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 Sufka.