

Pre-Testing

Years 7–12 | Generation Effect Strategy

WHAT IS PRE-TESTING?

Pre-testing means attempting to answer questions about a topic before you have studied it. You are expected to get things wrong — that is the point. The act of attempting to generate an answer, even incorrectly, primes the brain to notice, retain, and process the correct information when it is subsequently encountered.

WHY DOES IT WORK? THE PSYCHOLOGY

- The "generation effect" (Slamecka & Graf, 1978): information you generate yourself — even incorrectly — is remembered better than information you passively receive.
- Failed retrieval attempts create a mental "gap" or surprise when the correct answer is revealed, which deepens encoding.
- Kornell et al. (2009) showed that students who were tested before learning retained more in the long run than those who studied before being tested.
- Pre-testing also reduces overconfidence: it shows you what you don't know before you assume you know it.

"Get it wrong first. Your brain will remember the correction far better than if it had never been challenged."

HOW TO USE PRE-TESTING

- Before starting a new topic, write down everything you think you know about it and attempt any available practice questions.
- Before a lesson, look at the heading or learning objectives and try to predict the key content.
- Before reading a chapter, attempt the end-of-chapter review questions first.
- After the lesson or reading, compare your pre-test to what you actually learnt.

PRE-TESTING WORKSHEET

Topic / Lesson coming up:

PRE-TEST — Write everything you think you know about this topic RIGHT NOW (before studying):

Attempt these questions WITHOUT any notes:

Pre-Test Question	My Attempt (before studying)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

After studying — go back and fill in the correct answers:

Question	Correct Answer (after studying)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

What surprised you most about what you didn't know before?
