

# TAKING TESTS -- GENERAL TIPS

Tests measure how you are doing in a course. Usually test scores are the key determinants of your course grade. Doing well on tests requires test-taking skills, a purposeful positive attitude, strategic thinking and planning, and, naturally, a solid grasp of the course content. This article contains tips that apply to all types of tests: Additional tips are available for problem solving tests, objective tests, and essay tests.

## I. HOW TO PREPARE FOR TESTS.

1. Familiarize yourself with the test. Ask the professor how long it will be and what kind of questions will be on it. Ask your instructor which concepts are most important, which chapters to focus on, and what you will have to do on the test. Also ask for some sample test questions and whether there is a copy of a similar test on file in a library. Look over the tests you have already taken in the course to predict what you will need to prepare for. Your aim is to determine both the content of the questions and the type of memory/intellectual skills you will be asked to use.

Examples of these skills include:

- Remembering specific facts.
  - Comparing, contrasting, and otherwise interpreting meaning in the information studied.
  - Applying principles and theories to solve problems (that may not have been covered explicitly in the materials).
  - Predicting possible outcomes given a set of variables.
  - Evaluating the usefulness of certain ideas, concepts, or methods for a given event or situation.
2. Overview all the work to be done and schedule time to do it. On the basis of your familiarity with the test, make a list of all the tasks you must complete to prepare for it. Given what topics you expect to be most important on the test, set priorities among your study tasks and plan to do the most important ones first. In scheduling your test preparation work, keep as much as possible to your own routines. If you do not know how to make a study schedule, refer to the article on time management.
3. Avoid the "escape syndrome". If you find yourself fretting or talking about your work rather than studying, relax for a few minutes and rethink what you are doing - reappraise your priorities and if necessary rethink your study plan to address your worries and then **START WORKING**.
4. Deal with unread materials - succinctly. Approach your unread materials

- keeping in mind all of your study plans, how much time you have to catch up on your reading, and what it is you need to pull out of the reading. Preview the material, dividing it up into parts looking for the organizational scheme of the work. Decide what parts in the reading you can omit, what parts you can skim, and what parts you want to read. Set time limits for each part, and keep to the limits. Use the following techniques to help move through the reading:
- Skim all reading material first (except the parts you have decided to omit) so you will have at least looked at everything before the test. Take notes on what you skim.
  - Read, emphasizing key sentences and concentrating on understanding the ideas expressed. Try editorializing as you read by asking yourself questions regarding WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW about the information.
  - Recite the material to yourself immediately, self-testing at the end of each part to enhance recall even without later review.
5. Review actively. Integrate notes, text, and supplementary information onto summary sheets by diagramming, charting, outlining, categorizing in tables, or simply writing paragraph summaries of the information. Try to create a summary sheet for each study session, or for each main idea, or for each concept. Use as many of the suggested ways possible, bringing all your senses as well as your sense of humor to bear on these summary sheets to make them really personally meaningful. The more of yourself you put into these sheets, the better you will remember the information.
6. Practice doing what you will be doing on the test. If you will be solving problems, then that is what you need to do while studying; if you will be conjugating Spanish verbs, then write these out. Answer unassigned problems or questions in the text or anticipate test questions by thinking frequently, 'If I were making up this test, I would probably ask...', and then answer your question. Remember, the single most effective way to prepare for any test is to practice doing what you will have to do on the test.
7. It is frequently useful to study with other well-prepared students and to attend any review sessions if available. Use these forums to clarify any questions you have about the materials and the test. Do not expect review sessions to repeat any lectures nor to present any additional information. The purpose of these sessions is to give you the opportunity to ask questions about the information to further your understanding.

## **II. HOW TO TAKE TESTS.**

- 1. Be prepared emotionally and physically as well as intellectually. Get into a "fighting" attitude, emotionally ready to do your best. Stay away from others right before the test. Anxiety is highly contagious. Focus on what you know rather than on what you do not know: Reinforce your strengths and arrest your weaknesses. Get your rest the night before a test, eat well balanced meals, keep up with your regular exercise - prepare your brain for optimum functioning by keeping your physical resources well maintained. Avoid fasts; do not take any stimulants you are not used to, and if you are used to them (i.e. coffee or soft drinks) keep within moderate amounts.**
- 2. Arrive at the test room early enough to arrange your working conditions, establishing a calm and alert mode. Select a seat where the lighting is the best (frequently in the front of the room) and where your view of other students will be minimized.**
- 3. When you receive your test, use the back to jot down all the information you are worried you might forget. Remember first to ask whether you can write on the test form itself.**
- 4. Preview the whole test before beginning to answer any questions. Make sure your copy has no missing or duplicate pages. Ask the instructor or proctor to clarify any ambiguities. Read the directions carefully.**
- 5. Plan your time. Allow the most time for the questions that offer the most points. Allocate time at the end to review.**
- 6. Start with the easy questions to build your confidence and to gain time for the harder ones. Work the entire test: Put down some answer for each question, even if you must guess (unless there is a penalty for guessing).**
- 7. Do not panic if you see a question you did not anticipate or prepare for. Use everything you know about the content of the course, the instructor's explanations and your own reasoning ability to analyze the question and create a logical answer. Go for partial credit when you know you cannot get all the points: If you have studied, you are bound to know something.**
- 8. Read the question as is. Avoid overanalyzing or oversimplifying, or you will end up answering a question that exists only in your mind, not on the grading key. Answer the question the testmaker intended: interpret the test within the scope of the course.**

## **III. HOW TO ANALYZE RETURNED TESTS.**

- 1. If you receive your test back to keep, rework your errors trying to reason**

- out why the correct answer was correct.
2. **If you do not receive your test back, visit your instructor's office to take a look at your answer sheet and the questions you missed.**
  3. **Look for the origin of each question - text, notes, labs, supplementary reading, etc.**
  4. **Identify the reason you missed a question. Did you fail to read it correctly? Did you fail to prepare for it? Was the test at a more difficult level than you prepared for? Did you run out of time?**
  5. **Check the level of detail and skill of the test. Were most of the questions on precise details and facts or were they over main ideas and principles? Did the questions come straight from the text, or did the testmaker expect you to make sophisticated transformations and analyses?**
  6. **Did you have any problems with anxiety or blocking during the test?**