

Strategic Test-Taking: Before, During & After the Exam

Getting A's on exams is rarely due to luck. Achieving good grades takes long-term planning, preparation, discipline and practice. Here are some basic strategies for better test performance. Try them out!

Before The Test

- Know what the exam will cover. Collect study materials, such as class notes, old exams, the study guide.
- Allow enough time, preferably a week, to review your study materials and to create study tools.
- In general, students perform better on exams if they prepare as if anticipating an essay exam.
- For better memory recall, get a good night's rest the night before; avoid marathon or all-night study sessions.
- Don't forget to eat! Include proteins and avoid excessive amounts of sugar and caffeine.
- Be confident in your ability to do well! Use positive self-talk.
- Practice relaxation techniques in advance (such as deep breathing or guided imagery) if you are prone to test anxiety.
- In the lines below and later in the page, write in some practices that we did not mention!

During the Test

- Ignore or avoid other test-takers; their anxiety might be contagious.
- Sit in your usual seat, if possible, but sit where you can avoid distractions, such as people leaving.
- Bring all necessary materials, i.e., pencils, pens, a watch, calculator, scratch paper, blue book, etc.
- Know *exactly* how long you have to complete the exam.
- Listen carefully to any verbal instructions.
- When you are given the test, take a deep breath, RELAX and read the directions carefully.
- Review the *entire* test before starting to answer any questions.
- Set up a schedule and budget your time. Be aware of how many points each answer is worth.
- Answer the easiest questions first.
- Change your answer only if you're *absolutely* sure that your second choice is correct.

After the Test

- Review the exam and count the points. Could the TA or grader have made a calculating error?
- Identify if you missed questions because you couldn't remember it during the test, if it was something you had never studied, or if it was a careless error such as a misplaced decimal.
- Analyze the test-taking strategies you used. What worked? What did not? Did you start preparing early enough, or could you have started studying for the exam earlier?
- Use this information to decide how you'll approach your next exam.
- Be gentle with yourself and give yourself credit for what you did right!
- _____
- _____
- _____

Try it out yourself!

Read over this document from the top. Identify and *circle* 2 or 3 bullet points in each area that describes a test-taking strategy that you don't currently utilize, but you're willing to try.

Changing our practices is more successful if we are as specific as possible. Write here the class in which you will try out this new strategy, and elaborate other actions you will need to support it.

For example:

*Chemistry midterm: I'll start studying earlier. I'll create a study schedule one week before the test, right after I attend a review session. I'll write out all my time obligations for the week and I'll identify blocks of **daily** study time. Then I'll write it down and post it above my computer so I don't forget or find excuses to put it off.*

Now you try:
