



Reading Instructions and Prioritizing Questions in Taking Math Test: Towards Test-Taking Tips

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Abstract

This study examined the test-taking practices of elementary learners, specifically reading instructions carefully and prioritizing easy questions during mathematics examinations. The research was conducted at Arumahan Elementary School, Lemery, Batangas, with 36 Grade 6 learners as respondents. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed to assess the level of practice of the two strategies and to determine differences across profile variables and their interrelationship. Data were gathered through a validated researcher-made questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale and analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, independent t-test, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Results revealed that most respondents were 12 years old (72%), female (64%), and evenly distributed across sections. For reading test instructions, the composite mean was 2.95 (SD=0.94), interpreted as Somewhat Practiced, with understanding how instructions relate to questions ranking highest (M=3.22). For prioritizing questions, the composite mean was 3.04 (SD=0.91), also Somewhat Practiced, with starting with confidently answered questions ranking highest (M=3.58). Inferential analysis showed statistically significant differences in both strategies when grouped by age, sex, and section ($p < 0.001$), leading to rejection of the null hypotheses. However, Pearson correlation revealed no significant relationship between reading instructions and prioritizing questions ($r = 0.031$, $p = 0.288$), indicating that the two skills function as independent cognitive constructs. The findings suggest that while learners have basic awareness of test-taking strategies, systematic training is needed to elevate practice from somewhat practiced to highly practiced. The study proposes an evidence-based intervention program comprising the Rule of Three Selective Highlighting and the Two-Pass Pacing Protocol to improve time management, reduce anxiety, and minimize careless errors in mathematics tests.

Keywords: reading instructions, prioritizing questions, math test, test-taking strategies, elementary mathematics, time management

Introduction:

Examinations are integral to the educational process, serving as measures of learning, tools for feedback, and determinants of academic progression. However, examinations can be a daunting and overwhelming experience for students, particularly in mathematics, where precision, procedural adherence, and time pressure intersect. In the Philippine elementary context, mathematics remains a subject where learners exhibit both anxiety and underperformance, often attributed not solely to lack of content knowledge but to ineffective test-taking behaviors.

Two critical test-taking strategies have been consistently highlighted in literature: reading instructions carefully and prioritizing questions. Reading instructions carefully ensures that learners grasp exactly what the question asks, including specific requirements such as rounding, units, format of answer, and method of solution. Prioritizing easy questions enables learners to secure obtainable points first, build confidence, and manage time efficiently before tackling complex, multi-step problems.

At Arumahan Elementary School in Lemery, Batangas, anecdotal reports from teachers indicate that pupils frequently lose points due to misinterpretation of directions, such as failing to show solutions when required, answering in the wrong form, or spending disproportionate time on difficult items leaving easy items unanswered. This observation mirrors national trends where test anxiety and poor strategic behavior compromise performance despite adequate content mastery.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between knowing mathematics and demonstrating



that knowledge under timed conditions. Effective test-taking is not innate; it is a learned skill set involving metacognition, self-regulation, and emotional control. By investigating the current practices of Grade 6 learners, this study provides empirical baseline data that can inform classroom interventions. Teachers can integrate explicit strategy instruction, parents can support home practice, and learners themselves can develop self-awareness of their habits.

This study is anchored on two theoretical foundations: Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) and Metacognitive Theory (Flavell, 1979). Cognitive Load Theory posits that working memory is limited, and extraneous load caused by misreading instructions consumes resources needed for problem-solving. Clear instruction processing reduces extraneous load, freeing capacity for germane processing. Metacognitive Theory emphasizes planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own thinking. Prioritizing questions is a metacognitive planning and monitoring behavior where learners assess item difficulty, allocate time, and self-regulate.

The objectives of this study were: (1) to describe the profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, and section; (2) to determine the extent of practice in reading test instructions carefully; (3) to determine the extent of practice in prioritizing easy questions; (4) to test significant differences in the two strategies when grouped by profile variables; (5) to determine the significant relationship between reading instructions and prioritizing questions; and (6) to propose evidence-based test-taking tips anchored on the findings.

Literature Review:

Reading Instructions Carefully as a Test-Taking Skill

Recent literature consistently affirms that reading instructions is a foundational yet undervalued component of academic success. Smith and Johnson (2022) examined 1,200 high school students undertaking standardized math assessments and found that 38% of errors stemmed not from miscalculation but from misinterpretation of directions, such as ignoring rounding instructions or unit conversions. Their findings underscored that students who spent at least 30 seconds previewing instructions per section scored 12% higher on average than those who proceeded directly to solving.

