
General Test-Taking Strategies

On the Day of the Test

1. Make sure you are well rested and that you have eaten some protein (settles your stomach).
2. Arrive early and take a moment to relax and reduce your anxiety. Avoid distractions including sitting near or anything or anyone who is distracting to you.
3. Listen carefully to instructions given by the instructor; then read the directions very carefully. For example, you may discover that you only need to answer three out of the five essay questions. Ask for clarification if you do not understand the directions.
4. As soon as the test begins, write down any relevant formulae, concepts, figures, or memory cues that will help you during the test. Add to this list as inspirations come. Refer to it as needed.
5. Scan the entire test to let yourself know what to expect before you start answering.
6. Plan how you will use the time for the test. Observe the point value of each section and figure out a rough time allowance accordingly. Bring a time piece and pay attention to the passing time.
7. Do the easiest questions first. This will increase your confidence and may trigger memory for other answers. Don't waste time lingering over questions you don't know right away.
8. Go back to look at the harder questions. Choose the highest value questions next. If a question is worth 3 marks, there are usually three points that the instructor is looking for. 10 marks = 10 points.
9. Focus on the questions and not the answers. Underline the key words in each question. Think about where you have seen or heard these key words before. Think about other questions that you have already answered for clues. Write your best answer. If it is multiple choice, then check the answers to see if there is an answer that is close to your answer.
10. If two questions or potential answers seem similar, look for what words are different. Think carefully about what difference each word makes. This can lead you to decide on the correct response.
11. Take your time. Don't race through the exam and don't leave early.
12. Use any extra time at the end to check for careless errors, re-visit any difficult questions you left unanswered, or proofread essay answers for grammar and spelling. Make sure you answered all the questions!
13. When you have answered all of the questions, take a minute to re-scan your paper. Do not change any answers unless you are absolutely sure that you have made a mistake. Your first response is more likely to be correct. Second-guessing can lead to lower scores.

Afterwards

Learn from your tests! When one is returned, review it thoroughly to see where you can improve next time. Test taking is a skill like any other and improves with practice. We hope that you are successful in your testing. If you are not, you can find help. Please contact The Learning Centre on your campus. We offer study skills workshops throughout the school year. You are welcome to sign up for a session of tutoring or to book time with a Learning Strategist to help you with your learning strategies.