading. This chart will help you understand what is expected of your child in the reading sections of the FCAT.

### Benchmarks

#### L.A.A.1.2.3

**Benchmark:** The student uses simple strategies to determine meaning and increase vocabulary for reading, including the use of prefixes, suffixes, root words, multiple meanings, antonyms, synonyms, and word relationships.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's vocabulary, as it relates to finding the meaning of unknown words and understanding word relationships.

#### L.A.A. 2.2.1

**Benchmark:** The student reads text and determines the main idea or essential message, identifies relevant supporting details and facts, and arranges events in chronological order.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to understand the main idea and the details that support that idea. In addition, the benchmark includes the student's ability to understand the order of events in a text.

### **L.A.A. 2.2.2**

**Benchmark:** The student identifies the author's purpose in a simple text.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to understand why an author writes a text (for example, to inform, to tell a story, to explain).

### **L.A.A. 2.2.7**

**Benchmark:** The student recognizes the use of comparison and contrast in a text.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to recognize when an author compares or contrasts things in a text. The benchmark expects that students will be able to recognize differences or similarities and explain how things are different or similar.

### **L.A.A. 2.2.8**

**Benchmark:** The student selects and uses a variety of appropriate reference materials, including multiple presentations of information such as maps, charts, and photos, to gather information for research projects.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to find information in a text for a variety of purposes. The student might be asked to locate information in the text, a map, chart, or photo, or gather information for a research project.

### **L.A.E. 1.2.2**

**Benchmark:** The student understands the development of plot and how conflicts are resolved.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to understand how a story unfolds or develops in a narrative. This benchmark also focuses on the student's ability to understand how conflicts in the story are resolved. In addition, the student may be asked to make inferences (informed guesses) or draw conclusions about a story.

### **L.A.E. 1.2.3**

**Benchmark:** The student knows the similarities and differences among the characters, settings, and events presented in various texts.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to find similarities and differences between the characters, settings, and events of a story. The student may be asked to recognize when a character changes (or stays the same) over the course of a story.

### **L.A.E. 2.2.1**

**Benchmark:** The student recognizes cause-and-effect relationships in literary texts.

**Summary:** This benchmark focuses on the student's ability to see cause and effect relationships in stories and articles. Students may be asked to find causes or effects in fiction (stories), non-fiction (essays), poetry, or plays.

To succeed on the FCAT, your child must develop strong reading comprehension skills. The FCAT does not test a student's intelligence or prior knowledge. Instead, it tests a student's ability to understand the meaning of what he or she reads.

Reading comprehension skills improve only with **PRACTICE**. Your child can use a number of simple, everyday activities to practice the Reading Benchmarks tested on the FCAT, and you can help him at home to improve his skills.

#### **Encourage Your Child to Practice Reading**

To help your child perform well in school and on the FCAT, the best (and simplest) thing to do is to encourage practice reading at home. The more time your child spends reading, the more improvement you both will see in vocabulary, comprehension, and knowledge.

To encourage practice reading, help your child find easy-to-read materials that match your child's interests. Children read what interests them. A child who hates reading a literature assignment might like to read a magazine on fashion, sports, or music. This is good because the skills he needs to develop are the same no matter what the source. Finding stories related to a child's interests can tempt even the most reluctant child to start reading more.

## II. Preparing Children for the FCAT Reading

Each one of the following areas is covered on the FCAT Reading. Make sure you use several of the strategies outlined below to teach them to your child:

### ➤ Vocabulary

- Definition of concepts
- Vocabulary in context
- Vocabulary map
- World wall
- Synonyms/Antonyms



### ➤ Main Idea

- Main Idea
- One sentence summary
- Respond to:  
Somebody/Wanted/But/So
- Two column notes
- Summarizing

### ➤ Facts & Details

- Selective underlining / Highlighting
- Concept mapping
- Webbing
- Illustrations of passage
- Summarizing



➤ Plot Development/Resolution

- Story Map
- Retelling
- Flow Chart
- Somebody/Wanted/But/So
- Pattern Puzzle



➤ Compare & Contrast

- Venn Diagram with written summary
- Semantic feature analysis
- Summary frame for Compare/Contrast
- Content frame
- Similes and metaphors



➤ Chronological Order



- Timeline
- Story map
- Story board
- Flow chart

➤ Cause & Effect

- Summary frame
- Flow chart
- Cause effect chain
- Two column notes
- Somebody /Wanted/ But /So



➤ **Multiple Representations of Information**

- Charts
- Graphs
- Map



➤ **Author's Purpose**

**PIES**

Persuade

Inform

Entertain

Share an Experience



**Vocabulary Building**

**Prefixes, Root Words, and Suffixes**

- You and your child can make and decorate colorful flash cards with common prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Use index cards and draw pictures or symbols on each card to illustrate the meanings of the words or word parts. The more fun you have making the cards, the greater the chance your child will remember the words. Practice with the cards when taking car trips, on rainy days, or whenever you have a few minutes for play.
- It is a good idea to read aloud with your child. When reading aloud to one another, discuss words you come upon that contain prefixes and suffixes. Talk about what the word parts mean and how they change the meaning of the root word; then talk about synonyms for those words.

