
Test-Taking Strategies

In order to perform well on tests, it is important that students learn about and apply test-taking strategies. Both general test-taking strategies and strategies related to taking specific types of tests are included in this reading. They are intended to serve as the basis for study and class discussion both before and after students take classroom or standardized tests. (Source: Lopez-Valdez, J., and Reed, T. (June 1989). Building competencies to serve LEP vocational students: An inservice manual. Des Plaines, IL: Northwest Educational Cooperative.)

General Strategies

A. Preparing for Tests

1. Try to find out what kind of test will be given. If you know what kind of test to expect, you can practice by asking yourself similar types of questions.
2. Begin preparing for the test as soon as possible. Remember that studying often for short periods is more effective than studying for long hours at one time.
3. When you prepare for a test, think of the task positively! It is the best opportunity to really learn the material for future application.
4. Ask the instructor which concepts and topics are most important to study. Instructors will usually give you this information, although they will not tell you the exact questions on the test.
5. Look at all your notes and readings and organize the information into logical units, such as main topics.
6. Make a study plan by writing down the main topics and adding the most important points to concentrate on.
7. Read all lecture notes and notes from readings, and review important exercises you have done.
8. Make a new set of study notes which contains the most important information.
9. Practice writing difficult words and their definitions.
10. Review your notes on several different days.
11. Test your memory of important facts by looking away from your notes and asking yourself questions.
12. If it's difficult for you to study alone, form a study group. Discussing the subject

matter with other students helps the memory. However, you should know the basic facts before you study with other people. This is important for two reasons: 1) so that you can contribute your knowledge to the study session, and 2) so that you can recognize incorrect statements when your study partners make them.

B. Before the Test

1. Get a good night's sleep before the test. Being well rested makes it easier to remember what you have learned and studied.
2. Relax. Being too nervous makes it difficult to recall information you know.
3. Don't study anything new the day of the test--this will only make you nervous.
4. Eat a light meal a few hours before the test. Do not take a test on either an empty stomach or a full stomach; this will negatively affect your ability to concentrate.
5. Arrive in the test room a little early so you can make yourself comfortable.
6. Keep an optimistic attitude; don't let negative comments from other students make you nervous.

C. Taking the Test

1. Listen carefully to the teacher's instructions before and after the test is passed out.
2. When you receive the test, look at all of the different parts and pages to see what types of questions and how many questions there are.
3. Budget your time. If it is a long test you may have to decide how long to spend on each part.
4. Read all directions carefully; they may be different from what you expected.
5. Study all examples carefully.
6. If you don't understand what you are supposed to do, ask the instructor.
7. When you begin to write, skip questions which are very difficult and return to them after you have finished the other questions. Often you will find clues to the answer in another part of the test.
8. *If you don't know the answer to a question, make a guess (unless it is the type of test on which you lose points for incorrect answers). The concept of "educated guessing" is crucial to test-taking. "Guessing" is the underlying strategy to improving test scores beyond what knowledge of the content area alone would allow. Guessing involves applying knowledge of specific test format and identifying clues in the test items.*

9. Your first response is usually correct. Don't change an answer unless you are sure you made a mistake or misunderstood the question.
10. When you have finished answering all the questions, spend as much time as you have left to go back and check your answers.
11. Make sure your name is on the test or answer sheet before you turn it in.

D. After the Test

1. When you get the test back, go over the results carefully.
2. Pay equal attention to the items you got right and those you missed.
3. Add any new information to the ones you got right and make corrections to the items you missed directly on the test form.
4. For the items you missed, try to determine the reason why. Was your study plan a good one?
5. Use the test results to help you improve your plan for studying for the next test.

Specific Strategies

Multiple Choice Test Strategies

1. Try to figure out the answer before you look at the choices.
2. Read all the choices before you pick one. If they do not seem 100% correct, take the closest one.
3. If you are recording your answers on a separate answer sheet (especially machine-graded answer sheets), make sure that you mark your answers accurately.
4. Choices with absolute expressions such as "always, all, never" and "none" are usually incorrect.
5. Choices with expressions which are more "flexible," such as "usually, often", and "generally" are often correct.
6. If two choices are similar, usually one of them is correct.
7. If two answers are direct opposites, usually one of them is correct.
8. Make sure the choice agrees grammatically with the stem.

9. If two quantities (numbers) are almost the same, one is usually correct.
10. If the quantities (numbers) cover a wide range, usually one in the middle is correct.

True-False Test Strategies

1. Read each word carefully. If one word is false, the whole statement is false.
2. Don't spend too much time analyzing the statements; true-false questions test your knowledge of facts and usually don't require interpretation.
3. Statements with absolute expressions such as "all, always, never," and "only" are usually false.
4. Statements with "flexible" expressions such as "usually" are usually true.
5. There are usually more "trues" on a test than "falses."

Fill-in-the-Blank Test Strategies

1. These questions usually test how well you have memorized certain words or facts. Your answers should be short and clear. Do not give interpretations.
2. Look ahead to the other questions to make sure you don't give the answer to a question which is coming up.
3. Often you must define a word. When giving a definition of a concept or an object, remember to consider:

WHAT- What category it is in; what it looks like; what its characteristics are

WHERE- Where it is found or used

WHEN- When it is used or takes place

HOW- How it works, how it is used

Examples:

Define solid

Answer: A form of matter which has a definite shape.

Define coping saw

Answer: A wood saw that's used to saw curved lines in wood.

Define piston

Answer: A part in an internal combustion engine which moves up and down in a cylinder.

Open-Book and Take-Home Test Strategies

1. Prepare well for the test. This is the most important strategy because these tests are often the most difficult kind.
2. Know where to find the information in your book(s). This type of exam doesn't test what you know as much as it tests your ability to find important information quickly.
3. Use the table of contents and the index to help you find the information you need.
4. When you find an answer to a test question, try to write the answer using your own words.
5. If you copy more than a few words directly from the book, put the words in quotation marks and give the name of the book and the page number.

"Pop-Quiz" Strategies

1. The only way to prepare for these is to do your homework! Complete all study and reading assignments on time and keep up with the course syllabus.