

Test Taking Tips

Back on Track



Mentally prepare yourself. Before you start, know that you are going to have to think and work hard. Remain calm if answers don't immediately come to you.

Do a "mind dump." When you first get the exam, jot down notes on the front page about details you know you might forget. Also, briefly outline your answers to questions that require a written response.

Scan over the exam. Before you start, note the point values for each question and whether or not your exam is complete.

Do the easy problems first. Working from easiest to hardest will build confidence and ensure you don't miss any easy points because you ran out of time.

Read each question carefully. Make sure you answer all parts of the question.

Don't waste time on a question you don't know- move on! It is not worth wasting time and getting frustrated. Make sure you get the points for the questions you do know. If you run out of time, make an educated guess to get partial points.

Generally, it is important to answer all the questions. When you don't know the answer, make an educated guess based on what you know already and contextual clues.

Ask questions about anything unclear to you. This includes anything from general grammar to the phrasing of a question to a specific concept.

Answer questions from the instructor's point of view. Remember what he or she has emphasized over the entire course as important or necessary information to take away from the class.

The most important thing to do is to read the question carefully!

- Know the vocabulary. Be alert to terminology that links the question to key areas of the lectures or text.
- If you do not know what a word means ask for clarification or look at the context in which the word is used. If you don't understand what the question is asking, ask the professor or TA to reword it. Make sure you understand before they walk away.
- Look at how choices differ. Match up those choices to the stem of the question and see if any of them don't fit.
- Circle or underline key terms (i.e. all, always, never, none, few, many, some, sometimes). These will often change the scope of the question. Also watch for prepositional phrases and details (the "fillers") in the question. This will help you get to the heart of the question.
- Be sure your answer encompasses both parts of the question. Multiple choice problems test your applied knowledge, so think through the questions carefully.
- If you must guess, go with your gut feeling and try to look at other test questions to see if you can draw connections between the materials.

Tips for Specific Tests

Problem-Solving Tests

- Show all your work to increase chances of getting at least partial credit.
- Don't waste time erasing. Draw a single line through the ignored work and move on. It will save time and may turn out to be useful to you later on in the problem.
- If you have extra time go back and check your work.

True-False Tests

- Watch out for key terms, such as always, all, never, none, etc. Things are rarely always true.
- Be wary of longer statements. The longer the statement, the more things you are going to have to think about. Break it down into phrases and assess each component of it.

Fill in The Blank Tests

- If there are two blanks, treat them as two different questions.
- Answers to fill in the blank questions are rarely vague, so be as specific you can.

Matching Tests

- When first going through the list, only mark the matches you are absolutely sure of.
- When matching, go through all the choices before choosing an answer.

Take Home Exams

- Give yourself plenty of time to complete it, don't wait until the night before it's due.
- Put in more details and pay attention to grammar and style.

Open-Book Exams

- Make a note card of formulas for quick and easy reference.
- Fold down or bookmark important pages.
- If using notes, number each page and make a table of contents.
- Prepare thoroughly. Open-book exams are often the most difficult because the professor expects you to apply your knowledge even more than in closed-book exams.

Oral Exams

- Practice possible questions that could be asked and answer them to a friend.
- Allow for plenty of time to practice.

Multiple-Choice Tests

- You will need to do more than memorize for these types of tests – make sure you have an understanding of the material.
- Preview the exam and estimate how much time you should spend on each problem.
- Try to recall a concept from memory before looking at the choices (Cover up the answers and write down your own answer, and then match your answer with one of the choices).
- Read the question twice and then answer it. This helps cut down on stupid mistakes.
- Mark your first inclination on the question sheet. Usually your first guess is right.
- Only change your answer if you are absolutely sure.
- For opposite options one is usually correct.