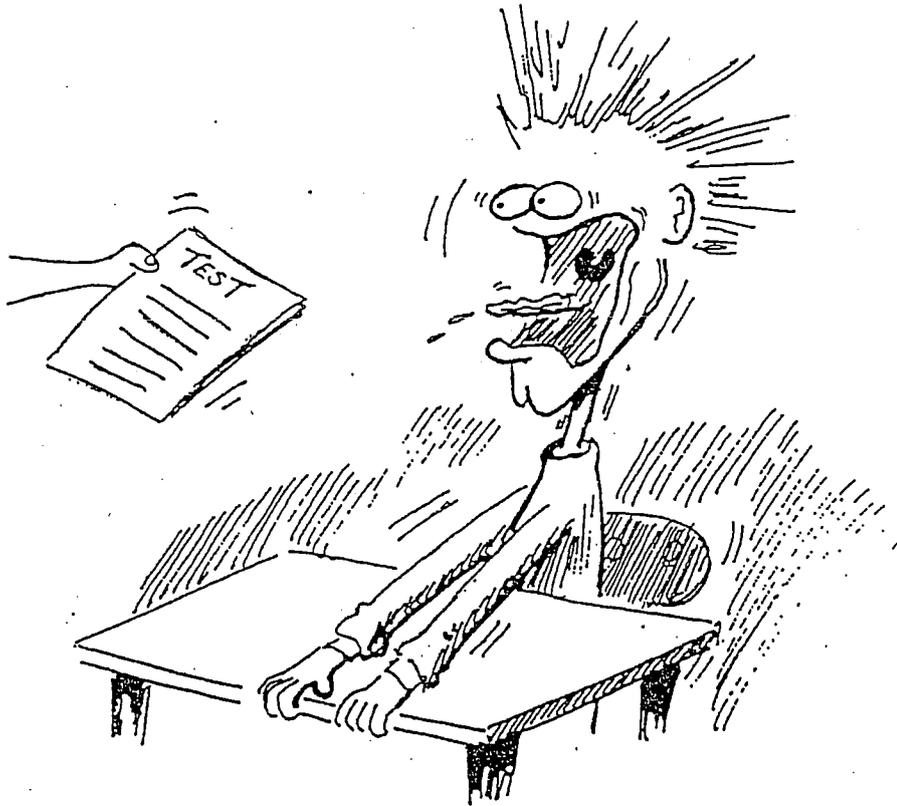


Taking Tests

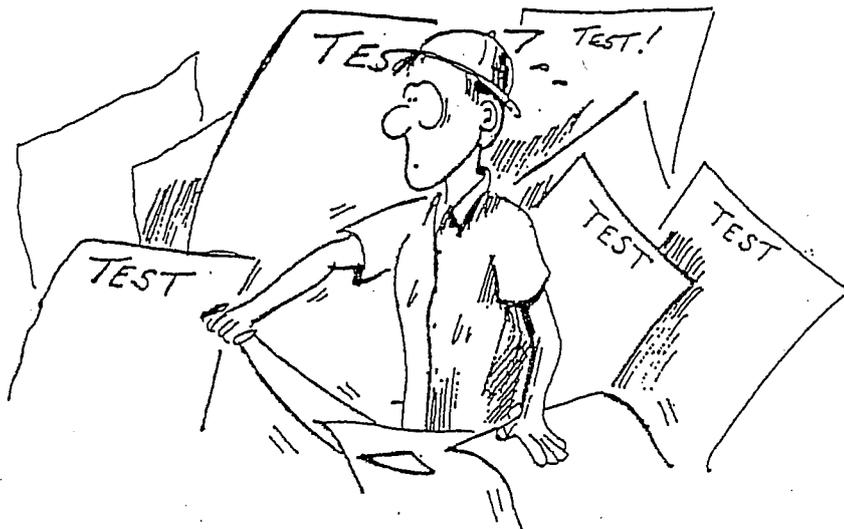
Very few of us, including our students, enjoy taking tests. Anxiety increases and attendance decreases as test day approaches. How many of our students are truly prepared for any given exam?

