

Taking An Objective Exam

A. General Tips

1. **STUDY!** None of these tips are a substitute for knowing the subject matter. People who know their subject are able to get much higher scores on tests than people who are good at test-taking but who do not know the subject. If you know your teacher's objectives for learning, study those things the hardest.
2. Survey the entire test. Read the directions carefully, making sure you understand exactly what is expected. Don't let your worry trick you into reading too fast and missing something important.
3. Determine the point value for each question and plan a time strategy for the exam. Find out if you are penalized for guessing. If not, always guess and do not leave any questions unanswered.
4. Read each question carefully, underlining key words if it's possible to write on exams. Don't read into questions what's not there. Read ALL of the answer options before choosing one. You may discover a later answer is even more correct than an earlier one.
5. Pass over the difficult or debatable questions on your first reading and then come back after completing those you are sure about.
6. How should you handle questions you don't know? Use information from other questions. Eliminate options that you know are wrong. If two answers say the same thing in different words, they are both probably wrong (unless two answers can be correct). If opposite answers are used, often one of them is correct. Watch for consistent grammatical structure between the question and answer. Look for qualifying words: questions with all, always and never are very strong and less often correct than questions that use general words like sometimes, often and seldom.
7. If you know you made an error, change your first answer. If it is just a guess, often your first impression is correct.
8. Ask the instructor for clarification if you have specific questions. Spot-check every few questions for location accuracy if you are using a computer-scored answer sheet.
9. Review your test for careless errors. Try to be the LAST to leave, not the first.

B. Multiple Choice Tests

1. Anticipate the answer and then look for it. Read all the choices before answering. When your anticipated answer is not one of the choices, discard it and concentrate on the others systematically. Discard options that are clearly wrong. Don't settle for the first correct answer; look for the most complete one.
2. When two or more choices look correct, compare them with each other. Decide what makes them different. Choose the more encompassing or longest option unless the question requires a specific answer.
3. If the question is long and complex, find the subject and verb and underline, if allowed.
4. If a question is in the negative--for example, "one of the following is not a cause," it will help you to look for three true answers and the one remaining false answer will be the correct one.
5. More general statements are likely to be correct than specific statements, especially if you can think of one exception.
6. If you are confused by the language of the question, try to break it down or rephrase it so it says the same thing in simpler language.
7. Read the question together with your answer. Check to see if it makes sense, grammatically and otherwise.
8. Remember that "none of the above" is a genuine option, and often is the correct answer.
9. Frequently check your answer sheet with your question sheet to make sure your numbering corresponds.
10. Watch your time. Skip difficult questions until later.

C. True-False Tests (or Binary response like yes-no, correct-incorrect)

1. In all questions, especially the true-false type, look for specific determiners. Words such as rarely, usually, sometimes, and seldom allow for exceptions; never, always, no and all indicate no exceptions.
2. Mark statements true only if they are true without exceptions. If any part of the statement is false, the whole statement is marked false.

3. In regard to true-false questions, there is a tendency for extremely positive statements to be false, and for qualified statements to be true. Research has established the following trends on the basis of a great number of questions collected from teachers:
 - a. Four out of five statements containing "all" were false.
 - b. Nine out of ten statements containing "only" were false.
 - c. Three out of four statements containing "generally" were true.
 - d. Four out of five "enumeration's" statements were true.
 - e. Two out of three "reason" or "because" statements were true.
 - f. Three out of four statements containing "always" were false.
 - g. The longer the statement, the more likely it is to be true.
 - h. Remember, there are exceptions to these generalities.

D. Matching Tests

1. Stay in one column of a matching test (usually the column with definitions) and work backwards to find the words or symbols that match. Be sure to find out if the answers can be used more than once.
2. Take advantage of the process of elimination by working the easy portions first.
3. Look for grammatical or contextual clues that may be helpful.

E. When The Test Comes Back

1. Look at the questions that you missed. What types of question were they: essay, multiple choice, matching, true-false? What was the source of the questions: lecture, reading, midterms, or labs? Were there surprise questions? Think about your study techniques and resources you used. What could you improve on?
2. Recall helpful study techniques. What DID work for you? Did you attend ALL lectures and labs? Did you do all the reading and homework? How effective was your notetaking? Did you use a study group or the Learning Center? What could you improve on?
3. If you have a question about your answers, talk to the professor. It is all right to respectfully question your answers. Good professors will explain it, recheck to make sure it was scored correctly, or recheck their own question. Occasionally there will be an error, so don't be afraid to ask. At the very least, you will learn something from it and many professors are encouraged by student interest after the exam.
4. If you have analyzed some ways that might improve your next grade, take steps to begin those changes right away!
5. Celebrate and reward all your hard work! Remember this is only one test in your whole education. Learn from it but put it in perspective.

F. Types Of Test-Taking Errors

1. **Misread direction errors (either skipped or misunderstood)**--*To avoid this type of error, read all the directions.*
2. **Careless errors**--*To avoid this type of error, watch simple mistakes as you proofread.*
3. **Concept errors (not understanding the properties or principles required to work the problem)**--*Go back to your textbook or notes to learn why you missed them.*
4. **Application errors (you know the concept but can't apply it to the problem)**--*Learn to predict the type of application problems that will be on the test.*
5. **Test procedure errors (because of the specific way you take tests)** such as:
 - a. *Missing more questions in the beginning, middle or end of the test--Try to review that part of the test first for errors.*
 - b. *Not completing a problem to its last step--Review last step before overall review.*
 - c. *Changing answers from correct to incorrect ones--Don't do it unless you are very sure of the change. Write, "Don't change answers" on a note if it's a chronic problem.*
 - d. *Getting stuck on one problem and spending too much time--Set a time limit and move on.*
 - e. *Rushing through the easy part and making careless errors--If you do this often, review the easy parts before the harder.*
 - f. *Miscopying answers from scratch paper to test--Systematically compare your last problem step on scratch paper to the exam.*
 - g. *Leaving answers blank--Write down some information, beginning steps or outline.*
6. **Study errors (studying the wrong material or not enough time on pertinent material)**--*To avoid errors in the future, analyze errors so you can study more effectively next time.*