

Test Taking Strategies

During the Exam

Test Taking Strategies

Test-taking strategies are cognitive abilities that are utilized in any testing situation; they enhance your understanding of what to do during tests. All students can benefit from test-taking strategies. Some examples of effective test-taking strategies are: managing your time effectively, reviewing all questions before responding, solving easier questions first, reviewing your answers, underlining key words, concepts and phrases, and eliminating incorrect answers. Test-taking strategies are effective independent of the knowledge needed to complete the test/exam (Sarnacki, 1979).



Be prepared



There is no substitution for being prepared for your exam/test. If you have not studied prior to the exam/reviewed the course material, there is no test-taking strategy that will make a difference in your performance on that exam.

Spend time learning and understanding the material. If you are stuck on concepts, you should reach out to your professor, TA or schedule an appointment with a subject area tutor. You can also utilize the “Study Buddies” app through Navigate to identify other students from your class who are interested in forming a study group.

Read the test instructions carefully to avoid unnecessary errors and listen attentively to any last minute instructions.

Knowing how to approach your exam and what is expected from you will help decrease any anxiety that may start to arise. You will often find valuable information in the test instructions. You should always read or listen carefully to the directions to ensure you understand what is being asked and what you are expected to complete. If you miss the instructions, do not be afraid to ask for instructions to be repeated.



Free Recall (“Brain Dump”)

Free Recall or “Brain Dump” is a small strategy that can yield a big impact. Free Recall is an easy, quick retrieval strategy for test-taking. As soon as you begin the exam/test, write down information you will likely need to know for the exam/test but may have trouble recalling during the exam (e.g. formulas, dates, lists, equations, etc.)

Handwritten notes illustrating mathematical formulas and calculations, including:

$$S^2 = \frac{a+b}{4} + \frac{32}{11} \left(\frac{a-b}{8} \right)^2$$

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

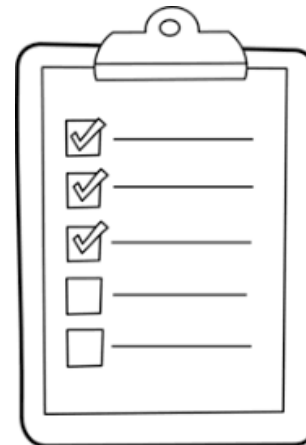
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Map out how you will utilize your allotted exam time.

- Prior to starting your exam, take a moment to estimate the amount of time you will have for each question and/or section of the exam. You want to allow yourself enough time to complete the more time-consuming (essay), challenging sections (material you are not as familiar/comfortable with) and/or sections that are weighted more heavily in the overall exam grade.
- You will want to pace yourself to ensure you can complete the entire exam within the allotted time. ***For students who receive an extended time accommodation of 1.5x or 2.0x for assessments, mapping out your allotted time is still very important to the successful completion of your exam/test.**
- Answering the questions you know first and circling back to the ones you're not as confident about helps you maximize your exam time.

Maintain a positive attitude



- Build confidence by answering the questions you know first. As previously noted, answering the questions you know first is also a great step in mapping out your allotted exam time. Do not lose confidence or waste time if you encounter confusing or difficult questions. Answer the questions you know first.
- If you truly do not know the answer to a question, make an educated guess

Rely on your first impressions

- Trust your gut (and your studying). The first answer that comes to mind is usually the correct answer. Do not second guess yourself and change your response unless you're absolutely sure the answer you've chosen is incorrect.
- While it's good practice to review your answers (if time allows) to ensure you didn't make simple mistakes, it can be counterproductive if you are second guessing all of your answers.



Plan to finish early and have time for review



- Answer questions you find easy first and then circle back to complete questions you found more difficult.
- If your exam/test has an essay component, make sure you leave time to review it for grammatical and spelling errors. Make sure to read through the completed essay to ensure it flows.
- Check the front and back page(s) of the exam to confirm you've answered all of the questions.



Every exam/test is an opportunity to build your skill set.

- Test taking is a skill set that takes time to develop. The more you practice the strategies and tips outlined above, the stronger your test taking skills will be.
- Take time to evaluate whether or not these test taking strategies are working for you after each exam/test. Make note of which strategies worked well for you and which ones did not. Working with a study skills tutor from the Tutoring Center may be helpful in honing these strategies.
- Identify where you are struggling. Are you struggling with essay questions, recalling formulas or multiple choice questions? Make note of your available resources such as the Tutoring Center and the Undergraduate Writing Center.

