



## Taking Tests

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### ***General Test Taking Strategies***

- **Arrive early**  
Plan to arrive 10 to 15 minutes before the test starts.
- **Make memory notes**  
As soon as the test is handed out, quickly jot down on the back of the test any material you are worried about forgetting (a definition, a formula, a date).
- **Preview the test**  
Skim through the test looking at the type and number of questions asked. This enables you to anticipate the content of the test and helps you budget your time.
- **Budget your time**  
Decide roughly how many minutes you can allow for each question or section. This enables you to pace yourself so that you read the questions properly and finish the test.
- **Carefully read directions**  
Make sure you know what you have to do before you start. If the directions are unclear or ambiguous, ask. When you are nervous, you tend to rush which results in either misreading directions or not reading them at all.
- **Do easy questions first**  
Do not waste energy worrying about the questions that you do not know. Answer first the easy questions and return to the more difficult ones.
- **Do not necessarily start with question one**  
The test may begin with multiple-choice questions and then have a short-answer section followed by some essay questions. If you find multiple-choice questions difficult, don't do them first; leave them, and do one of the other sections that you feel more comfortable with instead. This will help you to relax and feel confident so that you can more readily tackle the sections of the test that you find difficult.

### ***Multiple Choice Test-Taking Strategies***

Many students find multiple-choice questions difficult to answer, sometimes because they have not learned their course material thoroughly enough, but more often because they do not know how to effectively tackle the questions. Below are five steps to improving your ability to answer multiple-choice questions.

#### **Step 1: Read each question carefully.**

The biggest mistake students make when answering multiple-choice questions is that they do not read the questions properly. To ensure that you do, read the question slowly and circle the key words in the question, being alert for statements with NOT and EXCEPT in them. This will make the key words stand out.

*e.g. What are the behavioral characteristics of a schizophrenic?*



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Think through the meaning of each key word you have circled.

*e. g. What does behavioral mean? What is a characteristic? What is a schizophrenic?*

Simplify questions, if necessary, by turning them into statements that the options complete.

*e. g. Which of the following is the best method of treating depression?*

*Depression is best treated by ...*

### **Step 2: Answer the question in your head before reading the options.**

This will enable you to produce the answer in your own words and will prevent you from getting confused by the way the options are written or by the variety of options.

### **Step 3: Look for the correct option systematically.**

Students often mark options A or B without having read all the other options. However, the option chosen may not be the best one. Another problem students have when selecting an option is that they read all the possible options one after the other and get confused. These problems can be reduced by using the following system:

Cover all the options with a piece of paper, except for option A. Read option A and decide whether it is wrong, right, or questionable. Having decided, put either a tick, a cross, or a question mark beside the option. Then move on to the next option and repeat steps a), b), & c) Continue through all the options until you have made a decision about each one and have answered the question.

Questions with the word NOT in it are sometimes difficult to answer. Try rephrasing the question so that you take out the not. Then, identify all the answers to the rephrased question, and the option left will be the answer to the original question.

*e. g. Which of the following is not a behavioral theorist?*

Rephrase: Which of the following are behavioral theorists?

- a) Thorndike X
- b) Skinner X
- c) Rogers
- d) Hull X

Option C is the answer to the original question.

Some multiple-choice questions include options that are combinations of previously listed ones. e.g. Milk is a source of:



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- a) Calcium
- b) Vitamin C
- c) Vitamin D
- d) a and c
- e) a and b
- f) all of the above

Consider each of the first three choices first and mark each one with a check mark, cross, or question mark. Then select the option that contains the letters of the options you think are correct and does not include those that you know are wrong.

### **Step 4: If you do not know the answer to a question, move on to the next.**

If you cannot rationalize selecting one option over another, leave the question, put a big question mark by it, and move on. Do not guess at this point; leave your guessing to the end. This is because as you make your way through the test, a question may come up that triggers the answer to a previous question. Later questions may also cause you to reconsider earlier answers. However, only change answers if you are certain that your second choice is correct.