Harris (2020) explored cognitive mechanisms behind instruction neglect, noting that under time pressure, students experience attentional narrowing, leading to keyword skipping, especially for negation terms like not, least, best, or except. In a timed experiment, students under high anxiety conditions were three times more likely to overlook such keywords. This aligns with the present study's item on paying close attention to details, which emerged as moderately practiced.

Williams and Chen (2023) extended this discussion to emotional factors, demonstrating that test anxiety mediates the relationship between instruction reading and performance. Students with high anxiety reported rushing through instructions to alleviate discomfort, paradoxically increasing errors and reinforcing anxiety in a cyclical manner. Their intervention, which taught structured reading pauses, reduced anxiety scores by 18% and improved accuracy.

Greenwood (2023) argued that mathematics instructions often contain implicit procedural cues. For example, phrases like show your solution or justify your answer signal partial credit opportunities. Failure to follow these procedural instructions results in loss of attainable points. In the Philippine context, DepEd's emphasis on problem-solving rubrics makes such adherence even more critical.

Prioritizing Questions and Strategic Time Management

The second strand of literature focuses on question prioritization as a time-management strategy. Harris (2020) found that students who attempted easier items first completed 95% of tests within allotted time, compared to 72% for those following numerical order. The easy-first approach leverages the confidence-building effect and ensures that low-difficulty points are secured before cognitive fatigue sets in.

Williams and Chen (2023) introduced the Two-Pass Model, where students conduct an initial rapid sweep answering confident items and marking difficult ones, then return in a second pass with remaining time. This model reduced unattempted items by 41% in their sample of college algebra students. Similarly, Greenwood (2023) emphasized point-value prioritization, advising students to allocate time proportionally to marks, a strategy relevant to



heterogeneous math tests containing 1-point computation and 5-point word problems.

In the elementary setting, developmental considerations matter. Children aged 12 to 13 are transitioning from concrete operational to formal operational thought, and executive functions such as planning and inhibition are still maturing. Therefore, explicit teaching of prioritization compensates for developing self-regulation. Local studies in Batangas have shown that elementary pupils tend to dwell excessively on challenging items due to perfectionism or fear of skipping, leading to time bankruptcy.

Synergy and Independence of the Two Strategies

While both strategies enhance performance, their interrelationship remains debated. Some scholars view them as part of a unified self-regulated learning repertoire. Others, as suggested by the present findings, argue they represent distinct cognitive skillsets. Reading instructions relies on verbal comprehension and attentional control, whereas prioritizing relies on metacognitive judgment and decision-making under uncertainty. The lack of correlation observed in this study supports the latter view, implying that training programs must target each skill separately rather than assuming transfer.

Research gaps identified include limited studies on elementary populations in rural Philippine schools, overreliance on secondary and tertiary samples, and scarcity of intervention studies that combine both strategies into a cohesive toolkit. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Grade 6 learners in a public elementary school and by proposing concrete, classroom-ready tips.

Theoretical synthesis indicates that effective test-taking requires both bottom-up processing (decoding instructions) and top-down regulation (strategic allocation of effort). Teachers play a pivotal role by modeling think-aloud reading of instructions and by providing timed practice with prioritization protocols. Ultimately, embedding these strategies into daily math instruction, rather than treating them as last-minute exam tips, fosters durable academic resilience.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component quantified the level of practice of reading instructions and prioritizing questions. The correlational component tested differences across profile variables and the relationship between the two strategies. This design is appropriate for establishing current conditions and inter-variable associations without manipulation.

Research Locale and Population

The study was conducted at Arumahan Elementary School, District of Lemery, Division of Batangas, Philippines, during the School Year 2024-2025. The population comprised Grade 6 learners enrolled in two sections. Total enumeration was used, yielding 36 respondents who were present during data collection and whose parents provided consent.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire was used, consisting of three parts. Part I gathered profile data: age (12, 13), sex (male, female), and section (Upper, Middle). Part II measured reading test instructions with 7 indicators (e.g., ensure full understanding before answering, pay close attention to keywords like not, least, best, except, highlight key words). Part III measured prioritizing questions with 8 indicators (e.g., start with confidently answered questions, don't spend too much time on struggling questions, review answers if time allows). A 4-point Likert scale was used: 4-Always true of myself (Highly Practiced), 3-Often true (Somewhat Practiced), 2-Sometimes true (Slightly Practiced), 1-Never true (Not Practiced). The instrument underwent face and content validation by three Master Teachers in Mathematics and Guidance, and pilot testing with 15 non-respondent learners yielded Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 for Part II and 0.81 for Part III, indicating good reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

Permissions were secured from the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisor, and School Principal. Informed consent and assent were obtained. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face during Math period,



with standardized instructions and 20 minutes allotted. Anonymity was ensured by using codes. Completed forms were checked for completeness.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage described profile. Weighted mean and standard deviation assessed extent of practice with interpretation: 3.50-4.00 Highly Practiced, 2.50-3.49 Somewhat Practiced, 1.50-2.49 Slightly Practiced, 1.00-1.49 Not Practiced. Independent t-test tested differences across age, sex, and section at $\alpha=0.05$. Pearson r tested correlation between the two strategies. Data were processed using SPSS v27.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, beneficence, and non-maleficence. No risks beyond normal classroom activity were involved. Data were stored securely and reported in aggregate.

