

Test Preparation and Taking Skills

Section 1: Where do I Start? In class!

1. Attend every class:

Being in class, paying full attention, hearing instructor's comments about tests and knowing what is expected is the first rule of successful test-taking. You cannot expect to do your best when you have missed important information or gotten it second-hand. If you must miss class, always check with the teacher outside of class to find out what you missed.

2. Take Good Notes:

It is vital to your learning and test-taking to be a good note-taker. When taking notes in class, leave plenty of room so you can fill in details from the text later. See the "[Note Taking](#)" resource for more information on taking good notes.

Section 2: How Do I Study?

1. Start early:

Don't wait until a test is announced; start studying from the first day of class. Review your notes regularly (at least every week) and look for test question clues in your notes, quizzes, text, and homework assignments. Highlight these clues.

Plan a regular study schedule:

- ★ Create a schedule of when you will review for a class and for how long. Your plan should end with the test-taking day highlighted in your agenda.
- ★ Study with purpose, without distractions, in a place you have designated as your private study area. Have the tools and materials you need on hand (ie. paper, pencil, scientific calculator, highlighter etc.).
- ★ Study in **one hour** blocks of time with breaks of about 5-10 minutes in between.
- ★ Study actively, move around, stretch, and read out loud.
- ★ Study with a group, if possible and if this suits your learning style. Try making up test questions and quizzing each other.

2 Ask your teacher what to expect:

What type of test questions will be on the test? Will it be mostly *objective* questions (ex. multiple choice, true-false, fill in the blanks), short answer or essay? What should you concentrate on?

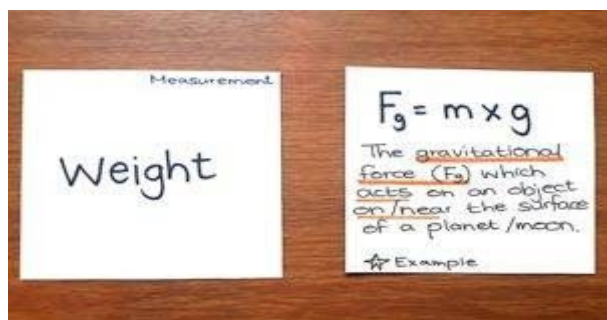
3. Make a Study Checklist:

A study checklist is a list of what you must study. It helps you to organize your study time and ensures that you cover all necessary topics. (see example)

4. Plan a study method (or methods).

Reading over your notes is NOT effective studying. Here are some better methods:

- ★ Write **summary notes** of your class notes and textbook sections. Use an Outline, Cornell or Flow format. (see additional information on Note-Taking)
- ★ Create an **acrostic poem** to help you remember key concepts (SCORER in Section 3 is an example)
- ★ Create **questions** that you think might be on the test. Quiz yourself or others in a study group with these questions. Use your notes as clues when making up the questions:
 - points that the teacher repeats or emphasizes in class
 - questions asked by students in class
 - questions asked by the teacher in class
 - anything the teacher writes on the board
 - questions from quizzes, homework, handouts
 - questions found in the text or on sample tests
- ★ Create **flashcards** to help you remember key terms. A main topic, word, or question written on one side while the definition, facts, or answer to the question are written on the back (see example). Quiz yourself or others in a study group.



5. Create an Effective Study Environment

You want to choose a study environment that helps you to study. Consider:

- **the room**--will it help keep me focused? Are the seating, writing surface and lighting choices helpful?
- **the people**--should I study alone? Will other people help me study?
- **distractions**--Decide: should I put my phone or other devices in another room? If you check them several times, then **YES!** Is music helpful for me or not? If you do use music, choose a longer playlist so you don't keep changing songs and keep the volume low.

Section 3: How Can I Effectively Write the Test?

1. Use the SCORER system to manage your time.

S – Schedule your time. Review the entire test and plan how long to spend on each item. Write your times down on the test to help you stick to it.

C – Look for Clue words. For example, on true-false items, words such as *always* and *never* usually indicate the statement is false. Words such as *usually* or *sometimes* frequently indicate the statement is true.

O – Omit difficult questions. If you find a question that is not easy to answer, skip that question and mark it (circle the number or check it, etc.) as a reminder to come back to that question. You can even jot brief notes in the margin to use later to help answer the question.

R – Read carefully. A careful reading of test directions and each item often improves test performance by reducing careless errors.

E – Estimate your answers. When you go back to the question you did not answer the first time through the test, estimate or make your best guess. At this point, cross-out choices that you know are incorrect and estimate the answer using the choices that are left.