The following pages contain many hints for taking tests. These pages are written directly to the student and can be distributed to students as a handout packet. Discuss the suggestions and explain to your students the kinds of questions you include on your tests (e.g., mostly essay, multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank). Not only will the students feel that you are being fair with them, they will also know how to study for your specific questions.



Things You Can do to Help Your Students Survive

- Write main ideas on chalkboard or use an overhead to alert students to important information.
- Print information on one side of the board at a time . . . walk to the other side and continue. Come back to the first side and erase. Then start over. This gives the students a chance to copy as much information as possible. Make sure what you write is legible.
- If following a text, present information in same order as information in text.
- Provide carbon paper (or NCR paper) and appoint good notetakers to make copies during lectures for students who are having a hard time keeping up.
- Instruct students how you want notes taken in your class.
- One of the least effective ways to teach vocabulary is to have vocabulary lists with definitions. Words are best learned in context and should be presented that way in sentences or thought units.
- Emphasize quantity or quality—not both.
- Record lectures for students to listen to later.
- Outline the work for the entire week, day-by-day, including pages to read, homework assignments, projects, etc. (This helps keep students on track.)
- The ability to read charts and graphs may be skills the students have never acquired. It may be necessary to teach this concept as a separate skill.
- Use operation definitions (e.g. "What is it used for" can be effective). Remember to evaluate on this basis too.



Understanding Questions

Test questions ask for different kinds of information about what you read. On a reading test, use question words to help you know what kind of answer to look for.

- Question words

who, what, which →

when →

where →

why, how →

- Kinds of answers

people, things, ideas, actions

time

place

reasons, explanations

✓ TEST STRATEGY

Using question words to identify the kind of answer to look for

- Read each question carefully. Ask yourself, "What kind of information do I need?" Look for it in the passage.

✓ TEST STRATEGY

Knowing the kind of question being asked and the kind of answer expected

✓ TEST STRATEGY

Keeping questions and key words in mind as you skim the passage

- Remember: who, what, and when are important key words.

Test questions do not always ask for information in the same order as it is given in a reading selection. The answer to the first question may be in the middle or the end of the selection. When you read a question, look for a key word that might help you find the answer in the passage.

- Remember! Read the passage completely before you start to answer the questions.

Reading Directions Carefully

Test directions tell you what to do. Read them *carefully and completely!* Vocabulary tests ask about the meanings of words. Some tests ask you to find a word that means the *same* as a test word. Others ask you to find a word that means the *opposite* of a test word. The lessons on pages 8-11 show you strategies to help you choose correct answers on vocabulary tests.

- To make sure you understand what the test is asking for, say the directions to yourself in your own words.

Test Directions Tell You What To Do.

- Read all directions carefully and *completely*.
- Make sure you know what they *ask you to do*.
- Say the directions to yourself *in your own words*.

Directions often use different words to mean the same thing. In each group of words below, the underlined words mean the same.

Read each question.
Read each item.
Read each exercise.

Fill in the space.
Mark your answer.
Record your answer.

Go on to the next page.
Continue on to the next page.
Turn to the next page.

Marking Your Answers

You may be given an answer sheet with circles or spaces to fill in. To mark your answer:

- find the *row* of spaces with the same number as the *test item*.
- fill in the *space* that has the same *letter or number* as your answer choice.



Some tests give you only a certain amount of time to work. Remember!

- Relax and answer as many items as you can in the time you are given.

Practice using your time wisely as you answer the items on this page. Your teacher will tell you how much time you will have.

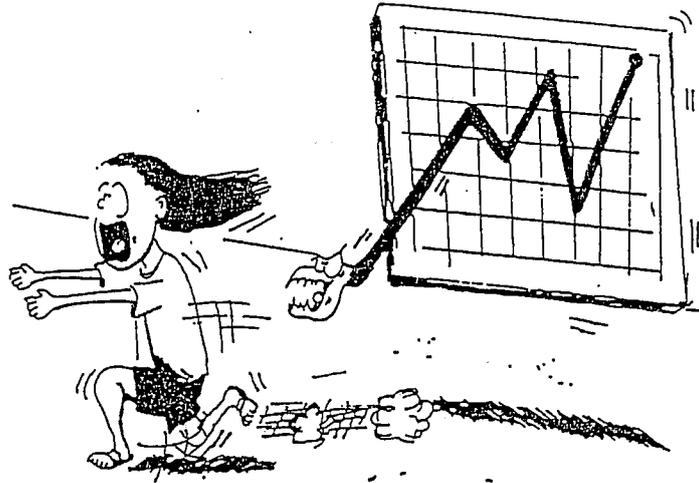
✓ TEST STRATEGY

Restating directions to yourself in your own words

- After reading the directions, tell yourself in your own words what they mean.

