

TEST-TAKING SKILLS

The following information will help you pass many tests you will encounter throughout your life. Tests such as your drivers test, hunter safety test, ACT test, classroom tests, and many more. (P.S. you won't be tested on this!)

Scores on tests . . . more than just knowledge

There are very few people whose lives, at some time, will not be seriously affected by the score of a test. Regardless of whether a person is college-bound or plans on entering the world of work immediately after graduation, a test score will often affect the possibilities that lies ahead for that person. Gaining knowledge of content is the most significant step in preparing for an examination. The person may not even realize that scoring well on an exam requires more than knowledge.

Test-taking skills are those skills, independent of subject matter knowledge, which include attitudinal, procedural, and mechanical approaches to test formats and items that help ensure an accurate measure of achievement.

THE BIG FIVE PLUS ONE

Research on test-taking skills suggests five major categories of development. In addition, the ability to take advantage of poorly written items is significant as well. The "Big Five Plus One" include:

1. Establishing an appropriate attitude toward testing.
2. Familiarity with test content.
3. Following directions.
4. Progressing through the test.
5. Attacking difficult items/guessing.

Plus One: Tricks to "win more than you lose".

SKILL #1 – ESTABLISHING AN APPROPRIATE ATTITUDE TOWARD TESTING

1. Acquire the skill to control anxiety. The message is "Take one step at a time. A little nervousness is natural. Some tests are easy, some are difficult; some are short, others are long. There are very few people who will get everything right. Don't worry

about the things you don't know. Learn about techniques for relaxation and practice them."

2. Think positively. The goal is, "I'm going to do the best I can do," rather than, "I'll never make it through this thing."
3. Be physically fit. To perform well on a test requires that you be alert. A good night's rest, a good breakfast, no stimulants or tranquilizers, not drinking a lot of fluids, and not eating a lot are advisable steps.
4. Learn how to take a test. Knowing how to approach a test contributes to a positive attitude.
5. Know your personal strengths and weaknesses related to taking a test. For example, extreme nervousness, a tendency to answer a question too quickly, or spending too much time on difficult items are characteristics that can seriously affect scores. Establish a plan for compensating for these weaknesses. Most students have weaknesses of one kind or another when taking an exam.
6. Don't become so taken by developing test-taking skills that these skills become more important than the knowledge of content.

SKILL #2 – FAMILIARITY WITH TEST CONTENT

1. Become familiar with the five most common kinds of items that are given on exams. Know how to respond to each of the five. (These are multiple-choice, true-false, short answer or blank filling, matching, and essay.)
2. Know the purpose of each exam that is taken and what will be done with the results. Be able to assess the importance of each test.
3. Know what item formats will be included on a particular exam. Become familiar with the lesser-used formats.
4. Know how the test will be scored. How many points will be awarded for each item and how will incorrect answers be scored? The scoring for incorrect answers directly affects whether or not students choose to guess.
5. Know what will count and what won't count when a test is scored. For example, will spelling count for or against you on a social studies test? Do you have to show work on a math test to get credit? When answering an essay question in social studies, will capitalization and punctuation count against you if there are mistakes?

SKILL #3 – FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

1. Listen to directions, and you must ask questions about any direction you do not understand.
2. When reading directions, be aware of the vocabulary that is used. Know exactly what each word means as it relates to the exam.
3. Know exactly how to mark machine scored answer sheets. The directions say to “fill in the bubble completely.” Many students receive lower scores than they deserve because they do not follow the directions for completing answer sheets. This often occurs with district proficiency exams. And remember, most require a #2 pencil.

SKILL #4 – PROGRESSING THROUGH THE TEST

1. Know the importance of time management. View this skill as an area for development, just as knowledge of content is an area for development.
2. Scan an entire test before beginning an exam. Become adept at picking out the easy and difficult items without immediately trying to answer them.
3. Learn to skip items, then go back if time allows. Do the easy items first, then go back and do the more difficult items.
4. If an answer sheet is used, and an item is skipped, be sure to mark the skipped item on the answer sheet. This prevents answering the next item in the wrong answer space. Be certain to erase the marks after the test is complete.
5. When taking a multiple-choice test, read each possible answer before marking your choice. A student may read choice A and believe that choice A is correct without reading choices B, C, D, or E. It may be that choice D is a far better answer than choice A, even though choice A may be partially correct.
6. When taking a multiple-choice test, sometimes some of the choices can be eliminated, with an uncertainty about the remaining choices so that when the item is considered later, it will be easier.
7. Ask the teacher for clarification of an item during the testing period. When questions do arise, take the initiative, even if clarifying statements were made just before testing began.

SKILL #5 – ATTACKING DIFFICULT ITEMS/GUESSING

1. When encountering a difficult item, stay alert and maintain a positive attitude. Don't allow a difficult item or two to ruin the continuity you have established when progressing through the exam.
2. Know whether guessing is advisable. In most cases, it is a good idea.
3. Know the probability of getting an answer right when guessing.
4. Have a plan of action in mind when attacking a difficult problem.

PLUS ONE – TRICKS TO WIN MORE THAN YOU LOSE

1. Learn to identify cues and answer the question accordingly. Some of the more common cues that occur in exams are these:
2. A. Multiple-choice exam. . .
 - * the correct answer is often much longer or shorter than the incorrect options.
 - the correct answer is often qualified much more carefully or represents a higher degree of generalization than the options.
 - with five choices, usually there are more "C" answers than other alternatives.
 - if the last word in a stem ends with "a" then the test taker knows that the answer must begin with a consonant. Likewise, if it ends in "an," the answer must begin with a vowel.
 - look for resemblances between the stem and the possible answer. Sometimes, various forms of the same word will occur in both the stem and the right answer.
 - a positive statement is more likely to be correct than a negative statement.
 - oftentimes two of the possible answers say the same thing but are just worded differently. This is an obvious clue to eliminate both as the correct answer.
- b. In a true-false exam. . .
 - there are usually more true than false statements.
 - the use of the words "always" or "never" usually accompanies a false response. The use of words like "sometimes" or "usually" generally go with true responses.
- c. The right answer to one item of an exam can oftentimes surface in other items of the exam. It is not recommended that a student look for the correct answer in another part of the test, but to be aware of it.