

Test Preparation Tips

PLAN AHEAD: During class, always be thinking of what is going to be on an exam. What problems or notes will you need to study to do well?

PRACTICE REGULARLY: Develop a set of review questions (or problems) and answers to use for practice before the exam. Make copies of blank maps, charts, diagrams, etc. for practice. Keep one filled out (of each kind) correctly for feedback. For history dates, science definitions, language vocabulary, and other single answer information create flash cards and drill regularly.

STUDY ACTIVELY: Prepare by writing definitions, summaries, or outlines. This is more effective than simply reading over your notes. You learn more when you get actively engaged. Get a "study buddy" or make up games, anything that will help you learn is worth the extra effort.

TEST YOURSELF: Practice for the test by testing yourself.

SLEEP: Get plenty of rest before a test.

EXAM DAY WARM-UP: Study the night before. In the morning, solve a few problems or answer a few questions for a quick review. Just like a warm-up, it helps your brain to get "in gear".

FOOD: The food you eat on test days should give you plenty of constant energy. Carbohydrates are easy to digest and give fairly steady energy. Eat carbohydrates like fruit, fruit juice, cereals, and bread. Limit heavy foods that may make you sleepy. These include meat and oily or fried foods. Be careful of coffee and other caffeine drinks since your natural nervousness will supply plenty of adrenaline to your system. Sugar also tends to rev you up, then let you down; use it in moderation.

test taking tips

WHEN YOU TAKE A TEST, DO THE EASY QUESTIONS FIRST. This is a good technique whether you are writing an essay test or answering questions. Research has shown that tackling easy items first on a test tends to produce better results than doing the difficult items first on the same test. So skim over the test and find where to begin. On an objective test, don't spend a lot of time worrying about a tough item. Skip it and come back to it later. On an essay test, write the easy items first but leave plenty of space so that your answers will be in the correct sequence.

ON AN ESSAY TEST, WRITE DOWN SOMETHING FOR EVERY ITEM. Be sure to read the directions. You may be asked to write only part of the items. Then, for each item you select, write something. Don't leave any item blank. The worst that can happen is that you do not get any credit for the answer, which you wouldn't have if you had left it blank. But, if you write something down, even if it is a guess, you may pick up a few points or partial credit.

ON AN ESSAY TEST BE NEAT. Some informal research indicates that to many teachers a neatly written paper is worth about one letter grade more than the exact paper written in a sloppy, messy sort of way. Look at it this way: You are an instructor and you have to read through 30-40 essay exams. You are naturally going to be a little more sympathetic to the student who makes your job easier by writing neatly and clearly. So for an essay test, do the best you can.

ON AN ESSAY TEST, ANSWER THE EASY QUESTION FIRST. Skip the tough questions and come back to them later. Answering the questions that you know first will help you to stay calm for the test.

ON OBJECTIVE TESTS, IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND, CHANGE YOUR ANSWER. Many students think that their first answer to a test item is somehow magically the best. On the basis of that unfounded belief they rarely change their answers. The question of whether or not to change answers has been carefully researched. All of the studies, over the decades, are quite consistent. They indicate that on the average you can expect to pick up more points that you will have lost by changing answers. So if you change your mind, change your answer.

WHEN ANSWERING TRUE-FALSE TESTS THINK OF SCORER.

S=Schedule your time, estimate how much time you can allow for each question. Stick to your estimate. Don't get hung up on a difficult item, move on. (To estimate time, divide the available test time by the number of questions, such as 60 minutes divided by 60 questions equals one minute per question.)

C-Clue Words: Statements are usually false when they contain clue words which indicate that the statement must always be true with no exceptions. (Such as: all, every, none, always, invariably, never, best, exactly, worst). Statements are usually true when they contain clue words which modify the absoluteness of the statement. (Such as: many, most, some, few, often, usually, sometimes, seldom, more, equal, less, good, bad). Watch out for statements that are really definitions, such as: "All triangles have three sides." (This is a true statement: be careful of these statements in science and math areas.)

O=Omit Difficult Questions Until Last: Answer easy question first as you go through your test and place a mark by the doubtful statements. This action will help you stick to your time schedule will ensure your receiving points on all the items you know; and may trigger your memory when going back to answer the doubtful statements on the test. Repeat this procedure until all the questions are answered. (HINT: On tests that count only the correct answers in the score or for tests that do not penalize for wrong answers, always give an answer. The percentages are on your side for picking up some points even through guessing.)

