



Test Taking Strategies by Exam Format

Multiple Choice

- Includes true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and matching formats.
- Tests receptive knowledge and is not open-ended; requires a greater breadth of understanding.
 - **Study tip:** Use Quizlet to help you cover a lot of conceptual information. Use the desktop version with the typing function and prioritize activities that have you produce the answer like Write, Spell or Gravity. Use the Test activity to create fill-in-the-blank questions that will challenge you to recall concepts.

Strategies

- Cover the answers as you first read the question. Predict what the answer will be yourself, and then uncover the answers and find the one that best matches your prediction. You are less likely to be misled by the distractors (sometimes very reasonable, but wrong choices).
- Circle words like *not* in the question to make sure you are reading the question correctly. If faced with a double negative (example: coffee is not a non-alcoholic beverage), cross out both negatives and reevaluate the statement (coffee is ~~not~~ a ~~non~~-alcoholic beverage → false).
- When you don't know the answer, make an educated guess. Use process of elimination to remove the answers you know to be incorrect. True/false statements or multiple choice answers that include absolutes can tend to be false/incorrect, as only one exception invalidates the statement. Examples of absolutes include words like *never*, *all*, *always*. Softer language like *seldom*, *many*, *often* allows for exceptions and is easier to support, meaning it may be more likely that the statement is true/correct.
- Multiple choice has content embedded into the questions and answers. Utilize the content in other questions to help you when you're stuck on a question (good reason to skip and come back later).
- Questions like the one below are not just testing your knowledge, they are additionally logic problems. Be careful and systematic when answering. Evaluate the simple answers first (A, B, C). In this example assume that A is correct, and B is wrong. You could eliminate all other answers except for A!

Question...?

- A)
- B)
- C)
- D) A & B
- E) B & C
- F) All of the above.

Short Answer/Essay

- Open-ended prompts test productive knowledge, and require a greater depth of understanding, including showing what you know (from memory) and many times applying concepts to a scenario.
 - **Study tip:** Collect potential prompts (from the textbook, lecture) or create them yourself week-to-week, using index cards. A few times a week shuffle the index cards and pull out 5-10 prompts. Practice *writing out the answer* to the prompts one after another, and then go back and evaluate/grade your work. You are simulating the challenges of the real exam.

Strategies

- Break down the prompt to make sure you are addressing every aspect. Especially for longer questions/essay questions, consider summarizing the prompt in your own words with a check list.
- Determine the aim of the prompt to make sure you are meeting expectations. Is it looking for a definition? Explanation? Is it asking you to apply concepts to a case study or example? Compare and contrast concepts, or synthesize multiple sources? Take a stance on an issue and craft an argument? If you misread the aim, earning full points may be impossible. Example: you provide a definition and an example for a concept, but the prompt asked you to provide an argument that evaluates the concept.
- Make sure your ideas are as clear to the grader as possible by proofreading your writing at the end of the exam after you have had some distance from what you wrote initially.

Calculation/Math

- To excel in this format you usually need know how to (1) select the appropriate formula, (2) produce the formula accurately, (3) complete the steps to solve for the formula, and (4) perform your calculations without error to get the correct answer. Don't assume a bank of formulae will be provided, or that the problems will identify/provide the formula you need to use!
 - **Study tip:** Being able to do mixed problem sets with no notes and under timed conditions is your goal, in order to simulate the exam. An important foundation for this is to also memorize the formulae and when they are used. Quiz yourself by writing the formula name on one side of an index card and writing out the formula and when it is used on the back. With scratch paper, practice writing out the formula and when it is used, using the front of the card as a prompt.

Strategies

- When you get your exam, quickly write out the formulae you will need in the margin or on a scratch piece of paper.
- Complete as much of the calculation as you can before moving on to a new problem. Maximize your partial credit and give yourself a better chance of completing it if you have time to return to it later.
- Review your work at the very end, once you have had some distance from your answers. This will help you better identify silly calculation errors than if you attempted to do so right after finishing your calculation.

Final note: Do not assume that **take-home exams** or **open-book exams** will be easier! You still need to study and prepare, as these formats often ask you to show a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the content.