

Student Success: Test Taking Skills

START ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Start on day one. Tests measure learning, so attend all your classes, complete all your homework assignments on time, work with your classmates, and create study groups. Learn all semester, not just the night before a test. Review your homework and the readings as often as necessary to master the material.

Ask for sample tests and exams. Some of your professors may provide sample tests and exams. If your professor does, take the sample test as you would a real test. Identify your weak points and work on those.

Talk to your professor. Ask the instructor to specify the areas that will be emphasized on the test, and ask about the test's format and process. Make time to visit the instructor during office hours to clarify confusing areas.

Get help. Visit the Learning Resource Center (S500) as often as possible.

PREPARING FOR A TEST

Get some rest. Get at least five hours of sleep before the test. Eight hours of sleep is best.

Eat breakfast. Healthy food gives you energy and helps you focus. Avoid eating right before the exam because that can make you groggy.

Arrive early and prepared. Get to class fifteen to twenty minutes early. Bring the proper materials (pens, #2 pencils, calculators, etc.); calm yourself; do not panic; avoid discussing the exam with your fellow classmates.

Plan for comfort. Go the bathroom before you enter the classroom. Be prepared for any temperature. In winter, a room may be overly heated; in summer, overly air-conditioned. Dress in layers (for example, in cold weather, wear a t-shirt, a shirt and a sweater), and adjust your outfit to the room's temperature.

DURING THE TEST

Read all the instructions twice before you start answering questions. Understand the format and process of the test. Not following directions may result in lost points. Be sure you understand what each question is asking.

Make a plan. Answer the questions you know first, and then proceed to the more difficult ones. If there is no penalty for wrong answers, answer every question; if there is a penalty, leave questions blank if you are unsure.

Use all your time. After you finish, use the remaining time to review your grammar, spelling, calculations, and diagrams before turning in the test. Remember to insert mathematical signs and symbols where needed.

Answer the right question. If you have a separate answer sheet, check that your answers are in the correct place.

TECHNIQUES FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF QUESTIONS

Multiple choice questions. Read the question and answer it before you look at the choices. If your choice is not there, cross out the obviously wrong ones and choose from what is left.

Essay questions. Make notes before you start writing the final essay. Plan out your essay in quick bullet points or a brief outline before you start writing. If you run out of time, your notes may get you some points. Be sure your essay has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Math questions. Try to find the simplest way to solve a problem. If you feel like you do not have enough time, that may be a signal that there is a simpler method you should consider. Show your work.

KNOW WHY YOU ARE BEING TESTED

Believe that tests matter. Would you want to see a doctor who failed an anatomy test? Would you want an accountant who failed math? Tests are a way to prove your skills and knowledge.

Master stress. Tests are stressful, but so is life. In your profession, you will have to apply your skills under pressure, so use tests as practice. Try to think of a test as life training, not a hoop to jump through.

Show off! A test is the place to show how much you have learned. You should be proud of good grades, but you should be even prouder of the knowledge and skills good grades represent.