

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

GENERAL LAST MINUTE TIPS

1. Start preparing for the exam on the first day the instructor assigns the topic, the first time you read the text, and the first time the instructor covers the material in class. The night before the exam then becomes a final **review** session instead of a last minute cram session.
2. Get a good night's rest. Before going to sleep, relax and visualize yourself remaining calm in the test situation and performing well on the exam.
3. Be organized. Take all the necessary materials to class. Do you need #2 pencils? Take a couple. Do you need an erasable pen for possible essay questions? Do you need to take paper, or a blue book? Getting to class and realizing that you are not prepared simply increases anxiety and interferes with performance.
4. Be on time! If you are commuting, leave early enough to deal with potential traffic delays. This strategy is one more way to keep anxiety under control.
5. Sit in a quiet spot. Talking a great deal with other students right before the exam about the material on which you will be tested can interfere with your prior learning. You may want to glance over key terms or mnemonic devices one last time, but **do not** try to learn any new information at this time.
6. When the test is handed out, pay particular attention to any last-minute verbal instructions written on the board.
7. Skim over the test, making sure you understand all directions. Check to see if different amounts of credit are given for different questions. Jot down any key words or mnemonics that go with particular questions right away. Then you can come back later and complete those questions.
8. Make sure you know whether you have to answer all questions or only a certain number of questions. Also, determine if you get credit for all correct answers (thus making it worth your while to guess if you are unsure of an answer) or if a certain percentage will be counted against you for incorrect answers. This is particularly important to check on if the test is standardized.
9. Budget your time! Wear a watch or make sure there is a clock in the room. Monitor how much time you are spending on different sections of the test.
10. Are you supposed to mark all answers on the test or is there a separate answer sheet? On math and technical exams, do you get partial credit for partially correct procedures even if you do not get the final answer correct? Are you allowed to mark on the test? If you are, use that to your advantage.

TAKING THE TEST

1. Start with the questions you find easiest. This gets you on the success track, and frequently these questions will trigger memory regarding other questions.
2. If you must put answers on a separate answer sheet, develop a system of marking. Perhaps placing a light horizontal line beside questions you temporarily skip will keep you on track and let you return quickly to them at a later time. Use every fifth or tenth question to cross check the number of the question with the number on the answer sheet. Mismarking the answer sheet can cost valuable time and credit for knowledge you do have.
3. If you are allowed to write on the test, utilize marking strategies (preferably similar to ones you have developed to mark textbooks) to help you focus on important words in the test questions. Pay particular attention to:
 - A. Topic words.
 - B. Absolute versus “in-between” modifiers.
(always, all, none, never, must, usually, mandatory **vs.** some, etc.)
 - C. Key words that indicate what it is about the topic that is the focus.
(characteristics, functions, components, types, locations, theories, conditions, etc.)
 - D. Words that indicate number, sequence or importance.
(important, first, critical, three, crucial, determining, last, major, etc.)
 - E. Direction or instruction words, particularly in essay questions.
(compare, contrast, enumerate, summarize, justify, outline, etc.)

AFTER THE TEST - ANALYZE, DON'T CRITICIZE!

1. Study all returned exams. Analyze them to determine what you did right and what you did incorrectly. Pay attention to remarks from the professor. Look for clues as to how you can change to improve your study strategies for the future.
2. Look at what you got correct! Where did those questions come from . . . the lecture, textbook, handouts, discussions? How did you know that information might be on the test? How did you study that material? Whatever you did worked, so you might want to develop that strategy.
3. Look at what you missed? Did you expect that information to be on the test? If not, where did it come from? What clues did you miss that it might be good test material? If you did expect the topic to be covered, why did you miss the question? Did you misread the question? Was it a result of insufficient study time? Did you study it in too general a fashion and not focus on detail? Or did the question ask for a general concept and you focused too much on detail? All this analysis provides you with information regarding how to study for future tests in this course and in other courses.
4. Don't spend your time bad-mouthing or beating up on yourself (or the instructor). Instead of criticizing, spend your time analyzing and learning.