Using Graphs and Charts

Most textbooks, especially in the areas of science and social studies, use graphs and charts to summarize or convey information. Students routinely seem to ignore this information in their texts unless there is a specific reason for using it (such as a chapter question). The difficulty in teaching students about graphs and charts is that the material is nearly always taught in isolation, unrelated to material that students experience daily. The students are missing a valuable study aid as well as a skill that might help them in writing reports or making oral presentations.



Students should be taught not only how to read graphs or charts, but also how to interpret them. This is much like teaching them to “read between the lines” in a literature assignment. The study of graphs should include pictographs, bar graphs, line graphs, and circle graphs. Practice in interpreting graphs begins simply and moves to complex interpretations. The following might be a sequence for a unit on line graphs:

1. Explanation of a simple single-line graph of a student's grade average.
2. Study of a graph with a single line that steadily increases.
3. Practice with lines that show increases, decreases, and leveling off.
4. Fraction of a graph with two lines comparing and contrasting information.

ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING TEST-TAKING SKILLS

The following activities are suggested for helping students to develop their test-taking skills:

1. Instruct the student to determine what general information is relevant in preparing for a test. The following list may be used as a guide or reminder:

Subject content _____

Date of test _____

Chapters covered _____

Notes covered _____

Types of questions _____

Number of questions _____

Timed or untimed test _____

Information emphasized in class _____

Also, to facilitate test preparation, give the student a test that has been used previously.

2. Identify vocabulary terms that are frequently used in test directions. Instruct the student to define the terms and perform the specified behavior. For example:

a. Compare means

Contrast means

Compare and contrast milk and water.

b. Criticize means

Criticize some aspect of your school schedule.

- c. Illustrate means
Illustrate the difference between a triangle and a circle.
- d. Evaluate means
Evaluate the importance of reading.

Other words which may be covered include discuss, list, justify, outline, diagram, trace, match, define, and elaborate.

3. Present the SCORER system (Carman & Adams, 1972) as a strategy for helping students take tests. Each letter represents an important rule in test taking.

S = Schedule your time. The student reviews the entire test and plans time according to the number of items, point value per item, and easy and difficult items.

C = Look for clue words. The student searches for clue words on each item. For example, on true-false items, words such as always and never usually indicate the statement is incorrect. Words such as usually and sometimes frequently indicate the statement is correct.

O = Omit difficult questions. Postponing hard questions until later in the testing session can greatly improve a student's score. Specially, Carman and Adams (1972) suggest that the student use the following procedure:

- (a) Move rapidly through the test.
- (b) When you find an easy question or one you are certain of, answer it.
- (c) Omit the difficult ones on the first pass.
- (d) When you skip a question, make a mark in the margin (- or ✓). Do not use a red pencil or pen. Your marks could get confused with grader's marks.)
- (e) Keep moving. Never erase. Don't dawdle. Jot brief notes in the margin for later use if you need to.
- (f) When you have finished the easy ones, return to those with marks (- or ✓), and try again.
- (g) Mark again those answers you are still not sure of. Change the - to + or ✓ to ✓✓.

(h) In your review (that's the last R in SCORER), you will go over all the questions time permits, first the ✓✓, then the ✓, then the unmarked. (p. 217)

R = Read carefully. A careful reading of test directions and each item can significantly improve test performance. Careless reading can lead to confusion on essay items and careless errors on objective items.

E = Estimate your answer. On test items requiring calculations or problem solving the student should roughly estimate the answer. This helps correct careless errors. Moreover, if guessing is not penalized it is important to answer all questions. After eliminating alternatives that are obviously incorrect, the student should take a best guess.

