

Test-taking Strategies

General Guidelines

- 1. Gathering knowledge of the truth is the best preparation for tests.**
 - Hours of concentrated, effective study help to carefully place facts into your memory. This is the best way to prepare for any test.
 - However, teachers often try to test your memory of the material by slightly altering it. In this case, practice and some test-taking skill will help.
- 2. Always arrive early and take a moment to relax and reduce your anxiety.**
 - This brief time period will boost your confidence
 - Use this time to focus your mind and think positive thoughts.
- 3. Listen attentively to last minute instructions given by the instructor.**
 - Teachers often make last minute changes.
 - Missing instructions can cause extreme anxiety.
- 4. Read the test directions very carefully and watch for details.**
 - You may find that more than one answer may be possible on multiple choice tests.
 - A key detail may require that you choose only three out of the five essay questions.
- 5. Plan how you will use the allotted time.**
 - Estimate how many minutes you will need to finish each test section.
 - Determine a pace which will ensure completing the whole test on time.
 - Start with the easiest section to build your confidence.

6. Maintain a positive attitude.

- Don't let more difficult questions raise your anxiety and steal your valuable time. Move on and find success with other questions.
- Avoid watching for patterns. Noticing that the last four answers are "c," is not a good reason to continue with that pattern.

7. Rely on your first impressions.

- The answer which comes to mind first is often correct.
- Nervously reviewing questions and changing answers can do more harm than good.

8. Plan to finish early and have time for review.

- Return to difficult questions you marked for review.
- Proofread your essays and pay attention to grammar and spelling.
- Make sure you answer all the questions. Many students have failed to notice questions on the back side of the paper.

9. Consider every test a practice session - analyze your performance.

- Test taking is an art which needs refinement. One can not refine the art without practice and serious evaluation.
- Go through each test thoroughly and see if your plan worked.
- Look at each section to identify your fault patterns. Do you need to work on true/false, multiple choice, or essay questions?
- Talk to teachers regarding low scores, especially on essays.

Guidelines for Answering True/false Questions

1. When you do not know the answer. Mark it true!

- There are generally more true questions on true-false exams than false questions.
- Instructors find it difficult to make a false statement look true.
- Specific detail in the statement may also tend to make it true. For example, the statement "Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs in one season" has specific detail and is more likely to be true.

2. Look for any factor that will make a statement false.

- It is easy for the instructor to add a false part to an otherwise true statement.
- Students often read the question and see some truth and quickly assume that the entire statement is true. For example, "Water boils at 212 degrees in Denver." Water does boil at 212 degrees, but not at Denver's altitude.

3. Look for extreme modifiers that tend to make the question false.

- Extreme modifiers, such as always, all, never, or only make it more likely that the question is false. Here is a more complete list of EXTREME modifiers.

all	none	best
always	never	worst
only	nobody	everybody
invariably	no one	everyone

4. Qualifying words tend to make a question true. Qualifiers (seldom, often, many) increase the likelihood that the statement is true. Here is a more complete list of QUALIFIERS.

usually	frequently	often
some	seldom	many
probably	a majority	apt to
might	a few	may

5. Negative words or prefixes complicate the statement.

- The prefixes (un-, im-, miss-) will alter the meaning of the statement.
- Double negatives make a positive. For example "not uncommon" actually means common.

6. Questions that state a reason tend to be false.

- Words in the statement that cause justification or reason (since, because, when, if) tend to make the statement false.
- Pay close attention, the reason that is given may be incorrect or incomplete.

7. There is no substitute for the truth.

- Concentrated hours of study is the best way to prepare true-false questions.
- Teachers, however, often try to test your memory of the material by slightly altering it.

Guidelines for Answering Multiple-choice Questions

1. Formulate your own answer before reading the options.

- Focus on finding an answer without the help of the alternatives.
- This process will increase your concentration.
- Doing this will help you exercise your memory.

2. Eliminate unlikely answers first.

- Quickly eliminating two alternatives may increase your probability to 50/50 or better.
- Use the true-false methods described earlier and find the false alternative.

