

Being 'Testwise': Test-taking Strategies for Undergrads

- 'Testwise' - ability to use the *characteristics and formats of a test* to maximize your test score.
- **VERY IMPORTANT NOTE:** Being testwise is **never** a substitute for knowledge of a subject.

Being 'Testwise': Test-taking Strategies for Undergrads

- Don't cram.
- Study over a period of weeks.
- Schedule 1-2 hours of study per day in the week prior to your exam.
- Take frequent breaks. Reward yourself with a 10 min. break after 90 min. study.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before.
- Memory more fallible when you're tired.

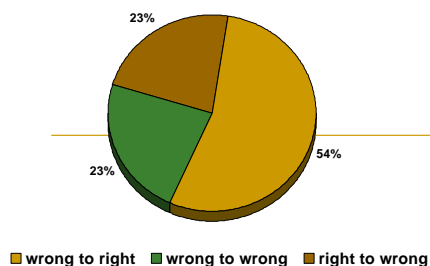
Myths about how to take tests:

1. Many students think they shouldn't go back and change their answers to multiple-choice questions. Many faculty believe this too.
2. BUT Benjamin, Cavell, and Shallenberger (1984) found the old adage "on tests, your first hunch is your best hunch" – is wrong.

Test-taking Myths

- **Formal studies indicate that changing answers pays off.**
- Benjamin et al. reviewed 20 studies on hunches and test-taking.
- Here are their (median) results:

Results of Benjamin et al. Study



- Don't worry about changing your answers, the odds are very good that you're moving from a wrong to a right answer.

BUT only do this based on your **KNOWLEDGE**, not guesswork. . .

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- As you read the '**stem**' of each question, *anticipate* the answer **before** looking at the options.

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- Even if you find your chosen answer in the list of options, *continue to read through all of the options*. There may be another choice farther down the list that's a better choice.

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- Always read each question completely.
- Don't spend too much time on a question, if you don't know the answer, keep going.
- Learn to eliminate highly-unlikely options quickly.

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- Many questions have only two plausible options and the rest are throwaways or 'filler'.
- Spot the filler, eliminate it, and narrow down your choices.
- Be aware that the information in one question may sometimes contain information relevant to another question.

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- On items that have "all of the above" as an option:
 - if you **know** that only two of the options are correct, you should think about choosing "all of the above."
 - If you're confident that **one** of the choices is incorrect, eliminate the "all of the above" option.

Tips for Multiple-choice Exams

- Although there will always be exceptions, options that are more detailed *tend* to be correct.
- It's a good idea to pay attention to the options that are extra-long or detailed.

Remember the inverse is also true:

- Options that create broad, sweeping generalizations tend to be incorrect.
- Hawkes, Lindquist and Mann found that in statements containing the words “**all**” or “**none**” 4 out of 5 were false. Those with word “**always**” 3/5 were false.

Remember the inverse is also true:

- Watch out for words that may make improbable assertions like:
 - ***always, never, necessarily, only, must, completely, totally, etc.***

Options that create carefully qualified statements tend to be correct.

- In statements containing “**some**” 4/5 were true.
- In statements containing “**generally**” 3/4 were true.
- Look for well-qualified multiple-choice word options: ***often, sometimes, perhaps, may, and generally, etc.***

- In multiple-choice exams, loaded words (i.e. “Stupid”, “nonsensical”, “ugly”, etc.) are unlikely to be part of the right answer.
- Funny answers are also unlikely to be right.

- For short answer exams, you’re usually expected to provide an exact name, word, or phrase.

- **If** you can’t remember it, write down the general idea in your own words (as a last resort). You may get partial credit for this.

Tips for Essay Exams

- Time is usually a crucial factor on essay tests.
- Begin by looking over the questions and making time allocations on the basis of:
 - 1. Your knowledge
 - 2. The time required to answer each question
 - 3. The points available for answering each question.

Tips for Essay Exams

- Wise to tackle your second-best question first.
- If you answer the question you know best, there's a danger you might write too long and not leave enough time for other questions.
- Also takes time to 'warm up' in essay exam.

- Appreciate the importance of good organization in your essay response.
- If your professor can't follow where you're going with your answer, you won't get many points.
- Make a plan before you plunge into your written answer.
- If you can give 2 versions of the answer, what 2 different thinkers, or schools have written on a subject, good. This is considered a sophisticated reply.

- Many profs appreciate it if you make your organization explicit by numbering the points you're making.
- In writing essays on test, the trick is to be **concise** while being **complete**.
- You should always try to get right to the point and **NEVER pad your answer**.
- While you can use point form, **AVOID** writing in such a shorthand way that you leave things ambiguous.

General Summary

- Sound study skills and habits are crucial to academic success.
- Intelligence alone doesn't do the job (but it helps).
- Good academic skills don't develop overnight, so be patient with yourself.
- Reading textbooks, writing papers and tests all tend to get easier with practice.
- Don't expect an "A" in your first year – this is rare and besides, where will you go from there?

Our Quizzes and Exams

- Exams & quizzes will be distributed face down. Keep them that way until you're told to begin.
- Nothing on your desk but a pen or pencil (place all books, purses, cellphones, etc. on the floor).
- Please be quiet. Respect your neighbour.