

What to Consider When Thinking About Test Prep



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Pros and Cons of Using a Tutor

If you are thinking about using the services of a private tutor, check out this list of pros and cons to find out if tutoring services may be right for you.

Pros of Using a Private Tutor

- **Personal Attention**
One of the biggest pros of working with a tutor one-on-one is the personalized attention you will receive. Many people find this time to be extremely beneficial because the focus is exclusively on them – providing opportunities to ask specific questions and discuss problem areas.
- **Tailored Study Time**
A one-on-one tutoring session is study time that is specifically tailored towards the student's needs. So, students who need help with entrance exams, subjects or catching up on certain skills will be able to exclusively focus on areas they need help in.
- **A Real Improvement in Results**
Sessions with private tutors often result in dramatic improvements in grades, entrance exam scores and test scores – and for many students, only a few sessions are needed before improvements are seen.

Cons of Using a Private Tutor

- **Price**
Fees for tutoring rates vary widely according to subject, service, grade level and location. On average fees range from around \$10 to \$20 per hour, and for some students the fees are just too much. However, if you have a tight budget you may want to look for tutoring services that offer discounts for low income students or which offer options for more affordable group sessions or shorter one-on-one sessions.
- **Accessibility**
Students who live in rural areas, or who do not have their own vehicle, may have difficulties getting to a tutor for a private session. The good news is that many tutors today will come to your home, and some tutors also offer private sessions on the Internet.
- **Personality Conflicts**
Personality conflicts can occur between tutors and students, and these conflicts may affect the quality of the tutoring sessions. Students should try to work through any conflicts with a private tutor, especially during the first few sessions (it can take time to get used to a new tutor) or look into hiring a different tutor if conflicts continue.

Questions to Ask a Potential Tutor

Following are some recommended questions, but you should always consider the unique needs of your child and add other questions as you feel relevant:

- How many years have you been a tutor?
- What are your qualifications?
- Are you, or is your company, a member of the Education Industry Association?
- Can you provide references?
- What standardized tests do you help students prepare for?
- What supplies and materials do you provide? What will my child need to provide?
- How long will the sessions be and how often?
- Where will the sessions take place?
- Will you provide private (one-to-one) tutoring?
- What is the cost?
- Are there additional fees?
- Is there any way to reduce the cost of tutoring?
- Will I have a contract?
- How can I get out of the contract?
- How will you know what my child's needs are?
- Do you have a particular teaching philosophy?
- How will you communicate with me?
- Can I observe tutoring sessions? How involved should I be in my child's tutoring program?
- What age groups do you provide tutoring for?

What Tutors Need to Know From You

Tutors need to understand your child as much as possible to start the sessions in a positive way. Be prepared to share with a potential tutor at least the following information:

- What seems to motivate your child?
- Does your child like school? What are his/her favorite subjects? Least favorite?
- How is your child's memory?
- How does your child feel about being tutored?
- Do you have work samples I can view?
- May I speak to the teacher regarding your child?
- How does your child feel about standardized tests? Does s/he get anxious? What are his/her past standardized test scores like?
- Does your child have any specific organizational/study skill issues?

Choosing the best method of tutoring for your child

Private Tutoring

- One-on-one or small group tutoring allows for personalized instruction and often the best results when it comes to score improvement. In an individual setting, students are most accountable for completing assignments and all the time is dedicated to making sure that student improves.
- The drawbacks to private tutoring are cost and quality. Cost is obvious; you are paying for the instructor's time and experience. A complete test prep program delivered one-on-one can cost between \$1200 and \$10,000. Quality can be an issue in private tutoring. You want an experienced instructor who specializes in test prep.

Group Classes

- Because they are more affordable than private tutoring, group classes are one of the most popular methods of test prep. Students receive the same information, but in a group setting. For some, a group is better because they learn from the questions of others and feel less pressured than in a one-on-one setting.
- Group programs offer a more consistent quality of information, but there are still huge variations. The big name "big box" test prep companies have consistent materials, but college students trained on the workbook often teach those classes. You can get some good teachers, but you can also get the instructor with no classroom management skills. Some of the best classes are offered by local and regional companies and are taught by experienced teachers who specialize in test prep.
- Classes usually range in cost between \$495 and \$1395. While you may be able to find some bargains, ask around for recommendations because cheaper is not always better.

Online Programs

- Online test prep can take many forms. Some require students to "attend" class at specific times each week to watch the lessons live; others allow students to access lessons at any time. Online classes can offer all the same benefits of a traditional class with added flexibility. The drawback to online education is accountability. Some students need the structure of a traditional class.
- The cost of online programs varies considerably, often based on the quality and quantity of information. Some programs cost less than \$100 while others are as much as \$3000. Again, do your research and get recommendations.

Self-Study

- Finally, the least expensive method to prepare for test is to study on your own. Some students are dedicated enough to review without guidance and these diligent scholars can teach themselves for the cost of materials alone.

- Self-study works best for bright students who are already good test takers. They already know most of the test content and don't have problems with nerves, so these students just need to study the format of the questions and exam to develop test-taking strategies.

Things to have in mind as a parent when looking for a one on one tutoring

- **Get References!**

Tutoring is a business and any tutor you hire will have had customers. You should get at least three referrals and contact them! It's best that those other references be parents also, so that you can know how well the tutor works with children. Yes, this is for safety, but also just for good business sense. You want to employ a reliable and effective tutor.

- **Play it safe!**

You should only have the tutor come to your house if at least one adult will be home. If you followed up on your references, then you should be getting a trustworthy tutor, but as a parent, use some common sense and just be careful!