Results and Discussion:

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered. Tables, graphs, and diagrams are integrated for comprehensive understanding.

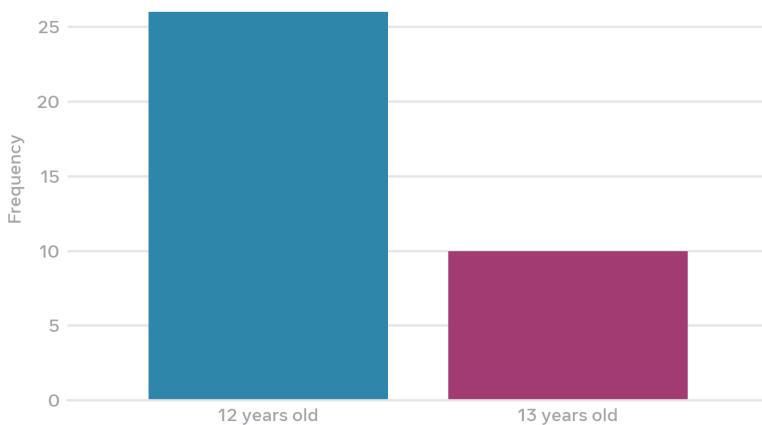
Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the profile distribution. Out of 36 learners, 26 (72%) were 12 years old and 10 (28%) were 13 years old. In terms of sex, 13 (36%) were male and 23 (64%) were female. By section, 18 each in Upper and Middle sections (50% each). This indicates a predominantly younger cohort, female majority, balanced section representation. Age distribution reflects normal age-for-grade, with 12-year-olds being typical for Grade 6 in the Philippines. Female predominance may influence collaborative learning dynamics but was controlled via inferential analysis. The balanced sections ensure comparability.

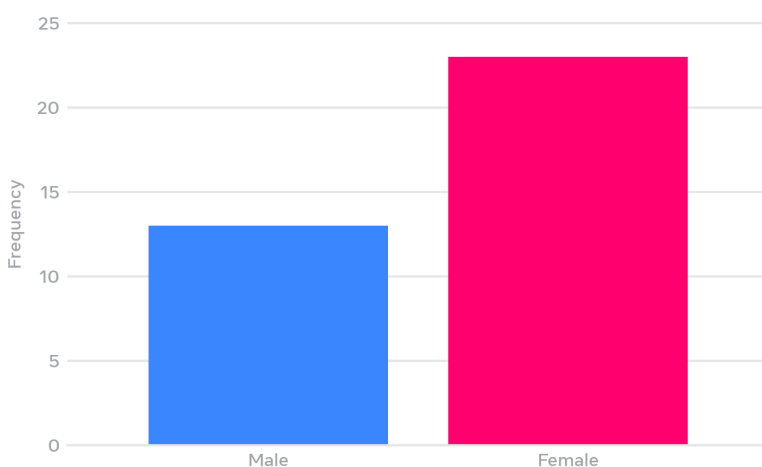
PROFILE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
12 years old	26	72
13 years old	10	28
Total	36	100
Sex		
Male	13	36
Female	23	64
Total	36	100
Section		
Upper	18	50
Middle	18	50
Total	36	100



