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Test Preparation

- Prepare for tests by reviewing study guides created by class instructors. Study guides typically contain main points and suggested readings.
- Find out from the teacher what to expect on the exam. Most teachers are willing to tell students the main concepts that will be on the test.
- Rewrite or retype your notes as a way to review and discover any gaps you missed in class. Make sure to leave time to look up concepts in your textbook or ask your instructor to clarify.
- When possible, review previous examinations to get familiar with the format and get an idea of what will be tested.
- Take lots notes right before the exam. Teachers often give hints days before the test. Pay close attention to terms, questions or topics focused on or repeated before exam.
- Try to figure out possible test questions. Create a list of questions and test yourself on them.

Adapted from multiple articles listed on: http://www.collegeatlas.org/
General

Before beginning the test, write down easily forgotten information. This includes formulas, equations, dates, names, and vital data. Likewise, write down brief outlines to refer to during essays, margin notes, mnemonic hints, and other key information that could be forgotten under stress. Frequently refer back to margin notes while completing the test.

Thoroughly read all test instructions. Briefly review all the sections, identifying if answers can be used multiple times, and pay close attention to each question since some contain multiple correct answers. Simplify complex instructions by breaking them into sections. Underline or circle confusing questions, and return to them after answering easy ones.

If permitted, bring a calculator, note paper, and other permitted tools to the testing center. Many students make the mistake of rushing through tests without utilizing permitted test-taking tools.

Once you’ve reviewed the test, create a plan to finish it. Set aside enough time for each question, focusing on simple questions at the beginning to save time for more challenging questions. Don’t spend excessive time on easy questions. Schedule time to check answers and review for simple errors. Sit near a clock or wear a watch to track time.

If you filled out a scantron sheet, ensure bubbles have been properly filled and every question answered. Double check essay and fill in the blank questions for legibility. Likewise, review each step completed on math problems and recheck calculations. Guess on any blank questions if penalties are not assessed.

Essay

Practice writing essays under timed conditions prior to the exam. Find questions in a work or textbook or create questions. Ask a classmate to create an essay question to practice. Refrain from using textbooks and notes when practicing.

Students who excel at writing essays typically spend a portion of the essay developing an outline. Develop an outline to organize an essay response and ensure all questions are adequately answered. In addition to outlines, students often use bubble maps, flow charts, tables, or herringbone maps to organize essays. This should only take a few minutes.

Don’t waste space or time, but leave some time to recheck your work. Be sure you thoroughly answered the question, presented coherent arguments, and effectively organized the essay. Also check for legibility, proper punctuation and grammar usage, and spelling errors.

Thoroughly read essay instructions before writing responses, especially when there are multiple questions to choose from. Essay directions provide instructions about whether you’re required to compare and contrast two viewpoints, summarize a series of events, make and support an argument, etc. Divide difficult questions into manageable sections to ensure every part is answered.

Try to determine whether the professor is seeking dates, technical concepts, names, or events when answering short answer and fill-in-the-blank questions. Also determine whether you’re being asked to summarize, describe, or compare information.

Review verb tenses and grammatical structure to decipher question clues. You can determine whether the answer is a verb if it makes sense with “to” placed before it and a noun if it makes sense with “the” placed before it. Also try to determine whether the answer is plural or singular. Closely monitor other questions to locate contextual clues.

Fill-In/Short Answer

Double check essay and fill in the blank questions for legibility. Likewise, review each step completed on math problems and recheck calculations. Guess on any blank questions if penalties are not assessed.

Refrain from overanalyzing questions since it will drive you crazy. Pay closer attention to contextual hints. The length and quantity of blanks often provide hints about answers. If a question contains multiple blanks, the answer is more than likely two or more words.

Analyze key phrases and terms and try to recall lectures when the professor used them. What concepts were discussed? If you cannot remember when these words and phrases were used, analyze grammatical structure and context to make an educated guess.

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Multiple Choice

Analyze each choice before selecting an answer. Students often make the mistake of choosing one of the first couple of answers without looking at the other options. Before selecting an answer, eliminate choices that are obviously incorrect.

Eliminate blatantly incorrect choices to narrow options. Pay close attention to similarly worded answer options since they often contain a few different words. In many cases, one of these choices is the correct answer.

Answer the question in your mind prior to looking at answer options. After reading the question stem, underline words that provide hints about the correct answer. When doing so, pay close attention and underline the following indicators: all, always, never, only, and all within them are typically false. Questions with often, usually, probably, most, generally, and seldom within them are typically true. Try to identify phrases used in textbooks or lectures within questions. Also, look for similarities in other questions to decipher clues that can be helpful in answering confusing ones.

Never leave questions you don’t know blank. First, eliminate incorrect choices, and if you are still not sure of the answer, make an educated guess. When in doubt, stick with your original answer unless you have a valid reason to do so.

Quantitative/Number

When points are not deducted for calculation errors, spend most of your time properly setting up the problem. However, when calculation errors result in point losses, write legible numbers. Use scratch paper to work through problems, and then recopy each step neatly with the answer on the test sheet. Be sure that the proper measurement units are included with the final answer.

Write down all the variables and numbers provided in the question. Next, determine what the question is asking you to calculate and the formula needed to find the correct answer. Quickly estimate the final answer before working through the problem.

Use All Information Given in the Problem. The data required to find the correct answer is typically provided within the question. Carefully review all graphs and charts included with the problem. Pay close attention to graph origins, axes, intervals, and measurement units.

Students often make the mistake of quitting when they forget formulas or struggle setting up problems. When this happens, replace variables with numbers to simplify the problem and apply real-world scenarios to the problem. When struggling with fractions, use rounded numbers or convert them into decimals.

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True or False

Questions with because, always, never, only, and all within them are typically false. Questions with often, usually, probably, most, generally, and seldom within them are typically true. Try to identify phrases used in textbooks or lectures within questions. Also, look for similarities in other questions to decipher clues that can be helpful in answering confusing ones.

Many students overanalyze true-false questions by looking for hidden meanings. Professors typically do not try to trick students; rather, they’re interested in assessing how well students understand the material. Questions that appear to be true are usually correct. Avoid choosing false simply because there is a grammatical error.

If you do not know the correct answer, and no penalties are incurred for guessing, make an educated guess. You have a 50 percent chance of correctly answering the question. Pay close attention to the question since if any part of the question is wrong, false is the correct answer. There typically tend to be more true-false questions that are true than false.

Matching

Answer the questions you know first. Cross off responses after being used if they cannot be used multiple times.

Begin with the section containing the longest phrases to save time. After you’ve completed the long section, read the shorter sections.

Once you’ve answered the easy questions, move onto the difficult ones. You’ll have fewer responses to choose from, simplifying the process. If you get stumped on a question, relate it to questions you’re 100 percent sure of. If answers can be used multiple times, examine the responses that have already been used since more difficult responses often only have one correct answer.

Write a brief justification in test margins next to selected answers you’re not 100 percent sure of. Be sure that the professor or teacher’s aide will not be confused about which questions correspond to written explanations.

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