Test Taking and Test Anxiety

University of St. Thomas
Counseling and Disability Services
Tutorial Services Center
Why test???
Reasons for Tests

• Motivate students to study and learn material

• Assess critical thinking skills and application of knowledge

• Provide teachers feedback about teaching effectiveness

• Provide students feedback about course progress

• Help decide student grades
Talk don’t cook rice.

-Chinese fortune cookie
Preparation

• Start early; conduct frequent self-reviews

• Use your syllabus, study guide, notes, and text to identify exam information

• Organize your notes; review all major concepts and course vocabulary

• Survey 3RQ System
  - Survey it
  - Read it
  - Recite it
  - Review it
  - Question it

• Ask professors for clarification

• Studying without sleep can hurt recall
Preparation

• Study actively. Engage your senses.

• Work with a classmate and test each other over the material.

• Work alone if you find yourself distracted.

• Know the test format.
Diagrams as Study Aids
So you’re prepared but still anxious?
Test Taking Exploration

- As test time gets close, one thing I notice I do is ...
- To avoid studying for a test, I ...
- When it comes to taking tests, I have trouble ...
- The night before a test I usually ...
- The morning of the test I usually ...
- During a test I usually feel ...
- After the test I usually ...
What is Test Anxiety?

The uneasiness or apprehension students experience because they must take a test.

Some anxiety is normal. It is helpful at moderate levels since it signals a need for action.

- Avoid OVERREACTION.
- High levels of anxiety can inhibit performance.

Adapted from College Study Skills, 5th Ed. James Shepherd (1994).
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

BEFORE THE TEST

- Insomnia
- Change in appetite
- Stomachache
- Restlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Avoidance
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

DURING THE TEST

- Confusion
- Panic
- Mental blocks
- Physical signs
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

AFTER THE TEST

- Indifference
- Guilt
- Blame
- Depression
- Anger
At the test...

• Visualize your success

• Scan the entire test
  ▫ Evaluate the test
  ▫ Note points for each question
  ▫ Pace yourself and track your time

• Jot down key points to remember on the test
At the test...

• Focus on the test and not the outcome. Avoid “what if . . .”

• Mark questions you need to go back to after you have answered the questions you know for sure.

• Try to answer every question.

• Outline essay questions.

• If there are bonus questions, go for it.
Objective Exams

- Read directions and mark key words.
- Decide your answer before looking at the choices.
- Read all choices before choosing one.
- Eliminate obviously wrong answers; then reduce the possible answers to two.
- If unsure about an answer, guess. Leave no blanks.
Objective Exams

• Look for clues to the answer in the question itself. This can be subtle.

• If you change your mind based on new information, you may change your answer. If vacillating between 2 options, go with your 1st choice.

• Use the entire test period.

• Check your work. Rushing can cause careless mistakes.
Short Answer Exams

• Know the answer style that your professor expects: short phrases, lists, outlines, full sentences.

• Use visuals – draw diagrams if appropriate.
Essay Exams

• Read directions carefully; ask questions if you don’t understand the directions.

• Do exactly what the directions say.

• Scan the test and review the content.

• Sequence for essay exams:
  1. Read the questions.
  2. Answer the questions you know first.
  3. Look for clues to the answer in the question itself.
  4. Think about what to include in the answer.
  5. Briefly outline what you plan to write.
  6. Complete the outline with pertinent details.
Take-Home Exams

- Create an environment conducive to test taking.
- Plan a strategy according to test instructions.
- Be prepared to use research if requested.
- Approach the exam as if you would a paper. Draft, write and rewrite.
Open-Book Exams

- Mark important pages in your textbooks and notes for easy reference.
- Jot down important information in textbook margins.
- If classroom notes are allowed, mark those too.
Quantitative Exams

• Analyze before you compute.

• If a question is not in mathematical notation, translate it to solve the problem.

• Show your work; teachers often give partial credit for knowing the math concept and application.

• Check your work systematically.
Reducing Test Anxiety

• Stop cramming at least 30 minutes before the exam
• Keep a positive attitude
• Yell “Stop!” to negative thoughts
• Focus on success; don’t expect perfection
• Avoid comparing yourself to others
• Take deep breaths, drink water or have a mint
• Visualize a calming place
• Relax and reward yourself
Just Breathe!
High Stakes Testing

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amkmxbRn5tkSlide 31
Want more information?

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