R=Read Each Question Carefully: Reading each true-false statement carefully (and the test instructions) can sometimes make or break your test score.

WHEN ANSWERING MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS THINK OF THE FOLLOWING:

Read through the test quickly, answering only questions you are sure about. (Many times clues to answers can be found in other questions.)

Read the entire question and all the possible answers. Sometimes the last answer is the best answer even though other answers might work.

Read all possible answers, marking through the first letter of those you are pretty sure are not correct. Usually a multiple-choice question will have one correct answer, two that are distractors, and one that is definitely wrong.

Locate the distractors. Sentences with the words always, never, none, and all are often distractors-but not every time. Be careful.

If you can find one or two of the distracting answers to a question, then look closely at them as they may give you the clue to the correct answer. Ask yourself, "What makes this a distractor?" and then select the "best" answer.

If you have two answer options that you feel are equal, select one and write a brief rationale for your choice in the margin-this is often good for extra credit, even if the answer is wrong.

If you change your mind, change your answer.

On standardized tests, leave unknown questions until last. If you have time, count the number of A's, B's, C's, and D's you've answered. Usually there will be an equal number of each, and odds are that if you have fewer of one letter that will be the one you should tend to select on the remaining questions.

Never leave a multiple-choice question unanswered. You have at least a 25% chance of getting it correct just by accident. If you can eliminate two choices, you are just as likely to get it right as you are to get it wrong.

When in doubt, guess B or C. Teachers often try to "hide" the answer.

Ways to Help Students Do Their Best

(On Standardized Testing)

The value of test results depends to a large extent on the atmosphere that surrounds the testing activities. This atmosphere is affected by the thoughtfulness and care with which testing is planned and conducted as well as the attitude and motivation of the students. When students are interested, feel confident about the test, and understand the procedures, the results are likely to be a more accurate measure of their skills and knowledge. The following are some suggestions to help create that atmosphere.

- ✓ Explain the purpose of the test to the students. Let them know that the test will be helpful in identifying the skills and knowledge that they have already mastered and those that they need to learn. Explain how standardized tests differ from classroom tests so that students understand the importance of each.
- ✓ Convey a positive attitude about the test and encourage the students to do their best. Let them know that some assessment activities may cover material they have not yet studied, and they are not expected to know all of the answers. However, encourage them to try all of the items, to pay careful attention to the directions, to use their time efficiently, and to review their answers if there is time.
- ✓ Help the students understand the value of testing as part of the educational process. The most effective motivation is self-motivation to do one's best.
- ✓ Review the testing schedule and the directions for administration in advance to ensure that class work can be organized to accommodate the testing sessions and that testing will go smoothly. Allow adequate time for each test section to be completed without interruptions. A relaxed atmosphere during testing will enable the students to do their best work.
- ✓ During regular class work, it may be helpful to write some classroom tests that are similar in format to the standardized test that will be taken. TerraNova has selected-response and constructed response questions. Providing opportunities throughout the year for students to become familiar with the different formats will make taking standardized tests that much easier.
- ✓ You may want to administer the practice tests several days before the actual tests. That way, if students are having difficulty with a particular format, there is a little more time for students to "experiment". You may amplify the directions and explanations for the Practice Activities if it appears the students do not understand what they are to do. The Practice Activities are designed to familiarize students with the formats and the terminology used in TerraNova, and when applicable, to provide practice in using separate answer sheets. In addition, for the parts of the test using manipulatives, you

may want to have the students punch out the pieces early and provide time for free exploration. It would be better for them to “explore” with the pieces when they have time, rather than when time is limited.

- ✓ There are many opinions about guessing on tests. Typically, you should encourage only *informed* guessing. The purpose of the test is to help students get the instruction they need. Blindly guessing at items will provide misleading information.
- ✓ Review the Teacher’s Guide to TerraNova. If you do not have a copy, check with your counselor. Every school has several copies. Inside you will find sample questions, information about the content of the test, descriptions/definitions for the objectives, and suggestions for teachers, parents, and students.

