

Tackle Tests with Confidence

You have taken extensive notes, faithfully reviewed them, and stored all the answers to your made-up questions neatly in your brain. You're now ready to unlock the final skill that leads to your success in school: mastering the art of taking tests.

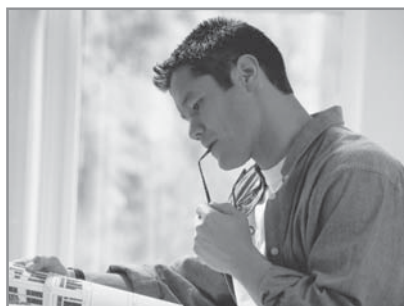
Doing well on tests takes creativity and strategy. Often, it's not what you know, but how well you take tests that decides your final grade in the class. A test doesn't necessarily reflect how smart you are or even how much you know about the subject matter. It does say something about how well you take tests, though.

This chapter will prepare you for test-taking battle by showing how questions are designed and the best way to attack each type. It also arms you with good test-taking habits and strategies.

Know the Testing Techniques

The teacher has spent weeks trying to help you pack a pile of information carefully into your memory warehouse. Now he or she has crafted a series of questions to make you haul it all out again.

Making up a good test is not that easy. You can bet the teacher has to learn the subject pretty well to make up good questions. (That's why in chapter 6 we suggested you make up your own questions while you study.)





Quiz Kid?

Are you an “expert” on something? Batting averages in the major leagues? Marvel Comics characters? Soap opera trivia? Heavy metal bands and tunes? Classic automobiles? Stephen King novels? Computers?

When you know a lot about something, isn’t it kind of fun to be asked questions about it? Do you sometimes enjoy watching quiz shows and trying not to be *The Weakest Link*? Do you ever get together with similarly minded friends and quiz each other?

See if you can capture that same spirit of challenging yourself on your next test. You’ll see a whole different way of relating to the testing situation. The test will be more like a game, and you’ll be the winner.

The reason your teacher goes to all this trouble is to check on the status of your knowledge. A test helps the teacher know what you’ve learned so that he or she knows what to emphasize in future lectures. It helps you know what you need to study harder to understand more clearly. A test is not supposed to be a battle between you and the teacher to see who can outsmart whom. But it does require a fighting spirit to overcome the normal test anxiety and deliver your very best performance.

To master the art of test-taking, start by understanding the methods teachers use to test your knowledge. Different types of test questions require you to use different skills. Each type gives you a slightly different opportunity to show how well you have prepared for the test.

Some ask you to recognize a correct answer. Some ask you to pull a fact out of your head. Others ask you to analyze a problem and devise a solution strategy. And still others ask you to assemble a set of ideas into a logical written answer.

Here are some hints about how to approach different types of test questions, both in studying for them and in answering them on test day.



True/False

True/false questions require that you recognize a fact or idea, but they often check whether you understand it in exact detail. If any detail is false, the whole answer is false. Watch for words that suggest that anything happens in only one way: *always* and *never*. Questions that contain these words are usually false. Also pay close attention to qualifying words such as *all*, *most*, *usually*, or *rarely*. Here's an example of true/false test questions:

Circle T for True or F for False:

- T F 1. Britney Spears was born in France.
- T F 2. Mozart never appeared in public because he was embarrassed to be seen in tights.

Multiple Choice

Multiple-choice questions require you to recognize a correct answer among several options. You might recognize this as the type of question asked on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. They can be tricky if the choices are very close to each other in meaning. But this type of question is easier than a lot of other question types because the correct answer is right in front of you. You just have to figure out which one it is.

To avoid confusing yourself, try to answer the question first without looking at the options. Then read each option carefully. If you don't recognize the correct choice right away, see whether you can eliminate at least one or two obviously incorrect choices. Then choose the best of the remaining two. And no, you can't phone a friend.

Here's an example of multiple-choice test questions:

Circle the letter beside the most appropriate choice.

1. The 42nd president of the United States started his career as a(n):
- a) peanut farmer
 - b) Hollywood actor
 - c) army general
 - d) Fulbright scholar



2. Elizabeth Taylor's favorite color is
- a) canary
 - b) scarlet
 - c) royal
 - d) She doesn't have a favorite

Matching

Matching questions test your recognition of things that go together. They can be like a puzzle. As you find a match for each item, cross it off the list. That narrows your choices when you're down to the last few items you're not sure of.

