

# Standardized Test Taking Tips

## General Test Taking Guidelines

- 1.** Arrive early and take a moment to relax and reduce your anxiety. This brief time period will boost your confidence and give you time to think positive thoughts and focus your mind.
- 2.** Listen attentively to last minute instructions given by the instructor. The teacher will almost always give you some valuable information just before handing out the test. Don't miss them because your anxiety causes you to talk to a classmate.
- 3.** Read the directions very carefully, looking for specific instructions on how to proceed. Watch for details. You may find that more than one answer may be possible on multiple choice or that you only need to answer three out of the five essay questions given.
- 4.** Plan how you will use the time for the test. Estimate how many minutes you will need to finish each test section and finish in the total time allotted. Bring your watch and pay close attention to the passing time. Follow your own pace and do not let the pace of others cause you to become nervous. Be confident in your plan for completing the test on time.
- 5.** Determine which test sections will receive priority. It is generally best to do the section that is easiest for you especially if it has a high point total. It is not a good idea to do the most difficult section first. Often, a student following this method will not leave enough time for questions that would have been sure points. Leaving essay and sentence completion questions for last can often be beneficial because you find answers among the already completed objective questions. However, if essays are left for last, be sure to leave enough time to outline your thoughts, and then write the answer clearly.
- 6.** Keep a steady pace and do not let more difficult questions affect your attitude and steal your valuable time. Students often cloud their minds by lingering over difficult questions. Moving on and finding success with other questions is a better method. If you are not penalized for wrong answers, guess and move on.
- 7.** Rely on your knowledge and don't watch for patterns. Noticing that the last four answers are "c" is not a good reason to change an answer. It is better to trust knowledge to help you answer the questions. Change answers only when you are certain. The answer which comes to mind first is often correct. Reviewing with an anxious mind and changing answers when you are not

certain can do more harm than good.

**8.** When you have completed your test, use the remaining time effectively. Review the difficult questions you left. Proofread your essays. Check your grammar and spelling. Make sure you answered all questions. More than one student has turned in a test and received only 50% because there were questions on the back side of the paper. Learn from your tests!

### **Guidelines for Answering Multiple-Choice Questions**

- 1.** Read each question with the intention of answering the question without the alternatives which follow.
- 2.** Focus on finding an answer without the help of the alternatives. This will increase your concentration and help you read the question more clearly.
- 3.** Use the process of elimination when you do not know the answer for sure. Eliminate two alternatives quickly and then make the decision between the two remaining. This increases your probability to 50/50.
- 4.** Another helpful method of elimination is to use the true-false methods described in the previous set of guidelines. When you can determine a likely false alternative, eliminate it. The true-false elimination method is particularly helpful when more than one answer is possibly true.
- 5.** When numbers are in each alternative, choose the numbers that are in the middle range, not the extremes. For example, if the height of Cascade Mountain is requested, eliminate 20,000 feet, and 3,000 feet. Then choose between 8,000 feet and 11,000 feet. Remember, the best results are obtained when you have studied and know the exact answer is 11,000 feet.
- 6.** Choose answers that are longer and more descriptive. These answers stand out from the others. Instructors will often give you descriptive detail to help you identify the truth.
- 7.** When two very similar answers appear, it is likely that one of them is the correct choice. Test makers often disguise the correct option by giving another option that looks very much like the correct one.
- 8.** Watch out for negative words in the instructions or in the main question. You may have been told to select an option that is not true. Remember to reverse your procedure and eliminate truth, not falsehood. When looking for

negative options look for extreme modifiers that make them false (*always, never, all, etc.*)

### Guidelines for Answering True-False Questions

1. There is no substitute for the truth. Many concentrated hours of study to force facts into your memory is the best way to prepare true-false questions. Teachers, however, often try to test your memory of the material by slightly altering it. In this case, practice and some test-taking skill will help.
2. When you do not know or can't remember information to determine the truth of a statement, assume that it is true. There are generally more true questions on true-false exams than false questions because instructors tend to emphasize true questions.
3. If there is specific detail in the statement, it may also tend to be true. For example, the statement "There are 980 endangered species worldwide" has specific detail and is likely to be true.
4. Carefully read each question, looking for any factor that will make it false. It is easier for the instructor to add a false part to an otherwise true statement. Students often read the question and see some truth and assume that the entire statement is true.
5. Look for extreme modifiers that tend to make the question false. Extreme modifiers, such as ***always, all, never, or only*** make it more likely that the question is false. A more complete list of extreme modifiers follows.

all	none	best	absolutely
always	never	worst	absolutely not
only	nobody	everybody	everybody certainly
invariably	no one	everyone	certainly not

6. Identify qualifiers that tend to make the question true. Qualifiers (***seldom, often, many***) make the question more likely true. A more complete list of often used qualifiers follows.

usually	frequently	often	sometimes
some	seldom	many	much
probably	a majority	apt to	most

might	a few	may	unlikely
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**7.** Watch out for negative words and how they may affect the truth. Statements containing negative words may be true or false but you must see them to make that determination. The prefixes (*un-*, *im-*, *miss-*) will alter the meaning of the statement. Double negatives make the statement true. For example "not uncommon" actually means common. Don't let this language dilemma cause you to make a mistake.

