

Test-taking Tips

Before the exam:

- Know what to expect, or clarify with your instructor (e.g. when, where, how much time, format, content/weeks covered, recommendations for how to prepare, study tools).
- Make a schedule and spread out your studying – break your study time into 1-2 hour sessions and spread them out over 4-5 days to help you remember the information efficiently.
- Test yourself. This is the MOST effective form of studying – to make yourself come up with the answers. Make and take practice tests and problems, make and use flashcards, work with classmates to quiz each other, cover up handouts or textbook chapters and explain it in your own words, or write sample essays to demonstrate your knowledge and identify topics and concepts where you need clarification or further study.
- Use COCC Tutoring for help – if there are concepts or problems you are struggling with, schedule time with a [COCC tutor](#).
- Use lots of different studying strategies – summarize lectures, combine notes, create your own study guide, answer review questions, teach someone, draw/re-draw from memory, quiz yourself, or make up games or puzzles.
- Get enough sleep. Not only does sleep help your long-term memory, but getting enough sleep in the days leading up to the test will help you be more alert, contribute to a positive mood, and decrease stress.
- Be positive and confident – catch yourself if you start a negative inner dialogue and be positive, “*This is an opportunity*”, “*I’ve been learning since the start of the term*” or “*No matter what, this is a springboard to what’s next*”. Trust your preparation and ability to perform well.

Right before the exam:

- Bring everything you need to take the exam. Prepare ahead of time.
- Develop a pre-test ritual to put you at ease like taking a short walk, listening to music, or visualizing your success on the exam.
- Avoid contact with anyone who might cause you stress.
- Arrive early to the exam.
- Take a few deep breaths, give yourself a positive pep-talk, and relax.

As soon as the exam begins:

- Skim through the entire exam and estimate how much time you’ll have to spend on each question.
- Pace yourself based on the amount of points questions are worth (spend the most time on the sections worth the most points).
- 2 Minute drill: do a brain dump on scratch paper or the back of your exam – unload any information, equations or other information that’s in your head in case you forget it later (but don’t take more than 1-2 minutes on this).

Test-Taking Strategies:

- Read each question and instruction THOROUGHLY.
- Answer ALL parts of the question.
- Circle key words, absolute words (e.g. must, always) or rephrase a question to make it a statement.
- If you are stuck, mark the question in the margin to come back to and move on.
- Leave time for going through the test to make sure you didn't miss any questions and that you've answered everything.

Problem-solving sections:

- Answer easy questions first to help build confidence.
- Be sure you understand the problem – mark key words, identify givens and unknowns, sketch a diagram or picture of the problem.
- Highlight, circle, or otherwise indicate what your final answer is, but don't erase any work that you've done. You may receive partial credit for that work.
- Make diagrams and graphs big and easy to read.

Essay sections:

- Underline key terms in the questions.
- Make sure that your essay does what the instructions call for (common verbs in instructions are: analyze, trace, explain, discuss, compare, and contrast).
- Write an outline at the beginning of your answer or in the margins. This will help you structure your response and may be a source of partial credit if you run out of time.
- Answer every part of the question.
- Provide textual examples, references, data, graphs, etc.

Multiple-choice sections:

- Don't over-interpret questions.
- Read every answer.
- Eliminate answers that you know to be wrong or that are highly unlikely.
- Trust your first instincts and change an answer only if you actually remember the correct one.

If you get stuck...

- Answer what you do know first. This might help you think of more information.
- Look for clues in other questions.
- Think back to your studying; can you recall anything related to the topic?
- Consider the question from the instructor's point of view – what knowledge do they want you to demonstrate?