

The Learning Center

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General Guidelines for Test-taking

1. Arrive early and take a moment to relax and reduce your anxiety. This brief time period will boost your confidence and give you time to think positive thoughts and focus your mind.
2. Listen attentively to last minute instructions given by the instructor. The teacher will almost always give you some valuable information just before handing out the test. Don't miss them because your anxiety causes you to talk to a classmate.
3. Read the directions very carefully, looking for specific instructions on how to proceed. Watch for details. You may find that more than one answer may be possible on multiple choice or that you only need to answer three out of the five essay questions given.
4. Plan how you will use the time for the test. Estimate how many minutes you will need to finish each test section and finish in the total time allotted. Bring your watch and pay close attention to the passing time. Follow your own pace and do not let the pace of others cause you to become nervous. Be confident in your plan for completing the test on time.
5. Determine which test sections will receive priority. It is generally best to do the section that is easiest for you especially if it has a high point total. It is not a good idea to do the most difficult section first. Often, a student following this method will not leave enough time for questions that would have been sure points. Leaving essay and sentence completion questions for last can often be beneficial because you find answers among the already completed objective questions. However, if essays are left for last, be sure to leave enough time to outline your thoughts, and then write the answer clearly.
6. Keep a steady pace and do not let more difficult questions affect your attitude and steal your valuable time. Students often cloud their minds by lingering over difficult questions. Moving on and finding success with other questions is a better method. If you are not penalized for wrong answers, guess and move on.

7. Rely on your knowledge and don't watch for patterns. Noticing that the last four answers are "c" is not a good reason to change an answer. One cannot be sure that the teacher varied the answers. It is better to trust knowledge to help you answer the questions.
8. Change answers only when you are certain. The answer which comes to mind first is often correct. Reviewing with an anxious mind and changing answers when you are not certain can do more harm than good.
9. When you have completed your test, use the remaining time effectively. Review the difficult questions you left. Proofread your essays. Check your grammar and spelling. Make sure you answered all questions. More than one student has turned in a test and received only 50% because there were questions on the back side of the paper.
10. Learn from your tests! When tests are returned, go through them thoroughly and see if your plan worked. Look at each section to identify your fault patterns. Do not be a defeatist. Consider every test a practice session. Do you need to pay more attention to multiple choice facts? Talk with the teachers regarding essay questions and find out how to describe your ideas, provide examples or be clearer. Test taking is an art, one which needs refinement. One can not refine the art without practice and serious thought.

Guidelines for Answering True-false Questions

1. There is no substitute for the truth. Many concentrated hours of study to force facts into your memory is the best way to prepare true-false questions. Teachers, however, 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. When you do not know or can't remember information to determine the truth of a statement, assume that it is true. There are generally more true questions on true-false exams than false questions because instructors tend to emphasize true questions. If there is specific detail in the statement, it may also tend to be true. For example, the statement "There are 980 endangered species worldwide" has specific detail and is likely to be true.

3. Carefully read each question, looking for any factor that will make it false. It is easier for the instructor to add a false part to an otherwise true statement. Students often read the question and see some truth and assume that the entire statement is true.
4. 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. A more complete list of extreme modifiers follows.
all none best absolutely
always never worst absolutely not
only nobody everybody certainly
invariably no one everyone certainly not
5. Identify qualifiers that tend to make the question true. Qualifiers (seldom, often, many) make the question more likely true. A more complete list of often used qualifiers follows.
usually frequently often sometimes
some seldom many much
probably a majority apt to most
might a few may unlikely
6. Watch out for negative words and how they may affect the truth. Statements containing negative words may be true or false but you must see them to make that determination. The prefixes (un-, im-, miss-) will alter the meaning of the statement. Double negatives make the statement true. For example "not uncommon" actually means common. Don't let this language dilemma cause you to make a mistake.
7. 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 because they bring in a reason that is incorrect or incomplete.

Guidelines for Answering Multiple-choice Questions

1. Read each question with the intention of answering the question without the alternatives which follow. Focus on finding an answer without the help of the alternatives. This will increase your concentration and help you read the question more clearly.
2. Use the process of elimination when you do not know the answer for sure. Eliminate two alternatives quickly and then make the decision between the two remaining. This increases your probability to 50/50. Another helpful method of elimination is to use the true-false methods described in the previous set of guidelines. When you can determine a likely false alternative, eliminate it. The true-false elimination method is particularly helpful when more than one answer is possibly true.
3. When numbers are in each alternative, choose the numbers that are in the middle range, not the extremes. For example, if the height of Cascade Mountain is requested, eliminate 20,000 feet, and 3,000 feet. Then choose between 8,000 feet and 11,000 feet. Remember, the best results are obtained when you have studied and know the exact answer is 11,000 feet.
4. Choose answers that are longer and more descriptive. These answers stand out from the others. Instructors will often give you descriptive detail to help you identify the truth.
5. When two very similar answers appear, it is likely that one of them is the correct choice. Test makers often disguise the correct option by giving another option that looks very much like the correct one.
6. Watch out for negative words in the instructions or in the main question. You may have been told to select an option that is not true. Remember to reverse your procedure and eliminate truth, not falsehood. When looking for negative options look for extreme modifiers that make them false (always, never, all, etc.)

Guidelines For Essay Tests

1. Do questions with higher point values first (if you run out of time at least you can maximize your points)
2. Read directions carefully to find out how many essays you have to do
3. Write down everything that is asked of you and more. More details = higher points
4. For factual essays, don't give your opinion
5. Be as neat as possible
6. Don't write long introductions or conclusions; focus on the body paragraphs
7. One main idea/paragraph
8. If you are unsure about dates, use approximates.
9. *Budget Your Time!