

BEING TEST-WISE: TIPS FOR TAKING EXAMS



...contributing to Student Success

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Take all necessary materials and get there early, but not too early!
2. Sit in the front of the room (or in a distraction-free location).
3. Take a wristwatch for keeping track of your time.
4. Preview the exam by skimming it and planning your time.
5. READ ALL DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY.
6. LEAVE NOTHING BLANK UNLESS TOLD DIRECTLY THAT THERE IS A PENALTY FOR GUESSING.
7. DON'T CHANGE ANSWERS WITHOUT GOOD REASON!

FOR MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS

1. Read the stem and predict the response, without looking at the distracters. If you don't see your answer, read all choices, considering each as it fits with the stem. Regard each as one true/false statement and eliminate the false statements.
2. Be careful of negatively worded questions: "All of the following except..."
3. Look for cues and clues:

The most general alternative is often correct.
One of two similar alternatives may be correct.
One of two opposite alternatives may be correct.
None- or all-of-the-above alternatives are often correct.
The middle value, or least extreme alternative is often correct.
The longest, most inclusive alternative is often correct.

FOR TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS:

1. Watch for qualifying words that can make a statement false: all/none; never/always; everything/nothing; best/worst. If you can think of a single exception, the statement is false.
2. Read two-part statements carefully; one part may be false, making the entire statement false.
3. Be careful of double negative statements.
4. With the odds at 50/50, always make your best guess and remember:

Absolute statements tend to be false.
Items that contain unfamiliar terminology or facts may be false.
When all else fails, it is better to guess "true" than "false." (True statements are easier for instructors to write.)

DEALING WITH PROBLEM-SOLVING TESTS

1. Practice/rehearse often and with time pressure. Work lots of problems; make-up your own problems. Practice solving problems in limited time –e.g. one problem in 5 minutes, without reference to notes or book. Use problems from other textbooks or old exams for such practice.
2. Divide problems by type. Make a list of the different kinds of problems you will be expected to solve and note the elements of each. By dividing problems by type or category, you can isolate the ones that are most difficult for you. Practice those more and get help if you need it.
3. Read the problem out loud. Sometimes the sound of your voice will cue your memory. Talk yourself through the solution. Read equations aloud.
4. Stay in a good mood. Problems aren't supposed to be easy, otherwise they wouldn't be problems.
5. If you understand the problem but don't know how to start, try anything that makes sense to you. A diagram is often a good way to get going.
6. Explore – take chances – have lots of scratch paper handy.
7. If you're not sure what's going on in the problem, try:
 - reading again, carefully.
 - taking notes, drawing pictures, circling key words.
 - asking about terms you don't recognize.
 - thinking about what the problem is asking for.
8. Sometimes you need to rest (briefly – 1-2 minutes) after you've been trying a while. Then try again.
9. Don't rush. Make sure you're thinking clearly. Consciously slow yourself down.
10. Keep an eye on what you're doing. Every few minutes, ask yourself;
 - Am I getting closer to answers the problem is asking for?
 - Should I keep doing what I'm doing or try something different?
11. When you do get an answer, check it. Does it make sense? Does it answer the question? If you do the problem a different way, will you still get the same answer?
12. Remember, there are no magic tricks to replace thinking clearly and persisting. Don't give up too soon.