

Test Taking Tips

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General Tips

Before you Begin

1. Preview the test before you answer anything. This gets you thinking about the material. Make sure to note the point value of each question. This will give you some ideas on budgeting your time.
2. Quickly calculate how much time you should allow for each section according to the point value. (You don't want to spend 30 minutes on an essay question that counts only 5 points.)
3. Do a mind dump. Using what you saw in the preview, make notes of anything you think you might forget. Write down things that you used in learning the material that might help you remember. Outline your answers to discussion questions.

Taking a Test

1. Read the directions. (Can more than one answer be correct? Are you penalized for guessing? etc.) Never assume that you know what the directions say.
2. Answer the easy questions first. This will give you the confidence and momentum to get through the rest of the test. You are sure these answers are correct. Try not to spend too much time on one question.
3. Go back to the difficult questions. While looking over the test and doing the easy questions, your subconscious mind will have been working on the answers to the hardest ones. Also, later items on the test might give you useful or needed information for earlier items.
4. Answer all questions (unless you are penalized for wrong answers).
5. Ask the instructor to explain any items that are not clear. Do not ask for the answer, but phrase your question in a way that shows the instructor that you have the information but are not sure what the question is asking for.
6. Try to answer the questions from the instructor's point of view. Try to remember what the instructor emphasized and felt was important.
7. Use the margin to help you figure out if the question does not seem clear or if the answer seems ambiguous.
8. Circle key words in difficult questions. This will force you to focus on the central point.
9. Express difficult questions in your own words. Rephrasing can make it clear to you, but be sure you don't change the meaning of the question.
10. Use all of the time allotted for the test. If you have extra time, cover up your answers and actually rework the question.

Essay Exams

Guidelines for taking an essay exam

1. Make sure you are ready for the test both mentally and physically.
2. Listen carefully to the final instructions of the teacher. (How much time do you have to complete the test? Do all the questions count equally? Are there any corrections, changes, or additions to the test?)
3. Begin the test immediately and watch the time carefully. Don't spend too much time answering one question that you run out of time before answering the others.
4. Read all the essay questions carefully, paying special attention to the key words.
5. Ask the teacher to clarify any question you may not understand.
6. Rephrase the question into the central idea for your essay answer.
7. Think before you write. Jot down all the important information and work it into a brief outline. Do this on the back of the test sheet or on a piece of scrap paper.
8. Use a logical pattern of organization and a strong topic sentence for each paragraph.
9. Write concisely without using abbreviations or nonstandard language.
10. Emphasize those areas of the subject you are most sure of.
11. Keep your test paper neat with reasonable margins. Neatness is always important; readability is a must, especially on an exam.
12. Revise and proofread as carefully and completely as time will permit.

Planning and writing the essay test question

It is important to understand what the teacher is asking for in an essay question. Too many students make the error of thinking the best way to answer an essay question is to write down everything and anything about the topic as fast as they can. No time is taken to think about the essay test question or to organize an appropriate answer.

The first step in correctly handling an essay test question is to read the question several times until you are sure you know what the teacher is asking. As you read, you must pay special attention to the key words found in every essay question. Your ability to understand and respond to these key words is a basic skill necessary to handling the essay question. Below are some steps for writing a good essay.

- Read the question several times or until you clearly understand what is being asked for. (Pay specific attention to the "key word" being used in the question.)

- Rephrase the question into a statement, which can serve as the thesis statement for your essay answer or the topic sentence for a one-paragraph answer. Note: It often works well to keep the key words in your thesis statement.
- Outline the main points you plan to cover in your answer. Time will probably not allow you to include all supporting details in your outline. (Using a topic outline rather than a sentence outline will also save time.)
- Write your essay. Your opening sentence will be your thesis statement (the reworded question). Follow this with any background information, which is necessary for a complete understanding of your answer.