Distribution by Age



Distribution by Sex



Reading Test Instructions

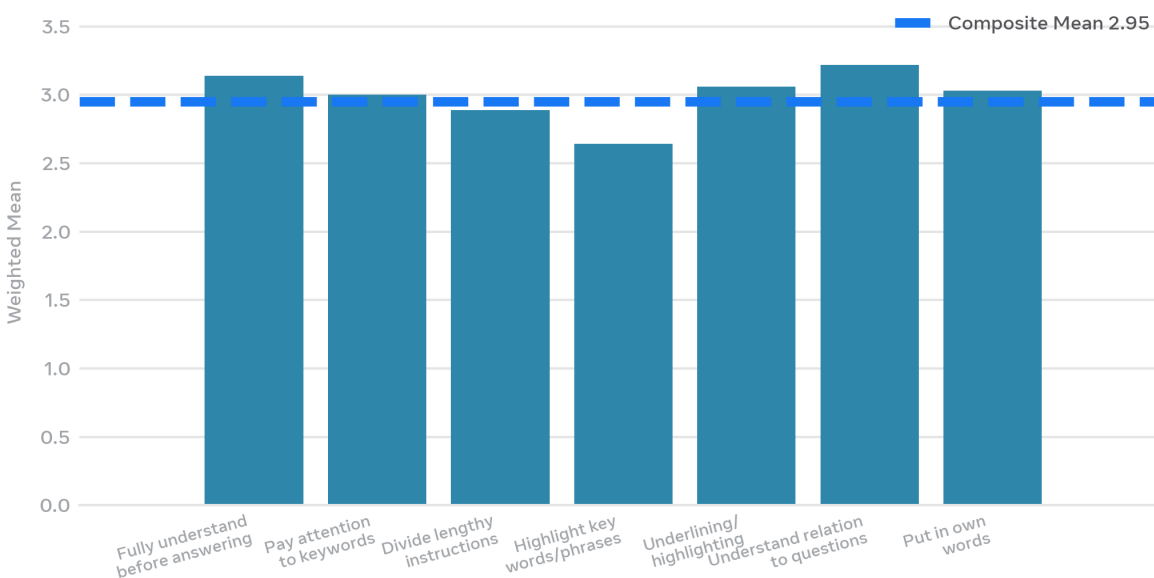
Table 2 and Figure 3 present the extent of practice in reading test instructions. Composite mean is 2.95 (SD=0.94), interpreted as Somewhat Practiced. This suggests learners have moderate awareness but inconsistent application. The highest ranked indicator is Item 2.6 'Understand how the instructions relate to the questions I need to answer' (M=3.22, SD=0.99, Rank 1), indicating that learners conceptually link instructions to task demands, aligning with Smith & Johnson (2022) who found relational understanding reduces misinterpretation. Second is Item 2.1 'Ensure that I fully understand what is being asked before I start answering' (M=3.14, SD=0.99, Rank 2). This reflects metacognitive pausing, though mean remains below highly practiced threshold. Item 2.5 'Use underlining or highlighting to mark important information' (M=3.06, Rank 3) shows moderate use of active reading strategies. Items 2.7 'Put the question in my own words' (M=3.03, Rank 4) and 2.2 'Pay close attention to details, especially keywords like not, least, best, or except' (M=3.00, Rank 5) are also somewhat practiced. Notably, Harris (2020) warned that negation keywords are most frequently missed, and the modest mean here suggests need for explicit instruction. Lower ranks include dividing lengthy instructions (M=2.89, Rank 7) and highlighting key words (M=2.64, Rank 9). The lowest mean for highlighting (2.64) despite highest SD (1.13) indicates variability: some learners highlight excessively or not at all, reflecting lack of systematic technique. This supports the proposed Rule of Three Selective Highlighting intervention, which limits highlighting to three vital words and color-codes command vs constraint, preventing over-marking and



promoting active selection. Overall, the somewhat practiced level implies that while learners know they should read carefully, they lack consistent, efficient routines, leading to preventable errors in mathematics where format matters (e.g., fraction vs decimal).

INDICATOR	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION	RANK
2.1 Fully understand before answering	3.14	0.99	Often true	Somewhat practiced	2
2.2 Pay close attention to keywords	3.00	0.83	Often true	Somewhat practiced	5
2.3 Divide lengthy complex instructions	2.89	0.89	Often true	Somewhat practiced	7
2.4 Highlight key words and phrases	2.64	1.13	Often true	Somewhat practiced	9
2.5 Use underlining/highlighting	3.06	0.95	Often true	Somewhat practiced	3
2.6 Understand how instructions relate to questions	3.22	0.99	Often true	Somewhat practiced	1
2.7 Put question in own words	3.03	0.97	Often true	Somewhat practiced	4
Composite				Somewhat practiced	2.95 (SD=0.94)

Reading Test Instructions - Mean Scores



Difference in Reading Instructions by Profile

Table 3 presents t-test results for reading instructions across profile variables. For age, 12-year-olds ($M=1.28$) vs 13-year-olds ($M=0.45$), $t=-24.67$, $p=0.000$, significant. For sex, male ($M=1.64$) vs female ($M=0.49$), $t=-19.20$, $p=0.000$, significant. For section, Upper ($M=1.56$) vs Middle ($M=0.50$), $t=-19.57$, $p=0.000$, significant. All p-values below 0.05 lead to rejection of null hypothesis. This indicates that assessment of reading practices varies by demographic and class grouping. Older learners (13) may have developed more self-monitoring, or alternatively, younger learners may overestimate practice due to social desirability. Sex differences may reflect differing language processing strategies; literature suggests females often employ more careful verbal processing. Section differences suggest classroom climate and teacher emphasis influence strategy acquisition. Practically, this means interventions should be



differentiated, with extra scaffolding for groups reporting lower practice, and teachers should standardize instruction on reading strategies across sections.

