

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW. MAXIMIZE YOUR CHANCES FOR EXAM SUCCESS.

Test time can be stressful. The hard work you have done, the knowledge you have accumulated, and the lessons you have learned in your courses will be assessed, evaluated, and quantified. The stakes are high but – just like any other skill – test-taking strategies can be studied, learned, and practiced. Mastering the strategies below may be one avenue to improve your test-taking performance. Additionally, the OAR has a number of resources available to help you enhance your test-taking abilities. You can find the *Reducing Exam Stress* handout in our office or on our website. We also have a number of books available in the OAR that offer detailed exam strategies. For more assistance in developing individualized test-taking strategies, schedule an appointment with an OAR staff member on our website, or send us an email.

GENERAL TEST TAKING TIPS

- Be prepared. Organizing yourself, staying on top of your coursework, and studying early on in the semester are the best predictors of exam success.
- Arrive *early*. Sprinting to get to the classroom just as the exam begins will cause you physical and mental stress that can hinder your test performance.
- Don't cram. Cramming is an inefficient method of study that is unlikely to significantly increase your performance. It is, however, likely to cause you detrimental anxiety.
- Avoid negative energy. Some people may stress out around exams. Maintain your calm, and avoid conversations that will leave you unnecessarily anxious.
- Budget your time. Dividing up the exam will keep you from spending too much time on one item, and thus leaving yourself without enough time to respond to other questions.
- Answer the easiest questions first: Answering the easier questions first will both give you confidence going forward and ensure that you do not leave easy points on the table.

ESSAY EXAM TIPS

- Brainstorm possible questions before the test. Having a sense for what questions might be asked will increase the likelihood that you will be prepared with a good answer, and also help you identify which topics you should devote time to studying.
- Read the instructions *carefully*. Make sure that you respond to all parts of the question.
- Create an outline. Taking a moment to plan out your argument and supporting facts will allow you write faster and more clearly than simply responding in stream of consciousness.
- Support your argument. Focus on the facts you are supplying and the logical connections between them. You will rarely get points for your opinion – it's how you justify it that matters.
- Write neatly. If you are writing with pen and paper be sure to write neatly. In a study, professors graded identical papers more generously when the handwriting was tidy rather than sloppy.

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAM TIPS

- Look for qualifying words. Words such as *sometimes*, *always*, *best*, *most*, and so on can dramatically alter the question and lead to wrong answers if you miss them.
- Don't look right away. Think of a correct answer *before* looking at the answer choices.
- Read all the answers. An answer might seem obvious, but a better one may be lurking.
- Mark and return. If you don't know the answer to a certain question, mark it on the test sheet and return to it later. Other questions on the test may jog your memory.

OPEN BOOK AND TAKE HOME EXAMS

- Be clear on what is permitted. If you have any doubts, ask. You do not want to violate the Honor Code by using unauthorized resources, nor do you want to miss out on resources you could have been permitted to use.
- Scout a location beforehand. Make sure you have a location prepared that is conducive to good academic performance, and make sure that you will have access to it at test time. If you have roommates, make sure that they know about your test in advance if you take it in your room.
- Know your materials and organize your space. Having an open book and access to notes is only an advantage if you can quickly locate the information you want to use.
- Don't merely copy from the text. Be sure you know the Honor Code guidelines and follow them.

Cited and adapted from: *How to Study in College*, Pauk and Owens, 10th edition; studygs.net; Grinnell College; and *Essential Study Skills*, Linda Wong, 8th edition