R = Review your work. The student should be encouraged to use every minute available. After he/she has answered all items, have her review the test, Carman & Adams (1972) suggest the student use the following checklist:

- (a) Return to the double-checked (✓✓) difficult questions. Reread them. Look for clue words. Look for new hints. Then go to the ✓ questions, and finally to the unmarked ones if there is still time.
- (b) Don't be too eager to change answer. Change only if you have a good reason for changing.
- (c) Be certain you have considered all questions.
- (d) PRINT your name on the test. If there are separate sheets, print your name on each sheet. (p. 222)

4. Present the following activities and guidelines to help the student answering true-false test items:

- a. Note the following rule to remember with true-false items: A statement must be completely true to be true. If any part of the statement is false, the whole statement is false.
- b. Instruct the student to be careful about tricky words. Some of these words include some, many, most, everyone, no one, never, and always. Demonstrate how these words cue true and false statements.

c. Instruct the student to notice that directions to true--false items may vary. Sample directions include the following:

- (1) Next to each statement, print T for true or F for false.
- (2) Write the word true or the word false on the line next to each statement.
- (3) If a statement is true do nothing to it. If a statement is false, cross out the part that makes it false. Rewrite the part you crossed out to make a true statement.

d. Instruct the student to look for reworded statements in which positive or negative words have been used to change the answer.

5. Present the following activities and guidelines to help the student with answering multiple-choice test items:

- a. Explain to the student that in most multiple-choice questions several alternatives are usually easy to eliminate because they are obviously incorrect. Frequently two alternatives seem correct, but instructions require the selection of the best answer.
- b. Provide the student with sample multiple-choice items that illustrate different ways of thinking. For example, use items which include such key words as except, not, and all of the above.
- c. Encourage the student to use the following guidelines with multiple-choice items:

- (1) Know how many answers to select.
- (2) Be aware of the kind of answer you are seeking (for example, for a negative question).
- (3) Remember the question.
- (4) Eliminate the obvious wrong answers.
- (5) Choose the answer that fits best.
- (6) Be careful in recording the answer.

6. Present the following activities and guidelines to help the student with answering essay questions:

- a. Instruct the student to read the directions and questions carefully and underline key words. In directions, the student should underline such parts as "answer two of the following

questions." In questions key words include "discuss, compare, list," etc.

- b. Instruct the student to outline or organize the answer before attempting to write it (Alley & Deshler, 1979). If time becomes a serious factor, the question can be finished in outline form.
- c. Teach the student to use the SCORER system with essay questions.

7. Instruct the student to use the following techniques when taking all tests:

- a. Review the entire test.
- b. Know the time allotted for taking the test.
- c. Know the value of specific questions.
- d. Follow the directions very carefully.
- e. Notice key words in instructions and questions.
- f. Reread directions and questions.
- g. Go through the test and answer questions you are sure of first.
- h. Place a checkmark beside questions you need to return to later.
- i. Return to questions that have been checked.
- j. Mark an X at the bottom of each completed page.
- k. Review all questions.

8. Use a test that the student has taken previously to review ways in which his/her performance can be improved.

9. Provide the student with a machine-scorable sheet and a set of multiple-choice questions. Instruct him to answer each test question by filling in the appropriate space. Many students with learning problems have difficulty with standardized and minimum competency tests. Practice in using different types of answer formats helps students develop skills with these formats.

Essay Tests

Essay questions require the student to provide an answer that has much more information in it, beyond a word or phrase, or sentence. There are several tips to keep in mind when answering essay test questions.

- ◆ Read through the entire question.
- ◆ Always think through how the question could be answered. Teach students to mentally prepare their answer before they just start writing.
- ◆ Pick out the key words in the question such as: compare, contrast, list, describe, etc; then exactly that!
- ◆ Write out an outline or notes to organize your thoughts. Write the essay answer following that outline.
- ◆ Restate the question in your first sentence and use it in your concluding statement as well.
- ◆ Essay test questions are usually graded for both content and form, so check for correct spelling, capital letters, punctuation, and grammar. Make sure the sentences are complete and are not fragments.
- ◆ Use the information in the test question and from other test questions in that section pertaining to the same topic to help answer the question being worked on.
- ◆ On essay tests write down something for every item. The directions may call for the student to write only part of the item. Again, follow the directions carefully.
- ◆ On essay questions always be neat. Work written neat and clearly is often scored higher than sloppy and messy work.
- ◆ Read through the entire essay test. Identify which questions are going to be the easiest to answer and do those first. Come back to the tougher or longer items later.
- ◆ Know the time allotted for taking the test. Remember to pace yourself so that you can answer as many questions as you can during the time given.
- ◆ When finished writing an essay answer, go back and read the completed response carefully. Always check your work.
- ◆ If possible highlight key words in the essay question. Those words and phrases will help in addressing the key points in the student's written response.

