

Test Day Game Plan

Taking tests and exams can be stressful and difficult. Oftentimes, the stakes are high because tests and exams can constitute a large portion of your final grade in the class. Exams often cover large amounts of material and can be very rigorous. However, no matter the length or difficulty of an exam, there are strategies you can use to decrease stress and improve your performance. This handout shares strategies to use the day of your exam to maximize your success.

Before arriving at the test or exam

Give yourself a pep talk. Tell yourself you're well prepared and "You got this!"

Think through these questions and scenarios that could occur during the test:

- How will you choose an answer when you can't make an educated guess?
- What will you do when you come across an item that you're not sure of?
- What will you do if you're running out of time?

Before starting the test

Carefully read the directions.

Survey the test. How many questions are there? What type of questions? How are the points distributed?

Sit up straight in a comfortable posture before and during the test. Research shows that practicing good posture before an event increases your self-esteem and confidence and can lead to better performance.

Speak positive and encouraging words to yourself, like "I know this stuff," or "I am prepared."

Make a plan of attack so you can earn as many points as possible in the given time. Decide the order in which you'll approach each question and how you'll allocate time. Write your plan on the test or on a scrap of paper.

Make a plan to complete test sections in order of their overall value so you will earn the most possible points if you run out of time to finish the test. For example, assume you have a 50-minute test consisting of the following sections:

- 15 Multiple Choice Questions (30 points)
- 5 Short Answer Questions (10 points)
- Essay Question (60 overall points)

Keeping the distribution of points in mind, what if you allocated your time among the three sections in the following order?

- Essay: 30 minutes (60% of your time because it's worth 60% of the points)
- Multiple Choice: 15 Minutes (30% of your time, 30% of points)
- Short Answers: 5 minutes (10 % of your time, 10% of points)

Another strategy is to complete the test in order of questions you know the best. Both these strategies help you earn the most possible points in the case that you can't finish the entire test.

While taking the test

Keep track of time so you can follow your plan of attack. Check the time regularly to stay on pace.

Answer the questions you know and can do most easily first. This will give you a confidence boost and help you to not use too much time on difficult questions.

Read questions actively. Underline key words and eliminate any distractors. Restate the essence of the question in your own words.

Use process of elimination to rule out answers you know are incorrect.

Use information in other question items on the exam to help you with questions you don't know. There may be clues or information that can help you figure out or make educated guesses on difficult items.

Don't stay stuck on one question for too long. Mark it and keep moving, then come back to it at the end.

Read all the answer options for multiple-choice questions before selecting an answer.

Review your answers and work after you have finished but before you turn in your exam. Make sure you have answered all the questions.

Connect with other resources

In addition to these strategies to use the day of your exam, check out our other resources for tips about how to prepare for an exam in advance:

- Check out our handout on [effective study strategies](#) to prepare for your exam.
- Feeling anxious? Read our handout on [Tackling Test Anxiety](#).
- Read our handout for specific tips on [Multiple Choice exams](#).
- Having trouble focusing on and comprehending your class readings? Check out our handout for helpful [Reading Comprehension Tips](#).
- Use our [Strategic Test Prep](#) handout to think through your exam and create a study plan.
- Stop by the Prep Center and talk to our resource teacher to create a study plan, discuss study strategies, or work through any other academic issue.

Works consulted

- Cuddy, Amy (2015). *Presence: Bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges*. New York: Little, Brown, & Co.
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- Holschuh, J. and Nist, S. (2000). *Active learning: Strategies for college success*. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Dodeen, H. (2008). Assessing test-taking strategies of university students: Developing a scale and estimating its psychometric indices. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33, 409-419.
- "Tips & Tools." Learning Center, learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/.