MAKING THE GRADE: TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

Learning Programs Presents
An Academic Skills Workshop
Today’s Workshop will cover:

- Study Strategies: Before the Test
- Test-Taking Strategies: During the Test
  - Objective Exams:
    - Multiple Choice
    - True/False
    - Matching
    - Fill in the blank (Completion)
  - Essay Exams
Study Strategies: Before the Test

1. Pay Attention in class
   - Points your instructor dwells on or emphasizes
     - Many times through **nonverbals** – so pay attention to these
       - Pauses
       - Stress/Weight in voice
       - Repetition
       - Class activities: what does prof spend time in class doing? Most likely important

2. Start your studying **at least** a week in advance
   - Plenty of time to map out a strategy of what you need to cover
   - Cramming (studying only one or two days before the test) is unproductive and doesn’t get results
2. The Spacing Effect / The Testing Effect

- Spaced study is greatly beneficial
- Distribution of material over a long period of time
- Start studying for an exam at least a week in advance

- Most students’ habit of cramming for tests undermines their ability to remember info long-term

The Testing Effect

- The act of retrieving information affects our ability to subsequently remember it
- Testing yourself over material is one of the most efficient uses of study time
- Doesn’t have to be formal—Flashcards, End of Chapter Reviews, etc.
3. Study your in-class notes

4. Have an eye for details
   - MC Tests usually test over details (not just big-picture ideas)

5. Practice
   - End of chapter review items
   - Even better: Try to get a hold of an old exam
     - Test Library at the LSC
     - Ask prof if they would be willing to show you a couple of examples of their test questions from a previous semester

6. Attend review sessions, if offered
   - Sometimes you’ll get clues into the exam
6. Study with others

- Just make sure that the group you study with is doing as well as, or better than, you are in the class
- Dialogue & discussion lead to longer-term memory
- You’ll also be sure that you don’t have some of the concepts completely wrong!

7. Find out about the exam

- Ask your prof:
  - How many of each type of question will be on the exam
  - How many points the exam is worth
  - How much time you’ll have
- Surprises are not fun on test day!
8. Get enough sleep

- Sleep is our body’s way of resting and recharging for the next day
- When we don’t get enough (7-9 hours for most people) we throw off our memory and concentration
Strategies: The Day of the Test

- Be sure to bring anything you might need: pencils, pens, scratch paper, a calculator, any notes/books the prof is allowing.
- Sit in your normal seat in class if possible.
- Don’t arrive at the test too early.
- Take deep, calming breaths and send yourself positive messages.
When you get the exam, look over the entire test
- Budget time per section
- Notice which parts of exam are worth the most points
- Write down mnemonic devices or formulas you’ve memorized on your test/in margins right away
- If there’s a part of the exam that you’re most worried about, complete that section first
1. Read the entire question
   - Cover up the answers and try to generate what you THINK the answer is
   - That way, you’ll have some of the components the “correct” answer will require in your mind before choosing
   - Read carefully! –Watch for negatives:
     - “Which theory is not associated with Thomas Hobbes?”
2. Read all the answers

The directions on a MC test usually ask you to choose the “best” answer. Some answers may be partially correct, but another answer might be the better one.

3. Eliminate the answers that you know are incorrect

Cross them out so you’re left with the best options, making it easier to compare the answers you think might be correct.

4. Skip the questions you’re unsure of

Sometimes, you might even find some of the answers to questions you don’t know embedded in other questions – so be on the lookout!
5. Do not spend too much time on any one question
   - Many times your 1st instinct is correct anyway!
6. If you must guess, it’s best to choose “B” or “C”
7. Consider “all of the above”
   - If you can find more two or more answers that are equally correct, and “all of the above” is an option, it is likely to be the answer
Hints for Tackling True/False Questions

1. For an item to be TRUE, every part of the statement must be true
   - Watch for absolute words, such as:
     - Always
     - Never
     - Totally
     - Completely
     - Must
2. **Qualifiers** restrict the possibilities of a broad, sweeping statement, making it more likely to be true

- Brainstorm some qualifiers

- When you see a qualifier, the statement is more likely to be true than an absolute statement is
Hints for Tackling Completion (a.k.a. Fill-in-the-Blank Questions)

- Studying requires looking over class notes and the text for the specific language used in the course.
- Write down what you’re thinking near the question.
  - You may get partial credit if your professor can see that you’re on the right track.
  - Don’t leave any space blank—even if you know it’s incorrect.
- 3. Make sure that your answer makes sense logically and grammatically within the sentence.
Help! I have to write an essay...
Relax!

- In many cases, students do better on essays than on objective tests
- Why?

BUT—still need to prepare to be successful

- Know ahead of time the format of the exam, and what you will need to have ready
  - Blue book?
  - Own notebook paper?
  - Write in pen? pencil?
What a Blue Book looks like

Less than $1 at the CSU Bookstore

Inside: blank notebook pages
Study Strategies: Before the Test

- Predict what the essay questions might be
  - What has your professor stressed in class?
  - Does prof rely on lecture for course content, or do you spend time in class discussing readings?
    - This can clue you in to what the instructor might ask you to synthesize in an essay
### Types of questions usually asked in an essay:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Answer Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare/Contrast two opposing views or ideas</td>
<td>Justify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticize</td>
<td>List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define</td>
<td>Outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Prove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagram</td>
<td>Relate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrate</td>
<td>Summarize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>Trace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Ask your prof for sample questions
  - Try to predict a question that is similar to, but not exactly like, the question from the former semester
- Know the material. Well. Memorization of facts is not enough
  - You must understand how major concepts in the class fit together
  - You must also know specific details are important to know and understand in support of major concepts
And the best preparation tool...

- Practice writing answers to the questions you predict
- Create an outline of how you would structure a response to the questions you’ve predicted
Essay Strategies: During the test

- Listen carefully to all of your prof’s directions
- It’s best to use pencil or erasable pen
- When you receive the exam, look over the entire thing – Note where there are more points allotted and budget your time accordingly
Common pitfalls on essay questions:

1. Not answering everything the question asks you to cover

- Take note if the question is asking you to compare/contrast, discuss, evaluate, explain, etc.
- Also carefully note the breadth of the question: are their multiple parts that you’ll need to address? Make sure that you address each part of the question
2. Leaving out important arguments covered in class

- Before you start writing, sketch out every argument you want to cover in your response.
- Create a quick outline on a piece of scratch paper or in the margin.
- Include:
  - Thesis statement — to guide the organization of your essay.
  - Bullet-point list for the body of the essay.
- Then, give yourself 2-3 minutes to just think. Ask yourself:
  - What am I missing? What arguments fit really well? Which ones don’t work?
- It’s difficult to slow down (to think) when your classmates are writing away furiously, but this reflection will bring you to better insights
- Handwriting: don’t worry too much about it...But be legible!
- Spelling and punctuation: not as important as in a formal paper
- Grammar mistakes are more important to correct
- Keep your introduction short and sweet
- Use examples to illustrate major concepts
  - Examples from the class readings
  - Or ways you have related class material to your own experience
  - This demonstrates that you have full understanding of the material (and you’re able to apply it)
- Citing sources: follow your instructor’s directions for citing sources and whether it is necessary to do so in your exam
Use transitions between paragraphs to make it clear when you are moving on to a new topic

- “In addition to...”
- “However...”
- “Furthermore...”
- “Despite these features...”
- “Another reason...”
- Your conclusion can also be short & sweet

- Emphasize the main point you made throughout the essay by reviewing your overall purpose/argument
Thanks for coming!

- Questions? Comments?
- Contact Heather Landers:
  - Heather.landers@colostate.edu
  - 491-1324