

Looking Back: Test Taking Strategies

What kind of test will I encounter in college?

- Although tests are an unpopular fact of college life, they can provide useful information about one's level of knowledge and understanding about a subject.
- There are several types of tests, including brief, informal quizzes; more substantial tests; and even more weighty exams, which tend to be administered at the midpoint and end of a course.

What are the best ways to prepare for and take various kinds of tests?

- Good test preparation begins with doing the course assignments, attending class regularly, and paying attention in class. It also helps to find out as much as possible about a test beforehand and to form a study group to review material.
- If cramming becomes necessary, focus on summarizing factual information broadly, identifying key concepts and ideas, and rehearsing information orally.
- When you first receive the test, skim it to see what kinds of questions are asked, figure out how the different questions and sections will be weighted, and jot down complex factual information that is likely to be needed for the test.
- Answer the easiest questions first, write legibly, use only one side of each sheet of paper, mark answer sheets carefully, and record answers in the test book as well as the answer sheet. (When allowed)

What are the best strategies for answering specific kinds of test questions?

- For essay questions, be sure to understand each question and each of its parts, interpret action words correctly, write concisely, organize the essay logically, and include examples.
- The best strategy for short-answer and fill-in questions is to be very sure what is being asked. Keep answers complete but brief.
- For multiple-choice questions, read the question very carefully and then read all response choices. Educated guessing based on eliminating incorrect response choices is usually a reasonable strategy.
- For true-false and matching questions, answer all the items that you are sure of quickly and then go back to the remaining items.

ON CAMPUS

Colleges provide a variety of resources for students having difficulties with test-taking. Some offer general workshops for students, reviewing test-taking strategies. Furthermore, if you are planning to take a specific standardized test, such as the tests required for admission to business, law, or medical school, you may be able to sign up for a course offered through your college (or through such commercial organizations as Princeton Review or Kaplan).

If you are experiencing difficulties in a specific course, you may be able to find a tutor to help you out. Northwest Florida State College has a tutoring center that can provide one-to-one assistance. You also can talk to your advisor, who may be able to point you in the right direction. It's also important to speak to your instructor, who more than likely has

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encountered many students with similar problems and may have some useful test-taking strategies.

IN PRINT

In *How to Ace Any Test* (Wiley 2004), Beverley Chin provides a variety of techniques designed to improve your performance on any kind of test.

Eileen Tracy's *The Student's Guide to Exam Success* (Open University Press, 2006) gives an overview of strategies for test-taking success.

Finally, *Test Anxiety and What You Can Do About It* (National Professional Resources, 2005), by Joseph Casbarro is a professional guide to dealing with test anxiety, providing a variety of concrete suggestions.

ON THE WEB

The following sites on the World Wide Web provide opportunities to extend your learning about the material in this chapter.

- “The Multiple Choice Exam,” an online handout from the University of Victoria’s Learning Skills Program (www.coun.uvic.ca/learning/exams/multiple-choice.html), offers some valuable suggestions on how to approach multiple-choice exams. Several types of multiple-choice questions are described and strategies for answering them are explained. There are also helpful hints about what to look for in the wording of both the questions and the answer choices.
- “Simplified Plans of Action for Common types of Question Words,” another online handout from the University of Victoria’s Learning Skills Program (www.coun.uvic.ca/learning/essays/simple-answers.html), give examples of question words that are often found in essay assignments or in essay questions on exams. Possible “plans of action” for each of the question types are outlined. These outlines can be useful as a starting point for understanding how to approach essay questions.
- “Tactics for Managing Stress and Anxiety” (www.coun.uvic.ca/personal/stess-anxiety.html), offers several suggestions that you might find helpful in managing and reducing your level of stress and anxiety. The techniques may help you deal with test-related anxiety as well as academic anxiety in general. Not all of the techniques work for everyone. Try them and use the ones that work best for you.