



Acing The Exam

Strategies For Writing Different Types Of Exams

3 Pillars of Good Test Performance

- Preparation
- Relaxation
- Positive Thinking

Before the Exam...

- Psych yourself up – be confident!
- Sleep, eat, exercise
- Collect your materials
- Glance at your notes
- Avoid talking about the test!
- Practice relaxation strategies – breathe!
- Sit where there are minimal distractions

During the Exam...

- Breathe
- Pay attention to the instructions
- Scan the test – note the kinds of questions and distribution of marks
- Plan your time
- Do “the dump”
- Begin with the easy questions
- Write neatly and clearly
- Relax and refocus
- Do your best!

University Exams Often Require You To:

- Go beyond the material that was covered in the textbook & the lecture
- Think about the relationships between key concepts & ideas
- Link together material from the text & the lecture & to think about the relationship of one to the other
- Cover multiple pieces of information at once to test your knowledge of course material
- Apply the theoretical concepts covered in the text & lecture to new situations

Multiple Choice Exams

- Read the “stem” carefully to avoid careless mistakes
 - Cover up alternatives before you read the stem
 - Process the stem
 - Predict an answer
- Uncover alternatives and read **all** of them carefully, even if the first choice seems correct
- Identify the best response

Multiple Choice Exams

- When you encounter a question with difficult or confusing wording, try the following:
 - Pay attention to **absolute terms**, such as *never*, *always* or *none*. Often they indicate that the statement is false.
 - Pay attention to the use of **negatives**, such as *not*, *unless* or *none*. It may be helpful to rephrase stems with 2 negatives in positive terms.
 - Pay attention to the words **not, except, and best**. These questions ask you to choose an answer that's the opposite of what you expect.
 - Watch for the **all-of-the-above** choice. For this to be the answer, every part of the choice has to be correct. Verify the truth of every part of every choice before you choose this.

Multiple Choice Exams

- Look for distracters. When reading the stem, cross out the distracters & underline the key points to help you focus.
- Rephrase the stem in your own words. Try to turn a question into a statement. Be careful not to lose the original meaning.
- Treat each alternative as a true-false statement, and search for the one true statement amid the options.
- Look at the question from a different perspective, it sometimes helps to clarify its underlying purpose. If debating between 2 similar answers, try to identify which is the worse answer, rather than the better one.

Multiple Choice Exams

- If 2 choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.
- Questions are not devised with a specific formula in mind. Don't fall into the trap of "picking C when in doubt" or other rules of thumb.

Multiple Choice Exams

- To change or not to change?
 - When **not** to change your answer:
 - You have already read the question carefully & analyzed the answers systematically
 - You want to change your answer because you think the revised answer is “what the prof is looking for”.
 - You think there is a double meaning or “trick” in the question.
 - You are in a rush near the end of the exam.

Multiple Choice Exams

- To change or not to change?
 - When **to** change your answer:
 - You remember significant new information that affects your decision about a question. Or if you discover important new information in another part of the test.
 - You are very confident that you misread the question initially.
 - You discover that your math calculations were incorrect.

True / False Questions

- Statements with *all, always, never, every,* and *none* are **usually false**.
- Statements with *usually, often, most, sometimes,* and *many* are **more likely to be true**.
- Read true/ false questions very carefully. One word will often determine whether a statement is true or false.

True / False Questions

- Be on the guard for false logic. 2 sentences can be true but connected by a word that makes them false.
- Study sentence length. All parts of the sentence must be true. A longer sentence is more likely to be false. Pay very close attention.

Short Answer & Essay Exams

- Read instructions carefully. Note:
 - how many questions you need to answer.
 - the mark distribution
- Stick to a time plan.
- Process questions to ensure you know how to answer them. Pay attention to the wording of the question.
 - Ask yourself what you are asked to do and how you are required to do it.

Short Answer & Essay Exams

- Take time to brainstorm & make a brief outline.
- Don't know the answer? Write what you can. You may get partial credit.
- Ensure all answers have a clear structure with all points evident and explicit.
- Try to leave enough time to review your answers at the end of the exam.
- Write legibly and clear.
- Double space if you can.

Exams Involving Calculations

- Try to predict the answer
- Draw diagrams to help you think out problems
- Rephrase word problems
- Show the answer in the correct mathematical form (decimals, fractions, etc.)
- Show all of your computations

Exams Involving Calculations

- Check your answers
- Use common sense
 - If an answer doesn't seem right even if you've found a matching answer, trust your instincts. Recalculate and find out where the error occurred.

Open Book Exams

- Aren't as easy as they seem.
- You must be able to locate the information quickly
 - Go through your notes & highlight the most important information
 - Know your textbook & use sticky notes or bookmarks to locate specific information
 - Write down all the important info you know you're going to need on one sheet of paper

Minimizing Exam Anxiety

- Prepare
- Take care of yourself
- Have a realistic view of the test
- Utilize relaxation techniques
- Eliminate negative thoughts
- Visualize success
- Avoid talking about the test afterwards
- Talk to someone about your anxiety

Post-Exam Strategies

- Try to determine why you chose an incorrect answer by asking yourself these questions:
 - Did I misread the question?
 - Did I make careless mistakes, such as reversing numbers?
 - Did I know general concepts, but not at the necessary level of detail?
 - Did I simply not know the answer because I missed class, didn't read the chapter, or didn't have enough time to review?
 - Did I run out of time?

Post-Exam Strategies

- Misreading the question or making careless errors?
 - Slow down
 - Cover up alternatives to ensure that you read the stem carefully, without looking at the alternatives
 - Leave time to check your answers
- Not knowing the answers due to missed lectures or a lack of review time?
 - Develop a good time management plan

Post-Exam Strategies

- Not knowing details?
 - Incorporate regular weekly review sessions to give yourself more time to absorb the information
 - Use practice exams or explain concepts aloud to a study partner to ensure mastery of the important details
- Running out of time?
 - You may need to study the material in more depth so that the answers come more quickly as you're writing the exam
 - If anxiety is getting in your way of your efficient use of time, contact Counselling Services.