



The CENTER for STUDENT SUCCESS

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

Test-taking is an essential component of the college experience. To excel at test-taking requires careful strategy both before and during the exam. (For more information/tips about studying for classes, see our **Study Strategies** handout.)

Preparing for a test

- Always **go to class and pay attention**. Learning the material while in class will minimize your future study time.
- Understand clearly the **scope** of the exam, identifying what topics/lectures/readings will be covered.
- Know what **type of test** you are preparing for: Is it multiple choice? Are essay questions involved? How long will the exam be?
- Study strategically. Simply looking over your notes involves only a superficial level of processing.
 - Build a **study-guide** of all your material. Create a summary sheet for each major topic/concept covered in class that includes both lecture and reading notes.
 - Use the **quiz-and-recall** method: review your notes, then try to explain it, unaided, in your own words (do *not* merely read over something). Do this repeatedly until you are confident with all the material.
 - **Notation-reduction**: gather all your lecture notes and summarize them onto a single page, then a 5x8 card, then a 3x5 card. Finally, quiz yourself from memory using your 3x5 card.
- Separate information you know well from information less familiar to you. Prioritize learning new information while also continuing to review more familiar material.
- Check your learning using:
 - **Self-testing** with friends—get a friend to quiz you by asking questions from your notes.
 - Team up with a friend and “**teach**” each other specific material from the class. This will force you to process the information on a deeper level.
- Get a good night’s rest the evening before your test. Do NOT pull an all nighter or stay up late cramming. Having a well-rested mind will improve your mental clarity while taking your exam.

Taking the test

- Read all directions **thoroughly** and **carefully**, then briefly read through the entire exam.
- Build a time frame for completion based upon the amount of time given, the number of questions, and the types of questions being asked.
- **Multiple choice** exams:
 - Read every option and select the best answer.
 - If you have trouble with a question, reword it, then eliminate obviously incorrect choices.
 - Only change your answer if (1) you know another alternative is absolutely correct, or (2) you know your initial choice is absolutely incorrect.
- Read **essay questions** slowly and jot down a quick outline before you start. This will help you to know where you are going before you start writing.
- Answer the **easiest questions** first. Skip ones you do not know so as to get maximum points in minimal time. Return to the skipped questions once you have finished going through the whole test.
- Check and recheck your work with any remaining time.

NOTE: This guide draws some strategies from *How to Become a Straight-A Student* by Cal Newport and *The A Game* by Kenneth Sukka.