

Test-Taking Strategies—A Game Plan to Win

Games and tests seem like they couldn't be more dissimilar. Actually, they have more in common than you might think. If you were to prepare for a test the way you might prepare for a big game, you'd probably make a game plan. OK, so the test probably isn't nearly as much fun as a game, but your goal is the same—to win. Here are a few tips for winning at the testing game.

Before the Test

1. **Prepare for the exam** by studying for the type of exam given. If it is a multiple choice exam, create flash cards that help you memorize the material. If you must write an essay, create outlines that help you see the relationships in the material.
2. **Get a good night's rest** prior to the test day and eat a healthy breakfast or lunch on the day of the exam (don't overeat!).
3. **Bring a watch to your exam**—it will help you manage your time during the test.

When You Begin

1. **Take a deep breath to relax.** Anxiety may reduce your confidence and be an obstacle to doing your best.
2. **Preview the whole test** briefly before you begin (if allowed). This will help get you warmed up to take the test and allow you to note the way the test is organized.
3. **Figure out how much time** you have for each section of the test and how much each section is worth. Allocate your time accordingly—don't spend the whole test on a section that is worth only 10 points.

During the Test

1. **ALWAYS read the directions** before you work on a section. Circle key words of importance such as compare, contrast, similar, and different. Failing to read directions can cause you to completely misjudge what the test is asking.
2. **Ask your instructor** to explain directions you don't understand.
3. **Divide and conquer!** Answer the easy questions first to build confidence. This will also allow you to rack up as many points as possible right from the start. However, always be sure to mark the questions you don't answer right away so you can go back to them.
4. **Pace yourself.** Check your watch from time to time to make sure you're pacing yourself appropriately.
5. **When in doubt, guess.** You at least have a chance that you might guess correctly.
6. **Don't let others distract you.** Focus only on your own test. If others are writing and you aren't, don't panic. If others finish before you do, try not to get nervous.
7. **Use any extra time** to first make sure you've answered all the questions. Then, go over the more difficult questions and read them a second time. Read essays carefully for accuracy first and grammar second.
8. **Don't change your initial answer unless you have a good reason to do so;** research indicates that 3 out of 4 times a first choice was probably correct.

Good luck!