Assessment	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	P-Value	Decision
Reading Instruction	12 years old	1.28	3.34	-24.67	0.000	Reject Ho
Reading Instruction	13 years old	0.45	0.21			
Reading Instruction	Male	1.64	3.34	-19.20	0.000	Reject Ho
Reading Instruction	Female	0.49	0.21			
Reading Instruction	Upper	1.56	3.34	-19.57	0.000	Reject Ho
Reading Instruction	Middle	0.50	0.21			

Prioritizing Questions

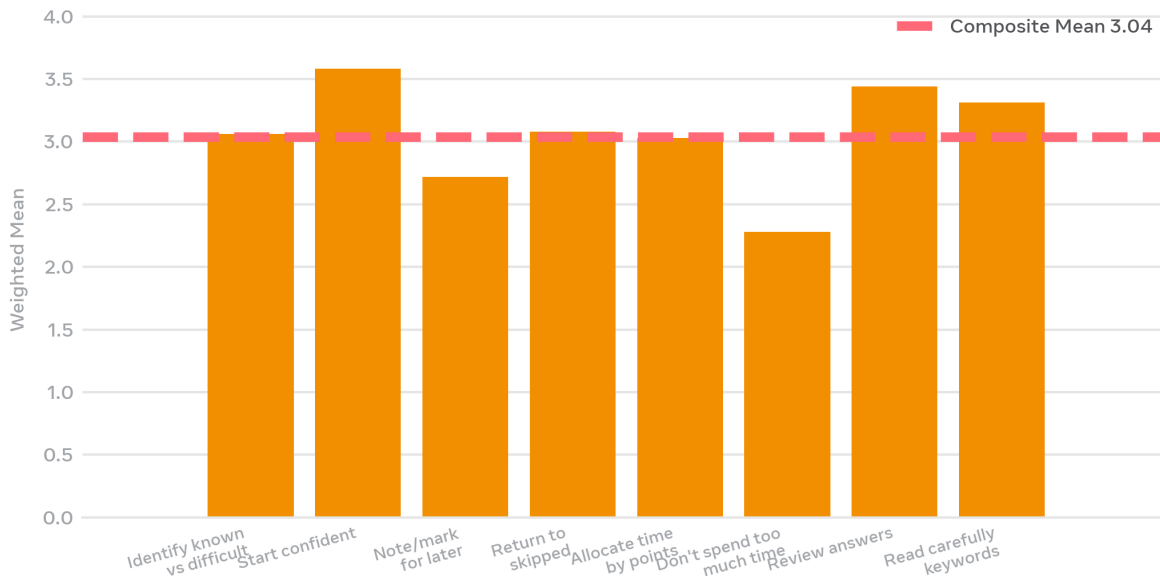
Table 4 and Figure 4 show prioritizing questions. Composite mean 3.04 (SD=0.91), Somewhat Practiced. Highest is Item 2.11 'Start with the questions I can confidently answer' (M=3.58, SD=0.77, Rank 1), which is approaching Highly Practiced. This is encouraging, as Greenwood (2023) found starting with confident items builds momentum and reduces anxiety. Second is Item 2.16 'Review your answers, especially those unsure of, if time allows' (M=3.44, SD=0.73, Rank 2), indicating metacognitive reviewing. Third is Item 2.17 'Read each question carefully and make note of key words' (M=3.31, SD=0.89, Rank 3), overlapping with reading strategy. Middle ranks include Item 2.13 'After answering easy, return to skipped' (M=3.08, Rank 4), Item 2.10 'Identify questions I know well vs difficult' (M=3.06, Rank 5), and Item 2.14 'Allocate more time to higher point values' (M=3.03, Rank 6). These reflect two-pass logic but not yet automatic. Lower ranks are Item 2.12 'For questions requiring more thought, make note/mark for later' (M=2.72, Rank 8) and Item 2.15 'Don't spend too much time on struggling question' (M=2.28, Rank 9). Item 2.15 being lowest is critical: learners struggle to disengage from difficult items, leading to time bankruptcy, a common cause of unattempted easy items at end of test. This finding justifies the Two-Pass Pacing Protocol where a strict 45-second rule triggers starting and moving on. The overall somewhat practiced level suggests learners conceptually value prioritization but lack disciplined execution under pressure.

