

# STRATEGIC TEST-TAKING: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE EXAM

Getting A's on exams is rarely due to luck. Achieving good grades takes long-term planning, preparation, discipline, and practice. Here are some basic strategies for better test performance. Try them out!

## BEFORE THE EXAM

- Know what the exam will cover. Collect study materials, such as class notes, old exams, the study guide.
- Allow enough time, preferably a week, to review your study materials and to create study tools. Spaced review increases retention significantly more effectively than cramming.
- Try studying in different places to vary the context you study in and maximize retrieval cues.
- In general, students perform better on exams if they prepare as if it were an essay exam.
- Test yourself as often as possible. Not only does this tell you what you know and don't know, but retrieving information by self-testing is one of the best ways to increase retention.
- For better memory recall, get a good night's rest the night before; avoid marathon or all-night study sessions.
- Don't forget to eat! Include proteins and avoid excessive amounts of sugar and caffeine.
- Be confident in your ability to do well! Use positive self-talk.
- Practice relaxation techniques in advance (such as deep breathing or guided imagery) if you are prone to test anxiety.

## DURING THE EXAM

- Ignore or avoid other test-takers; their anxiety might be contagious.
- Sit in your usual seat, if possible, but sit where you can avoid distractions, such as people leaving.
- Bring all necessary materials, i.e., pencils, pens, a watch, calculator, scratch paper, blue book, etc.
- Know exactly how long you have to complete the exam.
- Listen carefully to any verbal instructions.
- When you are given the test, take a deep breath, RELAX and read the directions carefully.
- Review the entire test before starting to answer any questions.
- Set up a schedule and budget your time. Be aware of how many points each answer is worth.
- Answer the easiest questions first.
- Change your answer only if you're absolutely sure that your second choice is correct.

## AFTER THE EXAM

- Review the exam and count the points. Could the TA or grader have made a calculating error?
- Identify if you missed questions because you couldn't remember it during the test, if it was something you had never studied, or if it was a careless error such as a misplaced decimal.
- Analyze the test-taking strategies you used. What worked? What did not? Did you start preparing early enough, or could you have started studying for the exam earlier?



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- Use this information to decide how you'll approach your next exam.
- Be gentle with yourself and give yourself credit for what you did right!