3. Select numbered answers from the middle range, not the extremes.

- For example, if the height of a mountain is requested, eliminate 20,000 feet (high), and 3,000 feet (low). Then choose between 8,000 feet and 11,000 feet.

4. Select answers that are longer and more descriptive.

- Longer (true) answers stand out and contain more detail.
- Shorter (false) answers are created quickly as throw aways.
- Descriptive detail is given to help you identify the truth.

5. Similar answers give you a clue! One of them is correct, the other is disguised.

6. Watch out for "NOT TRUE"

- Remember to reverse your procedure and eliminate truth.
- Use the true-false methods described earlier and find the false alternative.

Guidelines for Answering Matching Questions

- 1. Examine both lists to determine the types of items and their relationships.**
 - Remember the test maker may be testing to see if you have mastered terms.
 - Look completely through both lists to become familiar with the words , build your confidence, and enhance your memory of key words or phrases.
- 2. Use one list as a starting point and go through the second list to find a match.**
 - This process organizes your thinking and promotes memory.
 - As you become familiar with the second list, you will be able to go straight to a match that you saw when looking through the lists a previous time.
- 3. Move through the entire list before selecting a match because a more correct answer may follow.**
- 4. Cross off items on the second list when your are certain that you have a match.**
- 5. Do not guess until all absolute matches have been made because you will likely eliminate an answer that could be used for a later choice.**

Guidelines for Answering Sentence Completion or Fill-in-the-blank Questions

- 1. Concentrate on the number of blanks in the sentence and the length of the space.** The test maker is giving you clues to the answer by adding spaces and making them longer.

2. **Provide a descriptive answer when you can not think of the exact word or words.** The instructor will often reward your effort with partial credit.

Guidelines for Essay Questions

1. **Organize your thoughts before you begin to write.**
 - A short outline on a separate piece of paper will improve your essay.
 - Write the topics and the key introductory words.
2. **Paraphrase the original question to form your introductory statement.**
 - This process helps you get the question straight in your mind.
 - Restating the question allows the teacher to see how you understood the question. Perhaps you understood it to mean something other than what the teacher intended.
3. **Use the principles of English composition**
 - Form a clear thesis statement (statement of purpose) and place it as near to the beginning as possible.
 - Provide clear explanations to back up the main concept.
 - Remember, a complete answer usually has a main idea, supporting details and illustrative examples.
4. **Write clearly! Teachers need to be able to read it.**
 - Making teachers work hard to read lowers your grade.
 - Print clearly, using a dark-colored erasable ball point pen.
 - Avoid crossing out words or sentences, and don't smudge your paper.
 - Remember to save some space for a brief but adequate summary.
5. **Use lists or bullets wherever possible.**
 - Numbers or bullets allow the teacher to easily see your points.
 - Never bury your lists or key points in the middle of a paragraph.
 - If you must use a long paragraph, underline your key points.

6. Identify the verbs or words in the question that give you direction.

- Key words in each question describe the task you are expected to complete.
- Circle the direction words in the question to make sure that you are focusing on the desired task.
- Sample direction verbs or adjectives, and their generally intended action or task, are listed below.

Direction *verbs* that ask you to *review an idea or concept* in your own words:

summarize, survey, discuss, explain

Direction *verbs* that ask for a *set of items or ideas* that were presented in lecture or reading. These action words generally require more precise wording of items by giving numbers or steps:

trace, outline, list, diagram, solve

Directions *verbs* that ask you to *speak in favor* of a concept or give the reasons why it should be accepted as valid:

defend, argue, debate, contend, justify

Directions *verbs* that ask for a *specific meaning* or picture of a concept:

define, clarify, describe, depict, illustrate

Directions *verbs* that ask you to show *differences* in several ideas or situations:

contrast, compare, distinguish, differentiate,

Direction *adjectives* that ask for *specific information* the instructor considers important:

significant, critical, key, important, major, principal, essential, vital