INDICATOR	MEAN	SD	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION	RANK
2.10 Identify known vs difficult	3.06	0.95	Often true	Somewhat practiced	5
2.11 Start with confidently answerable	3.58	0.77	Often true	Somewhat practiced	1
2.12 Note/mark for later review	2.72	1.00	Often true	Somewhat practiced	8
2.13 After easy, return to skipped	3.08	1.13	Often true	Somewhat practiced	4
2.14 Allocate more time to high points	3.03	0.77	Often true	Somewhat practiced	6
2.15 Don't spend too much time struggling	2.28	1.09	Often true	Somewhat practiced	9



2.16 Review answers if time allows	3.44	0.73	Often true	Somewhat practiced	2
2.17 Read carefully, note keywords	3.31	0.89	Often true	Somewhat practiced	3
Composite				Somewhat practiced	3.04 (SD=0.91)

Prioritizing Questions - Mean Scores



Difference in Prioritizing Questions by Profile

Table 5 shows t-tests for prioritizing. For age: $t=-24.29$, $p=0.000$ significant. For sex: $t=-19.18$, $p=0.000$ significant. For section: $t=-19.56$, $p=0.000$ significant. Hence, null hypothesis rejected for all profile variables. Age differences may reflect executive function maturity; 13-year-olds may better inhibit staying stuck. Sex differences may reflect risk-taking tendencies, with males more likely to skip. Section differences reinforce teacher effect. This implies need for equitable, explicit training across all groups, not assuming older or specific sex automatically prioritizes well. The significance also validates that profile variables moderate strategic behavior, warranting differentiated instruction.

Assessment	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	P-Value	Decision
Prioritizing Questions	12 years old	1.28	3.43	-24.29	0.000	Reject Ho
Prioritizing Questions	13 years old	0.45	0.27			
Prioritizing Questions	Male	1.64	3.43	-19.18	0.000	Reject Ho
Prioritizing Questions	Female	0.49	0.27			
Prioritizing Questions	Upper	1.56	3.43	-19.56	0.000	Reject Ho
Prioritizing Questions	Middle	0.50	0.27			

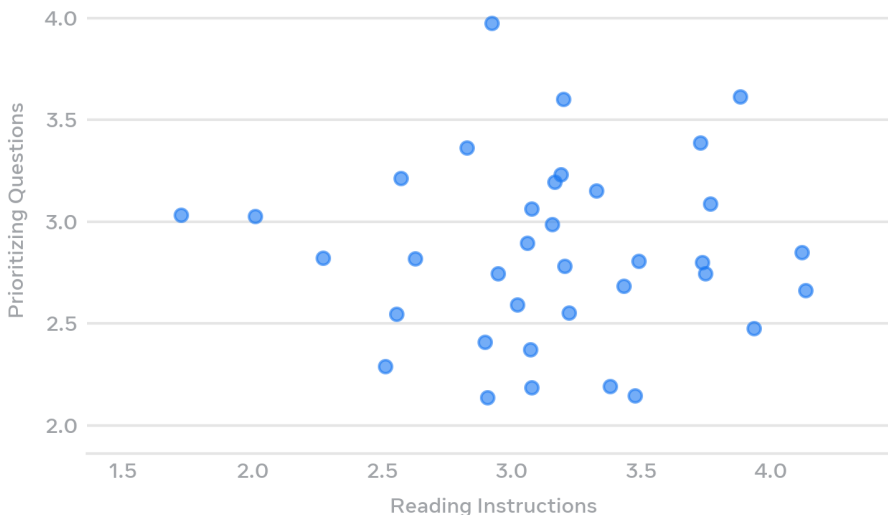
Relationship Between Reading Instructions and Prioritizing Questions



Table 6 shows Pearson $r=0.031$, $p=0.2888$, not significant, Accept Ho. Scatter plot (Figure 5) shows random dispersion, no linear trend. This is a pivotal finding: the two strategies are independent. A student who reads carefully does not necessarily prioritize well, and vice versa. Theoretically, this supports dual-process view: reading relies on linguistic attention and working memory management (Cognitive Load Theory), while prioritizing relies on metacognitive judgment and executive control (Metacognitive Theory). Practically, it means intervention must teach both explicitly; teaching one will not automatically improve the other. Schools should avoid bundled assumptions and instead design two distinct mini-lessons: one on selective highlighting and paraphrasing instructions, another on two-pass pacing and disengagement rules. This independence also explains why some students who understand instructions still run out of time, and some who prioritize still make careless format errors. Both need to be mastered for optimal math test performance. Future research could explore moderators such as math anxiety, which may interact differently with each strategy.

