

Test-Taking



Study Skills Services
323 Oswald Building
246-6537

Test-Taking

Taking tests is stressful for everyone. However, some students experience so much anxiety that it affects their performance. Learning how to deal with test anxiety and knowing how to prepare for tests can make college life much easier.

What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety is nervousness or tension before a test. A certain amount of test anxiety can be beneficial – it can motivate you to do well. Too much test anxiety can interfere with your ability to prepare for and perform well on tests. Some symptoms of test anxiety include sweating, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, shaking, and nausea. You can learn to control test anxiety by learning some test preparation skills and practicing some relaxation techniques.



Before the Test

- **Keep up with your assignments on a daily basis.** Read your textbook, take good notes and review them daily, attend every class, and get help when you need it.
- **Think positively.** Negative thoughts will only add to your stress level. Tell yourself you're going to do well. Don't worry about past performance; it has nothing to do with the upcoming test.
- **Know what to expect.** Ask your instructor what kinds of questions will be on the test (true/false, multiple choice, etc.) and which material/chapters will be covered.
- **Create a study checklist.** At least one week before the test, make a list of major topics that you want to review.
- **Prepare a detailed summary sheet for each major topic.** This summary should include key words or phrases with relevant information you need to know. Caution: Don't just rewrite your notes; write summaries in your own words.
- **Review with a study group or study buddy.** Brainstorm possible test questions, compare notes, teach concepts to each other.
- **Create practice tests.** This helps identify what you know and what you need to spend more time on. When possible, use old exams the instructor has put in the library.
- **Shorter, more frequent study sessions are more effective.** You remember material better if you practice it several times rather than in one long, marathon session.
- **Get plenty of sleep the night before the test.** You'll be more mentally alert.

The Day of the Test

- ***Eat something healthy.*** Fruits and vegetables are a good choice. Avoid junk food, sugar, and caffeine. These will only add to your stress level.
- ***Practice relaxation techniques.*** Try some of these to calm you before the test.

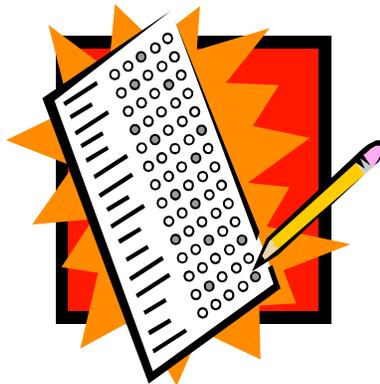
- ***Visualization.*** Close your eyes and imagine that you are in a place that relaxes you (the beach, the mountains, in a field). Really put yourself in that place – feel the sun on your face, the sound of the ocean, a breeze blowing across your body, the smell of flowers. Think how relaxed and happy you feel. When you bring yourself back to reality, tell yourself that you will feel relaxed, refreshed, focused, alert, and energized.



- ***Tense and release body scan.*** Contract and relax the different muscle groups of your body. Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet on the floor, and close your eyes. Tighten the muscles in your feet and toes and hold for a count of five. Now, completely relax your feet and toes. Become aware of the difference in the way your feet and toes feel. Move up your body, repeating the tense and relax procedure until you have worked each muscle group.
 - ***Deep breathing.*** Focus on your breathing, thinking of nothing but inhaling and exhaling. Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of five, hold it for a count of seven, then exhale through your mouth for a count of eight. Imagine tension leaving your body as you breathe out. Breathe slowly and steadily from your abdomen. Repeat three to five times.
 - ***Physical activity.*** Exercise is an excellent way to reduce stress and to release anxiety. Take a walk, jog around the block, play a game of tennis or basketball, etc.
 - ***Do something fun.*** Do something that will take your mind off the test for a little while. Watch TV, go to a movie, play video games.
 - ***Have a good cry.*** Crying is a great release.
 - ***Talk to someone.*** Share your concerns or feelings with a family member, friend, advisor, professor – just not with a classmate who might also be suffering from stress and/or test anxiety.
- ***Arrive at the test location a few minutes early.*** Use the time before the test to relax and think positive thoughts. Avoid talking with your classmates about the test and avoid last-minute cramming. This will only create more stress.

