

[→ Register](#)

Home About Us Getting Started Career Explorer Profiles Issues in Health Care Education Links Blog FAQ Sitemap



# Explore HEALTHCareers.org

## Seven Prep Tips for Retaking (or Taking) the Standardized Tests

So you took the standardized entrance exam for the health professions education of your dreams -- and you're unhappy with your scores. Maybe you don't understand what went wrong. You are not alone. Thousands of students take a standardized test required for the health professions more than once.

LaDonna, Chicago, IL, notes that she "could have studied a little more and have done more research before taking it...and I did before taking the test again. That is probably the biggest thing: it is possible to get it right the second time around if the first time doesn't work out so well."

Jarron, St. Peters, MO, focused on the helpful comments he received and ignored those that discouraged him from trying again. "Just try to find out where your weaknesses are and spend a lot of time trying to improve in those areas before you retake the exam," and "You gotta read more." These messages helped me focus on what I needed to do."

Jackie H., Fayetteville, GA, says that what helped her the most was realizing that if she didn't know the materials well enough yet, there was no point in moving "forward and into a health professional school. I had to be inspired to picture the future and not focus on the previous exam. My motivation came from those who were counting on me and thoughts of all that I had sacrificed to reach this certain point in life."



Chung Ho Leung/Flickr

### Now It's Your Turn

It is amazing what you will be able to accomplish if you assume control to make sure you are both well informed and proficient for the challenge ahead.

Just follow the systematic approach by following the steps outlined below. As you do, you will become confident that you can meet the challenge of taking the test.

#### What You Need to Do

- ▶ [Know the test.](#)
- ▶ [Know yourself.](#)
- ▶ [Make a realistic plan.](#)
- ▶ [Be active in your preparation.](#)
- ▶ [Practice.](#)
- ▶ [Analyze your mistakes and make improvements.](#)
- ▶ [Be test-wise on test day.](#)

*Shirley McGlenn, M.S. & Evelyn W. Jackson, Ph.D. originally wrote these achievement tips.*

### Know the Test

Remember that understanding the demands of the test is essential. If you have questions about the test, contact the sponsoring agency and get clarification as you do your work.

#### Find the Test's Format and Content

- ▶ Find the test format and content information by googling the name of the test.
- ▶ Look for the test's statement of purpose.
- ▶ Is it computerized or a paper-and-pencil test?
- ▶ How is it scored?
- ▶ Where and when will it be administered?

Once you have that information, you can make a plan for retaking the test.

#### Read the Sample Questions

Read the sample questions to find out:

- ▶ What content is being tested?
- ▶ What skills are needed to answer the questions?

Re-read the questions several times so you can fully understand them and figure out what you need to know.

#### Learn to Think Logically, Critically and Quickly

You will be expected to demonstrate a range of skills as you work through each test question. The test will assess your ability to think logically, critically and quickly under the pressure of a time limit.

Learning to think logically and critically isn't an automatic process. It takes time to get to the point where you can go through the steps so quickly that it seems automatic. Start by dissecting the thinking process you need to use for the test you are taking and looking at the components involved:

- ▶ Recognize exactly what the question is asking.
- ▶ Predict or generate hypotheses.
- ▶ Gather information from your background knowledge, the question stem or accompanying passage information.
- ▶ Analyze information.
- ▶ Synthesize information.
- ▶ Apply information.
- ▶ Make a decision about your answer choice or guess and go on.

## Know Yourself

### Take a Readiness Inventory

Do an in-depth and realistic assessment of your background knowledge, formal coursework, skills and attitudes. No one knows how much you have learned better than you. The key word is "learned." Anyone can tell what courses you have taken or what grades are on your record; your transcript reveals that information. However, there may be a gap between what the record indicates and what you really possess as knowledge and skills.

### Build Your Knowledge Base

- ▶ Where is that base lacking?
- ▶ Are there test subjects you should study more?
- ▶ What reading can you do to help you prepare for the test?
- ▶ Who can help you put together a reading list based on what you need to know?

