

TOPIC

Test Taking

Helping students **PREPARE, ADVANCE** and **EXCEL.**

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CAMPUSES

Flanagan, Room 3620
(above cafeteria)
401-333-7440

Knight, Room 3540
(third floor, library)
401-825-1170

Liston, Room 2236
(second floor, next to library)
401-455-6116

Newport, Room 251 & 252
(within library)
401-851-1701

How successful students make the grade

Successful students prepare for exams by:

- attending all classes
- reading their textbooks and other assigned materials
- taking class and textbook notes
- studying all class materials on a weekly basis
- talking with their professors about any concerns regarding classes
- engaging a peer tutor as early in the semester as possible



What to study

Key terms: Look for key terms and their definitions. These terms are usually **boldfaced** or *italic*. Identify examples that clarify the meaning of the terms. Use class and textbook notes to identify key terms.

Enumerations: These are lists of items that should be looked for (*e.g., the top causes of stress, different types of clouds, etc.*) The list will have a descriptive heading and items may be numbered. Enumerations are often the basis of essay questions.

Points emphasized: Often, phrases such as the *most significant, of special importance, the chief reason* and others are used to call attention to important points in a book or lecture. When taking notes on such material, use an asterisk or some other mark to denote its significance.

Topics identified by the instructor: Pay attention to areas instructors advise students to study. Many instructors conduct exam reviews that will emphasize what material to study. Be sure to jot down any hints or direct statements instructors make regarding the content of the exam.

Study strategies to help reduce test anxiety

Test anxiety is when a student excessively worries about doing well on a test. This can become a major hindrance on test performance and cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses, among other symptoms.

Space out your studying over a few days or weeks and continually review class material. Don't wait until the night before to try to learn all the material. Spend the night before an exam making a final review of your notes. Then go right to bed without watching television or engaging in any activity that will interfere with the material you have learned. When you sleep, your mind will continue to work through and absorb the information you studied prior to sleep. Wake up an hour earlier to review your notes again.

The following are study strategies that will not only help you retain the necessary information but will reduce test-taking anxiety as well.

Before the test

Be as prepared as possible for the test. This is the best way to reduce test anxiety. You should also:

- Maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the test and during the test.
- Exercise for a few days before the test.
- Get a good night's sleep before the test.

Arriving for the test and before you begin

- *Be prepared.* Be sure to bring all materials you will need for the exam such as pens, books, identification, etc.
- *Be on time.* Arriving late will set you up to do poorly.
- *Select a quiet spot to sit.* Review your notes and avoid talking with other students to lessen any interference with your learning.
- *Stay relaxed.* If you begin to get nervous, take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.

- *Preview the test.* Before you answer anything, previewing the questions gets you thinking about the material. Make sure to note the point value of each question. This will give you an idea about how to budget your time.
- *Determine time needed.* Quickly calculate how much time to allow for each section according to the point value. Don't spend 30 minutes on an essay question that counts for only five points.
- *Do a mind dump.* Write down things used in learning the material that might help you remember. Using what you saw in the preview, make notes of anything you think you might forget (*e.g., formulas, key terms, etc.*). Outline the answers to essay questions.

Taking the test

- Read the directions slowly and carefully. Can more than one answer be correct? Is there a penalty for guessing? Never assume that you know what the directions say. Ask for clarification if necessary.
- Answer the easy questions first. This will give you the confidence and momentum to get through the rest of the test.
- Answer all the questions, unless there is a penalty for wrong answers. Focus on the question at hand; don't let your mind wander on other things.
- Go back to the difficult questions. Your subconscious mind will have been working on the answers to the harder questions, and you may have picked up information from the easier questions to help you determine the answers to the harder questions.
- Ask the instructor to explain any key terms that are not clear. Do not ask for the answer, but phrase your question in a way that shows the instructor that you have the information but are unsure what the question is asking for.
- Try to answer the questions from the instructor's point of view. Remember what the instructor emphasized and thought was important.

Don't worry about how fast other people finish their tests; just concentrate on your own test.

TIP:

Exercise, rest and good nutrition all help to reduce test anxiety.

The following tips can be used by test takers when they do not know an answer, and they are making an educated guess.

Types of test questions

Multiple-choice

Keep these tips in mind when taking a multiple-choice test:

1. The correct answer is frequently longer and more detailed than the wrong answer.
2. The incorrect options are often very similar and the correct answer is the one option that is quite different.
3. Words like *all*, *never* and *always* often signal wrong answers.
4. Words like *sometimes*, *usually* and *generally* are more likely to be included in correct answers.
5. If two answers seem equally correct, and there's no "all of the above" option, choose the answer choice that comes later in the list of answers. Test-makers frequently put the wrong answer first because they know that some students are quick to choose the first answer that seems correct.
6. Silly or foolish answers usually are not meant to trick you; they are wrong.
7. If a question seems unclear, ask the instructor to explain it.
8. If a question seems unclear, try paraphrasing the question. Sometimes putting things in your own words can help you come up with the answer. Be sure that your paraphrase matches the meaning in the original question.
9. Circle, highlight or underline key words in difficult questions. This can lead to better concentration and clear understanding of questions.
10. Think about what you have learned from the textbook and the instructor's lecture. Based on what has been covered in the course, which answer seems correct or the most logical?

