



# Test Taking

## Memory, Recall, & Test Taking

Most research suggests that we remember virtually everything that happens to us. Unfortunately (sometimes fortunately), we can't easily recall all of those memories.

Studying for a test has for two related main goals:

1. Understanding the intellectual concepts to be covered on the exam
2. Making what we understand available for recall

There are several factors, which make information more easily recalled. Essentially, the more your brain works with, thinks about and repeats information, the easier you will be able to recall it. Here are the basic factors involved in making information "stick"

**Repetition:** The more often you encounter an idea, the easier it is to recall. In studying for a test, this means that looking at your notes (and by extension, taking good notes) frequently will be more effective than looking at them once.

**Association/Connection:** Connecting the information you are studying with something you already know or feel will make retaining the information easier. These connections also make it easier to use this information in other contexts. For example, if you make connections about cell divisions in a biology class, say with any previous courses in biology or health education, or even with how your own body is made up of many of these dividing cells, the better you'll remember how the process works.

The key here is to make connections that make sense to you. It's great if you can fit an idea into a logical framework, but if the framework doesn't have some personal meaning, you are not going to remember it.

**Intensity:** Think back to an incident you found terrifying or very exciting. It could be a near-wreck in a car or the first time you got an A in class; chances are, you remember such incidents with more clarity than most other incidents. For test taking, this is both a good and a bad thing. You may, for instance find the pressure of cramming for a test may make you sharper, because the fear of failing the test can make the information more memorable.

There are a couple of problems with this, though. The first is that you often remember the fear is just fine, but the actual information isn't what you found intense and therefore isn't what you remember. The other, related problem is that you do get anxious, this fear causes paralysis rather than efficiency. Again, you end up remembering the study session, not the actual topics you studied.

**Involvement:** The more senses you use when dealing with an idea, the more you manipulate that idea in your head, hands, eyes, ears and nose, the better you will remember it. Also, working with information in more than one form is helpful. If you write down notes about material you've read or heard, that process your brain more than just reading or listening would.

## 7 Things to Do to Prepare for a Test

1. Familiarize yourself with the test. Determine the contents and the type of memory/intellectual skills you will be asked to use.
2. Make a study schedule. Determine what concepts are most important and set aside your time accordingly. If you have trouble making a study schedule. Refer to time management.
3. Avoid the escape syndrome. Don't get caught talking about everything that you have to do, and not studying.
4. Decide which parts of the reading you need to review and which parts you can omit.
5. Make summary sheets. Try to summarize all the materials into a few main ideas. This will make it much easier to remember things on the test.
6. Practice doing what you will be doing on the test. Whether it be solving problems or writing short essays.
7. If possible study with other well prepared students. Use time to clarify any questions you may have.

## 12 Tips for Doing Well on Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Be careful not to read too much into the question.
2. Underline key words.
3. If two choices are very similar, they are probably both wrong.
4. If two choices are opposite, one of them is probably correct.
5. Don't go against your first impulse unless you are absolutely certain that it was wrong.
6. Check for negatives and other words that are there to throw you off.
7. The answer is usually wrong if it contains all, always, never or none.
8. The answer has a good chance of being right if it contains sometimes, probably or some.
9. When you don't know the right answer, use process of elimination.
10. Don't eliminate the answer unless you know what every word means.
11. Read every answer.
12. If it is a standardized test. Consider transferring all of the answers from one sheet of paper to the answer sheet. It saves time.

## 12 Tips for Essay Test Preparation

1. Do I really understand what the question asks me to do?
2. Does the first sentence of my answer repeat the question and forcefully shows the reader how I will develop the answer?
3. Have I done preliminary planning of my major points?
4. Do major points stand out?
5. Are the major points supported with examples and facts?
6. Are there clear transitions between major points?
7. Would someone who had not taken this class be able to understand the concepts discussed in the way I explained it?
8. Have I completely covered major points needed to answer the question?
9. Did I stick to the question?
10. Did I proofread my misspelled words, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, subject verb or pronoun agreement errors, and other errors, which might cause the reader not to understand what I have written?
11. Is my handwriting readable and have I left enough spaces for comments or additions?