



STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL TEST-TAKING

General Study & Testing Strategies



- ◇ Begin by reviewing the study guide (if given one) and/or previous test/quizzes. If none, review class notes and syllabus for clues about what to focus on. Spend more time on things you now less well.
- ◇ **Match study strategy and leaning style to kind of material:** flash cards for foreign language vocabulary, terminology, key concepts or names/events; charts/time lines/diagrams work well for visual learners and for history or scientific processes; outlines break down big topics into smaller chunks. Auditory learners can benefit from reciting concepts, definitions, formulas, etc. aloud; taping yourself and listening in the car, while walking or doing laundry; and talking about/explaining material to a study partner or tutor.
- ◇ Break study/practice sessions into 45 minute to 1 hour chunks, followed by 10-15 minute breaks (stretch, breathe, walk around the block, change location, get a snack/coffee...). Reward yourself after the goal has been achieved.
- ◇ **Reading:** outline, use Cornell method, or do theme/topic note-taking and **short summaries** (topic, key points, one or two examples or **diagrams/charts**). Also, note questions when you read instead of highlighting. Use the index, table of contents, focused skimming to look for answers to possible test questions. Read or skim before the lecture and read or skim again after to reinforce if material is difficult.
- ◇ When practicing and when taking the test, read the question and underline/circle/highlight key words. Put the question into your own words if you're having trouble understanding it.
- ◇ **Taking the test:** remember to skim the whole test first and approximate how much time you have for each question based on worth, time it will take, and overall time you have. Before beginning, jot down dates, formulas, etc. on margin of paper if you're afraid you'll forget. Start with the easiest questions or questions about information you worry you'll forget.

- ◇ **Essay tests:** start by jotting down a brainstorm list/outline for each question, starting with the easiest. You may get partial credit if you run out of time. A typical structure is 1. Restate question 2. Give your response and rationale 3. Give example(s) 4. Summarize, conclude, tying back to question. Adjust depth of answer, number of examples, etc. depending on time allowed.
- ◇ **Matching:** start with easy ones and cross off options as you go—leaving fewer choices if you have to guess.
- ◇ **Multiple choice:** try forming possible answers in your mind **before** looking at the choices. Cross off unlikely answers. Watch for “always/never”—also watch for **T/F**. Don’t keep re-reading the answer choices; it will only confuse you.
- ◇ On any type of test, **SKIP** questions you don’t get after a short time—circle and come back. Also circle and come back to ones you answer but aren’t sure of.
- ◇ Whenever possible, leave a bit of time to check calculations or re-read essay/short answers to avoid rushed mistakes and to allow yourself the opportunity to add things you might think of later.
- ◇ After the test: relax, do something fun, reward yourself! When you get the test back, go over it with your professor or a classmate to see what you did right and what you missed.

Psyching Yourself Up & Managing Anxiety



- ◇ Taking 10-15 minute **PHYSICAL BREAKS** (stretching, walking, etc.) during studying relieves stress, increases energy, oxygen flow, mood, focus, and studying efficiency.
- ◇ Try not to spend time with people who make you feel more nervous or negative.
- ◇ Become aware of negative cycles (cramming, not sleeping, not focusing so you have to cram, not sleeping, etc.) and interrupt them. Use a journal, notes to self, checking in with a friend/tutor, planning, seeing someone in the PLTC or Stone Center for help. Also try to establish positive cycles. Think of a situation when you did well on a test and consider the circumstances (mental attitude, physical state, study strategies used, etc.). Try to replicate those circumstances.

- ◇ Try shifting from “self-focus” (“what’s wrong with me?” etc.) to “task-focus” (“First, I need to look at the study guide. Then I need to review the notes for chapter one,” etc.).
- ◇ **Practice positive self-talk. Talk back to negative messages with logical counter-thoughts.** Think ABC: If you are well prepared, the test itself (A) does not cause the stressed response (B), but negative self-talk (C) can. Change the stress response by changing what you say to yourself into something positive.
- ◇ Study some place pleasant, with good light (café, public library, outside).
- ◇ Study with a friend sometimes, even if he or she is working on something different.
- ◇ Try to maintain perspective—your whole life is NOT riding on this test!!
- ◇ **Study to music** if not too distracting—especially instrumental. Bring it to the test and listen before taking the test.
- ◇ **Practice deep breathing.** Breath in: peace, confidence, I know this... Breathe out: stress, worry, anxiety, doubt. Practice at home, especially before/during studying, and before/during test.
- ◇ **Practice positive visualization before/during studying and before/during test.**
- ◇ Watch caffeine intake.
- ◇ Stop studying 45 minutes to an hour before going to sleep, and **SLEEP 7-9 hours before the test!** Lack of sleep can compromise short term memory! Use exercise and relaxation techniques to help you sleep.
- ◇ If you feel anxious, tired, or start to feel your mind drift during the test, **stop for a minute, stand up and stretch, take some deep breaths, talk back to negative messages, and/or call up a positive image.**
- ◇ If you have a documented disability or think you may have a disability (such as anxiety disorder, dyslexia, or ADHD) that is interfering with your ability to succeed on tests, see Jim Wice in Accessibility and Disability Resources to discuss how to get tested for a disability and/or possible testing accommodations. You can also talk to your professor and Roberta Schotka if you feel you may not be preparing for or taking tests in the best manner or to someone in the Stone Counseling Center if you feel anxiety is interfering with your performance on tests.