During the Test

- **Listen for any last-minute instructions from the professor.** Sometimes there are mistakes on the test.
- **Immediately write down any information that you have memorized but are afraid you may forget.** This would include formulas, memory cues, etc.
- **Quickly decide how you will budget your time.** Remember to spend the bulk of your time on the sections worth the most points. Use all of the allotted time.
- **Read all directions carefully.** Sometimes you only have to answer three out of four questions.
- **Remember, you don't have to answer the questions in order.** Answer the easy questions first.
- **Use the test itself to get hints for answers.** Look for clues for essay questions in the multiple choice. Does a true/false question contain the answer to a multiple choice question?
- **If your mind goes blank, don't panic.** Take a few deep breaths to relax yourself. Let your mind wander a bit on the topic and see if the answer comes to you. If necessary, skip the question and come back to it later.
- **Take a guess.** From time to time, you will come across a question that leaves you completely stumped. Here are some pointers to help you make your best guess:
 1. If two answers are similar, choose one of them.
 2. If two answers have similar words, choose one of them.
 3. If two answers have opposite meanings, choose one of them.
 4. Choose the longest answer.
 5. If none of the above works, choose (b). Studies show that (b) is correct 40% of the time.



- **Make sure you answer all of the questions.** Pay close attention to the number of question you are answering and the number on your “bubble” (Scantron) sheet.
- **Changing answers is a personal choice.** Usually, your first instinct is correct.

- **Apply strategies for different types of tests:**

Multiple Choice

1. Answer the question in your head before you look at the choices.
2. If you're sure that two answers are right and are unsure of the third, you may want to consider the "all of the above" answer.
3. If you have to guess, use the following tips:
 - Answers that contain "absolute" words like *always*, *none*, *all*, and *every* are often wrong.
 - Answers that contain "qualifying" words like *usually*, *could*, *some*, *frequently* and *probably* are often right.
 - If you see two answers with the same meaning, they are usually both wrong.
 - If you see two answers with opposite meanings, one of these may be correct.
 - Cross out answers you know are incorrect, and select from the remaining options



Matching

1. Elimination is the key to matching questions.
2. Work consistently from one column to the other.
3. Mark off answers as you use them.
4. Skip the ones you don't know and come back to them after you've eliminated more answers.

True/False

1. Answers that contain "absolute" words are often false.
2. Answers that contain "qualifying" words are often true.
3. If any part of a statement is false, the whole statement is false.

Fill-in-the-blank or Short Answer

1. These questions rely solely on recall.
2. Look for grammatical hints (e.g., a sentence that begins with "an" indicates that the word starts with a vowel).
3. Look for key words in the question to help trigger your memory.

Essay

1. Read the question carefully. The following list of words are commonly used in essay questions. Familiarize yourself with these terms so when you see them on a test, you'll know exactly what is expected.

Analyze – examine in detail; involves judgment.

Compare – show similarities and differences.

Contrast – show differences.

Define – explain the meaning in a short answer

Describe – give as many details as you can.

Discuss – write everything you know in a logical series.

Evaluate – examine the positive and negative aspects; draw a conclusion.

Illustrate – use specific examples and details.

Justify – give reasons to support a position.

Outline – give an overview using the main ideas.

Prove – use facts and evidence to support a position.

Summarize – give the main ideas in a short answer.

2. Create an outline before you begin writing. If you run out of time, your instructor will be able to see what you intended to write about and may give you partial credit.
3. Get to the point and keep to the point. Write only what is relevant. The quality of your answer doesn't depend on the quantity.
4. Write legibly. If the instructor can't read your answer, he/she won't be able to grade it.
5. Proofread your paper. Check for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.



Science and Math

1. Translate the problem from symbols to words.
2. Write out the formula.
3. Draw a diagram or picture to help you “see” the problem.
4. Show your work. You may receive partial credit for an incorrect answer.
5. Check your work. Use the opposite operation on the problem (check addition by subtraction, multiplication by division, etc.)

After the Test

- **Don't rehash the exam with classmates.** There's nothing you can do about it anyway.
- **Make sure the test was graded correctly.** Instructors sometimes may mistakes.
- **Write the correct answers on the test.** Make sure this is okay first.
- **Use the test as a study tool.** What kinds of questions did the instructor ask? Did the questions come from notes, lectures, text, etc.? What kinds of mistakes did you make?
- **Keep things in perspective.** One test grade is not going to make or break your college career.
- **Reward yourself.** Whether you did well or not, do something nice for yourself just for making it through the experience.

