Test Taking Strategies
Office for Academic Success
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Analyzing the Problem

The topic of test taking has several components.

1. Purpose and function
2. Types of tests
3. Necessary preparation
4. Helpful study techniques
**Purpose and Function**

- Tests measure what we know.
- But unlike many tests in high school, college tests often require us to use and apply what we have learned.
High School vs College

High School Requires More Memorization

- In general, many high school tests require memorization of facts
- Attending class, taking notes, and brief study is usually sufficient to earn a minimum of a C in high school

College Requires Critical Thinking

- College instructors expect application plus memorization
- Students must be able to use what they have learned to make decisions and evaluations
- The ability to apply new knowledge is critical
- Questions on tests may not have been studied in class or included in notes or lectures but may require application through critical thinking.
WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

- The active, focused process of analyzing, evaluating and making conclusions based on new information.
- A way of questioning new material and finding flaws in arguments.
- Applying knowledge to a variety of situations.
The transition from high school to college can be challenging.

Students often feel overwhelmed by course requirements and tests.

Many students believe it is impossible to learn all the material they are asked to master.

However, we all use critical thinking in our everyday lives and can easily make the transition to using it in school.
Using Critical Thinking

Critical thinking helps students:

- Understand the purpose of the course and how it relates to the field of study.
- Use active learning techniques: listening, reading, and writing.
- Look for connections and relationships.
- Become questioners.
- Explain the material to other people, particularly people who are not in the class.
- Test thought processes regarding the material and effectively summarize main points.
Test Formats

- Multiple choice tests, true/false tests, essay tests, or a combination of all three are common in college.
- Test types often reflect the course information.

For example, tests for Biology courses are likely to include multiple choice questions to determine the extent to which students have memorized necessary information. Tests for Psychology and English are likely to have essay components to gauge students’ comprehension of major concepts as well as writing ability.
Preparation

Study! To do well on tests, it’s essential to study. There is no substitute for knowing the material!

Develop a study schedule that shows how many hours you need to study each week based on the amount of reading, the homework, and the difficulty of the material.

A general rule of thumb is that students should spend 3 hours per week studying for each hour they spend in class. Add more time for very difficult courses and subtract time for courses that are relatively easy.
Take practice tests.

Test taking is a skill. Research indicates that test taking practice improves results. Practice tests also let students know about areas of weakness so that they can build up their knowledge base before the actual test date.

Look at questions from homework and past quizzes. Homework items and quiz questions relate to information that the instructor considers important, so these topics are likely to be addressed in test questions.
**Make Your Own Tests**

- **Anticipate test questions.** Think about the kinds of questions the instructor is likely to ask on tests.
  - Check the text and your class notes for important points.
  - What are the most important points in the chapter(s)?
  - Are there any rules, exceptions to rules, formulas, or other facts or concepts that are critical to course content?

If so, there will probably be questions that test your knowledge about this material.

**Work with classmates to create practice tests!**
ANTICIPATE CHALLENGES

Students often find certain types of tests more difficult than others. Which of the following do you find challenging?

- Multiple choice
- True/False
- Essay

Determine the types of tests that you find difficult and develop strategies for working through them.
Multiple Choice Tests

Study texts and class notes for “big picture” concepts and vital facts.

When taking the test, read all questions carefully to make sure you respond to what is being asked.

As you read each question, cover the choices with your hand and try to come up with the right answer in your head. If your answer matches one of the choices, it is probably correct!
TRUE/FALSE TESTS

If negatives such as no, not, and cannot make the question confusing, take the negative out and read the sentence. If it is true without the negative, then the answer is FALSE.

Absolutes make sentences either 100% true or 100% false. Answers that include more moderate words such as sometimes, often, and frequently are more likely to be true.
Essay Tests

- Read all essay questions carefully. Many wrong answers result from careless reading.
- Analyze questions and break them into parts, making note of all requirements. This will help you to address all the parts of the question.
- Begin with an introduction and end with a conclusion.
- Be specific in your writing. Use examples and support details when appropriate.
- Review your essay to check organization, spelling, grammar, etc. Make necessary revisions.
TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Arrive well rested and adequately fed on test day.
- Dress comfortably.
- Bring all necessary supplies to the test.
- Arrive a few minutes early to give yourself time to settle in before beginning work on the test.
- Survey the test to see the scope and the point values.
- Read all instructions carefully.
MORE TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Answer the questions you know first. Make note of the questions you don’t know and return to them later. This gives you the chance to get credit for all the questions that you know.

- If some questions have higher point values, do those first.

- Keep a positive attitude no matter what! According to the experts, attitude and determination make a difference in test results.

Relax! Stress has a negative impact on your ability to concentrate. Some experts believe that taking a test while very stressed can be almost as harmful as not studying.
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Test taking requires study and skill. Demands for each course are different, and it’s important to remember that the type of material to be learned may help determine the appropriate study skills as well as the kinds of tests given.

- Each student should develop a test taking plan that works for him/her. Since we all learn and process information differently, our test taking strategies can vary too. It helps to experiment to find out what works well.
For more information about test taking, visit the Learning Center on your HACC Campus.