



TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

Tests measure how well you are doing in a course. Doing well on tests requires test-taking skills, a positive attitude, strategic thinking and planning, and, naturally, a solid grasp of the course content. This handout contains strategies to use before, during, and after a test, as well as tips that apply to different types of tests.

BEFORE TEST

- Start studying the first day of class
- Plan reviews as part of your weekly schedule
- Review by reading and rereading assignments, lecture notes and participating in study groups
- Review for several short periods rather than one long period
- Turn main points into questions
- Anticipate test questions for essays and write them down
- Make flashcards
- Study in the same room you will be testing in (if possible)
- Break studying into chunks
- Study from the top down (main ideas-subgroups)
- Study by using past exams
- Don't cram
- Get a good night's sleep and eat well
- Relax. Say to yourself, "I may not know all of the answers, and that's okay."
- Study by focusing on answering questions, solving problems, writing essays, defining, explaining and applying terms

DURING TEST

- ALWAYS read directions first
- Read the entire test before answering any questions
- Write down any memorized lists
- Underline or circle key words/concepts
- Read all items before making any matches
- Answer easy questions first
- If you don't understand a question, ask the instructor
- Move on when you get stuck
- Look for clues in other parts of test
- Answer all questions
- Guess (if you are not penalized for doing so)
- Eliminate obvious wrong answers first
- Beware of the words "always" and "never"
- Be confident and relax

AFTER TEST

- Identify the sources of the questions (Notes, tests, lecture, etc.)
- Study the instructor's comments so you know what to expect next time
- What processes were called for? (Compare & contrast, illustration, etc.)
- Review how you studied for the test
- If you get a test back & you feel there is a problem, talk with the instructor
- Write down questions you did not know the answers to and review them
- Look for mistakes in grading

Neatness counts....

Fair or not, people make judgments based on appearances. Often, "messy" work is seen as "inferior" work, and research suggests that some instructors assign lower grades to tests that are hard to read. In *Becoming a Master Student*, Dave Ellis gives the following tips to improve your test's appearance:

1. **Write legibly. (Print if you need to.)**
2. **Be brief. (Don't leave out the important information, but don't "pad" your answers, either. Rambling writing reveals disorganized thought, and tired instructors may express their irritation in your grade.)**
3. **Use a pen. (Pencil is difficult to read, so avoid it unless you're taking a math test.)**
4. **Write on only one side of the page. (This avoids "bleed through" which makes paper harder to read.)**

TIPS FOR MULTIPLE-CHOICE

- 1) If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility.
- 2) Eliminate obvious wrong answers.
- 3) Answer all questions.
- 4) For numbers answers toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers.
- 5) Always guess when there is no penalty.
- 6) Don't guess if you are penalized for guessing.
- 7) Read each option as if it were a true-false question. Cross out all the options that are false.

TIPS FOR MATCHING

- 1) Do the easiest matches first.
- 2) Cross an answer out after matching it - unless you can use it more than once.
- 3) Look for clues in other parts of the test.
- 4) Read all items before making matches.
- 5) Read the directions carefully to determine whether you can use answers more than once.

TIPS FOR FILL-IN/COMPLETION

- 1) Move on when you get stuck.
- 2) If you draw a "blank," write down everything and then review for a good fill-in answer.
- 3) A guess made with common sense could get you more test points than if you leave an answer blank.

TIPS FOR TRUE/FALSE

- 1) Every part of a true sentence must be "true." If any one part of the sentence is false, the whole sentence is false despite, many other true statements
- 2) Underline or circle key words.
- 3) Absolute words restrict possibilities. "No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate "false" answers.

Would you like to learn more?

After a test, it's pretty common for students to feel like they actually knew the material better than the grade suggests. If you would like to explore ways to become a more skillful test-taker, call 704-330-6433 and make an appointment with a Counselor.

TIPS FOR ESSAY

- 1) Read the entire test before answering questions.
- 2) Make a brief outline for each question.
- 3) Number the items in the order you will discuss them.
- 4) Make notes on back of exam sheet, e.g., ACRONYMS.
- 5) As soon as you get the exam, use the back of the question sheet (or a sheet of scratch paper) to write down facts and details that you have memorized, but are afraid you might forget. Only spend a minute or two on this.
- 6) Read all of the questions before answering any. As you read each question, write down any relevant ideas that occur to you. Also, circle any key words (e.g., "define", "compare", "explain", "contrast") in the question that tell you what kind of answer is wanted.
- 7) End your essay with one or two sentences that summarize the main points.

TIPS FOR OPEN BOOK

- 1) Underline or circle key concepts.
- 2) Answer what you know first, then go back to book
- 3) Familiarize yourself with the format and layout of your text books and source materials.