## **Homonyms**

- As you read aloud with your child, point out the homonyms (words that sound alike but have different meanings and sometimes different spellings, for example, red and read, bow, bough).

## **Synonyms and Antonyms**

- When your child asks what a word means, use the opportunity to define the word using synonyms (two words with the same meaning, for example, "shop" and "store"), if possible. Then ask the child if he or she knows an antonym (two words with opposite meaning, for example, "off" and "on") for the word.
- This is a version of the game "Concentration." Make a deck of cards with pairs of synonyms and antonyms. You can make two separate decks or you can mix them together for extra challenge. Shuffle the cards, then lay them out face down in a large rectangle. You and your child can take turns flipping pairs of cards, matching synonyms and antonyms until all the pairs have been matched.
- This is a good car-trip game or a game to play while working around the house together. You and your child can take turns calling out words to one another. The other person responds by giving a word that means the same (synonym) or by giving a word that means the opposite (antonym). When one person can't think of an answer, the other person wins that round.

## **Word Meaning From Context**

- This is a good game to play while driving or working around the house together. Think of a word your child does not know. Then, use the word in a sentence and see if the child can guess its meaning. You can take turns, your child uses a word in a sentence and you guess its meaning.
- Have your child read an article from the newspaper. Ask him to use a highlighter pen and highlight the words he does not know. Go back through the article with the child and discuss possible meaning for

the words, based on how they are used. Have the child look up the word in the dictionary to see if your definitions were correct.

### **Finding the Main Idea**

- After reading a story or chapter with your child, or even after watching a TV show or movie, ask your child to tell you what the story was about. You can have him or her draw a picture of his or her favorite part of the story and then write a few sentences that express the main idea.
- Have the child read aloud to you for twenty minutes. When he is done, ask him or her describe to you, in his or her own words what he has read.
- Each day after school or in the evenings, have your child tell you one or two stories about the day. Then, ask the child to make a newspaper headline to describe the event or events. These headlines are the main idea.

### **Supporting Details**

- Read with your child for about twenty minutes. Ask your child to tell you or list the important details in the story. Talk about why the details are important and how these details are important help to support the major events in the story.
- Have your child tell you a story about his or her day. Keep asking him or her questions so that he or she has to give you details to help you get a clear idea about the story. Talk about why those details are so important.

### **Inference**

- Together with your child, select a suspenseful story to read with your child. After reading a chapter, or the first part of the book, stop and talk about what you think might happen next. Write down your guesses

and your reasons for thinking them. When you have finished the story, compare your guesses with the story's events.

- Make up a story with your child. This can be written down or just made up on the spot. When you reach points in the story that require a decision about what action will happen next, choose three possible directions the story could take. Take turns making up what would happen if the action went these three different ways. Talk about why things would turn out the way they would.
- When watching a video together, pause the video at important moments in the story and make guesses about what might happen next and why, based on things you have learned about the characters, setting, or action in the previous minutes.

### **Significant and Minor Details**

- Use a brochure from somewhere you have visited — a zoo, museum, play, etc. — and have your child read it aloud to you. Then have him or her tell you which of the facts from the brochure are important to understanding the purpose, place, or event, and which details could be eliminated without making the information seem confusing or incomplete. You can also do this activity using newspaper articles.

### **Chronological Order**

- After reading a story or seeing a movie, have your child write down all the events that happened, each one on a slip of paper or a card. Put them into a hat or bowl and mix them up. Then, help your child put the events in order based on when they happened. This will give your child practice in making and understanding timelines.
- Have your child write a letter to you or to a grandparent or to a friend telling about a family vacation or adventure. Have him or her write the story by including every little detail.

## **Author's Purpose**

- After reading a story or chapter with your child, ask him or her to find five things in the story that are factual (true and based on fact) and five things that are someone's opinion (what someone thinks). Discuss the differences between fact and opinion.
- Play a game where you pretend that your child is a talk show host, a news reporter, or an advertising executive. Have him or her make up statements about people, things and events, and discuss the purpose of the statements — are they trying to entertain, inform, or persuade?