**8.** Questions that state a reason tend to be false. Words in the statement that cause justification or reason (*since*, *because*, *when*, *if*) tend to make the statement false because they bring in a reason that is incorrect or incomplete.

### **Guidelines for Answering Matching Questions**

**1.** Examine both lists to determine the types of items and their relationships. The test maker uses many terms or a large number of facts on a matching type test to discover if you have mastered a subject.

**2.** There are usually two lists that need to be matched. Take a look at both lists to get a feel for the relationships and build your confidence.

**3.** Use one list as a starting point and go through the second list to find a match. This process organizes your thinking. It will also speed your answers because you become familiar with the second list and will be able to go straight to a match that you saw when looking through the lists a previous time.

**4.** Move through the entire list before selecting a match. If you make a match with the first likely answer, you may make an error, because an answer later in the list may be more correct.

**5.** Cross off items on the second list when you are certain that you have a match. This seems simplistic, but it helps you feel confident and stay organized.

**6.** Do not guess until all absolute matches have been made. If you guess early in the process, you will likely eliminate an answer that could be used correctly for a later choice.

### **Guidelines for Answering Sentence Completion or Fill-in-the-Blank Questions**

- 1.** Read the question with the intent to give an answer and make the sentence grammatically correct. In this process it is important to focus on how the sentence is written. For example, if the blank is preceded by the article "an," you know the word that goes in the blank must start with a vowel.
- 2.** Concentrate on the number of blanks in the sentence and the length of the space. The test maker is giving you clues to the answer by adding spaces and making them longer.
- 3.** Provide a descriptive answer when you can not think of the exact word or words. The instructor will often give you credit or partial credit when you demonstrate that you have studied the material and can give a credible answer, even when you have not given the exact words.

### **Guidelines for Essay Questions**

- 1.** Organize your thoughts before you begin to write. A short outline on a separate piece of paper will improve your thinking. There is usually a main idea or issue, several supporting issues and examples to illustrate the issues.
- 2.** Paraphrase the original question to form your introductory statement. This benefits you in two ways. First, it helps you get the question straight in your mind. Second, it may protect you from the teacher. If you have re-phrased the question, the teacher can see how you understood the question. Perhaps you understood it to mean something other than the teacher intended. If so, the teacher may give you credit for seeing another perspective.
- 3.** Write your answer clearly, so the reader will be able to decode your writing and understand your ideas. Without clearly written words your chances of a good grade are severely diminished.
- 4.** Write or print clearly, using a dark-colored erasable ball point pen. Avoid crossing out words or sentences, and don't smudge your paper.
- 5.** Read each essay question with the intent to identify the verbs or words that give you direction. These are the verbs that describe the task you are expected to complete. Circle the direction verbs in the question to make sure that you

are focusing on the desired task. Sample direction verbs or adjectives, and their generally intended action or task, are listed below.

**6.** Use the principles of good English composition when answering all types of essay questions:

**a.** Form a clear thesis statement (statement of purpose) and place it as near to the beginning as possible.

**b.** Provide supporting issues to back up the main concept you present.

**c.** Underline or highlight the main and supporting issues. Examples will improve your answers and set them apart from other students' answers.

**d.** Remember to save some space for a brief but adequate summary.

**7.** Lastly, writing at its best is great fun. Enjoy the opportunity to offer your comments and opinion on a variety of different topics in a written form. So, relax, think thoroughly, and your writing will improve.

### **Guidelines for Reading Comprehension**

**1.** In reading comprehension sections, the questions demand plenty of serious reading, and you might be tempted to "speed-read." You may try to scan paragraphs and pages as fast as you can while hunting for main ideas. In a word: Don't. First, main ideas usually aren't quickly accessible from "speed-reading" complex texts.

*For Example*, if you race through good writing, you are likely to miss the subtlety and complexity. A paragraph of text by Frederick Douglass or Joyce Carol Oates, a poem by Auden, or a drama by Shakespeare cannot be appreciated -- or even minimally understood -- without careful, often-repeated readings.

**2.** In reading the text provided in the test, keep in mind to:

**a.** Read slowly

**b.** Reread complex and important sentences

**c.** Ask yourself often, "What does this sentence, paragraph, speech, stanza, or chapter mean?"