Here's an example of a matching question:

In the blank, write the letter of the slogan that goes best with each fast-food chain.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| ___ 1. McDonald's | a. Better run for the border |
| ___ 2. Wendy's | b. Billions and billions served |
| ___ 3. Taco Bell | c. Visit the colonel |
| ___ 4. KFC | d. Where's the beef? |

Short Answer, Fill in the Blanks

With these types of questions, you don't have choices to help you recognize the right answers. You have to retrieve the answers directly from your memory warehouse. Usually they test your recall of key terms and facts. If you committed to memory your class notes and the highlights of your reading assignments, you can probably recall the answers with ease.

Here's an example of each question type:

1. The Diamondbacks won the 2001 World Series because:
- a. _____
 - b. _____
2. The last three winners of the Super Bowl were _____, _____, and _____.



Story Problems

Questions like this require you to analyze a problem, recognize the appropriate method for solving it, apply the method correctly, and express the answer in the correct form. Such questions are common in math and science. Prepare for them by paying close attention when the teacher works problems on the blackboard, and by doing all your homework problems.

Here's an example of a story problem:

Sinbad has created a computer animation that takes up 30,450,896 bytes on his 200MB hard drive. He needs to back up the files, but he has only three blank 1.44 MB disks left (Sinbad can't afford a ZIP drive or CD burner). If he compresses the files, they will take up only 56,432 bytes. How much will Sinbad spend to back up all the compressed files on floppy disks if Kmart has disks on special for \$8.95 per box of 10?

During the test, if you don't see the path to the solution right away, ask yourself the following questions:

- What exactly is the problem?
- What information is provided?
- Which information in the story is part of the solution, and which information will I not need to use?
- Can I make a diagram of this?
- What have I done before that is similar?
- What form should the answer take?

These prompts will help you notice the clues provided in the question. Notice all the clues, write them down, translate them into math symbols and sentences, and keep looking them over. This will bring the moment of insight when you recognize the path to a solution.

As you work the problem to a solution, show all the steps and calculations clearly. Even if you've made an error, you might get partial credit if your method is correct.



Discussion or Essay Questions

Questions like these ask you to pull together what you know and organize it to answer a specific question. You could just write everything you know about the subject. But your grade will be better if you write thoughtfully in response to what was asked.

Here is an example of an essay question:

“Nancy Drew mysteries gave rise to the women’s liberation movement.”

Evaluate this statement and give at least three reasons why you agree or disagree, citing examples from specific Nancy Drew adventures.

Here are some tips for answering this type of question on a test:

- Before plunging into writing, make a mini-outline or mind map. Jot down the main ideas you plan to include, plus supporting details. Put the ideas in logical order. See whether they really answer the question. By doing this brief preparation, your answer will hang together much better.

intro: agree with statement
main points of women’s lib
end powerlessness
define own destiny w/o men
actively pursue goals
character of Nancy Drew (w/examples)
self-reliant
owns car
enlists help of women to solve crimes
effect on readers
visualize another way
feel empowered
sisterhood with other N.D. readers
conclusion: driving force behind women’s lib.



- Begin your essay by rephrasing the question as an introductory statement:

Nancy Drew mysteries, first published in 1930, provided the model for generations of women that culminated in the women's liberation movement.

- The body of your essay should build on your opening statement. It can be anywhere from one paragraph to several paragraphs long. It should give reasons for your statement and include details and examples to make your points.
- End with a concise statement that captures the overall theme of your answer and brings it to a logical close:
Thus, embodying the very characteristics that men have long suppressed, the character of Nancy Drew stands as a beacon for the army of women, young and old, who toppled the male chauvinists in the 1970s and who continue to define their own destiny today.
- Quickly review what you wrote just to be sure your grammar and facts are correct.
- If you worry that you can't write well under pressure, take heart: Even poor writers can win points if they include the main ideas the teacher is looking for. Take advantage of the mini-outline strategy to make sure you include those main ideas in your answer. If you're not sure you got your ideas across, underline the key phrases to make them stand out.



Key Terms in Essay Questions

Certain words tend to show up often in essay questions. Here's what your teacher is really asking you to do when he or she uses one of these words:

analyze—take the subject apart and highlight the interrelationships of parts.

compare—draw out similarities between two items.

contrast—draw out the differences between two items.

critique—analyze an idea in detail and then present your judgment.

define—explain the meaning of a term or concept.

describe—give an overview and details.