Important Points to Remember

- Planning
 - A few minutes of careful planning are crucial to a good essay answer.
 - Budget your time for planning, writing, and editing.
 - Read the question carefully; be sure you understand what the question is asking you to do, and what all parts of the answer should be.
 - Make notes, then organize them and check to see that your outline contains everything it should.
- Writing
 - The most important thing in writing the essay is to stay on track and still explain your points adequately. Keep in mind any special instructions your instructor gave.
 - Keep introductions and conclusions short.
 - Say what you are going to say in the introduction, then say it in the body, restate what you have just said in your conclusion.
 - Stick to your outline.
 - Note any new ideas in the margin; don't just stick them in when you think of them.
 - Try not to start over if you get off track; just get back to your outline.
 - Don't save important points for conclusion.
 - If you can save time, reading your essay over can help greatly.
 - Ask yourself:
 1. Do I need to reread the question?
 2. Does it answer the question?
 3. Are any points left out?
 4. Are there words or phrases that you skipped writing fast?
 5. Did you spell important words (relevant to the subject) correctly?

Math & Science

Special Techniques for Math and Science Tests

1. Translate problems in English. Putting problems into words aids your understanding. When you study equations and formulas, put those into words too. The words help you see a variety of applications for each formula.
2. Perform opposite operations. If a problem involves multiplication, check your work by dividing; add, subtract; factor, multiply; square root, square; differentiate, integrate.
3. Use time drills. Practice working problems fast. Time yourself. Exchange problems with a friend and time each other. You can also do this in a study group.
4. Analyze before you compute. Set up the problem before you begin to solve it. When a problem is worth a lot of points, read it twice, slowly. Analyze it carefully. When you take time to analyze a problem you can often see ways to take computational shortcuts.
5. Make a picture. Draw a clear picture or a diagram if you are stuck. Sometimes a visual representation will clear a blocked mind.
6. Estimate first. Estimation is a good way to double-check your work. Doing this first can help you notice if your computations go awry, and then you can correct the error quickly.
7. Check your work systematically. When you check your work, ask yourself: Did I read the problem correctly? Did I use the correct formula or equation? Is my arithmetic correct? Is my answer in the proper form? Avoid the temptation to change an answer in the last few minutes-unless you're sure the answer is wrong. In the last-minute rush to finish the test, it's easier to choose the wrong answer.
8. Review formulas. Right before the test, review any formulas you'll need to use. Then write them on the margin of the test or on the back of the test paper.

Taking Math and Science Exams

1. Do the easy ones first.
2. Read the problem.
 - Determine exactly what you are required to find.
 - What does the answer look like? - is it a speed? A temperature? An energy?
3. Estimate the answer before you start to work on the problem.
 - It helps to have a rough idea of the size of the answer.
4. Include the units with all answers and round them to the proper place.
5. Try to see the exam problem as another example of a problem you have already solved or studied.
 - Your instructor will have worked problems in class and you may recall worked examples in your text.
6. In preparing for problem exams it is important that you work many problems.
 - For most students the course grade or exam grade is directly proportional to the number of problems they do.
 - Don't spend all your time on a few very difficult problems. Rather, do many of the easier ones until you are certain of your ability.
7. If the exam will require you to perform mathematical proofs or derivations, be certain that you know which proofs may be required.
 - Drill yourself on these before the test.
 - Repeat each proof step-by-step until you remember each step and can quickly outline the proof.

8. See your instructor for pre-exam help when you need it, but come prepared with a list of specific questions.
 - Show him/her your attempts at solving the problem and he/she will be more willing to help.
9. Go over every test after you take it.
 - Learn how to do the problems you missed.
 - Science and math build an inverted pyramid of ideas. Anything you do not understand now will return to haunt you later in the course.

Taking Math Exams

1. Be prepared at exam and on time.
2. Write down any formulas you'll need to remember.
3. Read instructions carefully.
4. Skim test and do those questions you know immediately.
5. Pace yourself so you have time to consider all questions.
6. Do problems you can do but take more time.
7. Go back and work on hard problems.
 - Be systematic
 - Find relevant information
 - Break into smaller parts
 - Don't panic
 - Don't write a novel
8. If you have no idea where to start.
 - Re-read question
 - Check to see if similar to any other problems
 - Re-read formulas
 - List what is known, what you need to find, and what is needed to find the answer.
9. Allow time to check problems
10. Look out for stupid errors.