TIP:

If you notice two or more answer choices that you are sure are correct, check for an "all of the above" option. If you are sure that more than one of the answers is correct, then the correct answer has to be "all of the above."

TIP:

Whenever the words "not" or "except" appear in a question, circle them to make them stand out. When a question has not or except in it, you are usually looking for the incorrect response.



Multiple-choice format

Incomplete sentences: Most multiple-choice questions start with an incomplete sentence stem. You must circle the correct ending for the sentence. For example:

All are contraindications except:

- a). Cancer
- b). Absent or diminished sensation
- c). Pacemaker
- d). Active tuberculosis

When reading a question like this, try to complete the sentence before looking at the answer choices. Sometimes the correct answer will occur to you right away, and then you can check the answer choices for the one that sounds like the answer you came up with. **Always read all of the answer choices** because sometimes there will be two very similar choices, and you will need to determine which is the best choice.

Read carefully; sometimes one or two answer choices will not grammatically fit the question. For example:

Johannes Kepler was an:

- a). Astronomer
- b). Astrologer
- c). Physicist
- d). Anthropologist
- e). Paleontologist

In this case you can eliminate answer choices *c* and *e*, because the article (*an*) is always followed by a word that begins with a vowel sound. If you are unsure of the answer, try reading the question with each separate answer. Sometimes this will jog your memory and help you make the right selection.

“True” or “False” questions

Simplify questions with double negatives by crossing out both negatives and then determining the correct answer. For example:

You won't be unprepared for essay exams if you anticipate several questions and prepare your answers for those questions.

___ True ___ False

The statement is true. It can be reworded to read, “You will be prepared for essay exams if you anticipate several questions and prepare your answers to those questions.”

- Remember that answers with qualifiers such as *generally, probably, most, often, some, sometimes* and *usually* are frequently true.
- Answers with absolute words such as *all, always, everyone, never, no one, nobody, none* and *only* are usually false.

Fill-in questions

Read the question to yourself so you can actually hear what is being asked. If more than one response comes to mind, write both responses lightly in the margin. Then, when you review your answers later, choose the answer that seems most right to you.

Make sure each answer you provide fits logically and grammatically into its slot in the sentence. For example:

Longer pulse durations are capable of generating a _____ muscle contraction, while higher frequencies are more _____.

- a) *stronger, uncomfortable*
- b) *weaker, comfortable*
- c) *stronger, comfortable*
- d) *weaker, uncomfortable*

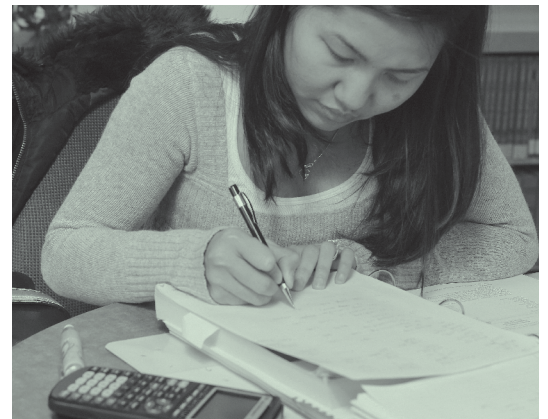
Remember not all fill-in answers require only one word. Write in all the words you believe are correct unless the instructor or the directions indicate only single-word responses will be accepted.

Matching questions

Don't start matching items until you read both columns and get a sense of the choices. Often, there is an extra item or two in one column. This means that not all items can be paired. Start with the easiest items and cross out items as you use them.

Essay questions

Essay questions require a good deal of preparation on the test-taker's part as well as a close reading. Many anxious students skim the essay question itself and plunge into writing what they think is the correct answer. Every essay question has two essential elements: the topic and the requirement or requirements. The topic of an essay is the specific subject you need to discuss. The requirements tell you how to approach or handle the topic.



I. Defining the topic: What is the topic of this question?

On occasion, Mark Twain's novel "Huckleberry Finn" has been criticized for its supposed racism. Yet, according to Twain expert Mark Fischer, Twain's novel is actually an attack on the institution of slavery, and the true hero of the novel is not Huck, but Jim. Begin your essay by summarizing Professor Fischer's argument. Then explain why you do or do not agree with it. Be sure to use evidence from the text to argue your position.

What is the topic of the question:

- a) *Mark Twain's novel "Huckleberry Finn"*
- b) *Mark Fischer's view of "Huckleberry Finn"*
- c) *Racism in the work of Mark Twain*

The correct answer is b. The essay question does not ask for a general discussion of the novel nor does it ask you to discuss the theme of racism in any other Twain book. The question focuses on Mr. Fischer's defense of the book.

