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Dispatch Accent Reporter

**Y**ou don't have to be born a genius to become one.

Gary Gruber, a guru of standardized testing, says many people can score at the genius level on tests by learning a handful of critical-thinking strategies.

Many people, he explained, haven't learned to make the most of their ability to reason and solve problems. When they have learned the process, they can not only achieve higher IQ and Scholastic Assessment Test scores but also solve real-life problems.

Gruber, a Mill Valley, Calif., consultant on testing and learning programs, has written more than 25 books — many aimed at helping students score higher on the SAT, the American College Test and other standardized tests.

He isn't "the answer man": Gruber, 54, advocates the development of critical thinking skills vs. the discovery of quick answers to improve test scores.

Answers, he said in an interview, are secondary to the process of thinking.

Instructors don't teach reasoning and problem-solving skills, he said, because they weren't taught them.

"Everybody is rushing into getting an answer, whether it's on a test or in a real-life situation," Gruber said. "They don't realize, if they get interested in what the problem is about and extract something from it, that will automatically lead them to an answer."

He cites a couple of telltale experiences:

When presented with one of Gruber's geometry problems, students 20 years ago solved the problem and, without urging, applied the knowledge to other problems to see whether the principle held. Students recently given the same problem had no interest in pursuing the matter after finding the answer.

Meanwhile, the consultant's books for parents to help teach elementary- and middle-school pupils creative-thinking skills have sold poorly.

"Why isn't it selling? It's not a priority," he said.

Gruber's *Complete Preparation for the New SAT* (Harper Collins, \$11.95), though, has sold well because "it's the desperation of the market."



Gruber

Developing  
reasoning  
skills  
far more  
important  
than  
finding  
answers,  
guru says

"I wonder if it's just the tone of the nation. People don't think critically. I think that's why a lot of businesses fail."

Gruber provides a prime example of how one can learn to be a genius.

He scored a below-normal 90 on an IQ test in fifth grade and couldn't enroll in an advanced course. So his father, a high-school English teacher, obtained a copy of the test for his son to study and see whether he could improve his score.

"I started getting fascinated with what's in the test, with what was preventing me from answering the questions correctly," Gruber said. "I became fascinated with how the questions were worded and what they actually prompted you to do. I noticed there were certain strategies."

On a retest, Gruber scored 126. Several years later, he scored 150.

He graduated with honors from the City

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**GRUBER from 1D**

College of New York and received a master's in physics from Columbia University and a doctorate in astrophysics from Yeshiva University.

Gruber's strategies — breaking down complex words to discern their meanings, weeding out unnecessary information, using information that one already has and avoiding easy answers designed to be misleading — are the basis of his books, tapes and programs.

People who excel by learning to use reasoning and thinking skills, he says, deserve the genius label as much as those who inherently have such skills.

"If a kid gets a 150 IQ, obviously he's smart — he's a genius," Gruber said. "But let's say a kid gets a 110 IQ. I would say: 'Wait a minute; this kid may be as creative as the genius. He may think as fast as the genius, but he doesn't know some of the strategies that are involved in the thinking process."

"Instead of taking the test cold, teach the kid some of the strategies, then give him the test. If he gets 110, then that's his IQ; if he gets a 150, I'd rate it the same way as the genius. The genius somehow learned the strategies beforehand or has a mind to figure it out. The bottom line is: Both of them would be able to do genius work."

Gruber's studies have convinced him that some complaints about standardized testing are invalid.

Women and men who worked on specific thinking skills for 30 days, for instance, scored about the same on SAT exams. Before any training, the men scored about 53 points higher than the women on the 1,600-point test of verbal and math skills; afterward, scores for both groups rose, but the women's scores showed greater increases.

During training, Gruber said, about 70 percent of the men and 90 percent of the women learned to use problem-solving skills.

"Once women learned the strategies," he said, "they used them more intuitively than men."

Gruber obtained similar results working with minority students in San Francisco.

"In 30 days, minority students increased their SAT scores by about 110 points," he said.

Even a genius, though, doesn't know everything: Gruber's "genius test" has one problem that he is unable to master.

"It's the geometry problem at the end. I still cannot solve it. As a high-school kid, it took me about two hours to solve it. But I cannot do it today. I don't know what I lost."

*People who excel by learning to use reasoning skills, he says, deserve the genius label.*