## **Comparison and Contrast**

- Have your child make a small notebook of cut-out pictures from magazines, printed pages from the Internet, old books or the newspaper. Then, ask him or her to create captions that compare the pictures.
- Wherever you go, talk to your child about what is alike and what is different about the people, places, and things that you see together. You can compare items on a menu, in a shop window, or at the grocery store. Ask your child to supply as much detail as possible to emphasize "sameness" and "difference."

## **Reading Maps and Charts**

- Organize a backyard treasure hunt. Make a simple map with clues or riddles directing the participating children to each spot on the map. Once they have gotten the final clue and the final object, they receive a prize or reward.
- Have a weekly or monthly family show-and-tell session. Each member of the family must make a presentation about something he or she did, learned or want to learn. Emphasize the use of graphs, charts and maps in your presentations.

### **Using Photos to Make Predictions and Write Summaries**

- Look through a magazine or book that has lots of interesting colorful pictures. Talk about what the pictures might mean and what the accompanying article might be about based on the pictures. Make up stories about the pictures. Then read the article and find out if your guesses and stories were correct.
- Let your child take pictures of a family vacation or outing. Ask your child to write a summary of the family adventure, and then use the photographs to support and illustrate the points or events in the story. Make a book that combines the child's account and his or her pictures.
- Take family photos and put them in a box. Ask your child to use the pictures to make up a story (it doesn't have to be a true story). Make a book using the story and the pictures, and give it to someone as a gift!

### **Beginning the Research Process**

- Hold a family science fair or cooking contest with a special theme. You could have a small-scale science fair where everyone is to make something to help attract birds to your back yard. You could have a "Best Cookie Contest" where everyone has to choose their own recipe. Each of these examples requires that children conduct some research before starting, whether looking through cookbooks for recipes or garden magazines for birdfeeder ideas.
- Start a family newsletter. Ask each member of your family to interview another family member and write a short article about him or her. Each interview should have a theme or main topic such as favorite hobbies, sports, etc. Children can use pictures, drawings, or cartoons to illustrate the newsletter articles.
- The next time your child asks you a question about how something works or the meaning of a word, direct him or her to the encyclopedia, almanac, internet or dictionary to reinforce the habit of using reference materials.

### **Understanding Plot Development**

- When you watch movies, television programs, or plays with your children, ask them questions about the story involved. Ask your child to tell you what he thinks the conflict or crisis was. Discuss what the story was about and the details that led up to the conflict or crisis. Talk about the events that happened in the story, and discuss what the characters were like. Discuss the problems that each of the individual characters faced.

### **Describing Solutions to Problems**

- Talk about a problem your child may be facing in school , at home or with his or her friends. Encourage your child to think of ways to solve the problem on his or her own, and give your child some time to work out the problem. Later, ask your child to talk about the problem he or she faced and how the problem was solved.

### **Describing Conflict Resolution**

- Once you have discovered how a character in a movie or book resolves his or her conflicts, ask your child what he or she would do in the same situation. What are some other possible solutions to the conflict?
- Talk to your child about the conflicts that arise in everyday life. Ask the child to describe how conflicts at school, home, or in his or her club activities are resolved. How did your family decide where to spend the holidays? How did your children decide who was going to do which chore? Talk about how we can sometimes be in conflict with other people and be in conflict with ourselves when we cannot think of the right thing to do.

### **Inferences About Character Traits**

- After reading a story, watching a television show or movie with your child, talk about how your child's favorite character would act in another situation. Discuss what details in the story helped you decide what the character was like. You can even pretend that you are the character and have your child give you a new situation to react to, or ask the child to be the character and you give him or her a situation.

- Ask your child about people in his or her life. Make up situations and guess how those people might react to those situations. Why? What do you know about the person that makes you think he or she would react a certain way? These are the details on which we base inference.
- Watch a video with your child and stop the story at certain important points in the action. Discuss what you think the character might do. Write down your guesses and compare them to what the character really does at the end of the movie.

### **Inferences About Character Motives**

- Watch a movie or read a book that has a clear-cut "bad guy" and a "good guy." Talk with your child about why these characters do the things they do, or what "motivates" their actions.
- This is a fun game to play while traveling in a car. Make up a character for yourself and have your child make up a character to play as well. Tell each other important details about the character. Then, create a scenario in which the character does something a bit odd, dangerous, silly, or mysterious. Ask each other what motives the character might have had.

