

What to do During the Test

In general

It's time to begin. If necessary, allow yourself a minute or two of "panic" time. This is time to notice any tension you feel and apply one of the techniques explained in the Study Skills Tip Sheet: "Let Go of Test Anxiety".

Answer the easiest, shortest questions first. This gives you the experience of success. It also stimulates associations and prepares you for more difficult questions.

Next answer multiple choice. True/false and fill-in-the-blank questions. Use memory techniques when you're stuck.

Pace yourself. Watch the time; if you are stuck, move on. Follow your time plan.

Leave plenty of space between answers. The space makes it easier on the person who grades your test. You can use the extra space, if there's time, to add information.

Look for answers in other test questions. A term, name, date, or other fact that escapes you might appear in the test itself. You can also use other questions to stimulate your memory.

In quick-answer questions (multiple choice, true/false), your first instinct is usually best. If you think your first answer is wrong because you misread the question, do change your answer.

Multiple choice questions

Check the directions to see if the questions call for more than one answer.

Answer each question in your head before you look at the possible answers. If you can come up with the answer before you look at the choices, you eliminate the possibility of being confused by those choices.

Be sure to read all answers to multiple choice questions before selecting one. Sometimes two answers will be similar and only one will be correct.

If you have no clue as to what the answer is and if incorrect answers are not deducted from your score, use the following guidelines to guess.

1. If two answers are similar, except for one or two words, choose one of these answers.
2. If two answers have similar-sounding or similar-looking words (intermediate, intermittent), choose one of these answers.
3. If the answer calls for a sentence completion, eliminate the answers that would not form grammatically correct sentences.
4. If two quantities are almost the same, choose one.
5. If answers cover a wide range (4.5, 66.7, 88.7, 90.1, 5000.11), choose the one in the middle of the range.
6. If there is no penalty for guessing and none of the above techniques works, close your eyes and go for it.

Note: None of these suggestions for guessing is meant to take the place of studying for the test.

True/False questions

Answer true/false questions quickly. Often these questions are not worth many points individually.

Read carefully. Sometimes one word can make a statement inaccurate. If any part of the true/false statement is false, the statement is false.

Look for qualifiers, like *all*, *most*, *sometimes*, *never* or *rarely*. These are the key words upon which the question depends. Absolute qualifiers such as *always* or *never* generally indicate a false statement.

Machine-graded tests

To do well on these tests, make sure the answer you mark corresponds to the question you are answering. Check the test booklet against the answer sheet whenever you switch sections and whenever you come to the top of a column. Watch for stray marks; they can look like answers.

Open-book tests

When studying for the test, write down any formulas you will need on a separate sheet. Place Post-It notes on important pages of the book (tables, for instance) so you don't have to waste time flipping through the pages. You could also use paper clips. If you plan to use your notes, number them and write a short table of contents.

Prepare thoroughly for open-book exams. They are usually the most difficult tests.

Short answer/fill-in-the-blanks tests

These questions often ask for definitions or short descriptions. Concentrate on key words and facts. Be brief.

Research going back over 60 years indicates that over-learning material can really pay off. When you know a subject backward and forward, you can answer this type of question almost as fast as you can write.

Essay questions

When you set out to answer an essay question, your first task is to find out what the question is asking—precisely. If a question asks that you *compare* Gestalt and Reichian therapies, no matter how eloquently you *explain* them, you are on a one-way trip to No Credit City.

Standard essay questions are defined in the Study Skills Tip Sheet “Ways to Predict Test Questions”. Knowing them can make all the difference on an essay test.

Before you write, make a quick outline. There are three reasons for doing this. First, you might be able to write faster. Second, you're less likely to leave out important facts. Third, if you don't have time to finish your answer, your outline could win you some points.

When you start to write, get to the point. Forget introductions. Sentences such as “There are many interesting facets to this difficult question” cause acute pain for teachers grading tests.

One way to get to the point is to include part of the question in your answer. Suppose the question is “Discuss how increasing the city police budget may or may not contribute to a decrease in street crime.” Your first sentence might be “An Increase in police expenditures will not have a significant effect on street crime for the following reasons.” Your position is clear. You are on your way to the answer.

When you expand your answer with supporting ideas and facts, start out with the most solid points. Don't try for drama by saving the best for last.

Some final points in regard to style:

1. **Write legibly.** Grading essay questions is in large part a subjective process. Sloppy, difficult-to-read handwriting might actually lower your grade.
2. **Be brief.** Avoid filler sentences that say nothing. (“The question certainly bears careful deliberation in order to take into account all the many interesting facts pertaining to this important period in the history of our great nation”.) Write as if you expect the person grading your test to be tired, bored, and overworked. Even a well-rested instructor doesn't like to wade through a swamp of murky writing in order to spot an occasional lonely insight.
3. **Use a pen.** Many instructors will require this because pencil is difficult to read.
4. **Write on one side of the page only.** If you write on both sides of the page, writing will show through and obscure the writing on the other side. If necessary, use the blank side to add points you missed. Leave a generous left-hand margin and plenty of space between your answers in case you want to add to them later.

Finally, if you have time, review your answers for grammar and spelling errors, clarity, and legibility.

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