

# Test Taking Strategies

Examinations are a fact of life in college. But the only time an exam should be a trial is when you aren't prepared for it, and the best sign that you aren't prepared is when you have to stay up all night to "cram." Cramming won't do very much for you (except make you so tired that when you take the exam you won't be able to think clearly enough to answer the questions you DO know).

Here are some tips to help you develop test taking skills:

## BEFORE THE TEST

1. Start preparing for your exams the first day of class. You can do this by reading your syllabus carefully to find out when your exams will be, how many there will be, and how much they are weighed into your grade.
2. Plan reviews as part of your regularly weekly study schedule; consequently, you review over the whole quarter rather than just at exam time.
3. Reviews are much more than reading and rereading all assignments. You need to read over your lecture notes and ask yourself questions on the material you don't know well. (If your notes are relatively complete and well organized, you may find that very little rereading of the textbook for detail is needed.) You may want to create a [study group](#) for these reviews to reinforce your learning.
4. Review for several short periods rather than one long period. You will find that you retain information better and get less fatigued.
5. Turn the main points of each topic or heading into questions and check to see if the answers come to you quickly and correctly. Try to predict examination questions; then outline your answers.
6. It may seem "old-fashioned", but flashcards may be a helpful way to review in courses that have many unfamiliar terms. Review the card in random order using only those terms that you have difficulty remembering.

## DURING THE TEST

There are also some things to keep in mind when you are **TAKING** the test.

1. First, read the directions carefully!! Many points have been lost because students didn't follow the directions.
2. Remember to preview the test to see how much time you need to allot for each section. If the test is all multiple choice questions, it is good to know that immediately.
3. Work on the "easiest" parts first. If your strength is essay questions, answer those first to get the maximum points. Pace yourself to allow time for the more difficult parts.

4. Find out if you are penalized for incorrect responses. (This is probably covered in the directions. If not, make educated guesses. If there is a penalty, avoid guessing.
5. When answering essay questions, try to make an outline in the margin before you begin writing. Organization, clear thinking, and good writing is important, but so is neatness. Be sure to make your writing legible.
6. Save time at the end of the exam to review your test and make sure you haven't left out any answers or parts of answers. This is difficult to do under the stress of exams, but it often keeps you from making needless errors.

## **AFTER THE TEST**

1. If the instructor reviews the exam in class, make sure you attend. Many students choose to skip class of the day of the review because "nothing is happening" that day. On the contrary, this is an important class to attend because it helps reinforce the information one more time in long term memory. Even if you aren't interested in the "learning" aspect of the class, it is an opportunity to hear what the instructor was looking for in the answers. This can help you on the **NEXT** exam.

Keep in mind that there are things you can do before, during, and after exams that will help you succeed in the class. You may want to read and complete the [Test Taking Checklist](#) to evaluate your development as a test-wise student.