



Taking Tests

Two types of tests:

1. Objective exams - - measure your ability to recognize and recall
2. Essay exams - - general in character; suggest broad topics; need to organize and express ideas clearly

1. Helpful hints on how to take objective exams:

- Read the directions twice and underline all significant words in the directions. (This rule also applies to essay exams.)
- Find out whether you will be penalized for wrong answers or whether only the correct answers will be counted. If there is no penalty for wrong answers, guess.
- Move rapidly through the test, responding to all of the questions for which you know the answer. Skip difficult and debatable questions and come back to them later. Don't waste time on items you can't answer quickly.
- Try recalling a forgotten fact by some relationship. Think of the book in which you read it, the page, an illustration, etc...
- Underline words such as "only", "always", and "not usually", before you answer.
- Try changing the wording of a difficult true-false statement so that you may be able to understand it better.
- Upon finishing your paper, reread it as a check against carelessness.
Whenever you are in doubt, rely upon your first answer.

2. Helpful hints on how to take essay exams:

- Read all questions through first, unless there is a large number of questions, each requiring a short answer. Make a very sketchy outline of the answers – jotting down key words and phrases. Do this directly on the paper or exam booklet that will be turned in. Do it especially for questions to which answers are on the tip of your tongue. Organize your answers in advance of writing them if you expect the reader to understand you. Read the questions through in order to:
- Allow you to answer the easiest questions first.
- Give you a chance to choose the questions you desire to answer if there are any options.
- Allow more time for any "blocked" information to appear.
- Give you a chance to apportion your time so that you may spend more time on weighted questions, which count for more points.
- Write answers that do not overlap.
- Make up your mind quickly on optional questions. Don't waste time worrying about your decision.
- Answer first the questions you are certain you know, following the sketchy outline previously accomplished. After each answer leave four or five lines for additional thought.
- Don't overwrite on an area you know. Spending thirty minutes on a fifteen minute question merely wastes fifteen minutes, regardless of the brilliance of your answer.
- Concentrate on one question at a time. Don't try to think ahead while still working on a question.

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- Be sure you know exactly what is wanted before you begin to write.
- Think more and write less. Teachers are usually impressed by brevity, conciseness and accuracy.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, try to reason it out.
- Begin your answer to each question with one or more summary sentences. Restate part of the question in the first sentence. Never begin an answer with “it is because” or “it is when.”
- Be familiar with what the directions require. Know the meaning of key words: name, describe, compare, contrast, etc.
- Never turn in an examination paper without checking it thoroughly. Check it for spelling, punctuation, neatness, and order, and also reread answers to be sure they say exactly what you mean.

3. A Reminder

- Poor grades on exams are largely (but not entirely) the result of poor preparation and/or undue fear of failure. The information in this and related study guide procedures can help you improve your preparation. Excessive fear of failure directs the attention of students to “How well they are doing” instead of “What they are doing.” You can easily see that good test taking techniques require you to focus on what you are doing. Recognize that concern for improving performance is appropriate, but making a mental catastrophe out of the possibility of obtaining a low grade will greatly increase the likelihood of getting what you do not want.