



# Handy Handouts®

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## What Are Standardized Tests?

by Rynette R. Kjesbo, M.S., CCC-SLP



*Standardized tests* are formal tests that measure students' performances and abilities in different subjects or areas. These tests use uniform procedures for both giving and scoring the test. All of the students taking the test answer the same questions written in the same format. As well, standardized tests use a specific way to score in order to maintain accurate scoring among all students. This set-up reduces bias when testing large groups of students and makes the test "standard" for all students.

There are two main types of standardized tests: norm-referenced and criterion-referenced. *Norm-referenced tests* measure a student's performance against the performance of his/her peers. Norm-referenced tests help rank students by ability level in order to place them in appropriate educational programs (for example, gifted or remedial classes). *Criterion-referenced tests* help determine whether or not students have mastered specific skills.

Criterion-referenced tests help to measure how much a student knows before teaching begins, as well as how much a student has learned as a result of teaching.

### Using Standardized Tests to Evaluate Students' Learning

Educators use standardized tests to assess how much students are learning as well as how much progress they are making in school. While standardized tests can provide important information about what students are learning, they should not be the only assessment tool used to evaluate the skills and knowledge of students. There are many other factors that are important to consider—classroom observations, classroom performance, and classwork and homework can be assessed along with standardized testing in order to get a complete picture of a student's abilities.

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