

Test Taking



I am going to give you the biggest tip on being a successful test taker: *know your stuff!* It isn't rocket science – put in the effort to study well and you should do OK on the test. The second biggest tip is one that seems pretty simple: *read the directions and questions carefully.* Rushing through reading can cause us to misunderstand a question or miss a key word.

The following are some suggestions to make you a better test taker:

Be Prepared

As stated above, the easiest way to improve your test taking ability is to be prepared. Start studying early and do weekly reviews. Doing a practice test is a great way to prepare you for the real thing. See the section on study strategies if you could use some help.

Being prepared also includes your physical state. Get a good night's sleep the night before (this means no all-nighters!), eat breakfast, limit caffeine and generally take care of yourself.

Do a Brain Dump

As unattractive as that sounds, it really is a great habit to get into. As soon as you get into the exam, before even reading it, write down the things you are worried that you will forget and are certain are on the test - formulas, key definitions, lists, etc. This way you won't be worried about forgetting them and you are ready to answer those questions.



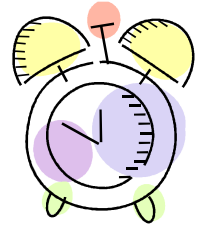
Read the Test CAREFULLY



Read the directions and questions more than once, if necessary. Underline key words. If you don't understand the directions or questions, ask for clarification. You don't want to write out a long answer, only to find that you didn't do what the directions told you to do. Even missing out on one word can change the outcome of the answer.

Time Allocation

Survey the test first. How are the marks divided up? Use this as a guideline for time. For example, if there is an essay question worth 1/3 of the test, it should take about 1/3 of the allotted time. Do not spend large amounts of time on questions that are worth only a few marks. Use your time wisely to maximize marks.



Types of Questions

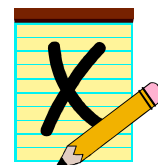


Multiple Choice

- Read the stem carefully and underline key words
- Read all the choices thoroughly before choosing – pay attention for words like “not” or “except”
- Avoid superstitious behaviour – “I haven’t chosen C for awhile so that must be the answer”
- Don’t choose an answer that is unfamiliar to you. Don’t assume that the professor is trying to trick you
- Try to narrow down the choices – eliminate the answers you are sure are wrong.
- Beware of “absolutes” like “never”, “always”, “everyone” – these are seldom the correct answer
- If you are unsure of the answer, narrow down the choices and then try to use logic and reasoning to determine the correct answer
- If you don’t know the answer, put a mark beside the question and move on - you may be able to find clues in other questions

Short Answer

- Organize your thoughts in your head or on scrap paper before you begin writing
- Use the marking scheme as a guideline for how much information is required (i.e. a question worth 3 marks probably requires 3 points)
- Pay attention to the words used in the question – “list” does not usually require an explanation, but “explain” or “describe” does
- Make sure your answer is legible. Most professors will not take the time to decipher bad handwriting and will simply mark it wrong.



Essay Questions

- Read the directions carefully because you may have a choice as to what questions you answer, and also to make sure that you answer the question properly
- Underline key words in the question
- Pay attention to point value to give yourself an idea of how in-depth you are required to be in your answer
- Organize and outline your thoughts on scrap paper first
- Pay attention to the time
- Write on every second line – this leaves you room to add in information and makes it easier to read
- Read it over when you are finished – Does it make sense? Does it answer the question? Did you stay on topic? Is it legible?
- Make sure the prof can read your work!



Never Leave a Question Blank



Your worst fear is realized and you don't know the answer to a question. Don't panic! Think about what you do know about the subject, try to use common sense and logic, and look for clues in other questions. Always write **something**. You may get lucky and get part marks, which is better than zero.

Test Anxiety



A bit of test anxiety is normal and may even help you out. However, too much can be a bad thing and cause us to “blank out” or get too worked up to focus. The following are some tips to help with test anxiety:

- Be prepared – the more you know your stuff, the less nervous you will be
- Do practice tests beforehand
- Use positive self-talk (“I can do this. I am prepared.”) and try to avoid negative self-talk (“I am going to fail! I can't do this!”). We tend to believe what we tell ourselves.
- Take some deep breaths before the test starts
- Focus on the process of answering the questions and not on the end result
- Visualize yourself being successful on the test

Common Test Terms



<i>The Word</i>	<i>The Meaning</i>
Analyze	Break subject into sections and deal with each one
Compare	Usually means looking for similarities, but check with teacher to be sure
Contrast	Finding differences
Criticize, discuss, evaluate	Give positive and negative elements of the subject and draw conclusions
Describe and Explain	Clarify the subject with major details and evidence
Illustrate	Indicate some examples
Interpret	Show that you understand the meaning
Justify	Give the reason or purpose of a statement
Prove	Confirm a point with facts/details
Relate	Show links between/among topics
Summarize	Provide the principal (main) points
Trace	Indicate how something developed

