



STUDY SKILLS – Test Preparation & Test-Taking

Recall practice (practice test questions) and spacing out practice over time are the two MOST EFFECTIVE study strategies. According to research, students **score the highest on tests** and **retain information longer** when they use these strategies.

Test-Preparation Strategies

- Keep up with course readings/ assignments.
- Do regular review/recall practice each week.
- Plan at least 2-3 in depth exam review sessions in the week before the test.
- Create a study agenda (materials, topics, time required).
- Practice for the test.
 - Spend more time on newer material for cumulative tests
 - Spend more time on content that is confusing/difficult
 - Do practice test questions like the test (source material: textbooks, old tests, quizzes, class notes, online resources, make your own)
 - Teach others / group study
- Use positive affirmations.
- Sleep 7-9 hours the night before. Eat before the test/bring a snack.
- Take a mental break an hour before the test.
- Arrive early. Avoid talking with others about how they studied.

Test-Taking Strategies

Being Test-Smart:

- Bring a watch / sit where you can see the clock.
- Brain dump (jot down anything you're worried about forgetting)
- Deep breathing for 1 minute
- Skim test – number of questions, value of each question, time available
- Read the directions, then reread.
- Start with easy/short questions. Mark ones that you need to come back to.
- Look for clues in the test to help you answer questions you don't know.
- Leave time to review answers if possible.
- Don't change answers unless you are sure you have made a mistake.
- Don't leave a question unanswered unless there is a penalty for wrong answers!

Multiple Choice Question Strategies:

“Look for the best true answer”

1. Circle/underline key words in the question (“main effect”, “best describes”, vocabulary terms, “never” and “not”).
2. Answer each question before looking at the choices. Find the answer that matches.



3. Read all possible answers before selecting one.
 - Eliminate incorrect answers.
 - If there are two similar answers, read carefully for distinct differences.

If you aren't sure, here are some strategies to help you make an informed guess:

- Pick the more specific, inclusive choice (often the longest answer)
- Pick a choice that is similar in format to other choices (repeated terms, structure or word pattern)
- Focus on familiar terminology as possible true answers
- Answer with qualifying words (sometimes, usually, often, frequently, tends to) are usually right
- Answers with absolute words (always, certainly, definitely, absolutely, never, none) are usually wrong
- Use your common sense

Short Answer Question Strategies

1. *Be clear on what the question is asking.*

- Is it a short answer (1-2 paragraphs) or a long answer (several paragraphs)?
- Understand common directive words (ex. compare, contrast, discuss, describe, explain, identify, illustrate, list, relate, summarize).
- Circle key words and terms.
- Identify how many parts to the question there are. For example, define two terms and compare them is a two-part question.

2. *Brainstorm or make a quick outline before you write.*

- Write down your immediate thoughts (terms, ideas).
- Keep your outline brief. Use key words/formulas/phrases.
- An outline may give you partial points even if you don't complete the question.

3. *Start with key ideas.*

- Get to the point. Don't write vague, fluffy sentences.

4. *Write legibly.*

- No points for something that can't be read!

5. *Review for content, spelling, and grammar.*

- Did you answer the question completely? Does your writing make sense (logic/flow)? Do you have enough supporting ideas for your main idea?

AFTER THE TEST IS MARKED

Take time to reflect on what went well and what you can learn from the experience.

Adapted from

Ellis, D., Toft, D., & Dawson, D. (2016). *Becoming a Master Student* (6th Canadian ed.). Toronto: Nelson Education.
Lipsky, S. A. (2013). *College Success: the essential ingredients*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.



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