

# Test-Taking Strategies

Taking tests is an integral part of any college experience. This is the only manner in which many instructors are able to evaluate what students have learned. While this is true, it is also a very difficult and stressful thing for many students to face. If we prepare ourselves properly for tests, we can alleviate many of the difficulties that undermine our ability to succeed in demonstrating our knowledge of the material that we are being tested on.

## **There are three phases of preparation and study for all tests. These are:**

1. Before: Get all information about the test you can, attend all classes, and study.
2. During: Relax, scan the entire test, and then actually take the test.
3. After: Find the correct answers and learn from any mistakes you may have made.

## **Preparation for all tests:**

- While it may seem obvious at first, know the basics about the test.
  - Where is it?
  - When is it?
  - What directions must I follow on the test?
  - What material is the test covering?
  - What type of test is it (multiple choice, matching, essay, etc.)?
- Health is important for tests. By getting enough sleep, eating properly, and being in generally good health, you will allow your body and mind to work most effectively. If you attempt to take a test when this is not true, your ability to perform is undermined and can affect your ability to work efficiently or even recall information.
- When you are studying, do everything you can to help recall the information. This includes studying frequently, rewriting information, using flashcards, or any other method you can find to present the information to yourself in an effective manner.
- Cramming does not work! While it is true that many times cramming may be enough to get you through a test with a

passing grade, this information will be soon lost from your memory. Only through true studying over time can we actually learn information. If we do not do this, it will come back to haunt us when we need to apply the information in the future or have future tests over the material such as a comprehensive exam at the end of the semester.

## **Types of tests:**

There are two main classifications of tests that students are asked to take. These include objective and subjective tests. Objective tests include things such as multiple choice, true and false, and matching tests. Subjective tests include tests such as fill-in-the-blank tests, and essay tests. The way each test is taken and prepared for will vary and should be considered.

### **Objective Tests:**

- When taking objective tests, it is important that you read the question for what it truly asks. Many run into difficulty when they second-guess what the question is asking. Read the question for what it asks and answer based on the knowledge you have developed.
- On multiple choice tests, make sure you read each possible answer and consider it in relation to the question that is asked. Rushing to the first answer that seems correct will many times lead you to an incorrect answer.
- Consider each question on the test separately. Patterns in answers, 'rules-of-thumb' about picking answers, and various other rumors will not help you succeed.
- Write out lists to study from that may include terms, definitions, or details about the information you will be tested on.
- Think about what the professor is looking for. By anticipating the information they are looking for you may be able to eliminate some answers based on the context of the class.
- Approach multiple-choice questions as a process of elimination. Each answer you can eliminate will allow you to focus more clearly on answers that are truly possible. Pick the best choice from the answers that are left and eliminate distractions that are improbable answers in the process. This will also ensure that you read all the potential answers.

- If you must guess, be aware of words like “always”, “never”, “only”, “must”, and completely.” These can help you to eliminate answers or to clarify what the question is asking.
- When considering whether you should change an answer as you review your test, do so only when you know positively that the choice you have made is correct. Many times, if you are unsure of the answer, your first answer is correct.
- Do not pay attention to how many A’s, B’s, C’s, or D’s you have marked. Patterns in answers do not necessarily mean anything and can distract you from taking the test properly.
- Watch for clue words. These may include negative or positive connotations, contextual relationships, or absolutes such as always, never, etc. These will allow you to more accurately understand the questions.
- Timing is important. Consider how much time you have to take the test and budget your time appropriately.

## **Subjective Tests**

Many people are very fearful of fill in the blank, short answer, and essay tests. These can be some of the most effective tests for students to showcase their knowledge of the material they are being tested on. To do so, proper preparation and knowledge of the material, as well as knowledge of how to take these tests is required. The following are a few generalized tips to succeed in these tests.

- Study material for understanding, concepts, and ability to apply the material.
- Learn and know key concepts.
- Know definitions.
- Essay exams allow you to truly explain information in a manner that is comfortable for you and that allow you to show how much you truly know.
- Use outlines if they are applicable.
- Structure essay exams as you would any paper: an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Paraphrase.
- Use examples to explain your answers.
- Use logic.

## **General Test Taking Tips:**

- Relax

- Bring a stress reliever with you (book, magazine, or music for beforehand, gum, etc.).
- Ignore other test-takers; other people can pass their anxiety on to you.
- Don't put pressure on one test, study for all your tests! § Know and use your best learning skills.
- Take sample tests.
- Bring all necessary materials (pencils, pens, a watch, scratch paper, calculator...).
- Read directions.
- Look over the entire test before beginning.
- Budget your time according to how many questions and how many points possible.
- For some, study groups can be highly effective means of studying for tests.
- Paraphrase material into your own words.
- Know when to stop. This applies to studying and taking the test itself.