

Five Simple Strategies to Improve Test Performance

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A person could spend years becoming a sophisticated test taker, but generally we are too busy *studying* for a test to learn how to *take* a test. The following are five very simple strategies employed by excellent test takers.

Develop a Plan of Action. Don't just "dive" into a test. When it is first handed out take a minute or two to plan out a strategy. Glance through the test, determine what is included, estimate how much time you have for each section. Make sure you invest adequate time in the sections that have the most points.

Look for Key Words. Find the words in the question that can change the meaning. Words like: sometimes, *always*, *usually*, *may*, *discuss*, *contrast*, *except*, *etc.* Take your pencil and underline them. How many times have you missed a question because you mis-read? This will slow you down and make you read carefully.

Develop a Skipping Strategy. Often we will waste time by struggling over one question. Have a plan to skip around the test and first answer all the questions that you know, and then go back to the ones that you can't answer the first time. If you are unsure, then guess. However, when you go back through the second time do not change a guess unless you are very certain you have made a mistake.

Outline Essay Questions. Before you start writing, make a brief outline of your response. This will focus your thinking and actually save you time. Your teachers will love you for doing this because it makes it easy to follow your logic.

Prepare Practice Tests. Experience is the best teacher. Use chapter reviews or sample tests from the textbook to prepare. Better still; write your own test questions as you study. If you do this early in your study process you will have a better idea of your strengths and weaknesses. It will make you less nervous on test day because you have had a "dress rehearsal."