2. Understanding the requirements. Every essay question has one or more requirements or tasks that you must fulfill. The above essay question has three requirements for you to address in order to get full credit: (1) summarize Professor Fischer’s position; (2) explain why you agree or disagree; and (3) use evidence from the text. If you fail to address any one of these, your exam score will suffer.

Case-based and application-based questions

These tests styles are unlike most tests you have encountered in high school and most college classes you’ve taken before. The typical high school or college test is a knowledge-based test. An application- or case-based text question requires that you prepare yourself in a completely different way! You won’t simply be reciting memorized facts as they were phrased in some textbook, and you won’t be applying any learned formulas to specific problems that will be laid out.

These test questions require you to think in a thorough, quick and strategic manner and still be accurate, logical and wise. This test is designed to judge your abilities in ways vital to the success of first-year nursing, rehabilitative health care, human services and education graduates. This is not something you can learn from taking a course or reading a book, but it is something you can develop through practice and concentration.



Strategies for case-based and application-based questions

1. Discard extraneous or distracting

information. Read the case or scenario and weed out the distracting information. Cases are frequently drawn from real-world experiences; therefore, the passage that you face may seem out of context and as though it begins in the middle of a medical process. You won’t have a nice title overhead explaining the general topic being covered but will immediately be thrown into the middle of a strange format that you do not recognize. Just remember that the questions themselves will contain all the information necessary to choose a correct answer.

2. Reading pace. Everyone reads and tests at a different rate. It will take practice to determine what is the optimal rate at which you can read and yet absorb and comprehend the information. Skim the question to look for surface-level knowledge and then read the question slowly to begin to focus on a specific question. You need optimal comprehension, not maximum comprehension, when reading. You want to optimize how much you comprehend with how much time you spend reading each question.

3. Factually correct answers may be not the right answer. Be careful of an answer choice that is factually correct on its own, but fails to answer the question, and so is actually wrong. Before you mark it as your answer choice, first make sure that you go back to the question and confirm that the choice answers the question being asked. Does the answer choice actually match the question or is it based on extraneous information contained in the question? How much you comprehend relates to how much time you spend reading each question. Practice will allow you to determine that optimal rate.

4. Avoid perfectionism. If you are deciding between two answer choices, and you’re reading the question over and over again to decide, you are in one of the most frustrating situations. Be careful: it’s easy to get so absorbed in a problem that you lose track of time. It is better to accept that you will have to guess on some questions and possibly get them wrong but still have time

for every question than to analyze every question until you're absolutely confident in your answer and then run out of time on the test.

5. Avoiding specifics. Answer choices that make specific statements are often wrong. Try to choose answer choices that make less definite and more general statements that would likely be correct in a wider range of situations and aren't exclusive. For example:

- a). *The nurse should follow universal contact precautions at all times in every case.*
- b). *The nursing assistant demonstrated completely poor awareness of transfer safety.*
- c). *Never allow new medications to be accessible in the unit.*
- d). *Sometimes, the action taken by the aide was not well planned.*

Without knowing anything about the question, answer choice *d* uses the term "sometimes," meaning there could have been a few strong points and weak points about the aide's performance. All of the other answer choices have a more definite sense about them.

6. Instincts are right. When in doubt, go with your first instinct. This is an old test-taking trick that still works today. Oftentimes if something feels right instinctively, it is right. Unfortunately, over-analytical test-takers often will convince themselves otherwise. You shouldn't have to twist the facts and create hypothetical scenarios for an answer choice to be correct.

7. Don't get thrown off by new information.

Sometimes test-makers will include completely new information in answer choices that are wrong. Test-takers will get thrown off by the new information and, if it seems like it might be related, they could choose that answer choice incorrectly. Make sure that you don't get distracted by answer choices containing new information that doesn't answer the question.

8. Narrow the search. Whenever two answer choices are direct opposites, the correct answer choice is usually one of the two. It is hard for test-makers to resist making one of the wrong answer choices with the same wording, but changing one word to make it the direct opposite in meaning. This can usually cue a test-taker that one of the two choices is correct. For example:

- a). *Calcium is the primary mineral linked to osteoporosis treatment.*
- b). *Potassium is the primary mineral linked to osteoporosis treatment.*

These answer choices are direct opposites, meaning one of them is likely correct. You can typically rule out the other two answer choices.

9. You're not expected to be a brainiac! The questions will contain the information that you need to know to answer them. You aren't expected to be a brainiac and know all related knowledge to the topic being discussed. Remember, these questions may be about obscure topics that you've never heard of. If you would need to know a lot of outside knowledge about a topic to choose a certain answer choice, it's usually wrong.

TIP:

Form study groups. Collaborative learning can be a real boost to your study routine.