(continues)



Key Terms in Essay Questions (continued)

discuss—give reasons and details, especially about two sides of an issue.

evaluate—look at both sides of an issue and state your viewpoint, citing evidence to support your view.

explain—state why and how something happens or happened.

illustrate—give examples of how an idea works in different circumstances.

interpret—describe the subject's meaning and relate it to examples.

justify—explain why.

list—itemize a set of concepts in brief form.

outline—sketch the main points, showing the structure of the subject matter.

prove—present documented facts that support a point of view.

relate—draw connections between dissimilar ideas.

state—use precise terms to describe rules, laws, opinions, and so on.

summarize—give a concise overview that preserves the meaning.

trace—give a historical progression or development.



Mini-Quiz

Name the seven different types of test questions discussed in this chapter:



Develop Good Test-Taking Habits

Other than taking excellent notes, completing assignments, and studying hard for specific types of questions, what can you do to give yourself a head start on test day? Develop good test-taking habits. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Get a good night's sleep.** Don't expect your mind to deliver peak performance if you stayed up half the night cramming. You're better off resting to prepare your mind for quality thinking. Remember that a good night's sleep means seven to nine hours.
2. **Eat a healthy meal.** Inhale a bag of chips right before the test and your reward is indigestion. Instead, eat a light meal at least an hour before the test, including fruits and whole-grain breads or cereals—all excellent brain foods. You'll have energy for the task ahead.
3. **Dress up.** Take a little extra care with your appearance on test day. If you feel good about how you look, you'll stand a little taller and think a little more quickly. Relaxed and confident, you'll be more ready to concentrate on the test.
4. **Bring the needed tools.** Before you leave home, do a mental rundown of everything you need: a watch, extra pencils, erasers, a ruler, a calculator, test booklets, paper, or whatever. Having the right tools will help you focus on the test instead of scrambling around to borrow what you forgot.
5. **Arrive early.** Find a seat where you can be quiet and undisturbed, but where you can easily see and hear the teacher's test instructions. During the moments before the test, take several deep breaths and imagine yourself answering every question with ease. This step is important. It gives you a head start on all those folks who stroll in at the last minute.
6. **Avoid pretest chatter.** Students are often seen testing each other during the hour before an exam. Avoid this unsystematic last-minute cramming. It might confuse you more than help you, and you risk becoming anxious. Consult your notes only if you have a specific question. That way you implant nothing but correct information in your brain.



7. **Write carefully.** Your test sheet should reflect the same care you have shown with your behavior in class. Neatness counts. Take care to mark your answer sheet correctly, especially if you skip around between questions. That's the only way to receive full credit for each correct answer.
8. **Take mini-breaks.** Test-taking can be intense. A 20-second time-out for a yawn and stretch can do wonders to recharge your batteries and clear your mind. Rest before you get tired.

Have a Plan of Attack

Here's a five-point strategy to follow from the time you receive your test paper until after you turn it in. This strategy will help you get the highest grade possible on the test.

1. **Jot down notes and formulas.** As soon as you have written your name on the test paper, write down any important notes or formulas while they're still fresh in your memory. These notes might help you answer questions later.
2. **Read the instructions.** Test formats vary with your teacher's mood, so don't count on this test being just like the last one. Read and understand exactly what's required of you and how the test will be scored. For example, on some standardized tests, wrong answers are actually subtracted from your score; in this case, you would not want to take a chance on guessing the answers.
3. **Scan the test.** Look it over to see what kinds of questions you need to answer, noting the ones that you can do quickly and accurately. See how many points each section is worth in calculating your grade.
4. **Budget your time.** Quickly map out how many minutes you can devote to each section of the test. Put most of your time toward the sections that count the most in your final grade. If three essay questions together are worth 75 points on a 100-point test, don't spend more than one-quarter of your time on the remaining questions. You need time to answer all the questions if you intend to get a good grade. If you do run short of time, jot down at least the main points of your essay, with an explanation to the teacher such as "I ran out of time." If your points are



good and the teacher believes you are sincere, you might earn partial credit.

5. **Answer the simple questions first.** True/false, multiple-choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, and short-answer questions can usually be answered quickly. Tackle these first to build momentum and increase your confidence. (But watch out! Don't work so fast that you fail to read these questions carefully.)
6. **Answer the remaining questions.** Start from the beginning and work your way to the end. This technique helps you avoid skipping questions. If you must skip one because you don't know the answer, put a check mark next to it so that you can return to it quickly later. As you continue through the test, you might think of clues to help answer the questions you skipped. In some cases the correct answers are revealed in other test questions.
7. **Read questions carefully.** Don't decide on an answer until you've read the entire question. This is a common mistake. People tend to see what they expect to see, when what's really there is slightly different. Take a closer look before drawing any conclusions.
8. **Ask for clarification.** If you truly don't understand a question, ask the teacher to rephrase it for you. But speak only to the teacher. Otherwise, you might be accused of cheating.
9. **Don't second-guess your answers.** You'll improve your chances for high grades if you avoid looking at the pattern of previous answers on your answer sheet. If you do see a pattern (A, A, B, B, C, C, and so on), don't be fooled into making any changes. You'll do much better if you respond based on what you know about the subject. If you start to doubt one of your answers, but you're not absolutely sure it's wrong, don't change it. Studies show that your first hunch is often the correct one.
10. **Be creative.** Sometimes the solution to a problem is not obvious. This can happen even if you're well prepared. In this case, relax and let your mind wander back over all your notes and homework problems. Use your imagination to create links between this tough problem and what you've been studying. Draw a picture to help you think it through. Chances are, you'll stumble on a clue that will lead you to a solution.



