

Answering Multiple Choice Questions

Before answering any questions, read the directions thoroughly and carefully. If the directions are not clear, ask the instructor or test proctor for clarification.

Read each question carefully. See if you can predict the answer before looking at the options.

Read ALL of the multiple choice options in their entirety before choosing an answer. Avoid the temptation to mark the first option that looks good (sometimes a "good" option will be listed before the "best" option).

If you cannot select the correct answer after several seconds of thought, cross out any options that you are sure are wrong, put a mark next to the question, and move on to the next question. *The goal is to do all the relatively easy questions first, then come back later to the difficult ones. But don't rush. Be sure to give each question some thought before moving on.*

When you have gone through the entire test once, go back to the items you have marked. This time concentrate on eliminating as many options as you can.

Be wary of options that include extreme words, such as "always," "never," "all," "best," "worst," "none." (If you have to guess, it's usually best to eliminate options with extreme words).

Read each option as if it were a true-false question. Cross out all the options that are false.

Pay close attention to words such as "not" or "except." (e.g., "Which of the following is not true about?"). Circle words like "not" and "except" whenever you see them, to make them stand out. (Usually these words are a signal that all of the options are true except one, and your task is to pick out the FALSE option).

Don't look for patterns in the answers on the answer sheet!

If you have no idea what the correct answer is, guess. Some tips that may improve your guessing accuracy (however none of these are foolproof, or guaranteed to work) include:

If two options look similar, except for 1 or 2 words, usually one of these is the correct answer.

If two options have the same meaning, usually both are wrong.

If two options consist of words that look or sound the same (e.g., "interference" vs. "interferon") one of these is often the correct answer.

If the options cover a wide range of numerical values, a value at or near the middle is often a good guess.

An option that is longer or more detailed than the other options is often the correct answer.

The option "all of the above" is frequently correct.

Try working backwards. Read the answers first, then read the question.

If time permits, recheck your answers for accuracy before turning in your exam.

General Suggestions For Taking Tests

Plan your arrival so that you have plenty of time. Be sure to check your test taking material prior to leaving for the exam. (Showing up for an exam late or without a pencil is a sure way to focus unfavorable attention on yourself.)

Read all directions. Underline key words in the directions that give indication as to how your answers are to be recorded and how they should be worded.

Budget your time. Survey the test to determine the type and number of questions to be answered. Determine where you will start on the test. Check yourself at 15 or 20 minute intervals to determine if you are progressing at an acceptable rate.

Be aware that you may have problems remembering from time to time. If you find yourself blocking, move on to the next question.

Ask for help in interpreting test questions which you do not understand.

Be aware of any negative statements you are telling yourself about the test. Such statements as "I'm failing, I didn't study for this, and the test is too hard for me" are sure ways of increasing anxiety.

Do not be concerned with what the other students are doing. (Another sure way of increasing anxiety is to tell yourself you are the only one having trouble.)

As a general rule answer the easy questions first.

How to Keep Calm During Tests

Prepare well in advance.

Admit to yourself, "I will not know all of the answers." *Perfection is not required!*

Don't go to class too early. Other people's panic is contagious.

Don't quiz each other just before the exam.

Allow yourself time to "warm-up." Don't panic if you don't know the first few questions.

Pay attention to the test, not to yourself or others.

If you notice you are not thinking well, relax yourself physically during the exam.

Don't hesitate to ask for clarification.

Read over the test and plan your approach.

WHAT IS TEST ANXIETY?

It is a feeling of agitation and distress. Anxiety can be labeled as "anticipatory anxiety" if you feel distress while studying and when thinking about what might happen when you take a test. Anxiety can be labeled as "situational anxiety" if it occurs while taking a test. Some anxiety is natural and helps to keep you mentally and physically alert, but too much may cause physical distress, emotional upset, and concentration difficulties. Anxiety occurs in a wave, so it will increase from the time you first recognize it, come to a peak, and then naturally subside.

HOW DOES TEST ANXIETY AFFECT YOU?

Anxiety has physiological, behavioral, and psychological effects.

Physiological reactions may include rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, queasiness, dry mouth, or perspiration. Behavioral reactions may include an inability to act, make decisions, to express yourself, or to deal with everyday situations. As a result, you might have difficulty (a) reading and understanding questions, (b) organizing thoughts, or (c) retrieving key words and concepts. You might also experience mental blocking, which means going blank on questions and possibly remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over. Psychological reactions may include feelings of apprehension, uneasiness, upset, and self-doubt.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF TEST ANXIETY?

Usually there is some real or perceived activating agent. It may be past experiences of blanking out on tests, or being unable to retrieve answers to questions. It could also be a lack of preparation for an exam, which is a real reason to be worried about your performance. In this case errors in time management, poor study habits, failure to properly organize material and cramming the night before the exam might increase anxiety. If you have adequately prepared for a test, your anxiety may result from negative thinking and worries. You might be focusing on past performances on exams, how friends and other classmates are doing, or the negative consequences you expect if you do poorly.

HOW CAN YOU REDUCE TEST ANXIETY?

While studying: Allow yourself plenty of time to accomplish all the things you have to do before the test. Build up confidence by reviewing the material frequently. Set up your study goals and take one step at a time to not overwhelm yourself. If you are feeling anxiety building, there are several types of exercises which can help you get through this period.

Engage in deep breathing for 2-5 minutes. Close your eyes and concentrate on the air going in and out of your lungs. Take long, deep breaths, fill your lungs and abdomen, hold your breath, and then exhale.

Tense and relax different muscle groups. For example, if your shoulders are tense pull them back and hold them for a few seconds, then relax. This will help you to be aware of the relaxation of muscles and help you to relax more.

Engage in guided imagery for a few minutes. Pick a scene that you find peaceful, beautiful, and natural. Think about what you see, what you hear, what you feel and what you smell while in this scene.

Try to describe the anxiety. Focus your attention on your anxiety and think about the feelings it causes: how large is it? Where is it located in your body? What is its color, its shape, and its texture? If you can completely experience a physical sensation it will often disappear.

Aerobic exercise will help you to release anxiety and excess energy and, as a result, reduce body tension.

Engage in positive self talk. This involves: (a) thinking about rational responses to counter negative thoughts (e.g., instead of saying "I'm going to fail this test" say "I have the ability to do this, I just need to get some help."); (b) thoughts that help you to cope with stress (e.g., "a little anxiety is helpful. I will just try my best."); and (c) thoughts that keep you on task (e.g., "I can write this paper if I break it into smaller steps.")

Prior to the test: Arrive early so you can sit where you are most comfortable, and avoid people who are anxious and might cause you to doubt your knowledge. When you receive the test look it over, read the directions twice, and then organize your time efficiently. Don't rush through the test, but work at a comfortable pace and don't worry about how far along classmates are on the test.

During the test: Some of the exercises you can use while studying for a test will also be helpful during the test, such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation. You may want to take a break for a few minutes during the test and try them. Other suggestions to combat test anxiety during a test include: (a) get a drink of water and try to clear your mind, (b) move onto easier questions, (c) eat something or chew gum as an anxiety distraction, (d) ask the instructor a question, (e) think about post-exam rewards for a minute, (f) utilize positive self talk. Come up with positive statements which help to keep you calm, such as "this is only one test," "I am familiar with this material," "this test doesn't reflect on my intelligence," etc.