During the Test

RELAX! It is normal to be nervous before a test. Don't worry.

KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE ABOUT YOUR ABILITY TO DO WELL ON THE TEST. There is always another chance.

IF YOU ARE NOT SURE HOW TO ANSWER A QUESTION, ELIMINATE ANSWER CHOICES THAT YOU KNOW ARE INCORRECT AND CHOOSE FROM AMONG THE REMAINING OPTIONS. Do not guess blindly.

TAKE A GOOD WRITING UTENSIL TO CLASS. (Teachers appreciate dark lead or ink they can see. Avoid colored inks and pencils.) Watch your handwriting, spelling, and writing mechanics during the test.

BE SURE YOU CAN HEAR THE DIRECTIONS. Raise your hand if you cannot hear or do not understand the directions.

IF YOU ARE MARKING YOUR ANSWERS ON A SEPARATE SHEET, BE SURE THE CIRCLES ARE FILLED IN NEATLY AND COMPLETELY. Make sure they match the item numbers in the test book. If you realize that you have been marking your answers in the wrong place, let the proctor or teacher know immediately.

READ QUICKLY THROUGH ALL THE QUESTIONS BEFORE BEGINNING. Estimate the time you can allow for each question.

PLAN TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOU KNOW FIRST. Go through the entire test and answer everything you know. Then go back and start to work on the questions that were skipped.

READ THE GENERAL TEST INSTRUCTIONS. You may have options as to how many questions you must answer. You may also have to do different things for different parts of the test, read all directions carefully.

BE SURE TO READ EACH QUESTION CAREFULLY TO DETERMINE WHAT IS REALLY BEING ASKED. Before responding to a question, be sure you know what is being asked. For example, an item might say, "Which of these is *not* an even number?" If you read the item too quickly, you may miss the word *not* and respond incorrectly. Sketch an outline in the margin or on scrap paper making sure that all the important points are included in your answer and that they follow a logical order.

AVOID ANSWERS THAT BEGIN: "It is when..." and "It is because..." Who knows what "it" is referring to?

WHEN WRITING YOUR ESSAY ANSWERS, START A SEPARATE PARAGRAPH FOR EACH OF THE MAIN IDEAS OR STATEMENTS WITHIN ONE ESSAY ANSWER. Put your details and examples under their respective main ideas. This aids organization and writing mechanics.

READ OVER YOUR PAPER BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN. Check for completeness in expression and ideas and for mechanical errors. Also make sure you have answered all the questions.

USE ALL OF YOUR TEST TIME. Check and recheck and only stop when you are directed to.

Simple Ways to Ease Stress

(Elementary)

- Set a supportive tone by arranging for a class breakfast where parent volunteers help.
- Begin the day in a festive mood. Gather students together and tell them that the test is a celebration of all they have learned about test preparation.
- A few days before the testing have students make paper hats decorated with motivational phrases like “Just do it!” or “Hot Thinker!”. The students can wear the hats on testing days.
- Several weeks in advance send a letter home to parents to help dissipate their anxiety, which in turn, might affect their children. Stress that scores are not as important as other information the school has about any one child’s performance.
- Rearrange the room several days ahead with the kids’ help. This way when they arrive on testing day the room doesn’t look unfamiliar.

8. Score all responses to one exercise at a time (faster!).
9. Score holistically or analytically, but with criteria clearly established.

Formatting Test Items

1. Be consistent in the presentation of an item-type.
2. Keep all parts of a test question on one page.
3. Avoid crowding too many questions on one page.

Arranging Test Items

1. Group the questions on the test by item-type--that is, put all completion questions together, all multiple choice, all true/false, and so on.
2. Begin with some very easy questions to give students a chance to "break into" the test.

Writing Directions

1. Write clear, explicit directions for each type of item.
2. State the point value of each item-type.
3. Indicate how the answer should be expressed by the student. For example, should the word TRUE or FALSE be written or simply T or F? Should numbers be rounded to the nearest tenth? Should units, such as months, meters, or grams be included in the answer?

Producing Tests

1. Avoid writing tests on the chalkboard.
2. Type tests for duplication--unless your handwriting is very clear and neat.
3. Proofread the test carefully.
4. Duplicate clear, readable copies.
5. Ask a colleague to review or to take important tests.