11. **Include details.** Load your answers with relevant facts. These show how well you understand the subject matter and earn you maximum credit. If an essay question has you baffled, try writing as many relevant details as you can, even if they do not add up to the answer that the teacher was looking for. Some teachers will give you points for showing that you know a lot about the subject. Others will take off points for citing facts that don't contribute to the desired answer, so you'll have to use your judgment. Above all, avoid trying to fake your way to an answer. Teachers can easily spot vague answers that anyone could write without ever taking the class.
12. **Have reasons for each answer.** Ask yourself how you know each answer is correct. This builds your confidence and helps later if you dispute the way a teacher graded your answer. If you can give a convincing argument for how you arrived at your answer, you might get those points added back to your score.
13. **If you're stumped, don't panic.** Breathe normally and let your mind float outside of yourself for a moment. This detaches your mind from the panic. It shuts up that little inner voice that's predicting doom and gloom for your entire future based on the results of this test. All that matters is what's happening right here, right now. After all, it's only a test, not a matter of life and death.
14. **Review the test.** If you have time left over, take a few moments to relax and clear your mind. Then review your test one more time. Reread the test instructions. Start at the beginning and work your way through to the end, checking each answer. Make sure you have shown all your work and written each answer neatly. There's no shame in being the last student to finish. Use every available minute to perfect your work, and don't hand it in until you're convinced you've done your best.
15. **Reward yourself.** When the test is over, celebrate! Treat yourself to watching a video, having a special meal, or playing your favorite sport. The goal is to link studying and test-taking with a little fun. You'll look forward to studying for future tests and the good times that follow.



Mini-Quiz

Name the five good test-taking habits you can learn from this chapter:

Review Your Results

When you get your test score back, take a few moments to bask in the glory of your victory. You followed your strategy, and now maybe there's a big, juicy *A* on your paper. Enjoy the warm feeling of success. It's a feeling you'll want to experience again and again.

To make sure you do, pay careful attention to the lecture just after the test. The teacher might review questions, and those may appear on future tests, such as a final exam. Get them all down in your notes, whether you got them right or wrong on the test. This post-test review lets you know what material your teacher feels is important. When you know that, it's easy to review for upcoming tests.

Learn from Your Mistakes

What if you didn't get an *A* on the test? The first thing you need to do is think positive! Don't compare your grade to what other students got. Rather, focus on your past successes and remind yourself that you have other successes to look forward to.

When you're over the initial shock and have regained a positive attitude, follow these five steps to move closer to your goal of high grades:

1. **Check for grading errors.** Teachers, being human, sometimes make mistakes. They might even write a clinker question that really has two correct answers. You might be able to improve your score if you can demonstrate why your answer is reasonable.



2. **Talk with your teacher.** Most teachers will go out of their way to help you, especially if you are obviously trying hard. They recognize that your learning depends in part on how well they do their job. Don't accept a low score as final until you've sorted things out with the person giving out the grades.
3. **Find a positive message.** You may feel like pitching the test in the nearest trashcan. Resist the temptation. It's easier to achieve top grades when you make a habit of gaining from your experiences. If you missed getting an *A*, review the test (however painful it may feel) to find out where things went wrong. Were your notes not detailed enough? Did you skip the reading assignments? Did you misread a problem? Did you overlook important test instructions? On essay questions, pay attention to the teacher's written comments. If you have the courage to review your test, you have what it takes to get a better grade next time.
4. **Vow to do better.** If your score is not up to your standards, make up your mind to improve it on the next test. One low grade is not a disaster. You can often revise your strategy and raise your future scores to the levels you are hoping for.
5. **Attend a "help session."** There are often help sessions available to students during, or sometimes after, the school day. These are often led by other students, who can sometimes explain things differently than a teacher might. These are free and worth the time and effort to attend.



