Test taking tips & strategies

General tips

**Before the test or exam**

* Avoid cramming: Set up a study schedule.
* Divide the material to be studied into manageable sections.
* Attend study groups and review sessions.
* Review actively: blend notes, textbook information and study group notes into summary sheets.
* Write legibly when taking notes and preparing practice questions.

**During the exam**

* Arrive at the test early to select a seat with good lighting and few distractions.
* Preview the whole test before getting started.
* Ask the instructor to clarify any questions before the test begins.
* Plan how to use the test time to answer all the questions. Spend a significant amount of time on the portion of the test that has the highest value. For example: If an essay question is worth half the test value, plan to spend at least half the allotted test time on that portion.
* Read and follow all the directions to each test section carefully.
* Start with the easy questions to build confidence.
* If a test requires a scantron answer sheet, take the time every fifth question to match the number of the question to the number of the answer. This step guarantees your mark will always represent your response to the correct question.

**Objective Test Taking: multiple choice, true/false, matching**

**Objective test study tips**

* Review your notes and text carefully.
* Make flashcards, highlight notes and text information.
* Identify new words and terms: keep a vocabulary list or vocabulary flash cards and self-test often.
* Make diagrams and charts to organize your studying.

**Multiple choice questions**

* Read the stem of the question carefully, adding each possible answer to see which choice may be correct.
* Eliminate answers that are obviously incorrect.
* Underline or circle key words in the questions. This will help you focus on the correct answer.
* Be alert for words such as "except," "but," and "not"; these words will limit the answer.
* Watch for qualifying words such as "always," "never," and "only." These words mean all the time. Answers with these qualifiers tend to be incorrect because they state that there are no exceptions.
* "All of the above" should be considered as an answer only if two or more of the choices are correct. If any of the choices are incorrect, "all of the above" can be eliminated.
* When in doubt, if two options both seem correct, select the option with more information.

**True/false questions**

* True/false questions tend to focus on details: names, locations, dates, identifications, and vocabulary definitions.
* True/false questions often contain mismatched information: wrong name with theory, incorrect location with name, wrong definition with vocabulary word.
* To answer TRUE, the answer must be true 100 percent of the time.
* Use of words like "always" and "never" often denote a false statement.
* Use of words like "some" and "usually" often denote a true statement.

**Matching**

* If the two lists are not of the same length, begin with the longer list. This way you are looking for the answer in the short list, which will save you time.
* Cross out items already used in both columns.
* Read the directions carefully to see if only one answer will qualify per question.

**Essay exams**

**Preparing for essay exams**

* Look for repeated themes in class materials and notes.
* As the semester progresses, create a list of possible topics. Star or highlight material in the text and notes that will support those topics.
* Practice writing answers to old exam questions or make up your own, based on the themes.
* Using a timer, write out your practice exam answers to know how much time each answer will take. This is a key strategy to remember so that you will be able to complete the whole test in the allotted time.

**During essay exams**

* Read each question carefully: Circle key words and phrases so that you make sure to include that information in your answer. Select the easiest question to answer first.
* Jot down key points or make a quick outline before beginning to write your answer.
* Be sure to include the instructor's points and highlights in your answer.
* Write a thesis statement listing the direction and points your essay will discuss.
* Make clear transitions from one point in your essay to another.
* Define terms used in your essay.
* Write legibly.
* Budget your time during the test.
* If you don't have enough time to finish, write a brief outline of the remaining topics to be covered in your essay. You may get partial credit for showing the direction your essay was taking.
* Follow this formula when writing answers:
  1. State your point.
  2. Explain how your point answers the essay question.
  3. Write details and examples supporting your point.