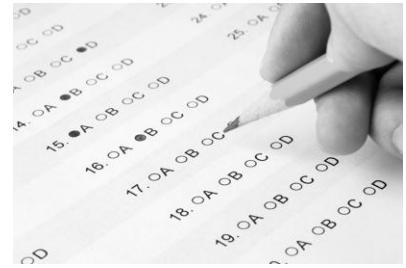


## Test-Taking Tips

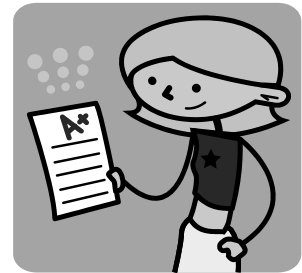
### General & Multiple Choice:



- 1) **Know how much time is allowed** (this governs your strategy).
  - a) Allot time for each section based on how many points each section is worth.
  - b) Write the time you hope to spend next to each section and move on if you're taking longer than you should for a section.
- 2) **Do a "mind dump"** at the start of the test; write down any formulas, equations, or other information that you have memorized right away. It's easy to forget these things during the pressure of the test situation. This way, you can simply refer back to them when you need to.
- 3) **Carefully read directions.**
  - a) Example: Choose the best answer, not just the right answer.
- 4) **Preview the test.**
  - a) Read through the test quickly and answer the easiest questions first.
  - b) Mark those you think you know in some way that is appropriate.
- 5) **Read each question thoroughly.**
  - a) Try to guess the answer before looking at the choices.
  - b) Then look at all the possible answers.
  - c) Remember the stem and statement when combined will be either true or false.
- 6) **Underline key words and phrases.**
  - a) If the question is complicated, break it down into small sections.
- 7) **Pay attention to words that can throw you off.**
  - a) For example, it's easy to overlook negatives.
- 8) **If you don't know the answer...**
  - a) Eliminate the ones you know are wrong.
    - i) Is the choice accurate on its own terms?
    - ii) Is the choice relevant?
    - iii) Are there any absolutes? Never? Always? All? None?
    - iv) Do the choices give you clues?
- 9) **If you're really stuck on a question, skip it and move on.** It's better to miss one than to waste time that you could use to answer other questions.
- 10) **Read through the test a second time and answer more difficult questions.**
  - a) You may pick up cues for answers from the first reading, or become more comfortable in the testing situation.
  - b) Also, remember that answers to some questions are often embedded in other questions.
- 11) **Review your answers** in the last few minutes of the test. *Do this even if you feel confident* to avoid "silly mistakes," leaving blanks, or filling in the wrong circles on the answer sheet.
- 12) **After the test,** use any opportunities to **review your performance.** See what questions you missed, and determine why you missed them. This will help you adjust for the next test.
  - a) If there are concepts you do not understand, go to the instructor or a tutor immediately. One missed concept often affects your understanding of the next concept, even if your exams are not cumulative. Stop this snowball effect!
  - b) If you need individualized study skills or test-taking help, come see someone in Learning Services, 1<sup>st</sup> floor Borders. They can be reached at 301-447-5006.

**Strategies to answer difficult questions:**

- 1) **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem.**
- 2) **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you.**
- 3) **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.**  
Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it.
- 4) **"All of the above:"**  
If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility.
- 5) **Number answers:**  
Toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers.
- 6) **"Look alike options:"**  
Probably one is correct; choose the best, but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing and thus cancel each other out.
- 7) **Double negatives:**  
Create the equivalent positive statement and consider.
- 8) **Echo options:**  
If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct.
- 9) **If two alternatives seem correct,** compare them for differences, and then refer to the stem to find your best answer.

**Fill in the Blanks:**

- 1) **Prepare by rewriting your flashcards or lecture notes and inserting blanks in them.**  
Then practice going through and filling in those blanks.
- 2) **Write yourself a word bank** when you begin; put a bunch of terms you know at the bottom of the sheet for reference before you read the questions.
- 3) **Read the entire question** – make sure you don't fill in a word that is already in the sentence!
- 4) **Check your spelling by using other questions** on the test (i.e. multiple choice, short answer).
- 5) **Make sure your answer fits** – logically AND grammatically.

**Short Answer/Essay:**

- 1) **Start by reading the directions and all of the questions.**
  - a) Decide which to answer if there's a choice.
  - b) Plan your essay.
    - i) Budget your time - answer all required questions to best of your ability.
    - ii) Create an informal outline or list of points.
    - iii) Look for action verbs such as analyze, compare, criticize, define, etc.
- 2) **If you are stuck,** start writing down (on the side or another sheet of paper) everything that you can remember about that topic.
- 3) **Draft your essay.**
  - a) Start with a thesis statement.
  - b) Address each of the main points in your outline.
  - c) Back up statements with evidence, examples, statistics, data, etc.
  - d) Wrap it up with a short concluding paragraph or sentence, depending on length.

- 4) **Revise your essay.**
  - a) Reread the question and double check to make sure you have answered all of its parts.
  - b) Look for ideas you left out or didn't support.
  - c) Clean up any faulty structure or confusing language.
- 5) **Edit your essay.**
  - a) Check for mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage. Being technically correct makes the work more impressive. Write legibly!
- 6) **If you run out of time, write as much as you can.**
  - a) Know if you get partial credit for responses. If you do, try to put at least something for all questions, even an outline of main points.



#### **Guessing/Changing Answers:**

- 1) **Always guess when there is no penalty** for guessing or when you can eliminate options.
- 2) **Use hints from questions you know** to answer questions you do not.
- 3) **Change your first answers** when you are sure of the correction or when other cues in the test cue you to change. *If you couldn't give a reason for changing it, then don't change it!*

Parts of this handout were taken from resources at Penn State Mont Alto's Academic Support Center. For more suggestions regarding test-taking tips or other study strategies, please contact a member of the Mount St. Mary's University's Learning Services Department for an appointment at 301-477-5006.