What Will Your Next Test Be Like?

What types of questions appear on tests in your chosen subject? Which suggestions in this chapter apply to those types of questions? List the techniques you plan to try on your next test in this subject.



***Latanya***

Latanya had her reasons to be nervous about the French exam. Her family had faced several moves recently because of plant closings, and here she was at a brand-new school in mid-December, facing a test tomorrow with a brand-new teacher, in the subject she loved best. Super conscientious, Latanya was eager to do well, but she knew that occasionally her over-eagerness played havoc with her mind during tests.

Earlier this fall, at the school she used to attend, her mind had gone blank for a few minutes when she stumbled over a verb she was supposed to conjugate. She managed to pull through, but she felt humiliated at the less-than-stellar grade that she got on that test.

Latanya shuddered thinking back on that experience. She knew it would take an effort of will to overcome her test anxiety this time. She reminded herself that this was only a test, not a measure of her self-worth. But she knew she needed more than reassurance to get her through this difficult trial. If she lost ground in school, especially in her favorite subject, it would just be more bad news for her family, and they had had enough trouble already to last the decade.

“Latanya,” she said to herself, “you can do this! You have memorized the vocabulary words. You have practiced using them in all kinds of sentences. You have recited them to yourself out loud so you know how they sound. You know the grammar rules backwards and forwards. There’s no objective reason for you to fear this test.”

(continues)



But Latanya's conversation with herself didn't stop there. "I seem to recall that last time you had a French test, you took your flair for languages for granted and didn't study until the last minute. In fact, weren't you looking at some parts of the French text *for the first time* the night before the test? And don't I recall that you confused yourself at the last minute by shooting grammar questions back and forth with a friend? Maybe you can avoid those pitfalls this time. In fact, I challenge you to think of all the ways you can feel prepared and confident for this test!"

Latanya's brow wrinkled as she thought about this a few moments. One final time she reviewed all her vocabulary words and conjugations. Then, with a grand gesture, she closed her French text and her notebook and put them away in her book bag. She tucked two freshly sharpened pencils alongside them. She set out her best jeans and her new turquoise sweater to wear in the morning. As Latanya brushed her teeth, she hummed a little French lullaby that her grandmother had sung to her as a child. She set her alarm clock a few minutes early and snuggled into bed.

Up at dawn, Latanya took a little extra care with her hair and makeup and surprised her parents by joining them at the breakfast table. She glided out the door throwing kisses. "Au revoir, mama, papa!" she called after her.

An hour later, Latanya was hard at work on the French exam. She had arrived early and cleared her mind of all distractions. She sat quietly and pictured herself effortlessly filling in each blank and flawlessly completing each sentence. "I'm going to enjoy this," she told herself. First she scanned the test and planned how much time to devote to each section. Then she was off and running.

Another hour later, and Latanya strode up to the teacher's desk to turn in her test paper. During the last five minutes, she had carefully reviewed her work, making sure it was neat and correct. The teacher's quick check confirmed that Latanya had nailed the test. "Merci, madame," said a jubilant Latanya. As Latanya left the room, the teacher thought she heard a loud whisper just outside the door. "Yes!"

Quiz

1. Your grade might be determined not by what you know, but by how well you take _____.



2. While studying, your brain stores information; while taking a test, your brain _____ information.
3. What does your teacher learn from your test result? What do you learn from your test result? _____

4. Which types of test questions require you to *recognize* facts that you have studied? _____

5. Which types of test questions require you to *recall* facts that you have studied? _____

6. Which types of test questions require you to *analyze, organize, or synthesize* facts and ideas? _____

7. Before answering an essay question, jot down the main ideas in a mini-_____ or a mind _____.
8. In answering an essay question, what should your opening statement include? What should your closing statement include? _____



11. Why is time management important when you're taking a test?



12. If you have trouble with a test question, what can you do to help your brain figure out the answer? _____

13. Why should you celebrate when a test is over? _____

14. What important things can you learn by reviewing a test after the teacher has graded it? _____

True or False?

15. A good night's sleep has a better effect on test performance than all-night cramming. T F
16. Arriving for the test a minute or two late gives you an adrenaline rush that boosts your performance. T F
17. Wear your grubbies on test day so that you don't risk getting sweat stains on your good shirt. T F
18. What you eat before a test can affect your test score. T F
19. Last-minute quizzing with your friends will give you confidence for the test. T F
20. Yawning and stretching during a test recharges your batteries. T F
21. When reading test instructions, don't review them because your first reading is probably more correct. T F

