

## Test Taking Strategies

1. Find out as much as you can about the format of the test before you take it. Selecting the correct answer from a list (multiple choice, matching) is often easier than constructing an answer from scratch (short answer, essay, fill-in-the-blank), but both are valid ways to test your knowledge.
2. Make sure you bring the required materials to the test – something to write with, scratch paper, calculator, formula sheet, etc.
3. Avoid a last-minute review of your notes just before going to take the test. This can actually make it harder for you to remember what you have already studied. Prepare well in advance, and relax for a few minutes before going to take the test.
4. Arrive a few minutes early to take the test. It is better to have a few minutes to relax than to be rushing in after the test has begun. Avoid chatting with other students if they seem nervous – anxiety can be contagious.
5. Make sure to pay attention to any last minute instructions that the teacher gives. It is not unusual for a teacher to make last minute changes, give corrections, or other important information.
6. Before you start the test, take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and relax your muscles. Say to yourself: “I can do this.” Repeat this any time you feel anxiety building up during the test.
7. Start by writing your name on the test, and, if needed, on your scantron. Always use your first and last name, and always use the same version of your name.
8. Always read the directions. It's tempting to just jump in and assume you know what the instructions say, but sometimes there is valuable information there. If you are allowed to write on the test, you may wish to underline anything important, so that you notice it fully.
9. If you are permitted to write on the test, jot down any key facts, formulas, or definitions that you might forget in the margin so that you can look back at them when you need them.
10. Whenever possible, glance through at the whole test before you begin. Notice if there are different parts, how many questions there are, etc. If you have a limited amount of time to take the test, quickly plan out about how long to spend on each question, or on various parts of the test. If different questions have different point values, spend the most time and effort on the questions that are worth the most points.
11. Depending on your personality, you may prefer to work straight through the test from beginning to end, or you might do better skipping around. Try both and see which works best for you. If you skip around, do the easiest questions first. This will help build your confidence and remind you of things you know, so that you'll be more able to tackle the more difficult questions. Either way, focus on one question at a time – don't let your mind wander to other parts of the test.
12. Read each question carefully; if permitted, underline key words that will help you understand the question. Pay special attention to words like “not,” “except,” and “but” that can completely change the answer. When writing out the answer to a question, make sure it is actually what the question asks, not

the first thing about the topic that pops into your head. Make sure to answer everything the question asks for if it has multiple parts.

13. If you are completely stumped on a question, leave it and go on. Stewing over it can ruin your confidence and waste your time. See if anything else in the exam triggers your memory. Remember that you can usually miss a few questions and still do well on the test.

14. If a written answer is required, write neatly. If you know your handwriting isn't very good, slow down. If the teacher has to struggle to make out what you are saying, you are less likely to earn full credit even if your answer is correct.

15. Keep in the back of your mind the fact that the test was written by a teacher who is trying to test your knowledge. Approach each question with the thought "what does the teacher want to find out if I understand?" or "what does the teacher want to know if I can do?"

16. On a test involving story problems, make sure that your final answer makes sense. If you get -2 bushels of apples, or 0.45 people, or a caterpillar that is 20,000 inches long, check your math!

17. If the test format allows it, show your work. When solving a problem, show your calculations; when answering a question, write down some of your thinking. Most teachers give partial credit if you were on the right track – but they can't give you anything if all you put down is a wrong answer.

18. When writing essays, jot a quick outline on the side of the page to organize what you will say. If you find you are running out of time, it is better to cover more parts of the question briefly than one part of the question thoroughly.

19. When taking multiple choice tests:

- Try to imagine the correct answer before looking at the options given. Then make sure to read all of the options before choosing one.
- If you are allowed to do so, cross off answers that you are sure are wrong. This can help you to visually narrow it down.
- If you are told to select the only true or only false statement, mark them T or F at the side (if permitted). Otherwise you can easily lose track.
- Don't change your answer unless you remember something new that you hadn't thought of before. Your first instinct is usually correct.
- Look for answers that are opposites – one of them is likely to be the correct answer.
- If there is one answer that is significantly different from the others, it is most likely incorrect.
- Watch out for "all of the above," "none of the above," etc. They are often the correct answer (but not always!).

- When marking answers on a scantron, double check every time you fill one in. It is easy to make a mistake and miss points on a question that you actually knew the right answer to.

20. Make sure to avoid any appearance of cheating. Rest your eyes by closing them or looking up, not around. If you are in a classroom, try to position your test so that it isn't easy for others to look at what you've written.

21. If you feel that there might be an error on the exam, bring it to your teacher's attention. If the test is in class, walk up to the desk and ask if there is any chance that the question is in error. If you're in the testing center, write a note on the test or see the teacher afterward. Make sure to avoid an accusing attitude – teachers are human and do make mistakes, but you are human too and may have misunderstood the material.

22. Don't worry about students finishing the test before you do. It doesn't necessarily mean that they have done better than you. Remember, there are no extra points for finishing first.

23. Resist the urge to leave as soon as you are finished. If you have extra time, review your answers before you turn your test in. Check for “dumb mistakes” that you didn't mean to make, or questions that you forgot to answer. Watch out for questions on the back of pages, especially the last page.

24. Once a test is over, don't continue to think about it. You can't do anything until it's been graded, and pestering your teacher for the grade won't help. Tell yourself you did the best you could, and put your energy into something else.

25. After a test has been graded, analyze your mistakes. If a test is not returned to you, ask your teacher if you can see it. Most teachers don't mind letting you look at a test in their office, and are willing to answer questions if you aren't able to figure out what you did wrong. Use what you learned to do better on the next test. If you are allowed to do so, keep the test for later studying.