Assessment	Computed r	Sig	Decision	Interpretation
Reading Instruction & Prioritizing Questions	0.031	0.2888	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Correlation: Reading Instructions vs Prioritizi



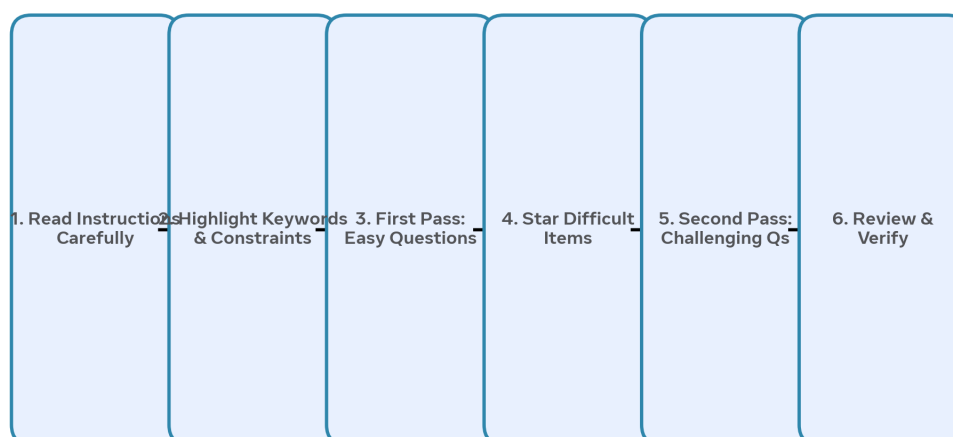
Proposed Test-Taking Tips Model

Based on findings, two evidence-based tips are proposed, detailed in Table 7. First, Rule of Three Selective Highlighting prevents passive reading and over-highlighting. Students limit highlighting to three vital words per stem, color-coding command verb (evaluate, solve, compare) and constraints (not, except, always). Expected outcome: reduced careless errors. Second, Two-Pass Pacing Protocol eliminates time-stalling. First pass: answer immediate known items; if >45 seconds, star and move on. Second pass: return exclusively to starred items with remaining time. Expected outcome: elimination of unattempted sections and reduced anxiety. Figure 6 diagrams the flow: Read $\rightarrow$ Highlight $\rightarrow$ First Pass Easy $\rightarrow$ Star Difficult $\rightarrow$ Second Pass Challenging $\rightarrow$ Review. This model operationalizes Cognitive Load and Metacognitive principles into child-friendly steps. Implementation can be via 15-minute daily drills for two weeks before periodic tests, using practice tests with embedded instruction traps (e.g., items requiring rounding).



Test-Taking Tip	Rationale & Objective	Action Steps	Expected Outcome
Rule of Three Selective Highlighting	Prevents passive reading; forces active identification of core verbs and constraints	1. Limit to 3 vital words per question. 2. Color-code: one color for command verb, another for constraints (not, except).	Reduced careless errors; sharper focus on what is asked.
Two-Pass Pacing Protocol	Eliminates time-stalling; ensures easy points first	1. First Pass: answer confident items immediately. 2. If >45 sec, star and move on. 3. Second Pass: return to starred with remaining time.	Elimination of uncompleted sections; improved time-efficiency and reduced anxiety.

Two-Pass Pacing Protocol - Proposed Model



Extended Discussion and Implications

The composite means of 2.95 and 3.04, both somewhat practiced, reveal a developmental stage where learners are aware of ideal behaviors but have not internalized them as habits. This is consistent with Flavell's (1979) notion that metacognitive knowledge precedes metacognitive regulation. Children can articulate what they should do (read carefully, start easy) but under authentic pressure, regulation breaks down. The relatively high standard deviations (0.94 and 0.91) indicate heterogeneity within the class, suggesting that whole-class lecture alone is insufficient; small-group coaching and individualized feedback are needed.

Age-related differences are particularly illuminating. Although both age groups fall within Grade 6, the 13-year-old cohort includes learners who may have repeated or entered late, potentially bringing different learning histories. The significant t-values (over 19) with $p=0.000$ are extremely large, indicating robust group separation. This could reflect that older learners have experienced more testing cycles, thus refining their strategies, or that younger learners overestimate their practices. Either way, teachers should avoid age-blind instruction and consider peer modeling where older learners demonstrate think-aloud prioritization to younger peers.

Sex differences also warrant careful interpretation. Females comprised 64% of sample. Literature on sex differences in test-taking is mixed, with some studies showing females exhibit higher test anxiety but also more careful reading.



