

## News & Announcements

### Provincial Exams

Grade 10 and 12 students on semester systems will be writing provincial exams at the end of January. The exam schedule as well as several practice exams are posted on the BC Ministry of Education website: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/>

You can find information and resources for prepping for exams in the links section of our website.

### STR in the Community

Smart Tutor Referrals offers talks and workshops for peer tutors, learning assistance teachers, teachers and students.

*30 - 45 minute talks for peer tutors are offered free of charge as a community service.*

### Earn a Discount

Complete our online survey and receive a discount toward your tuition or earn money toward a discount for tutoring for someone at your school.

Visit our website to learn more about the survey:

[www.SmartTutorReferrals.com](http://www.SmartTutorReferrals.com)

### Winter Break

Our tutors keep tutoring through the holidays, but our writer takes a break. *"The Smart Connection"* will be back in the new year with a February issue.

*Best wishes for a happy holiday season & a peaceful new year!*

## Challenges, Examinations and Tests

by Dahlia Miller

*In this article, we'll explore some perspectives on the challenges and tests that students face. Perhaps these points may help us to accept all our challenges and tests with greater willingness and understanding.*

There's a story about a young man and a rock. Perhaps it comes from Greek or Hindu mythology, but actually I'm not sure. It goes like this:

A god spoke to a young man and told him that he must push a boulder up the side of a particular mountain. The young man went to the mountain and found the boulder. He put his shoulder against the boulder but found that he couldn't budge it. He pushed with all his might, but still couldn't cause any change in the boulder's position. Looking up the side of the mountain, the young man complained aloud saying that it was an impossible task. The god heard him and replied that he hadn't said whether the task was possible or not, simply that it was the young man's duty to put his full effort to pushing this boulder up the side of the mountain. The god then agreed to allow the young man to use a tool to help him in his efforts.

So, the young man found a lever and slowly moved the boulder some distance up the mountain. When he wanted to rest, he propped another rock below the boulder to prevent it from slipping back down the mountainside. It went on like this for many days, with the young man making only a few meters of progress up the mountain. Again he complained aloud.

The god again told him that although the task was a difficult one, it was required. So, the young man continued in his efforts.

After a month or so, the young man cried out at the futility of the task. The god spoke to the young man one more time: "I know that this task is nearly an impossible one. I knew, before you started, that you probably wouldn't be able to push the boulder to the top of the mountain. But look at yourself now. Look at your body. After more than a month of effort, you are stronger than you ever were. This

was the real goal of the task: to increase your determination, strength, patience, endurance and effort."

From this story we can recognize some of the benefits of coming up against challenges and tests. Whether or not we "succeed" in accomplishing the stated goal, simply working through a challenge with determination brings its own rewards.

While we all encounter difficulties in our lives, students live lives full of challenges and tests. Students are constantly pushed to move beyond their current abilities not only in the many subjects they study, but in their time management, organization and oral and written communication as well. Some students feel the challenge of stretching their understanding on a daily basis, others only go through periods of difficulty or disruption in their study, but the fact is that all students, even the brightest, are tested. (Are there any schools without exams?)

Luckily, a student's life is also filled with support. Parents, teachers, schools and agencies provide a background of support in the forms of encouragement, food, housing, transportation, supplies, opportunities, instruction and the benefit of their experience.

Basically, the many types of challenges and tests students face can be boiled down into four categories:

**1. External Examinations** – These are challenges that come to us from the outside, like tests and quizzes given by teachers.

We need tests to help recognize our level. From the teacher's perspective, tests are there to help students. For example, a science test can help us to recognize how much we've understood the material, how well we've studied and how well we perform under test conditions. Even students who fail are helped by tests since they can then realize their shortcomings.

We only really realize our ability, habits and shortcomings after tests. There's no point saying we're good or that we understand.

# About Us

## Our Mission Is:

- ▶ To provide top quality, flexible learning support and service to students and parents through:

*In-home private tutoring  
matched specifically to  
each student's needs.*

*Stimulating workshops  
building skills in a practical  
and creative way.*

- ▶ To enhance students' skills and increase learning confidence through one-on-one support that is truly individualized, recognizing each student's unique abilities.
- ▶ To improve the quality of life, in individuals and communities through education.

