

Foster Care to Academic Success

How to Take Any Test

You've studied and you feel well prepared. You arrived on time, rested and fed. You know enough not to study until the last second, so you're calm and collected.

Ladies and Gentlemen, turn your papers over ...

Ready, set, go! Here are some basic strategies for taking any test:

- Read the instructions **carefully** to make sure you understand what is expected of you.
- Read through the **entire exam**. Notice the point value of each section and then calculate how much time you should spend on each one – you don't want to spend half an hour on 10 five-point short answer questions and leave yourself only 15 minutes for two essay questions worth 25 points each.
- If you don't understand something, **raise your hand and ask the professor**.
- Do a "mind dump." Jot down important facts or concepts you will need to remember for the essay questions.
- Answer the **easy questions first** – this will get them out of the way and give you the confidence (and time!) to tackle the harder ones.
- When you look at the more difficult questions, **circle key words and rewrite, them in your own words to make sure you understand them. If you can't answer a question fully, give it your best shot – partial credit is better than none.**
- Answer **every question**, even if you're not sure of the answer, unless points are specifically taken AWAY for wrong answers. In other words, if a blank and a wrong answer count the same, make an educated guess.
- Use **all of your allotted time**. If you finish before time's up, go over your work. Check your answers. Don't, however, change an answer unless you are absolutely sure of the correction.
- **Concentrate on your own work**. Don't worry if other people finish before you.

Now, here are strategies for answering particular types of exam questions:

Short Answers

- Read the question carefully. Underline key words.
- Start your answer with a thesis statement containing key words from the question.
- Follow the thesis statement with a reason, example or explanation.
- Reinforce your answer with a more specific example, reason or explanation if you can.

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What was the significance of the Council of Nicaea in 325 a.d.?

The 325 Council of Nicaea met on the orders of Constantine the Great of Rome and was significant because it was the first time leaders of the Western and Eastern churches came together to solve a problem. The problem was renouncing Arianism, by adopting a creed that stated the divinity of Christ and His position of equality in the Trinity.

Multiple Choice

- Read the question carefully. (Okay, this will be the first step for ALL types of exams)
- Try to guess the answer before you look at the choices.
- If you are unsure of an answer, eliminate what it CAN'T be. Look at the choices – do you remember seeing any of them in the chapter? If you have never even heard of one of the choices and you are up with your class work, it is probably a distracter and NOT the correct answer.
- After eliminating what you can, take a logical guess – at least you have narrowed the field. Your first guess is usually your best guess, unless you receive other information further along in the test. Put a dot in the margin so that you can easily find the question again if you do find the answer further on, or so that you can go back and reconsider the question if you finish the test early.
- NEVER leave a multiple choice question blank – you have a 25% chance of getting it correct even if you guess.
- All-of-the-above questions. If two or more of the options are correct, usually all-of-the-above is the right answer even if you are unsure of the third option.

True-False

- Every part of the sentence must be true – if any single part of the sentence is false, the entire sentence is false.
- Pay close attention to
 - Qualifiers – words like “sometimes, often, frequently, generally” are more likely to reflect reality than black-and-white statements, and are often true.
 - Absolute words – on the other hand, absolutes like “no, never, none, always, only” mean that the sentence must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate false sentences.
 - Long sentences – long sentences often include phrases separated by commas or semi-colons. Each phrase must be true in order for the sentence to be true.

Essay

- Read each question CAREFULLY. Make sure you understand exactly what it is asking. Note the use of words such as COMPARE, DESCRIBE, DISCUSS or EVALUATE.

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- See how many questions you have to answer and budget your time accordingly. Begin with the questions you feel most comfortable about but do not spend more than your allotted time on any one question. Attempt to answer all questions – partial credit is better than no credit at all.
- Reason out your answer, and jot down a few phrases, before you start writing each essay.
- Make your main point, or thesis statement, in the opening paragraph of your essay, with supporting material in the following paragraphs. Give specific examples of what you are talking about. Be concise – don't pad your essay (too much) because the professor will know what is answer and what is padding.
- If there is a time sequence to your answer, write the essay in chronological order.
- Pull your ideas together in a concluding paragraph or at least a sentence or two, restating your main idea.
- PROOFREAD your essay to make sure your sentences make sense and you said what you meant to say.

Open Book

- In an open book exam, you are being evaluated on understanding rather than recall and memorization. You are expected to:
 - Apply material to new situations
 - Analyze elements and relationship
 - Evaluate using the book material as evidence
 - Synthesize different ideas
- Preparation for an open book test involves ORGANIZING your textbook and any other materials you will be using, so that you know what information is where and how to find it easily. Use sticky notes or color coding to differentiate concepts and ideas.
- When writing essays from an open book test, use quotations from the book –
 - to illustrate a point, or act as a discussion point
 - to draw on the authority of the source
 - because you could not say it better
- Quotations can be short – three or four words inserted into a sentence can be very effective.
- Don't OVER quote; the essay is meant to be yours, not that of the author of a college textbook.

Oral Exams

As a college undergraduate, you are most likely to face an oral exam if you are taking a foreign language. In a foreign language oral exam, you are graded in four separate categories – grammar, pronunciation, communication, and ease of speech or naturalness.

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- On an oral exam, presentation counts. Dress nicely and arrive a little bit early. Stand straight and keep good eye contact. Remain collected and calm as best you can, but if you feel nervous or there are distractions (such as something happening outside the window) take a deep breath and tell the examiner.
- Topics that tend to be asked on oral exams include family life, hobbies, music, school life, what you would like to do during your next vacation or what you did over your last vacation, and current events.
- Try to steer the questions to a subject of interest to you. For example, if you are asked about your favorite sport and you don't have one, say "I am not interested in sports but I saw a good movie the other day," or "I don't have a favorite sport but I love to read." Hopefully, the examiner will then ask you about movies or books.
- Say as much as you can, but stick to what you know.
- If you get nervous or off-track, STOP, look at the professor, take a deep breath, and start over.

Math Tests

- Look over the entire test. Identify questions you think you can answer right away.
- Work the easiest problems first. This will build your confidence and ensure that you don't miss any points you should have gotten just because you ran out of time.
- Work QUICKLY and CONTINUOUSLY. If you get stuck on a problem, move on and then come back to it if you have time in the end.
- Work by the clock – On a 50-minute, 100-question test, you have 30 seconds per question. Start with the easy questions, and when you get to the harder ones spend the allotted time on each one and move on if you cannot finish it.
- Show all of your work. This makes it easier for the professor to see how much you know, and to allow you partial points if you cannot finish the question or the answer is incorrect.
- Never waste precious time erasing – just draw a line through work you want ignored and move on.
- VERIFY your answers.
- If you finish the test early, go back and CHECK every problem.

If you panic in the middle of the exam ...

- RELAX; remind yourself that it's just one test and there will be others
- Take a few slow, deep breaths; try not to think about your panic
- Change positions in your seat
- If allowed, get a drink or go to the bathroom
- Ask the professor a question if you have one
- Remind yourself that you are doing your best
- Pause, consider your next step and take another few slow, deep breaths

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- If you've drawn a complete blank, pick a question and just start writing – it may trigger the answer in your mind
- Continue to work through the exam, question by question, step by step
- 😊 - this too shall pass!

Don't forget – there is always the chance of a burst of genius when you are taking an exam, especially if you are ...

Well-prepared

Well-rested

and

Confident

... and again, remember these words of wisdom ...

This, too, shall pass!

Good luck.