R – Review your work. Use every minute available before the end of the test to check your work for completion and accuracy. **All items should have an answer.** You should not change an answer unless you have a good reason. Also, you should make sure you have included everything the teacher requests.

2. Tailor your answer strategy to the type of test question.

Read and practice all of these so that you will be prepared for any test question!

A. MULTIPLE CHOICE STRATEGIES

1. Answer the easy questions first, then the harder ones. Don't get nervous if some questions look unfamiliar. Skip them and return to them later.
2. Pay attention to qualifiers ("usually," "none," "always," "never") and key words ("except," "all but the following," "the best," "the least," etc.)
3. Try to anticipate the correct answer before looking at the options.
4. Read all of the options; eliminate the ones you know are incorrect.
5. Look for options that contain other options. These are called "umbrella" options because the other options fall within their scope.
6. Familiarity of a response option does not necessarily make it the correct choice.
7. Sometimes the longer response may be the clue to the correct response.

B. TRUE - FALSE STRATEGIES

1. Watch for absolutes such as “**always,**” “**never,**” or “**all**” and “**none.**” If they are present, chances are the statement is **false**.
2. If a statement is more detailed or specific than most, chances are it is **true**.
3. Never leave a blank – you have a 50% chance of getting it right!
4. Unusual sounding statements are likely to be false.

C. MATCHING COLUMNS STRATEGIES

1. Read all the items in both columns first before selecting answers.
2. Instead of looking at the one word column first and trying to select a match, read the column with the definitions or explanations and match those to the one-word column.
3. **Mark easy choices first and** eliminate them as you move to the more difficult.

D. SHORT ANSWER AND FILL-IN-THE-BLANK STRATEGIES

1. If you don't know the complete answer but remember something, write it down. You may get partial credit if you are partly correct. Leaving a blank will get you nothing.
2. Give general answers if you do not know specifics.
Example: Correct answer = 1904; Approximate and possibly correct answer = 1900's
3. Use proper grammar in completing the sentence. Pay attention to plural responses (ex. causes, changes, examples, types of, etc.)
4. Consider the number and length of the lines or blank spaces to be filled in as possible clues to the length of your answer. If the instructor leaves half a page for your answer, be sure you fill it and *not* with extra-large writing.

E. ESSAY QUESTION STRATEGIES

1. **Briefly** look over the entire test to budget your time for essay answers. They usually take longer than other types of questions.
2. **Read the essay question carefully. Watch for key words** such as “discuss,” “compare,” “define,” etc. A list of these commonly used words follows.
3. **Determine the amount of time** you'll have for each question, and give more time to higher scoring questions.
4. **Do a “Memory Dump.”** Jot down on scratch paper any ideas, facts, figures, etc. which could be used in answering the questions.
5. **Make a brief outline of the major points.** In some cases, even if you can't finish the essay, you can get partial credit for the outline.
6. **Use proper grammar,** punctuation and sentence skills. Always write complete sentences and begin your essay with the wording of the question. *Example: “The five major causes of the American Revolution were....”*
7. **Proofread your essay** and make corrections as needed.

Commonly used essay terms:

Analyze examine critically to show the how and/or why of something

Criticize point out strong and weak points (evaluate)

Compare show differences and similarities between two or more things

Contrast compare to show differences only

Define give a clear, detailed, and precise meaning (who or what, never, when or where)

Describe list physical characteristics but often means discuss, explain, identify or give an account of

Discuss/Comment - present essentials and their relationships

Elaborate develop theme or idea in greater detail

Evaluate appraise carefully, giving positive and negative aspects (critique)

Explain clarify and interpret details of the problem, theory, etc. Present a step-by-step account of or analysis (how and why)

Illustrate explain or clarify by giving clear, pertinent examples

E. MATH STRATEGIES

Don't let nervousness take over! Math is no different from any other subject, except that the same rules apply every time, so if you study the rules and complete many practice questions, you are likely to do well on the test.

Here are some other **math test tips**:

- Show up early to do a brief review and get organized.
- Jot down formulas and rules--ask your teacher if this is OK first
- Listen to instructions and read test directions carefully.
- Pay attention to + and - signs, complete problems, and simplify answers.
- Show all your work step by step and turn in your scratch paper (you may get partial credit for work shown).
- Put a box around your answer to make it visible.
- Don't get bogged down on one problem at the cost of missing others. *Make sure you use the SCORER system for time management.*
- Check every answer.
- Don't leave any blanks.
- Ask questions of the instructor if you do not understand something.