

# Successful Test Taking

Believe it or not, tests are necessary for learning. Tests and exams measure how well you've grasped the material presented. Here are some strategies to make you a better test-taker.

- Get a good night's sleep and eat a quality, high-protein breakfast.
- Get to the test a little early. Rushing at the last minute just increases your stress.
- Don't study or cram right before going into the test. Take the time to calm yourself and prepare mentally.
- Make sure you have the supplies you need- and spares. For example, if you are using a scantron, be sure to bring an extra scantron, multiple sharpened pencils and good erasers.
- Before the test, don't spend a lot of time talking with the other students. Comparing what you've studied with them may make you anxious.
- Make a decision to ignore students who finish before you do. There are no extra points for finishing quickly. Research shows that those who leave early usually don't score as well as those who take their time.
- Some students benefit from scratch paper to write on during an exam. Ask your instructor if you can use a blank sheet of paper during the test. If you don't ask, the extra paper may be mistaken for cheating.
- When you receive the test, read the instructions carefully. Failing to thoroughly read the instructions may be catastrophic.
- Scan the test to see the number of questions. If it is a timed test, calculate approximately how much time you can dedicate to each question. To pace yourself, put a mark at the halfway point of the test. That way you know where you need to be when half of the test time is gone, and you can adjust your speed for the second half of the test to make sure you get all questions answered in time.
- Read each question carefully. Misreading a question can cause you to answer incorrectly.
- If you cannot answer a question, mark it and come back to it later. Go through and do the easy questions first. If you waste time struggling on a hard question right at the start, it can affect your confidence for the entire test. And you may find clues to the answer in other test questions.

- Trust your instincts. Do not go back and change an answer unless you are extremely sure it is wrong. Most of the time, your first answer was correct.
- If the test appears to have an error or you have a question about the test itself, don't be afraid to ask the instructor.
- If using a scantron, make sure you are filling out the correct circle for each question. Fill it out as you go. If you choose to wait until the end to transfer your answers to the scantron, you may transfer them incorrectly, and you may run out of time.
- If you have time, check your answers before you turn it in.

## **Multiple Choice Questions**

- Read the question/statement and try to answer without looking at the choices. Then find the answer in the choices given.
- Don't stop at the first possible answer. Read all options before answering to make sure you select the best option.
- Eliminate/cross out the choices you know are wrong. This will help you narrow it down.
- If more than one of the choices is true, then it's a strong possibility that "all of the above" is the correct answer.
- Look for grammatical clues. For example, if the question asks you to finish a statement that ends with the word "an," then you know the correct answer likely starts with a vowel.
- If you absolutely do not know the answer, do not leave it blank. Use these clues to make an educated guess:
  - Look for an answer that is grammatically correct.
  - Look for similar words in the question and answer.
  - Stick to the subject matter of the course.
  - Look for a long, very specific answer.
  - Watch out for negatives and extreme wording like "always," "never," etc.
  - If two answers are opposite, the answer is probably one of them.
  - "None of the above" is seldom correct.
  - Research shows that the most common answer is "C," followed by "B."
- Sometimes re-phrasing the question in your own words can help you figure it out.

## **True/False Questions**

- Look for any factor that makes the statement wrong. For the statement/question to be true, the entire thing must be true.
- Read carefully; one misread word can make a huge difference.
- 100% qualifiers such as *never, none, every, always, all, only, entirely* usually make a statement false.
- Qualifiers that fall between the extremes, such as *sometimes, seldom, often, frequently, most, many, few, some, usually, generally, ordinarily* are often true.
- Pay attention to conjunctions like *such as, therefore, as a result, thus, because, consequently*.
- Pay attention to negative words in the statement like *not, cannot, won't, don't, no*.

## **Essay Questions**

- Read carefully so you know what needs to be included in your answer.
- Strive for a complete answer. Number the parts of a multi-part question so you include each item in your answer.
- Jot notes or a brief outline in the margin.
- Include factual details/ examples to support your answer.
- Be concise. Excessive rambling in your response makes it obvious that you don't know the answer.
- Avoid giving your opinion unless specifically directed to do so.
- Reread your answer to make sure it is clear and understandable to someone else.
- Write legibly.

## **Open-Book Exams**

- The key to success is the ability to find information quickly.
- Put markers or flags in your textbook to indicate important areas.
- If permitted, write formulas, definitions, key words, main points, in the margin of your book.
- Highlight important points in the text.
- If notes are permitted, keep your notes organized and easy-to-use so you can quickly find what you need.