- ◆ The SCORER method for responding to a test question is a good test-taking tip when answering essay style test questions.
- ◆ Write something for every essay question. Don't leave any question blank – even a minimal response may earn the student some points for the attempting to answer the question. (It's better than getting no points at all.)
- ◆ Essay questions call for more than just the recall of facts. Think of writing a response in a way that ties all of the pertinent information into a composition.
- ◆ Expand upon the facts required in the answer. Personalize the answer by interpreting, analyzing, or commenting on the facts and drawing upon present knowledge and personal experiences.
- ◆ When responding to an essay question remember how to construct a good paragraph. There should be an opening, supporting details and a closing and summary statement. Adding additional details and supporting information including background on the topic, as well as expanding on the topic indicates a true understanding of the concept/topic being tested. Remember to provide: 1.) an introduction, 2.) the body, and 3.) a conclusion.

Multiple-Choice Tests

This type of test question format is probably the most common. For these types of tests, a question is presented and then (usually) four choices are given and the student must choose the correct answer from the options given.

There are many test-taking tips when teaching students how become test-wise about this type of assessment tool.

- ◆ Never leave a multiple-choice question unanswered. Students have at least a 25% chance of getting the answer correct.
- ◆ Teach students the 'Process of Elimination'. In this way students can examine the options and rule out any that would be obviously incorrect. Once students can eliminate one or two of the options, there is a greater opportunity to select the one right answer.
- ◆ Read the directions carefully. In some situations, the question may ask the student to identify 'all' of the correct answers. This indicates that more than one answer may be correct. Remember; know how many answers to select.
- ◆ Eliminate responses containing specific determiners, such as all, always, or never.
- ◆ This type of test may have the answer section separate from the test questions. Students have a greater chance for error because of marking the answers in the wrong place. One to one coordination of question and answer section needs close attention.
- ◆ Be careful when recording the answer. Make the answer heavy and dark. Completely fill in the circle to indicate the correct answer. Stray marks can be mistaken for an answer choice.
- ◆ If the student wishes to change the first answer marked, be sure to erase the wrong answer completely. Again this could lead to the scorer marking the answer wrong because it appears that more than one choice has been marked. Change your mind? Then change the answer.
- ◆ Teach students to watch for 'NOT' questions. Negative questions like these ask the student to select the answer that is not the correct response.
- ◆ When the answer options seem really close and students are unsure of which answer to mark, choose the answer that fits the question the best.

- ◆ Read the entire question and all of the responses. Sometimes the last answer given is the correct one.
- ◆ Usually multiple-choice questions will have one correct answer, two that are distractors, and one that is definitely wrong.
- ◆ Many students think that their first answer to a test item is somehow magically the right answer. Because of that students rarely recheck and then change the answers.
- ◆ Don't look for patterns, so many A's, B's, etc... Try an educated guess instead of following (an accidental) pattern.
- ◆ Like with any other test, go through all of the test questions and answer the obvious ones first.
- ◆ Sometimes a series of test questions all deal with the same topic. Read the previous and proceeding questions for clues to the answers of other questions.
- ◆ Read each answer with the stem of the question or the entire question being asked. Identify the selection that sounds correct.
- ◆ If one choice is much longer than the rest, and it seems likely to be right, then go with it. Longer answers tend to be right more often than shorter answers.
- ◆ Another clue is when two choices are exact opposites. Pick one of those responses.
- ◆ After reading the question, think of the right answer BEFORE looking at the choices.
- ◆ Many of the possible answers may tell something about the question, but only one response is completely correct.
- ◆ Grammatical clues in the question stem may be a clue to what the correct answer is.