



General Tips for Test Taking

From the University Learning Centers at Penn State University

Before a student begins, they should:

- Preview the test before answering anything. This gets the brain thinking about the material. Make sure to note the point value of each question, if available.
- Quickly calculate how much time may be needed for each section according to the point value. Students don't want to spend 30 minutes on an essay question that counts only 5 points.
- Do a mind dump. Using what was seen in the preview, make notes. Write down things that were used when the material was being taught that might help with the answer. Outline possible answers to discussion questions.

When taking the test, students should:

- Read the directions. Can more than one answer be correct? Is there a penalty for guessing? Don't assume you know what the directions say.
- Answer the easy questions first. This will give you the confidence and momentum to get through the rest of the test. Try not to spend too much time on one question.
- Go back to difficult questions. While looking over the test and doing the easy questions, your subconscious mind will be working on the answers to the hardest ones. Also, later items on the test might provide useful information for earlier items.
- Answer all questions. On the SAT there are penalties for wrong answers, so don't guess too much.
- Ask the instructor to explain any items that are not clear. Do not ask for the answer, but phrase your question in a way that shows the instructor that you have the information but are not sure what the question is asking.
- Try to answer the questions from the instructor's point of view. Try to remember what the instructor emphasized and felt was important.
- Use the margin to help you figure out if the question does not seem clear or if the answer seems ambiguous.

- Circle key words in difficult questions. This will force you to focus on the central point.
- Express difficult questions in your own words. Rephrasing can make it clear to you, but be sure not to change the meaning of the question.
- Use all of the time allotted for the test. If there is no time limit - relax and spend what you need on each section. If you have extra time, cover up your answers and actually rework the question.

Special tips for multiple-choice tests from the Utah Education Association:

- While reading the question, try to guess the answer before looking at the choices. If your guess is one of the choices, it's probably correct.
- Always read each question and all the answers completely, even if you have already guessed at an answer. There may be a better choice further down the list.
- Quickly leave out any choices that could not possibly be right. Many questions have only two choices that make sense. Work at spotting the poor choices, so they can be eliminated.
- When "all of the above" is a choice, and you know two of the choices are right, select "all of the above."
- Look out for words such as "always," "never," "only," "must." If the answer does not allow for exceptions, it is probably wrong. Many times words like "often," "sometimes," "perhaps," "may" and "generally" show up in the correct answers.