

Preparing for the Test or Exam

Before the test or exam

- Think about your strengths and weaknesses in terms of test or exam preparation and taking. Try to find more information from books, or the Internet, or seek help.
- Make effective notes in class and from textbooks.
- Review notes before and after class.
- Allocate time at the end of the week to carry out a longer review.
- Find out from the Instructor the following:
 - when, where and how long will the test or exam be;
 - percentage of marks;
 - what type of questions will be on (essay, multiple choice, true or false, short answer); and
 - will there be a reading list or information on topics?
- Organize your notes and assignments according to topics that will be on the test.
- Write up a test schedule.
- Test yourself or get a friend or classmate or family friend to test you.
- Sit in a good spot and try to remain calm.
- Recite and review regularly using both summary sheets and flash cards.
- If you run out of study time, try to at least survey the chapters you need to study.

Test or exam anxiety

- Make sure to prepare.
- Get a good night's sleep before the night of the test or exam.
- Make sure to eat something before. Fresh fruits and vegetables are better at lowering stress, whereas processed foods (artificial sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, chocolate, eggs, fried foods, junk foods, etc.) and foods with high sugar (i.e., candy) can induce or increase stress.
- Go to the test or exam with a positive attitude. Use "positive talk".
- Relax and carry out any activity that you find that relaxes you i.e., deep breathing exercises, etc.

Taking the test or exam

- Arrive early for the test or exam and make sure to bring all the necessary materials (pencils, pens, watch, etc.).
- Try not to talk to other students prior to the test or exam. If you feel anxious, take several slow, deep breaths.
- Carefully read the instructions and start with easiest questions first or questions that you know, and then go back to the more difficult ones.
- Make sure to read the questions carefully.
- Budget your time, so that you are not spending more time on a question that is worth 1 to 2 points than one that is worth 15 points.
- Try to answer all questions, guess, there is nothing to lose.
- Leave time at the end to check your answers, or should you have extra time, make sure to go over the answers.
- If your mind goes blank, carry on to the next question, and return to the previous question at the end.
- Do not panic if you see other students handing in their tests or exams.

Strategies to answer different types of test items

Adapted from Landsberger, J. (2003). *Study Guides & Strategies*. Retrieved September 12, 2003, from University of St. Thomas Website: <http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/>

Essay questions

- Read through the questions carefully, noting down marks.
- Set up a time schedule to answer each question and to review / edit all questions.
- 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.
- Incomplete answers can be completed during the review time.
- Pay attention to what the essay is asking for ('compare', 'contrast', etc.). See handout on 'Terms or directives for essays, reports, & answering questions'.
- Write down key words, concepts that come into your mind. Otherwise these ideas may be blocked or be unavailable when the time comes to write the later questions.
- Think before you write. Brainstorm and make a brief outline for each question and then number the items in the order you will discuss them.

Essay structure

- Remember an essay has an introduction; middle portion; and summary or conclusion.
- 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.
- Present what you know well.
- Write legibly.

Developing your arguments

- Begin each paragraph with a key point from the introduction.
- Develop each point in a complete paragraph.
- Hold to your time allocation and organization
- Qualify answers when in doubt (e.g., it is better to say "toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you cannot remember).
- Summarize in your last paragraph and re-state your central idea and indicate why it is important.
- Review, edit, correct misspellings, incomplete words and sentences, miswritten dates and numbers.

Running out of time?

- Outline your answers.

Matching questions

- Start by matching what you know.
- Then return to the matches you are unclear about and try to guess.
- If you have to match definitions, look at the meaning of the 'word' that you have to define.

Multiple choice questions

- Read the directions carefully and look to see if the question has one or more correct option/s.
- Cover the options, read the stem, and try to answer.
- Select the option that most closely matches your answer.

- Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true".
- Always guess when there is no penalty.
- Try not to change your answers unless you are sure of the correction.
- Use hints from questions you know to answer questions you do not.

Short answer questions

- Need to generate specific information.
- Read the question carefully, and note the number of marks. The number of marks generally indicates number of points the Instructor is looking for.
- Write short clear answers in simple sentences, packing as much information as possible.
- Write legibly.
- Make sure to check grammar, punctuation and spelling.

True or false questions

- Read carefully.
- Begin by marking the questions you are sure about and initially skip questions you are not sure about.
- Return to the skipped questions and look for qualifiers ("all", "most", etc.).
- Absolute qualifiers such as "always" or "never" generally indicate a false statement.
- Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities and make more modest claims, and usually indicate "true" answers.
- Absolute words such as "No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100 per cent of the time and usually indicate "false" answers.
- With long sentences, pay attention to the "truth" of each of these phrases. If one is false, it usually indicates a "false" answer.
- Often true or false tests contain more true answers than false answers. Though you should review the Instructor's previous tests for patterns.
- Make sure you try to give an answer, you lose nothing.