

Test-Taking Triumph

How do you feel about tests? If you don't like them, you're not alone—many people wish tests would just go away! However, a test can be a positive, helpful thing. Just like a big game or a public performance, a test can give you the satisfaction of a job well done, and can show you areas to improve on so you have a solid foundation for the next phase.



But does every test accurately reflect what you've learned? Not always! Most students have had the experience of walking away from a test feeling that they could have done better. What are some strategies that will help you do your best when you have a test?

Before Your Test

The first tip for test success is: be prepared. Don't wait until the last minute! If you know there's a test coming up, take a few minutes each day to study. This is the time to use your learning skills. Use graphic organizers like mind maps and timelines to visualize information. Ask yourself questions—and answer them without looking at your notes—to make sure you understand how concepts are related. The night before the test, be sure to get a good night's sleep.



Do you get butterflies in your stomach before a test? Don't be disturbed by this; most people do, and that extra charge of energy can even help you do better on the test. But too much nervousness—test anxiety—can block your memory and prevent success.

Turn your nervousness into helpful energy with positive self-talk. Remind yourself, "I can do this. I studied well for this test." Take a deep breath, relax your muscles, and imagine yourself doing something fun or silly.

During the Test

First, write your name on your test paper! Then look over the whole test to see what it's like. Read the directions for each section carefully. Mark questions that look easy and those that will take longer to answer. There are two kinds of test questions—objective and subjective—and these two types require different strategies.

Objective Test Questions

These test questions give you answers to choose from: true-false, matching, or multiple choice. Here are some tips for answering objective questions.

- Answer the questions you know first—then go back to the harder ones.
- Cross out answers that you know are wrong. Then take your best guess among those that are left.

- Don't change your answer unless you're sure it's wrong; your first instinct is usually correct.
- Statements using words like *all*, *always*, and *never* are usually false. Statements using words like *most*, *many*, *frequently*, and *often* are usually true.

Subjective Test Questions

Subjective test questions ask you to write out a response, whether a sentence, a paragraph, or an essay. Some strategies apply for all types of subjective questions, whether the answer is short or long.

- Read the directions carefully! Circle important words, especially for long questions and those requiring two-step answers.
- Budget your time. Make sure you know how many questions you have to answer (sometimes you have a choice). Allow enough time for each question.
- Answer easier questions first, then come back to the harder ones.
- Write neatly, using complete sentences.
- If you don't know an answer, come back to it after doing the others. Make an educated guess—partial credit will usually give you more points than leaving the answer blank.
- If you finish early, take the time to reread your answers and correct any mistakes. Make sure you answered all parts of the questions.



Essay Questions

Essay questions are subjective questions that require a longer answer. When you respond to an essay question, you use the strategies listed above, but you also need to organize your thoughts. It can be helpful to make a mind map or a rough outline of the main points you want to cover—just to make sure you don't forget anything!

What About You?

Think about how you've approached test-taking in the past. Which of these strategies have you already used? Which would you like to add to your skill set? With a little practice, you can tackle test-taking with confidence!

Outlining Practice

Use this format to identify main points and sub-points for the text “Test-Taking Triumph.” (Hint: the headers and sub-headers in the text will give you clues about what the main points should be.) Then, fill in supporting details for each section.

I. Introduction

II. _____

III. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Conclusion: