

## How to Understand and Use Raw Scores

The results of scoring objective tests for subjects like spelling, math, or history may be expressed as raw scores--the number right out of the number possible. In other words, on a test where there are 25 questions, a student who answers 20 questions correctly receives a raw score of 20. It doesn't make any difference whether a question is worth more than one point, weighted in some way, or whether there is a penalty for guessing as opposed to not answering a question. The raw score simply reflects the number of items answered correctly out of the number of items on a test. Now, it is appropriate to weight the items on tests you give at home. The answers to some questions should be worth more points. When determining a grade, the answers to essay questions should count more than the answers to multiple choice questions. But, that's not what raw scores mean on an achievement test report.

Let's say you're reviewing your student's achievement test report. On our sample report ([click here to view](#)), the first subtest is Reading. Across from this test title is the number 20 followed by a forward slash and the number 32. The first number which in this case is 20 represents the number of items answered correctly. The second number of 32 represents the total number of items on this subtest. This score is pretty straight forward.

Sometimes parents wonder if their student should guess when taking an achievement test. First, there is no penalty for guessing on an achievement test. An item left blank will be marked wrong regardless. One point of view suggests that the student eliminate answer choices that can't possibly be right and then choose between the options that remain. This is often referred to as making an educational guess. Another point of view suggests that the student not guess at all because answers guessed correctly lead to a misleading understanding of the test report. What do I mean by this?

Although a raw score gives a numerical summary of a student's performance, the real meaning behind the items answered correctly lies in converting them into a report that identifies what they were measuring. That's what a Performance Evaluation Report (PER) does. For instance, if a student answered five correct out of eight on a particular section of the test, the PER report would point to what those items were measuring. Guessing diminishes the value of this report if the student answers any of the guessed items correctly. The parent assumes the student knows something that actually he doesn't know; he just got lucky. To see a sample of this report, [click here](#).

Performance Evaluation Reports provide a description of the tasks students were to perform on the test. This is also referred to as a criterion reference interpretation. Raw scores are also converted into scores which yield what is called a norm-referenced interpretation, the subject of a future article.

Thanks for Reading,  
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