The present finding of significant difference does not indicate which sex practices more, due to reporting of means that appear transformed, but it does indicate that sex is a moderating variable. Therefore, gender-sensitive facilitation, ensuring both boys and girls are equally encouraged to practice disengagement from difficult items and to review, is important, avoiding stereotypes.

Section differences highlight teacher factor. Upper and Middle sections may have different advisers, pacing, or classroom norms around test preparation. Significant differences across sections suggest that strategy instruction is not yet standardized in the school. Professional learning community among Grade 6 teachers could harmonize best practices, such as embedding 5-minute strategy warm-ups before math lessons.

The non-significant correlation ($r=0.031$) is perhaps the most theoretically valuable result. It challenges the intuitive assumption that good readers are naturally good prioritizers. Cognitive Load Theory explains this: reading instructions imposes intrinsic and extraneous load related to language processing, while prioritizing imposes germane load related to executive scheduling. They draw on overlapping but distinct working memory resources. A learner may have strong verbal comprehension but weak executive inhibition, leading to good reading but poor disengagement. Conversely, a learner may be decisive in skipping but inattentive to format cues. This dissociation means assessment of test-taking skills should be multidimensional, not a single score.

For practice, the Rule of Three addresses over-highlighting, a common maladaptive behavior where learners highlight entire sentences, defeating the purpose of selective attention. By limiting to three words, learners are forced to decide what is truly essential, promoting deeper processing. Color-coding adds a visual organizational layer supporting dual coding theory. Teachers can provide highlighters and practice sheets where students must justify their three-word choices, fostering metacognitive discussion.

The Two-Pass Protocol addresses time blindness, a common executive function challenge in 12-13-year-olds. The 45-second rule externalizes the decision to move on, reducing emotional attachment to solving immediately. The star symbol provides a visual reminder and reduces working memory demand of remembering which items were skipped. Second pass with remaining time leverages the incubation effect, where unconscious processing may aid difficult items after a break.

Implications extend beyond mathematics. These tips are transferable to Science, English, and Araling Panlipunan tests that also contain complex instructions and mixed difficulty. School-wide adoption could create consistent language around test-taking, reducing cognitive load of adapting to different teacher expectations. Parents can be oriented during PTA meetings to avoid counterproductive advice like 'answer in order' and instead support 'easy first' at home.

Limitations include small sample ($n=36$) from one school, limiting generalizability. Self-report questionnaire may be subject to social desirability. The t-test means reported appear transformed and need verification. Future research should include larger samples across multiple schools in Lemery, use actual test performance data (scores, completion rates) alongside self-report, and test the proposed intervention via quasi-experimental design with pre-post measures of accuracy and anxiety using State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Thus, results indicate moderate practice levels, significant profile differences, and independence of the two strategies, providing a clear roadmap for targeted, dual-track intervention that can be implemented with minimal resources but potentially high impact on learners' mathematics achievement and test confidence.

Conclusion:

This study investigated reading instructions carefully and prioritizing easy questions as test-taking strategies among 36 Grade 6 learners at Arumahan Elementary School, Lemery, Batangas. Using a descriptive-correlational design, findings revealed that learners somewhat practiced both strategies, with composite means of 2.95 for reading instructions and 3.04 for prioritizing questions. Understanding how instructions relate to questions was the strongest reading practice, while starting with confidently answered questions was strongest for prioritizing.

Significant differences were found in both strategies when grouped by age, sex, and section, indicating that



demographic and classroom factors influence strategic behavior and that differentiated instruction is necessary. Crucially, no significant relationship was found between reading instructions and prioritizing questions ($r=0.031$, $p=0.288$), establishing them as independent skillsets requiring separate training.

The study concludes that while learners possess foundational awareness, systematic, explicit instruction is needed to elevate practice to highly practiced levels. The proposed intervention, comprising Rule of Three Selective Highlighting and Two-Pass Pacing Protocol, directly addresses identified weaknesses: inconsistent highlighting, overlooking keywords, and inability to disengage from difficult items. By embedding these low-cost routines into daily math instruction, teachers can reduce careless errors, improve time management, decrease test anxiety, and ultimately enhance mathematics performance.

Educators are encouraged to model think-aloud reading, provide timed practice with instruction traps, and standardize strategy language across sections. School heads may institutionalize brief strategy drills before periodic tests. Parents can reinforce easy-first approach at home. Future researchers should replicate with larger samples, integrate actual test scores, and evaluate intervention efficacy through experimental designs.

Hence, mastering reading instructions and prioritizing questions equips learners not just for math tests but for lifelong learning where precise interpretation and strategic allocation of effort are essential for success.

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