### Coursework

If there are requisite courses you need in order to complete the test successfully, take them. Are there classes you should repeat? Do it.

### Skills

Some tests may require proficiency in certain skills. Do you know that you are proficient? Ask yourself that question and make sure you are honest in your answer. If you need to improve those skills, make a plan to do it.

### Attitude

If you have assessed yourself honestly and determined that you have the knowledge and skills you need, but your test scores don't reflect that, then the next step is to look at your attitude. Have you set yourself up for failure? What messages are you sending yourself?

Make sure you are thinking positively about your skills and knowledge. Tell yourself that you are prepared and ready for this exam. Talk with others who can reinforce that message for you.

## Make a Realistic Plan

A realistic and sensible plan to guide your time and preparation is a necessity. Think about what you learned when you took the test and what you have learned from your self-assessment and use that information to create a plan. Make sure to include these elements:

- ▶ **A timeline:** Work backward from the date you plan to re-take the test. What do you need to do to prepare? Break it into small chunks and make a timeline.
- ▶ **A calendar or daily planner:** Using an app or an online or hard-copy planner will enable you to chart your timeline and schedule time for study, review, practice and self-assessments.
- ▶ **An outline:** The outline gives you a map of how you intend to accomplish your task.
- ▶ **Workspace:** Find a place that is quiet where you can concentrate.
- ▶ **Materials:** Commercially available content review materials and test manuals will help you organize your preparation.

You may also consider a test-prep course or program. Keep in mind though that it is not a guarantee that you will pass and should not take the place of doing a self-assessment.

## Be Active in Your Preparation

To prepare for a test that measures your ability to think logically and demonstrate your understanding under a time limit, it is important that you be active in your preparation.

It is one level of understanding when you can grasp what you hear in a lecture or read or highlight in a book. But to take the test successfully, you need to own the material (meaning you can use the information in a new or novel context). That requires active learning. Try these suggestions:

- ▶ Predict questions you would expect the test to ask, based on your understanding of the material and the format of test.
- ▶ Elaborate on the information and apply it to a new situation.
- ▶ Teach a peer to ensure you have mastered the information and to identify gaps in your knowledge.
- ▶ Make concept maps or flow charts to show relationships.
- ▶ Use tables to make comparisons and contrasts.
- ▶ Try flash cards for reviewing details.
- ▶ Do the things that the test will ask you to do, whether it is write an essay, read a graph or verbal passage or make a calculation.
- ▶ Use catchy mnemonics or visual imagery to commit details to memory.

Studying for tests like these is a lot of hard work, but it can be fun, too. A good sense of humor can alleviate the weariness that comes with long, focused study. For an extra boost, visualize yourself in health professional school or practicing your profession.

## Practice

Both untimed and timed practice, using the appropriate types of material, are essential in your preparation. Remember, what works for someone else may not be the best strategy for you. You want to be confident using the techniques that work for you under test-like conditions so you will be confident on test day.

### Untimed Practice

Untimed practice can help you gain confidence in your abilities to answer the questions. You can also monitor your strategies for handling questions, identify areas that require more attention and change approaches that don't work. Try these strategies:

- ▶ Restate the question in your own words to ensure you understand the question.
- ▶ Answer the question first without reading the options. This is helpful if you become distracted by the answer choices and miss the meaning/intent of the question.
- ▶ If you are taking a reading comprehension test, there should be a passage with multiple-choice questions. Try answering the questions without reading the passage. This makes you focus on the question without interference from passage information. It is also a good exercise in reasoning through the choices.

### Timed Practice

Timed practice permits you to modify approaches that may have seemed effective during your untimed sessions but are too time-consuming. It also will help you get used to the pressure you will feel on test day when there is a time limit. To get used to that, try these strategies:

- ▶ Work through a problem set under a time limit. Then, before checking your answers, repeat the problem set without a time limit. Compare the number of correct answers under each condition. If you correctly answered more items under the untimed condition, you need to learn to reason more efficiently while under a time limit rather than spend more time reviewing the material.
- ▶ Work up to desirable time limits gradually, starting with a generous time limit and then decreasing it gradually. Impose a generous time limit at the beginning and then gradually decrease it to the actual time limits of the test.
- ▶ Learn when to guess and go on. It is never to your advantage to become stuck on a question.

