

Don't Get **Testy!** – Improve Your Test Taking and Test Preparation Strategies

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Effective preparation for a test begins long before the actual test date. In fact, the best preparation for a test begins on the first day of class and continues even after the test is over. The following information will assist you in developing test preparation and test taking strategies that you can use before, during, and after the test.

- I. **Before the Test** — Good test preparation begins on the **first day of class** and involves each of the following strategies:
 - A. **Keep up with class materials.** For on-campus students, this means going to every class meeting; for distance students, it means accessing the online course materials several times each week and keeping up with any new materials or assignments that are added. Describe your system for keeping up with materials for your classes:
 - B. **Schedule time every week for review.** You learn better when you space out your studying over a period of time. Allow time each day, starting at the beginning of the semester, for a quick review of what you have learned. Your brain requires repetition of material over an extended period of time in order to process the information and move it into long-term memory. If you study one hour a day for six days, you will remember more than if you study six hours the day before your test! Describe how and when you schedule time for regular review of course materials:
 - C. **Find out everything you can about the professor's expectations and grading criteria.** You should be able to find much of this information in your course syllabus, but if you are unsure about how your grade will be determined for a class, don't be afraid to ask! Make a list of **THREE** questions you should ask each of your professors about their grading policies, test formats, or expectations for you:
 - D. **Identify suitable study places and use them regularly.** A recent review of research about effective study habits suggests that it's not necessary to study in the same place every day, and that varying your study locations may help you remember more of what you study; however, all of your study spaces should be free from unnecessary distractions and should contain everything you need to study effectively (Carey, 2010). What are your preferred locations for studying? Describe your favorite study spots in the space below:

- E. Take care of yourself.** Eat healthily, exercise, limit alcohol and caffeine consumption (both can interfere with your sleep), and get at least eight hours of sleep per night.
- F. Practice ACTIVE studying!** Contrary to popular belief, information does not get burned into your brain just because you spend a considerable amount of time looking at it. People learn best when they find ways to engage with course material, to relate it to things they already know, and to interact with the material using a variety of learning strategies that represent the most common learning styles (visual, auditory, and tactile). Make a list of FIVE active study strategies you could use this semester. Next to each strategy, identify which of the primary learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile) the strategy would compliment. One example has been provided for you.

Active Study Strategy	Learning Style(s)
<i>Create a timeline to represent the events covered in American History</i>	<i>Visual and tactile</i>

II. During the Test — Every good student should have a test-taking strategy. The following are examples of some strategies you might incorporate into your test-taking experiences. ***Read through these strategies and place an asterisk (*) next to any that you could improve. Next, make a list of any additional strategies that you use when taking tests:***

- A. Be on time and prepared** on the day of the test. If your test is delivered at a specific time and you only have a certain amount of time to complete it, be sure that you are ready when the clock starts ticking.
- B. Think positively and relieve tension in your body.** If you've followed all of the suggestions above for preparing for your test, you should feel good about your level of preparation! Remind yourself of all the time you've spent reviewing and studying the material, and tell yourself that you are going to ace the test. If you feel tense, stiff, or nervous, try constricting certain muscle groups for 10 seconds and then slowly relaxing the muscles. Slow your breathing by inhaling slowly through your nose to the count of 10 and then exhaling slowly through your mouth to the count of 10. Repeat as necessary.
- C. Read over the entire test before answering any questions.** If something is unclear to you, seek clarification from your instructor. If it's not possible to communicate with your professor during the test, write a brief description of your questions/concerns and follow up with a message to your professor immediately after

the test is over. Notice if certain questions are weighted more heavily than others; you may want to start with these questions and answer all the ones you know first (see below).

- D. **Answer the easiest questions first;** this will give you the confidence you need to tackle the more difficult ones, and it means you are immediately earning points for each question you answer correctly. Do not get stuck on questions you don't immediately know; write down the question numbers and come back to them at the end.
- E. **Use the whole test time; no one wins a prize for being the fastest finisher.**
- F. **Use strategies suited to different types of test questions:**
 - 1. Multiple Choice: Answer the question to yourself before you look at the choices. Be sure to read all of the choices given and pick the best one. If you are not sure of the answer, cross out those that you know are wrong and make an educated guess from the remainders.
 - 2. Short Answer: If you don't know the exact answer but do know something related to it, write what you do know. Always write something; never leave a question blank.
 - 3. True/False: Always remember that for a statement to be true, it must be entirely true. Watch out for key words like *always*, *only*, *frequently*, *all*, *usually*, *often*, and *never*. Statements with these words are often false (Ex: The grass is *always* green.).
 - 4. Matching: It may be helpful to know if some of the matching items can be used more than once. If they can't, match the easiest items first and cross them off. Use the process of elimination to make educated guesses for items you are unsure of.
 - 5. Essay or Long Answer: Read the question carefully, then:
 - a) Plan – make an outline that includes all the important facts you want to mention in your answer.
 - b) Begin your answer by restating the question or writing a topic sentence.
 - c) Write your answer by elaborating on all the facts and ideas in your outline.
 - d) Re-read and edit.

III. After the Test — Like it or not, tests actually help you learn by requiring you to recall the material you've been studying. Tests also allow you to gauge your understanding of the information covered and to develop a plan for further review if your test score is not as high as you hoped it would be. If you don't do well on a test, take the necessary steps to make sure you understand the information that was covered...it may crop up again on a future test, on a

comprehensive exam, or in a future class!

- A. **Communicate with your professor** to resolve any unanswered questions or confusion you may have.
- B. **Correct your test and keep it as a study guide!** Keep any other study materials (flashcards, timelines, study guides) you created; these will come in handy if you are required to take a comprehensive exam at the end of the semester.

IV. TEST Time! — Assess your test-taking strategies by answering the following questions:

1. Preparation for a test should begin at what point in the semester?
2. It is better to study for a test:
 - a) for one hour just before the test
 - b) for one hour a day over several days or weeks
 - c) for six hours the day before the test
 - d) for a few minutes every day starting at the beginning of the semester
 - e) both b and d
3. What are the five basic types of test questions?
4. List two reasons why you should keep your old tests:
5. **True or False** — Students always remember information best when they've spent several hours reviewing the material the night before the test.
6. What one word in Question #5 should give you a hint as to the correct answer for that question?
7. List one strategy that you will use before, during, and after your next test-taking experience:

Before the test, I will...

During the test, I will...

After the test, I will...

References

Carey, B. (2010, September 7). Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>