

How to Be a Testing Hero

Another year of testing is coming. Surveying the room, you realize that last year's problem hasn't solved itself. If the students are seated far enough apart to keep them focused, with their eyes on their own tests, there just won't be enough places for everyone. A table that usually seats four will only hold two.

As you're pondering what to do, you think back to your college days, and the study carrels in the library that worked so well to reduce distractions. Something like that would work—but you don't have room to bring in more furniture. You need something portable, light-weight, something you could fold up and store to use again next time. You have an idea.

You stop by the office supply store on your way home and check out the folding science fair boards you've seen kids use. Kind of pricey—and you're going to need a lot of them. They're also the wrong size and shape. That's not going to work. "I'll make them myself," you think. "It'll be a breeze!" You head over to the packing supplies to find some large pieces of bright white corrugated cardboard and a utility knife. They only have brown corrugated cardboard, so you reluctantly settle for that.

That night, you lay the cardboard out on the floor and start cutting. It's almost straight. You try to fold the cardboard where you want the flap to go, but it bends and buckles. OK, you think, I'll just score it with the knife. One trip to the emergency room later and you're all set to score the second flap. You stand the carrel up on your kitchen table—it wobbles and falls to the floor, right into the dog's water bowl.

Undaunted, you make another one and another one. An hour later, you're almost a third of the way through your pile of cardboard when your friend Karen drops by—she teaches in another school in the district. While she enjoys a nice glass of iced tea, you struggle on the floor with your cardboard and utility knife, a little awkwardly because of the bandage on your hand.

Enthusiastically, you explain your great idea to make cardboard carrels for the upcoming testing. “Let me help you out,” she says, “before you cut yourself again.”

“I only have one knife,” you say.

“I don’t need a knife,” she replies, going over to your computer. You look over her shoulder as she types “cardboard study carrels” into the search engine. “This is what we use,” she says, clicking on a website. Amazing! There are cardboard study carrels, already made, in so many shapes and sizes. And look! They have rounded edges for safety—you never even thought of that! And can that really be the price? Some of the carrels are only a couple of dollars each! Is that a choir of angels you hear?

In just a few minutes you have ordered all the cardboard study carrels you’ll need for testing. And you don’t just have to use them for testing, you think. The other teachers in your school can use them for kids who need a little extra help focusing sometimes in class. There are all kinds of uses. And they store in their own box, so you can save them for next year. When the other teachers hear about this, you’ll be a hero—just like Karen.