

## Answering Essay Questions

- \*Make notes on back of exam sheet (eg., ACRONYMS).
- \*Read directions carefully—should you answer all questions?
- \*Survey all questions before answering and note worth of each question.
- \*Make key question words.
- \*Number all parts of the question.
- \*Jot notes along side each question as you read it for the first time.
- \*Start with the easiest questions to gain confidence.
- \*Before attempting to answer, make sure you understand the question—ask the instructor if you are unsure.
- \*When beginning to answer a question, jot down any additional points and number your points and ideas in the order that you will use them.
- \*Your attitude when writing should be that the reader is virtually ignorant of your topic and you should explain everything that falls outside the realm of “common knowledge”.
- \*Use facts and logic, not your feelings about something; exams are testing your understanding of a subject matter.
- \*Answer the question directly and forcefully in the first sentence and include some of the words in the question to keep your focus.
- \*Include only one main idea per paragraph—state your important idea clearly and precisely, and then follow this statement immediately supporting factual or logical evidence.
- \*With multi-paragraph answers use transition words to give continuity, do not save the best until last; and end with a summarizing statement or two.
- \*Be neat—research has shown that when the same paper is written neatly or sloppily, the graders on average rated the neat paper a letter grade higher.
- \*Write on only one side of the sheet and leave a generous margin.
- \*Double space to make later editing easier.

## Test Anxiety!

### Physical Signs

Perspiration, sweaty palms, headache, upset stomach, rapid heart beat, tense muscles.

### Effects

Nervousness:

- \*Having difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper.
- \*Having difficulty organizing your thoughts.
- \*Having difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions.
- \*Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material.

Mental Blocking:

- \*Going blank on questions.
- \*Remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over.

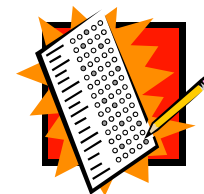
### How to Reduce Test Anxiety

- \*Study and know the material well enough so that you can recall it even if you are under stress.
- \*Learn and practice good time management and avoid laziness, procrastination, day dreaming.
- \*Build confidence by studying throughout the semester and avoid cramming the night before an exam.
- \*Learn to concentrate on the material you are studying by:
  - \*Generating questions from your textbooks and lecture notes.
  - \*Focusing on key words, concepts and examples in your textbooks and lecture notes.
  - \*Making charts and outlines which organize the information in your notes and textbooks.
  - \*Use relaxation techniques, for example, taking long deep breaths to relax the body and reduce stress.
- \*Don't think about fear; just think about what you have to do—keep your focus on the present.

Some information in this brochure is taken from materials from the University at Buffalo Counseling Center, the Academic Resource Center of Sweet Briar College and Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Developed by the  
Office of Retention  
Wallace State Community College—Hanceville

# Effective Test- Taking Strategies



## **BEFORE THE TEST**

\*Start preparing the first day of class. Read the syllabus carefully to find out dates of exams, how many there will be, how much they are weighted in your grade.

\*Avoid “cramming” by reviewing weekly instead of just at exam time. Review for several short periods rather than one long one—you will retain information better and get less fatigued.

\*It may seem old-fashioned, but flashcards are helpful ways to review unfamiliar or difficult terms or definitions. Review the cards in random order using only those you have difficulty remembering.

\*Approach the test confidently and get a good night’s sleep prior to the test—remember to eat healthy foods.

\*Arrive on time, choose a good seat, get comfortable.

\*Bring the complete set of “tools” you will need (pencils, erasers, paper, notes/ book for open-book tests, etc.).

\*Avoid sharing ideas with other students at the last minute, - this may confuse you.

\*Listen carefully to all directions given by the instructor.

## **DURING THE TEST**

\*Read all directions carefully—twice if necessary.

\*Pay attention to the scoring plan for the test.

\*Look over the whole test before answering any questions.

\*Appropriate your time with an “exam budget” and use every second effectively.

\*Do the easy questions first.

\*Read each question carefully. Make sure you understand each one before you answer. Re-read, if necessary.

\*Think! Avoid hurried answers. Guess intelligently.

\*Get all the help you can from “cue” words and phrases.

\*Rephrase difficult questions for yourself—watch out for “spoilers”.

\*Edit, check and proofread your answers before turning in the test.. Stay until the “bitter end” if necessary.

# **How to be a Master Test Taker!**

## **15 STEPS TO SUCCESS**

\*Keep up with reading assignments so that studying before a test will mean reviewing familiar material. Cramming of new material results in faulty understanding, poor recall, and low exam grades.

\*Complete long-term papers/projects well in advance of scheduled exams so your time will be free for studying.

\*Ask the professor what will be covered on an exam: which chapters, lab experiments, lectures, outside readings, etc. Ask questions about confusing material. You can’t remember what you don’t understand.

\*Plan the time you will spend preparing for the exam; to minimize mental and physical fatigue, plan a 5 or 10 minute break each hour.

\*To avoid re-reading text assignments, prepare them for review as you read by underlining key words and phrases or taking notes on major ideas.

\*Review each course once a week throughout the semester; reread class notes, review textbook underlining, etc.

\*Keep, correct and review all returned quizzes, tests, and papers. See the instructor if you are unsure of correct answers to questions you missed.

\*Study the instructor’s test technique to know what kind of objective questions they favor and what sort of essay answer is expected.

\*Prepare a list of likely test questions; turn statements into text and notes into questions. Answer each question in your own words.

\*Concentrate on recalling specific details (who, where, when) to prepare for an objective test; focus on broad concepts for an essay exam.

\*Reorganize material to effectively re-process and reinforce. This may require re-writing, which is an excellent memory aid. For example, if your history notes are arranged chronologically, rearrange them by cause/effect, problem/solution or biographically.

\*Change your point of view for deeper understanding and better recall. If you have memorized facts, look now at the application of the facts.

\*Review likely test questions (from step 9) with others in study groups of 2 to 4 after each person has first studied independently. Test each other, then correct and perfect answers using textbook and pooled lecture notes.

\*For problem-solving tests, review by memorizing formulas and equations you will need and then working numerous examples of each kind of problem likely to appear on the test. Study groups are particularly useful; check each other’s work to clarify your own understanding of the process used.

\*You’ll be able to recall more and think more logically if you get enough sleep the night before the test. All-night cramming can backfire by causing your overtired body and mind to “go blank” during the exam. Research shows a minimum of fours hours sleep plus a protein meal produce best results.

## **Strategies for Questions You Cannot Answer Immediately**

\*Translate the question into your own words.

\*Read each option carefully.

\*Use a strategy:

Attack unfamiliar words by sounding them out, by breaking them into familiar parts with meanings you know, by looking at the surrounding words and sentences for clues to the meaning.

Anticipate the answer and look for the one most like what you expect. Be flexible. You may not always find exactly the choice you are looking for. Then choose the best of the options available.

Use process of elimination with multiple choice questions for which more than one option is correct:

\*Pick out the options you are sure are correct

\*Pick out the options you are sure are incorrect

\*Rule out all answers which contain wrong options

\*Rule out all answers which omit options you are sure of