After Receiving the Test

1. Immediately look up questions that caused problems.
2. Go over test and correct missed problems.
3. Check with instructor if you can not figure out why the problem was wrong.

Taking Science Exams

- Read all test directions carefully and survey the entire test before answering any questions.
- Budget your time so you will be able to complete the entire test.
- Read the questions carefully and answer those you're sure of first. If there's no penalty for wrong answers, guess.
- Try to save time to review your answers before submitting your test.

True & False

1. The basic idea behind a true-false question is simple: It consists of a single statement; your job is to decide whether it's true. What makes the choice more difficult is that to be true, a statement must be 100 percent true!
2. Watch for those little words that can turn an otherwise true statement into one that is false, or vice versa. Researchers have found that statements containing certain words, such as the following, are generally false: All, Only, Always, Because. Statements containing certain other words, such as the following, are generally true: None, Generally, Usually.
3. If you don't know an answer, always guess-unless the scoring formula is "rights minus wrongs." If that's the case, never guess.
4. In true-false tests, your first hunch is usually correct. Don't change an answer unless you are very sure of the change.
5. If any part of the statement is false, the whole statement is false.

Matching

- You must connect items on one list with items on another generally by placing a number or letter identifying words on one list beside those on another.
- The best way to approach matching questions of this kind is to choose one of the columns and match as many items as you can with those in the other column. You can start with either column, but you can have more success if you start with the column providing the most information.
- Work with only one column at a time. Match each item in that column against all items in the second column until you find a proper match, marking through matches about which you are certain, so that it will be easier to match out the rest about which you are unsure. Cross out the words you have used as you go along to avoid confusion.

Multiple Choice

- Anticipate the answer before you look at the choices. Physically cover the answers with your scantron sheet to see if you can answer the question first.
- Read over all of your options.
- Eliminate highly implausible answers.
- Some examiners give away answers in their tests. By answering one question, you may be able to realize the answer to another question.
- If you must guess, keep in mind the following tips for multiple choice tests:
 - Sometimes lengthy or highly specific answers will be the correct answer.

- Be aware of words like "always," "never," "only," "must," and "completely." These are usually the wrong answers since there are many exceptions to rules. These are extreme words that are more than likely to be the wrong choice.
- Answer all questions in order without skipping or jumping around. Identify doubtful answers by marking in the margin and recheck these as time permits after all questions have been answered.
- Do not linger too long on any one question. Mark your best guess and move on, returning later if you have sufficient time.
- Reread all questions containing negative wording such as "not" or "least." Be especially alert for the use of double or even triple negatives within a sentence, as these must be read very carefully to assure full understanding.
- Check for qualifying words such as "all-most-some-none," "always-usually-seldom-never," "best-worst," or "smallest-largest." When you see one of these qualifiers, test for truth by substituting the other members of the series. If your substitution makes a better statement, the question is false; if your substitution does not make a better statement, the question is true.
- Watch for modifying or limiting phrases inserted into the true/false questions. Instructors often use inserted names, dates, places, or other details to make a statement inaccurate.
- Be alert for multiple ideas or concepts within the same true/false statements. All parts of the statement must be true or the entire statement is false.
- Be alert for grammatical inconsistencies between the question stem and the answer choices on multiple-choice questions. A choice is almost always wrong if it and the stem do not make a grammatically correct sentence.
- Be cautious about changing your answer to a true/false or multiple-choice question without a good reason. Your first "guess" is more likely to be correct than are subsequent "guesses," so be sure to have a sound reason for changing your answer.
- Apply the same approach to answering both true/false and multiple-choice questions. The same techniques will work equally well for both, since multiple-choice questions are basically true/false questions arranged in groups.

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