

Exam-taking Tips

Objective exams

1. Read the whole exam quickly, answering only the questions you know right away.
2. Go back to the unanswered questions. Read each of them with a pencil in hand, circling the key words that identify the information asked for in that question. Underline words such as: only, all, always, never, sometimes, not.
3. If you are stuck on a multiple-choice question, read the question again, stop and think of the answer, then look for it.
4. Sometimes the process of elimination will help you answer a difficult multiple-choice question.
5. Do not automatically eliminate the choices “all of the above” or “none of the above.”
6. Always find out if you can mark more than one choice in answering multiple-choice questions.
7. Sometimes you will read a multiple-choice question and draw a complete blank. Leave the question itself and read each of the answers separately and thoughtfully. Read the question repeatedly with each separate answer.
8. Paraphrase or restate a difficult question in your own words and then think of some examples.
9. Use what you have learned from the test itself to help you answer the tough questions you have saved for the end.
10. As an absolute last resort, make an educated guess on the remaining questions.
11. Proofread the entire test before you turn it in.

Quantitative exams

1. Start with the questions you know how to answer.
2. When you go back to unanswered questions, read each one carefully for clues to help you answer these questions.
3. Use your time well. Practice time management.
4. Never just write an answer, always show your work/ make a confident guess.
5. Remember that you are explaining to the professor what you know, so do it logically and clearly.
6. When you have finished, check to make sure that your answers are logical.
7. If you think you are missing a necessary piece of information, check to see if you calculated it or if it was given in a previous problem or a previous part of the question.
8. Check to see if you used all of the data given.

Essay exams

1. Do not start writing until you have done some thinking.
2. The best way to preplan is to read the entire exam first.
3. Read every word of every question carefully. Quietly read the question to yourself to help you comprehend what it's asking.
4. As you analyze each question, ideas for each answer will begin to flood into your mind. Write them down as briefly as possible in the margin of the exam next to each question.
5. As you compose your answer, take advantage of your preplanning and stick to your outline.
6. Do not get hung up answering one question and write for so long that there is insufficient time to answer the other questions adequately.
7. Proofread your answers before you turn in your exam.

Adapted from Nancy V. Wood. *College Reading and Study Skills*, 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 1982.

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Skills Handouts

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