### **Step 5: Make an educated guess for all unanswered questions.**

Once you have completed all the questions you can answer, go back and make an educated guess for all the questions left unanswered. Never leave a question blank unless you know you will be penalized for incorrect answers.

## ***Essay Test Taking Techniques***

Essay questions tell your instructor a great deal about your understanding of the course material and your ability to synthesize and apply it. They measure your ability to communicate your thoughts about the subject in written form, and provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate your learning. Writing good essay questions involves five steps.

### **Step 1: Read the directions very carefully.**

Often the directions will say something like the following:

*Answer any two of the following five essay questions.*

If you do not read the directions carefully, you might think you have to answer all five questions. This will be a waste of time and energy as the instructor will probably only read and mark the first two of the five essays you write.

### **Step 2: Analyze the question.**



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A well-written essay question defines the topic and gives clues as to the information to include. Read the question carefully several times. Underline or circle key words and make sure you know how many parts there are to the question. Use key words in the test question, such as describe, discuss, compare, to understand what approach you are to take when answering the question.

*e. g. Trace the history of the stock exchange in Alberta*

Your essay would be limited to discussing only the stock exchange's history, not its function or purpose, and only in Alberta.

*e. g. Describe Sheldon's three personality types and discuss which type you think you are.*

This question has four parts.

### **Step 3: Organize your answer.**

Before you begin to write your essay, brainstorm to recall as many points as possible that are relevant to the question. Then organize the points quickly into an outline that separates the main points and supporting details and lists the order in which you'll discuss them. An outline has many advantages:

It makes sure you stay on track and answer the question being asked. It prevents you from repeating yourself. It keeps your writing organized and helps you to see when to begin new paragraphs. It encourages you to think and develop your ideas before you begin writing your answer which helps to make your writing clear and error free.

### **Step 4: Write your answer.**

Start to write the body of your essay by following your outline closely. You may not have time for a lengthy introduction, so open the essay with a thesis sentence. The thesis sentence tells the reader what the essay is going to be about. The reader then knows what the information in your essay pertains to and can follow the logic of your ideas. Develop the thesis sentence from the essay question itself as shown below.

*Essay Question: Compare and contrast two sociological views of the family.*

Thesis Sentence: Conflict theorists and functionalist theorists views have some similar views of the family but also have some different perspectives.

*Essay Question: Identify and discuss the three theories of juvenile delinquency.*

Thesis Sentence: Conflict theory, structural interactionist theory, and structural functionalist theory are the three main theories of juvenile delinquency.



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### **Additional Writing Tips**

- Write one main point per paragraph and provide sufficient supporting details.
- Write clearly and concisely using complete sentences.
- If you can't think of the word you need, mark the space, keep writing, and when you proofread, fill in the gap.
- Use transition words within paragraphs and between them.
- Write double-spaced, legibly in pen, on one side of the page.
- End your essay with a concluding sentence or two.
- If you are out of time, jot down the main ideas you would have included in your essay. Your instructor may give you some credit for them.
- Proof read all of your essays, watching for:
  - missed words
  - spelling errors
  - punctuation errors
  - grammatical errors
  - errors in logic
  - forgotten points

### ***How to Learn From Your Tests***

You can learn a great deal about test preparation and test writing by going over your tests when they are returned to you. Answering some of the following questions will help you think about how you could improve your performance on the next test.

#### **When you get your test back, ask:**

Did the questions mainly come from the lecture, textbook, or both? Was I asked to apply my knowledge or just recall information from memory? How complex were the questions? Were the questions based on the textbook or the instructor's learning objectives?

#### **For questions you did poorly on, ask:**

Did I misread or misunderstand the question?

Did I know the material but was unable to recall it?

Did I not study thoroughly enough?

Did I study the wrong material?

Was my answer poorly organized?

Did I include enough supportive evidence in my essay?

Did I lose marks for poor spelling, punctuation, grammar etc.?

*Adapted from Mount Royal College.*