

# Test Taking Tips And Strategies

## Test Taking Strategies

Examinations are a fact of life in college. But the only time an exam should be a trial is when you aren't prepared for it, and the best sign that you aren't prepared is when you have to stay up all night to "cram." Cramming won't do very much for you (except make you so tired that when you take the exam you won't be able to think clearly enough to answer the questions you DO know).

Here are some tips to help you develop test-taking skills:

## BEFORE THE TEST

1. **Start preparing for your exams the first day of class.** You can do this by reading your syllabus carefully to find out when your exams will be, how many there will be, and how much they are weighed into your grade.
2. **Plan reviews as part of your regularly weekly study schedule;** consequently, you review over the whole quarter rather than just at exam time.
3. **Reviews are much more than reading and rereading all assignments.** You need to read over your lecture notes and ask yourself questions on the material you don't know well. (If your notes are relatively complete and well organized, you may find that very little rereading of the textbook for detail is needed.) You may want to create a study group for these reviews to reinforce your learning.
4. **Review for several short periods rather than one long period.** You will find that you retain information better and get less fatigued.
5. **Turn the main points of each topic or heading into questions and check to see if the answers come to you quickly and correctly.** Try to predict examination questions; then outline your answers.
6. **It may seem "old-fashioned", but flashcards may be a helpful way to review in courses that have many unfamiliar terms.** Review the card in random order using only those terms that you have difficulty remembering.

## DURING THE TEST

There are also some things to keep in mind when you are **TAKING** the test.

1. **First, read the directions carefully!!** Many points have been lost because students didn't follow the directions.
2. **Remember to preview the test to see how much time you need to allot for each section.** If the test is all multiple-choice questions, it is good to know that immediately.
3. **Work on the "easiest" parts first.** If your strength is essay questions, answer those first to get the maximum points. Pace yourself to allow time for the more difficult parts.

4. **Find out if you are penalized for incorrect responses.** (This is probably covered in the directions. If not, make educated guesses. If there is a penalty, avoid guessing.)
5. **When answering essay questions, try to make an outline in the margin before you begin writing.** Organization, clear thinking, and good writing is important, but so is neatness. Be sure to make your writing legible.
6. **Save time at the end of the exam to review your test and make sure you haven't left out any answers or parts of answers.** This is difficult to do under the stress of exams, but it often keeps you from making needless errors.

## AFTER THE TEST

If the instructor reviews the exam in class, make sure you attend. Many students choose to skip class of the day of the review because "nothing is happening" that day. On the contrary, this is an important class to attend because it helps reinforce the information one more time in long-term memory. Even if you aren't interested in the "learning" aspect of the class, it is an opportunity to hear what the instructor was looking for in the answers. This can help you on the **NEXT** exam.

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## 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 handout contains tips that apply to all types of tests; additional tips are available for problem solving tests, objective tests, and essay tests.

## Preparing 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 and intellectual skills you will be asked to use. Examples of these skills include:
  - **Remembering specific facts, details, terms and definitions.**
  - **Comparing, contrasting, and otherwise interpreting meaning in the information studies.**
  - **Applying principles and theories to solve problems (that may not have been covered explicitly in the course.)**
  - **Predicting possible outcomes given a set of variables.**
  - **Evaluating the usefulness of certain ideas, concepts, or methods for a given 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.

Assign priorities to your study tasks according to the topics you expect to be most important on the test. In scheduling your test preparation, try to stick to your own routines. There are handouts on time management at the UT Learning Center.

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. **When faced with unread material keep in mind your study plan, how much time you have, and what you need to get out of the reading.** Divide the material into parts, looking for the organizational scheme, and decide what can be omitted, what can be skimmed, and what needs to be read. Set time limits for reading each part and stick to them. The following techniques might help you get through your reading:
    - **Skim all of the 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.**
    - **Emphasize key sentences, and concentrate on understanding the ideas. Ask yourself the questions who, what, where, when and how.**
    - **Recite the material to yourself immediately. (Self-testing at the end of each part can enhance recall even without later review.)**
  5. **Review actively.** Integrate notes, text, and other information onto summary sheets by diagramming, charting, outlining, categorizing in tables, or simply writing summaries. Try to create a summary sheet for each study session, or for each main idea, or for each concept. Use all your senses as well as your sense of humor when writing your summary sheets to make them meaningful.
  6. **Practice doing what you will be doing on the test.** Answer unassigned problems and questions in the text or anticipate test questions by asking, "If I were making up this test I would probably ask....," and then answer your question. Remember, the best way to prepare for any test is to practice doing what you will have to do on the test.
  7. **Study with other well-prepared students and attend any review sessions.** Such sessions are to clarify the material; don't expect them to repeat lectures or give additional information.
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## Taking 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 what you do not know; reinforce your strengths and arrest your weaknesses. Get enough rest the night before the test, eat well balanced meals and exercise regularly, 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 and establish a calm, alert mode.** Select a seat where the lighting is best (frequently in the front of the room) and where your view of other students will be minimal.

3. **When you receive your test use the back to jot down all the information you might forget, but first, ask whether you can write on the test form.**
  4. **Preview the whole test before trying 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, which offer the most points, and leave time at the end to review.
  6. **Start with the easy questions to build confidence and gain time for harder questions.** Work the entire test, and put down an answer for each questions even if you must guess (unless there is a "correction for guessing").
  7. **Do not panic if you see a question you did not anticipate.** Use everything you know 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. Answer the question the test-maker intended: interpret the test within the scope of the course.
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## Analyzing Returned Tests:

1. **If you receive your test back to keep, rework your errors to find 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 questions.** 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 over precise details and facts or were they over main ideas and principles? Did the questions come straight from the text or did the test-maker expect you to make sophisticated transformations and analyses?
  6. **Did you have any problems with anxiety or blocking during the test?**
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## References:

[http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/test\\_take.html](http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/test_take.html)

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/handouts/1445.html>

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