

## **GENERAL TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES**

The best test strategy is to develop good study habits, which include such habits as regular study, frequent review of material, good time management, etc. Individual students, courses, and tests differ, so suggestions for test-taking will not apply to all individuals in all testing situations. But for general test-taking situations, consider these tips:

### **Be Prepared Mentally, Physically, and Spiritually:**

- A. Know as much as possible about the material being covered on the exam. In other words, STUDY!
- B. Before an exam, try to maintain your routine lifestyle as much as possible. (This does **not** mean to avoid study.)
  - 1. Eat as usual.
  - 2. Get proper rest.
    - a. Sleep when you normally sleep and for your usual length of time, even (especially) the night before the exam.
    - b. Even if you must pull an all-nighter, take a brief break or rest before the exam to “uncloud” your brain.
    - c. Always rest your eyes a bit right before the exam—even too to three minutes will help.
  - 3. Continue to practice your normal hygienic practices.
  - 4. Exercise. Take short breaks from time to time.
- C. Avoid medication, especially medication that may make you sleepy or nervous.
- D. Relax, meditate, visualize, and/or pray.
- E. Go to the exam feeling good about yourself.
  - 1. Say to yourself in your own words, “I have prepared as well as I possibly could have under the circumstances, and I am going to do my best on the exam. No matter what grade I receive on the exam, I know that my score will **not** evaluate **me** as a person, but it will evaluate my **performance** on that test at that time.”
  - 2. Go to the test looking your best because when you look your best, you feel more confident. Besides, if you shower, you’ll probably be more alert than if you hadn’t.
- F. Bring all the materials which you need for the test. Bring pens or pencils. If necessary, bring paper or a blue book. If the test is open book or open note, make sure to bring your notes with. If the test is an essay test, bring your dictionary or thesaurus (if you are allowed).

### **Immediately Before Starting the Test:**

- A. Get to the testing place on time, with a few minutes to spare. Sometimes your instructor might hand out the exams a few minutes early, and you will have an edge if you have that extra time to look over the exam. Also, a few extra minutes will give you time to be ready to listen if the instructor gives suggestions or makes comments about the test.
- B. Pay attention to any verbal directions which your instructor may give you. Ask questions if you need to.
- C. Do not let yourself be confused by the information that your classmates may give you right before the test.
- D. Take a few deep breaths, extending your diaphragm to calm down before you start your test. (For more information, see the lab handouts on stress management.)
- E. When you get the test, skim through it all the way to get an idea of the length and format of the questions.

### **Taking the Test:**

- A. Read the directions carefully. Make certain that you both **understand** and **do** what is wanted. If you are allowed to write on the test, underline key words (such as *check, fill-in, cross out, circle, underline*, etc.) in the directions. If you are not allowed to write on the test, “underline” the key words mentally.
- B. Look for point allotment. How many points is each question worth? If point value is not noted on the exam, ask your instructor for that information, and then note the point value in the margin (if you may write on the test). If the instructor does not count each question by points and instead counts the general quality of the exam, you need to know that, too.
- C. Budget your test time. Note the time allotted for the test. Then use the difficulty and point value of the questions to set up a time schedule for yourself. Jot your schedule in the margin (if you’re allowed to write on the test). If certain questions are worth more than others, set aside proportionately more time for those. But remember: Accuracy should not be sacrificed for speed.
- D. Read each question carefully three times and (if you are allowed to mark on the test) underline key words. “Underline” mentally if you can’t actually write on the test.
- E. Answer questions first and put a mark next to ones you skip over. That means that, in general, answer objective questions (multiple-choice, true-false, short-answer) first and essay questions last.

- F. If you come to a questions which you cannot answer, say in your own words to yourself, “I currently do not know the answer to this question. Maybe I’ll remember the answer to this question later on. I am still a worthwhile person.”
- G. Use the remaining time to go back over questions you skipped during your first run-through.
- H. In most cases, answer all questions. That suggestion wouldn’t apply in such cases as in standardized tests in which wrong guesses are counted against you, or in essay exams in which you are given a choice as to which of several questions you will answer.
- I. Double-check your work, making certain that you correctly followed the directions and that your writing or marks are legible. Change an answer **only** if you really have a good reason for doing so.

**After Finishing the Test:**

- A. Do something nice for yourself. You deserve it.
- B. When you get your test back, learn from your incorrect answers. After all, tests are really one type of learning situation.

**Note:** If you need help with textbook study, see the Writing Lab handout on the SQ3R study method.