

Exam Taking Tips and Techniques

Objective: To learn ways to take different types of tests more strategically and effectively

Be sure to do the following for all types of exam:

- Write your name on the exam and read the directions thoroughly
- Write down everything that you know and need to remember right when the tests begins on scrap paper or the test itself so you are not worried about remembering everything during the test
- Survey the test by looking it over to map out how much time you have, identify possible challenges, and look for answers that may be in other questions

Multiple-Choice Exams

Before you begin taking the test, look at the number of questions

- If you have 50 minutes and 50 items, you have about 1 minute for each question
- Some students find it helpful to mark the half way time and the half way question at the top of the exam to help them keep track of the time

Try answering the question first before looking at the options

- The correct answer is surrounded by “distractors” or incorrect answers
- Write your answer on the test near the question before revealing options
- This approach can help you from being distracted by the other choices

Complete the items you know for sure first

- You won’t miss any easy questions by running out time
- It builds confidence
- Later questions sometimes help to answer earlier questions
- After completing all of the answers you know for sure, go back and work through the rest of the test while being aware of how many questions you have left and how much time remains

Beware of gray and absolute terms

- Gray terms include: sometimes, frequently, often, many, generally, usually
- Absolute terms include: all, none, always, must, never, best
- Statements containing them may be incorrect because few things in life meet the requirements of “all, none, always, never, best”
- Read carefully so you do not miss terms like “not” and “except”

Read ALL choices

- Cross out the letter of obvious incorrect choices and select the best one
- If two or more choices are correct, choose the most specific one – for example, “a triangle has three sides” is better than “a triangle has more than two sides”
- Do not pay attention to how many a’s, b’s, c’s, or d’s you have marked

True/False Exams

Read the directions

- Do you have to write explanations as to why the statements are true or false?

Be careful of statements with two clauses

- If the statement contains “and,” then BOTH clauses have to be true for the statement to be true
- If the statement contains “or,” then only one clause has to be true for the statement to be true

Essay Exams

Ask your professor questions about the format beforehand

- Will there be long or short essay questions?
- How many essay questions?
- Will there be a choice of questions?

Essay exams are more than “spitting back information”

- They require application and evaluation of concepts, critical thinking and analysis
- Read the directions carefully and make sure you know what you’re being asked to do – for example, if your professor wants you to evaluate philosophical theory, then you won’t get full credit if you just describe the theory

Note the weight of each question

- Are all questions weighted equally?
- Budget your time according to the weight of each question

Create an outline, question chart, or key word diagram

- This will give your essay direction
- Your professors are definitely influenced by well organized, clear and compact thought patterns

Begin with a simple and clear thesis statement that reflects your understanding of the whole question

- Then, systematically support your thesis and do not stray from your thesis or outline
- Avoid “fat,” “fluff,” and “filler”
- Include some specific details and examples if applicable
- Finish with a summary, which is simply a paraphrasing of your introduction

Qualify answers when in doubt

- It is better to say, “towards the end of the 19th century” than to say “in 1894” when you can’t remember the exact date

Review the common used terms

- They are commonly found in essay exam questions
- An understanding of these terms will enable you to give your professor what he or she is requesting

Proofread your essay

- Make sure you answered the question in full

Math Exams

Prepare by practicing with examples in the book

- Prepare by taking notes in words and identify each step of a problem
- Study more than one example
- Know the number of steps it takes to finish a problem or formula
- Know the variations and variables that might affect the answer
- Teach the information to someone else

Be thorough in your work

- Remember that in math to ace a test it means making no mistakes so double-check all calculations
- Show your work – draw pictures/write calculations on the side to show what you are thinking