

Study Skills

Testing Taking Tips

True/False Tests

- **Every part of a true sentence must be "true"**

If any one part of the sentence is false, the whole sentence is false despite many other true statements.

- **Pay close attention to negatives, qualifiers, absolutes, and long strings of statements**

- **Negatives can be confusing.**

If the question contains negatives, as "no, not, cannot"

- Drop the negative and read what remains.
- Decide whether that sentence is true or false.
- If it is true, its opposite, or negative, is usually false

- **Qualifiers are words that restrict or open up general statements.**

- Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities of making accurate statements. They make more modest claims, are more likely to reflect reality, and usually indicate "true" answers.

- **Absolute words restrict possibilities.**

- "No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate "false" answers

- **Long sentences often include groups of words set off by punctuation.**

- Pay attention to the "truth" of each of these phrases. If one is false, it usually indicates a "false" answer.

- **Guessing:**

- Often true/false tests contain more true answers than false answers. You have more than a 50% chance of being right with "true".

Multiple Choice Tests

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or stem followed by three to five options:

Test strategies:

- **Read the directions carefully**
 - Know if each question has one or more correct option
 - Know if you are penalized for guessing
 - Know how much time is allowed (this governs your strategy)
- **Preview the test**
 - Read through the test quickly and answer the easiest questions first
 - Mark those you think you know in some way that is appropriate
- **Read through the test a second time and answer more difficult questions**

You may pick up cues for answers from the first reading, or become more comfortable in the testing situation
- **If time allows, review both questions and answers**
 - It is possible you misread questions the first time
 - Cover the options, read the stem, and try to answer
 - Select the option that most closely matches your answer
- **Read the stem with each option**
 - Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true"

Strategies for answering difficult questions:

- **Eliminate options you know to be incorrect**
 - If allowed, mark words or alternatives in questions that eliminate the option
- **Give each option of a question the "true-false test:"** This may reduce your selection to the best answer.
- **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem**
- **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you**
- **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.**

Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one. For example, *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate an option
- **"All of the above:"**

If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility

Borrowed and adapted from the following website: <http://www.studygs.net/tsttak.html>

Multiple Choice Tests (continued)

- **Number answers:**
 - Toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- **"Look alike options"**
 - Probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out
- **Double negatives:**
 - Create the equivalent positive statement
- **Echo options:**
 - If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct
- **Favor options that contain qualifiers**
 - The result is longer, more inclusive items that better fill the role of the answer
- **If two alternatives seem correct, compare them for differences, then refer to the stem to find your best answer**
- **Guessing:**
 - Always guess when there is no penalty for guessing or you can eliminate options
 - Don't guess if you are penalized for guessing and if you have no basis for your choice
 - Use hints from questions you know to answer questions you do not.
 - Change your first answers when you are sure of the correction, or other cues in the test cue you to change. Remember that you are looking for the best answer, not only a correct one and not one which must be true all of the time, in all cases, and without exception.

Open Book Exams

In an open book exam you are evaluated on understanding rather than recall and memorization.

You will be expected to

- apply material to new situations
- analyze elements and relationships
- synthesize, or structure
- evaluate using your material as evidence

Access to content (books, notes, etc.) varies by instructor. The exam can be take home or in the classroom with questions seen or unseen before exam time.

Do not underestimate the preparation needed for an open book exam: your time will be limited, so the key is proper organization in order to quickly find data, quotes, examples, and/or arguments you use in your answers.

Preparation:

- Keep current on readings and assignments in class
- Prepare brief, concise notes on ideas and concepts being tested
- Carefully select what you intend to bring with you to the exam, and note anything significant about what you do not
- Include your own commentary on the information that will provide fuel for your arguments, and demonstrate that you have thought this through
- Anticipate with model questions, but not model answers.
- Challenge yourself instead with how you would answer questions, and what options and resources you may need to consider.

