

Test Taking Strategies

A Handout for High School Students and Their Families

Tests. For better or worse, they are a part of life in high school. The good news is that there are lots of ways to prepare to take tests, no matter what subject they are in. Here are some tips from the Sunset Counseling Team to help you prepare for and feel confident when taking tests.

1. **Repetition:** the week before the test spend 20-30 minutes per day reviewing key points for the material that is going to be tested. For math and science, it might mean memorizing formulas. For English, it might mean reviewing the plot of the novel the class has been reading, or reviewing vocab terms. For history, it might mean memorizing key people and dates. You can use flashcards, lists, or highlighting your class notes to make sure you are reviewing the unit's key points.

2. **Read then Sleep:** the night before your test, make sure you read over your notes and key point flashcards or lists right before you go to sleep. Research shows that whatever we focus on last, right before we go to sleep, our brains will keep processing all night. It is like getting hours of free study time in!

3. **Rehearse:** for some students it is the time pressure or setting of tests that is tough for them. One way to help get used to those things is to practice being in the test-taking setting during study time at home. You can set up a study space that has just a chair and desk without any gadgets (like cell phones, computers, or TV) around you. Use a pen or pencil that can become your "lucky test taking" pen or pencil. Time yourself for 60-90 minutes doing a focused activity. If you finish your homework before that time is up, you might practice answering math questions for that amount of time, or free writing about the key points from your flashcards. The more you rehearse the routine of test taking, the easier it will feel to take tests when the time comes.

4. **Relax:** one secret to helping the answers flow from your brain to the paper is to help yourself relax at the beginning of the test before you start answering questions. You can start by taking 3-5 deep breaths before you read the first question. Also, if your teacher allows you to chew gum, try chewing gum during the test. Some research says that chewing gum can relieve stress and may even make blood flow to your brain so that it is easier to answer questions.

5. **Review:** on the day of your test, take your flashcards, study guide or key point lists with you to review on the bus, at lunch or whenever you have free time during the day.