

Strategies for Test Questions

Helpful approaches for objective questions, essay questions, and test problems.

Different kinds of tests require different test-taking strategies. This study guide provides some ways to increase your success with each type. Unfortunately, you still have to study.

Objective questions

True-false or multiple choice questions appear on objective tests. Since both types of question involve understanding a statement and making a choice in response to it, strategies for answering well are very similar.

- Look for the central idea in a question. What is the main point?
- Look for helpful key words like *always, never, none, except, most, least*. Underline key words if you are allowed to write on the test paper.
- Try to supply your own answer to a multiple choice question *before* you look at the alternatives. Then choose the response closest to your own answer.
- Mark an answer for every question. You may lose credit by guessing incorrectly, but an unanswered question will cost you credit automatically.
- If all else fails and you have to guess an answer, then and only then consider this advice:

The length of the choices can be a clue. When guessing, pick the long answer—it is easier for instructors to write short wrong answers than long ones.

If two choices are very similar, choose neither.

If two choices are opposite, choose one of them.

The most general alternative is frequently the right answer.

Don't change your original answer unless you're completely sure it's wrong.

Essay questions

When you answer an essay question, you're showing how well you can explain and support an idea, not just what you know. Keep the following ideas in mind.

- Read over all the essay questions before you start to write.
- Underline key words like *define, compare, explain, describe* or *discuss*. Jot down ideas on scratch paper, and then start with the easiest questions first.
- Think before you write, and try to outline your response. Remember, a good answer:
 - Often starts with a direct response to the question.

Mentions the topics or areas that the essay question describes.

Provides specific as well as general information.

Uses the technical vocabulary of the course.

- Write legibly. Graders sometimes presume your ignorance if they can't read your writing.
- Always write something and leave a space at the end so that you can add to your answer.
- Proofread your essay answers. A few minutes correcting errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling can improve your grade.



Solving problems

When you work on a problem, ask yourself three questions:

- 1) What are you really being asked to find?
- 2) What do you need to know in order to find this?
- 3) What does the problem itself give you that can help?

After working through the problem, look back at what it asked you to find. Does your answer cover it? If not, go through the three questions again.

Good problem solvers have these characteristics:

- Positive attitude. They believe that problems can be solved by careful, persistent (though sometimes lengthy) analysis, not by fast answers based on previous knowledge.
- Concern for accuracy. They read a problem several times trying to understand it. They review their judgments and conclusions, avoid guessing, and check their work.
- Methodical planning. They break work into parts and then solve it step by step, starting with the simplest step.
- Concentration. They use their energy to solve problems by talking to themselves about what they are doing, creating mental pictures, relating the problem to familiar experiences, counting, or drawing pictures.