## Analyze Your Mistakes and Make Improvements

After you practice taking tests or sample items, you should identify areas where you did well and where you need to improve so that subsequent preparation is focused in areas where you need the most effort.

Take your time with this analysis and be brutally honest with yourself. No one else sees this information. You will be missing valuable learning opportunities if you simply score your questions and move on. Analyzing your mistakes will help you understand what you need to do to improve your test performance, whether that is filling knowledge gaps or improving your test-taking skills.

### How to Analyze Your Results

First, you have to understand the rationale for the correct answer to any item you miss while practicing. You should be able to explain why the correct answer is correct and the other options are incorrect.

- ▶ Try writing out your explanation.
  - ▶ Share it verbally or in writing with someone so you can get feedback.
- Next, determine probable causes for each mistake you make. Figuring out causes will help you see if there is a pattern to your errors.

These general types of errors are associated with a knowledge gap:

- ▶ I did not know details; my information was inaccurate or incomplete.
- ▶ I did not know a concept; my information was inaccurate or incomplete.
- ▶ I was not able to apply the information I knew.
- ▶ I did not know the vocabulary.

These general types of errors are associated with test-taking skills:

- ▶ I did not understand what the question was asking.
- ▶ I answered a question different from the one that was asked.
- ▶ I made an easy question more difficult.
- ▶ I failed to consider key words such as except, not, least, most.
- ▶ I failed to recognize relationships in the material.
- ▶ I read part of the question and missed important information.
- ▶ I did not read all of the options carefully; I chose the first one that sounded right.
- ▶ I knew the answer but marked the answer sheet incorrectly.
- ▶ I changed the answer. My first response was correct. I did not finish in the time allotted and had to guess.
- ▶ I did not calculate correctly.

Make a plan to resolve the issues you uncovered.

## Be Test-Wise on Test Day

Taking a high-stakes standardized test is a physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting experience. It is easy to recognize that stamina is a factor. It may seem like this is the test of a lifetime (at least to this point) so emotions play a part. Make sure you are ready.

The day before the test:

- ▶ Accept the fact that there is nothing more you need to review.
- ▶ Think positive thoughts.
- ▶ Visualize yourself being successful.
- ▶ Eat well.
- ▶ Get some exercise. Fresh air is great.

- ▶ Plan some light entertainment for the evening.
- ▶ Make arrangements for someone to call you in the morning if you are worried about not waking on time.
- ▶ Have all your testing materials laid out so you are ready to go.
- ▶ Take a snack for the break time. Think energy-boosting and restorative.
- ▶ Have a backup plan for unexpected problems with anything that could cause problems for you on test day, including transportation.

On test day:

- ▶ Dress in layers so you will be comfortable no matter what the room temperature is.
- ▶ Double-check that you have what you will need at the test site.
- ▶ Warm up your concentration by answering a few practice questions before you leave.
- ▶ Leave home early enough to cope with transportation, parking and finding the test site (if you have never been there).
- ▶ Find the restroom.
- ▶ Relax. Breathe deeply and slowly.
- ▶ Think positive thoughts. Avoid talking with overly anxious test-takers.
- ▶ Be resilient if the day does not proceed smoothly. Have faith in your preparation. Take another deep breath and continue. You can handle it.

SHARE THIS PAGE!



Print



Facebook



Twitter



Google



LinkedIn



Digg



Delicious

Last updated: **August 28, 2015**

©2012 **American Dental Education Association**

**ADEA** | THE VOICE OF  
DENTAL EDUCATION

✉ [feedback@explorehealthcareers.org](mailto:feedback@explorehealthcareers.org)

▶ **Privacy Policy**

▶ **Terms of Use**

▶ **Diversity**

▶ **Contact Us**