**Our tutors** are certified teachers and professionals. They are carefully screened and chosen specially to match the needs and learning styles of each student.

*We support families in education.*

For more information and resources, visit us on-line at:

[www.SmartTutorReferrals.com](http://www.SmartTutorReferrals.com)

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Tests help us to prove our level of understanding. When we're stuck, or we score poorly on these types of external examinations, we need to realize if there's something for us to learn and improve, or if there is something for us to overcome in ourselves.

We need to learn to be our own masters: stable and unaffected by the outside environment. This means accepting tests with willingness and an open mind.

## 2. Self Examinations – These are tests created by our own selves.

For students, self-examinations often arise when we are challenged on a personal level by something at school. It could be that a topic or type of assignment is especially difficult or it may be something interpersonal like a challenge with a teacher or fellow student. Although these may look like external examinations, they actually aren't. Yes, the environment has an obvious impact, but it is the individual's reaction that determines the exam. What I mean is that not everyone reacts in the same way to the same situation. For example, when students are given the same assignment or lecture, some will find it easy while others may find it to be extremely challenging. Therefore, it's not the situation creating the test; the test is coming from within each individual.

Our responses to these self-examinations determine how they go. For example, if a student has trouble with a topic or a teacher, she may respond by not doing her homework. In this way, she is creating a test for herself. One result will obviously be lower marks. Over time, other results may be: falling behind; feeling overwhelmed in class; feeling nervous about falling behind; feeling frustrated when trying to keep up; feeling guilty and embarrassed in front of self, parents and classmates; and wanting to avoid these uncomfortable feelings. How we move through self-examinations depends on our self-understanding and what support is available.

When facing difficulties of this type, we need to reflect upon ourselves to see what we could be doing differently and how we may be getting in our own way. Most important is to learn from our experience and gain wisdom.

## 3. Examinations of "Going Against"

– This is when it seems that everything is difficult or that nothing is going our way for a few hours, a day, a term or a year. In this case, things may not be easy and we need

to set a firm determination to continue. Eventually, situations change. This type of examination helps to build our patience and our self-confidence. Watching ourselves continue to work hard, even under difficult conditions, is inspiring and will be a good memory for us in the future when we again encounter difficulties.

If we continually learn from obstacles, and gradually grow up, we'll eventually elevate ourselves. There is no shortcut. We need to move step-by-step with effort and courage.

## 4. Examinations of "Smooth"

– This may seem like a strange type of examination, but when school seems easy and homework is a breeze, it helps us to recognize our resolve and diligence. Sometimes students experience a time of relative ease at school. Often, when students go for long periods without feeling really challenged, they miss out on developing some of the skills that other students (who have to really work for it) get to learn - particularly study skills. Coasting along, it's easy to get complacent and not work at developing new skills in time management, memory techniques, exam preparation or other course-related topics. Eventually, though, all students hit a point in their careers where they find the coursework difficult. At that point, if they haven't learned how to study, they can find themselves falling behind quite quickly and lose confidence in themselves. This type of "smooth" examination helps us to see our level of commitment, responsibility and diligence in encouraging ourselves to grow.

As we have seen, there are many types of examinations and challenges that students face. Although they are in part created by the outside situation, most of the challenges come from our own selves and our reactions to what is happening around us. Any type of challenge can help us to see ourselves more clearly. In fact, without encountering difficulties, we'll stay at the same level. Whether we are able to overcome our own habits, reactions and current skill level depends on our efforts.

We all need to be willing to accept the tests that come to us. They help to build our patience, endurance, strength, skill, and acceptance. Our level of achievement isn't based on our estimation or others' judgments, but on our actions. When we're going to move to a new level, we'll be tested. So, these tests are part of our growth process. Facing all examinations with a good attitude makes our lives more enjoyable.

*"Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards."*  
Vernon Sanders Law, baseball pitcher