### **Inferences About Plot Development**

- Whenever you watch a television show or video with your child, make a game of guessing what may happen in the plot. At commercial breaks or when you choose to "pause" the video, guess what may happen next and why. Write your guesses down and at the end of the show or movie, see who made the best inferences.
- While sitting around the table after dinner or while traveling, make a circle story. In a circle story, one person makes up the beginning of a story for instance, a character and a situation, then the next person makes up an event that happens to the character and so on. Each person must use inferences, or educated guesses, in order to create

the next part of the story or to create details to make the characters lifelike.

### **Inferences About Story Setting**

- Read a story aloud to your child. Leave out any references to the story's setting that would tell the child exactly what the setting is, but leave in details that act as clues. When the story is finished, ask your fourth grader where they think the story is set and why.
- Have your fourth grader make up a story and tell it to you, but ask them not to tell you exactly where the story is set. You have to try and make a guess about the story's setting. If the child has not given you enough details to make a correct guess, ask questions until you can make a good guess. Then switch and you make up a story.
- This is a version of twenty questions that is fun to play in groups or pairs. Have your child make up a location, such as the mall during a thunderstorm, a sports event when it's raining, the kitchen during Thanksgiving dinner, a desert island. However, the child does not tell you "where" you are. Then, you ask your child "yes" or "no" questions until you figure out what setting he or she is trying to evoke.

### **Similarities and Differences in Characters**

- Play a family comparison game. Talk about what similarities and differences exist between members of your own extended and nuclear families. What things are alike about the child's two grandmothers? Do all the children in the family have the same color hair? Do they talk the same way? Do they all like macaroni and cheese?
- After reading a book with many characters in it, ask your fourth grader to make a table listing the similarities and differences between the characters.

### **Similarities and Differences in Settings**

- Read several short stories in one week with your child (or have him or her read the stories). Then, ask your child do a comparison of two

settings from the stories, taking note of where the stories took place and what kinds of details the author used to describe the story settings.

- After reading a book or seeing a movie, ask your child to compare the story or movie's setting with your own house, neighborhood, city, country, climate, etc. How are they alike? How are they different?

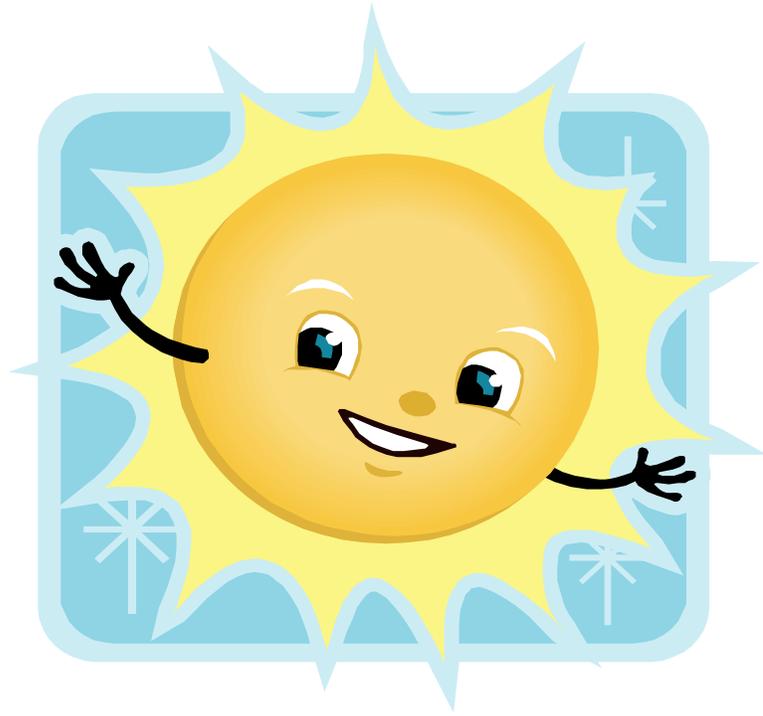
### **Similarities and Differences in Events**

- Play a game in which the child names an event, such as a wedding, a feast, an argument, or a swimming party, and you respond with an event that is opposite to that event: a funeral, a famine, a hug, a thunderstorm. Then, talk about what things are similar and different between the events.
- Talk with your child about how the events in a story or movie are alike or different from the events your child experienced that day. Are both events happy? Is one more exciting than the other? Are they both challenging?

### **Cause and Effect in Literary Writing**

- Talk about the relationship between cause and effect in your child's everyday life. When your child is dealing with the consequences of his or her actions, talk about what caused the consequences and what the child might do differently the next time to have a different effect. Talk about examples of cause and effect in your life.
- While watching a TV show or movie with your child, pause and discuss what may have caused a certain thing to happen. Why did the car go over the cliff? Why did the ballerina win the contest?

**That's All Folks!!**



**Have fun working with your children!!!!**