Organize your reference materials, your "open book:"

Make your reference materials as user-friendly as possible so that you don't lose time locating what you need

- Familiarize yourself with the format, layout and structure of your text books and source materials
- Organize these with your class notes for speedy retrieval, and index ideas and concepts with pointers and/or page numbers in the source material
(Develop a system of tabs/sticky notes, color coding, concept maps, etc. to mark important summaries, headings, sections)
- Write short, manageable summaries of content for each grouping
- List out data and formulas separately for easy access

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Open Book Exams (continued)

Test taking:

- Read the questions carefully to understand what is expected.
- Make good use of time
 - Quickly review the number of questions and note how much time each could take.
 - First answer the questions that you are confident of and/or for which you will not need much time checking out the resources.
 - Leave more complex and difficult questions for later
- Don't over-answer
 - Aim for concise, accurate, thoughtful answers that are based in evidence.

Use quotations

- to illustrate a point, or act as a discussion point
- to draw on the authority of the source
- because you could not say it better
- Quotations can be short. Three or four words can be extremely effective when they are worked into the structure of your sentence
- A reference to a quote may be as effective as the quote itself
- Guard against over-quoting. It is your words and your argument; extensive quoting may detract from your point or argument

Derived with permission from the The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning, National University of Singapore

CongressLink: Bloom's taxonomy definition of learning (and testing!) categories

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The Essay Exam

Before writing out the exam:

- **Write down their key words, listings, etc., as they are fresh in your mind.**
Otherwise these ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).
- **Set up a time schedule to answer each question and to review/edit all questions**
 - If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each
 - If questions are "weighted", prioritize that into your time allocation for each question
- **When the time is up for one question, stop writing, leave space, and begin the next question.**
The incomplete answers can be completed during the review time. Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three, complete ones.

Read through the questions once and note if you have any choice in answering questions

- **Pay attention to how the question is phrased, or to the "directives", or words such as "compare", "contrast", "criticize", etc.**
Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions. Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words
- **Now compare your version with the original.**
Do they mean the same thing? If they don't, you've misread the question. You'll be surprised how often they don't agree.

Think before you write:

- **Make a brief outline for each question**
- **Number the items in the order you will discuss them**
- **Get right to the point**
 - **State your main point in the first sentence**
 - **Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay.**
 - **Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail.**
 - **Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings and notes**

■ Teachers are influenced by compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer

Writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time-consuming and usually futile. To know a little and to present that little well is, by and large, superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly--when judged by the grade received.

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The Essay Exam

(continued)

Writing & Answering:

Begin with a strong first sentence that states the main idea of your essay.

Continue this first paragraph by presenting key points

Develop your argument:

- **Begin each paragraph with a key point from the introduction**
- **Develop each point in a complete paragraph**
- **Use transitions, or enumerate, to connect your points**
- **Hold to your time allocation and organization**
- **Avoid very definite statements when possible; a qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated person**
- **Qualify answers when in doubt.**

It is better to say "toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you can't remember, whether it's 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly.
- **Summarize in your last paragraph**
- **Restate your central idea and indicate why it is important.**

Review:

- **Complete questions left incomplete, but allow time to review all questions**
- **Review, edit, correct misspellings, incomplete words and sentences, miswritten dates and numbers.**

Short Answer Tests

A teacher's primary purpose in giving a short-answer test is to test whether you have a foundation of knowing the material, usually factual.

Prepare for the test:

- Develop summary sheets of the course material information.
- Focus on key words, events, vocabulary, concepts
- Organize and categorize the material, then review

When taking the test:

- Respond directly to the question or directive
- Focus on keywords and ideas called for
- Eliminate those that do not directly address the information requested in the test item
- Respond and write concise answers. Connect key facts into short sentences according to the test instructions
- If you can think of several answers let the instructor know. The instructor may give you a clue to the correct answer he/she's looking for
- A guess made with common sense could get you more test points than if you leave an answer blank