

Eight Test Taking Skills



SKILL ONE: Read the test questions and directions very carefully.

Be alert to read the questions as they are, not as you would like them to be. Make sure you understand the kinds of answers expected, and how they are scored, and whether there is an additional penalty for wrong answers.

Pay attention to the wording of each question. *Contrast* on an essay question has a different meaning from *evaluate, compare, or develop* a topic. Ask your instructor for clarification if you do not understand the directions.



SKILL TWO: Plan the use of your time on an essay exam.

Look over the entire test before you start to answer any questions, listing key phrases which come immediately to mind as you read. Have a watch with you. Budget your time for various sections/answers according to the importance and type of each; allow a few minutes for a final proofreading. Make sure you are working rapidly enough to answer all the questions. Begin to work as quickly as possible with reasonable assurance of accuracy. Work fast on those items which will yield the most points in a given amount of time, and guess at questions you are unsure of as long as there is no penalty for guessing. Most tests are evaluating both your knowledge of subject matter and your ability to organize that knowledge quickly and efficiently.



SKILL THREE: Answer easy questions first.

On essay tests, quickly order the questions from the easiest to the hardest and answer them in that order, not overlooking those which carry most credit.

Working on questions that you are prepared to answer is one method to reduce anxiety. On objective tests, try to first answer questions that you know.

If there are questions of which you are not certain, mark them, and come back later. If you struggle too long with questions that are difficult, you may waste time and later find yourself rushing through questions, making mistakes on those you otherwise would get right.



SKILL FOUR: Pay particular attention to the wording of questions.

Watch for qualifiers such as all, must, some, great, much, little, and no. The instructor is interested in knowing when and under what circumstances something is or is not true. Examine all questions containing negative wording such as not and the prefix un. Read these questions very carefully to assure full understanding. Watch for use of inserted names, dates, places, or other details which could make a statement inaccurate. Look for multiple ideas or concepts within the same true-false statement. All segments of the question must be true for the entire question to be true.



SKILL FIVE: On essay exams know what you can say about a subject in a given amount of time.

If you have ten minutes to answer the question, know how many paragraphs you can write in ten minutes. Decide what kind of answer the question requires before you begin writing. Action verbs such as trace, compare, and define all require different approaches to answering. Jot down a brief outline before responding to a question. Responding to an essay question consists of an opening paragraph stating the main idea to be discussed, a number of intermediate paragraphs (depending on the time allotted and your speed in writing), and a concluding paragraph to show how you have dealt with the question in a significant manner. Practice this style of writing. Avoid long-winded introductions, and get down to business in your first paragraph. You want to work toward earning the most points in the shortest amount of time.



SKILL SIX: Be aware that in objective and multiple-choice tests the question may have a best answer and not necessarily a correct answer.

If this is the case, work toward selecting the best answer from those which are available. Read a test question and think of your own answer first, then look for it in the example given. If your answer is not in the example, read the question again and substitute each different answer. Try to eliminate all the answers but two, and you will have a true-false test. Be cautious about changing your original answer without good reason.



SKILL SEVEN: Answer every question and write legibly and clearly.

Attempt to at least answer partially those questions for which you have no immediate response. To help you recall information you may visualize the place where you prepared for the test, how you took your notes, or other images that may provoke pertinent ideas.

You will want your test grader to understand every word you have written because it is highly unlikely that the grader will give a student the benefit of a doubt on answers they cannot read.



SKILL EIGHT: Formulate a game plan for taking the exam.

A plan of attack is one of the skills to develop for taking tests. People who know what to do in emergencies seldom get upset. This same principle applies to examinations. You should find out in most cases what kind of exam to expect and make preparation accordingly. As soon as you receive the exam, survey it to find out how many different kinds of questions are being used. What do the directions indicate? Understand precisely what is expected. Plan your time. Answer the easy questions first and save the more difficult ones until later. Learn to analyze qualifiers, such as all, must, more, equal, etc., that can change the meaning of a statement. Recognize key words in each question. Outline for essay questions. Save a few minutes at the end of the test period to proofread your work. Consistently modify your game plan according to the subject matter, the instructor, and the type of test.