

Test-Taking Strategies

Before the Test

1. Stay up-to-date on assignments. Learn material and review as you go along.
2. Make sure you understand the information as you are learning it. That way, you won't have to "re-learn" it OR have to "cram" a great deal of information at one time.
3. Read and study information in meaningful chunks (by chapters or units) so that you'll be able to "file" and "retrieve" information easily.
4. At the end of each chapter or unit, identify the information that was most important. Make up "flash cards" on this information that you can easily carry and use for study on a regular basis.
5. Analyze past tests to determine how you can improve test results.
6. Get the big picture. Ask the instructor about the test. Find out what information will be stressed and the kinds of questions that will be asked. Then go over your text and lecture notes to develop a study strategy. Map or outline the course contents if you haven't done so previously.
7. Before a test or exam, break study sessions into manageable time segments and meaningful units. You'll remember more if you study for short periods of time (45 minutes to 1 hour) and over a longer period of time (1-2 weeks) than if you cram all your study into a "binge" session the night before the test.
8. Practice answering essay questions BEFORE the test. Use cognitive questions at all levels to assure learning and ability to answer essay questions. For example: How would you describe, compare/contrast, predict, classify, apply, evaluate, prioritize, etc?
9. Use mnemonic techniques to memorize lists, definitions, and other specific kinds of information.
10. Form a study group with other students in your class to discuss and quiz each other on important material. This will add other perspectives and help to "complete" your study if you tend to be either a "detailed" or "big-picture" learner.
11. Maintain healthy living habits. Get a good night's sleep before the test.

During the Test

1. Get to the test site early so you can select a seat, organize your materials, and get relaxed. Be prepared with pencils, paper, calculator, books (if appropriate), etc.
2. Get the big picture. Survey the entire test before you answer any questions. This will help you to get an overview of what's expected and to strategize how you will take the test.
3. Take a few deep breaths and to relax tense muscles. Repeat throughout the test. This process will help you to stay relaxed and to make more energy available for remembering, thinking, and writing.
4. Read directions carefully. Ask questions if you don't understand or need clarification.
5. Do a quick "mind dump" of information you don't want to forget. Write it down on scrap paper or in the margin.

6. Answer the easiest questions first, to help yourself calm down. Matching questions are often good to start with because they provide a reminder of important terms and definitions.
7. Use good strategies for answering multiple choice and other objective questions.
 - Look for the central idea of each question. What is the main point?
 - Statements that begin with always, never, none, except, most, or least—are probably NOT the answer. Underline these or other key words if you are allowed to write on the test paper.
 - Try to supply your own answer before choosing an alternative listed on the test.
 - Mark an answer for every question.
 - If you *have* to guess:
 - The length of choices can be a clue. Choose the longest.
 - If two choices are similar, choose neither.
 - If two choices are opposites, choose one of them.
 - The most general alternative is usually the right answer.
8. When answering essay questions, remember that the objective is to demonstrate how well you can explain and support an idea, not just what you know. Keep the following in mind:
 - Read over all the essay questions before you start to write. Underline key words like *define, compare, explain, etc.*
 - Think before you write. Remember, a good answer:
 - Starts with a direct response to the question.
 - Mentions the topics or areas described in the question.
 - Provides specific as well as general information.
 - Uses the technical vocabulary of the course.
 - Then map or outline the main points you want to make, determine the order in which you want to write your points, determine the support you want to add, then write.
 - Write legibly. Leave some space so you can add to your answer, later.
 - Proofread your essay. Check for grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. This often adds points!
9. When problem solving, ask yourself:
 - What am I being asked to find?
 - What do I need to know in order to find the answer?
 - What information has been provided that will help me to find the answer?
 - How can I break the problem down into parts? What steps should I follow to solve the problem?
 - Does the answer make sense? Does it cover the whole problem?
10. Keep an eye on the clock. Make sure you'll have time to complete the test sections with the highest value, if not the entire test.

After the Test

When you receive your test paper, go over it to determine areas of strength and weakness in your test-taking skills. If you have done poorly, learn from your mistakes! Always analyze your tests to determine how you can improve future test results.

