

Self-Management Resource Library

Student Version



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Test-Taking Strategies: A Quick Reference Guide

General Test-Taking Strategies

- Make sure you know what information will be included on the test and what the format of the questions will be (multiple-choice, essay, etc.). If you are not sure, check your syllabus and ask your professor.
- Review your previous tests from the course to get a better idea of the kinds of information and ideas your professor tends to focus on and the types of questions he or she asks.
- Take practice tests to apply techniques that will help improve your test-taking skills.
- Read the directions before answering any questions.
- For some types of tests (e.g., math), it may be helpful to first work on the questions you can answer quickly and easily and then attempt the more difficult questions. Give the highest priority to questions that are worth the most points.
- Be observant—sometimes information in test questions will help you answer other questions.
- Once you have answered a question, move on. Clear your head and think about the next question; do not think about the different ways you could have answered the previous one.
- Keep an eye on the time. Pay attention to how much time you have to complete the test. Periodically review how many questions you still have to answer, and speed up or slow down as needed.
- If you have time, double-check your answers after you have completed the test.

Strategies for Multiple-Choice Questions

- Read the directions, question, and all answer choices carefully before answering the question.
- Focus on the important information in the question.
- Look for words in the question that give you clues to the answer.
- Check to see that your answer is reasonable. Ask yourself, “Does this answer make sense?”
- If you are not sure of the answer, cross out any answers you think are incorrect. Then you can focus on the remaining choices, picking the one you think is the best answer.
- For questions that include an answer choice of “all of the above,” look at each answer choice and ask yourself if it is a true or false statement. If you find a choice that is false, the choice with “all of the above” will be incorrect. Eliminating those two choices, you can concentrate on the remaining answer choices to make your selection.
- Put a true-or-false question into yes-or-no terms. For example, if a question states, “The sky is blue,” ask yourself, “Is the sky blue?” Yes = true. No = false. Sometimes thinking of the answer in everyday yes-or-no terms makes it clearer.
- Usually, one word will determine whether a statement is true or false. For example, words like “always,” “never,” and “all” frequently make a statement false.
- When a question is difficult for you, try rereading the question and the answer choices. If you are still not sure of an answer, do not get stuck on the question. Simply mark the question and come back to it later if you have time.

Strategies for Problem-Solving Questions

- Read the problem carefully and determine what it is asking you to do.
- Look for information in the problem that will help you figure out the answer.
- Figure out what steps you need to take to solve the problem.
- Review your answer. Does it make sense? Does it solve the whole problem?

Strategies for Essay Questions

- If there is more than one essay question to complete, start with the one that you feel best prepared to answer. This strategy can help you build confidence for answering the remaining questions.
- Carefully read the directions and the question to understand exactly what you need to do. Look for key words such as “define,” “compare,” “list,” “describe,” “evaluate,” “summarize,” and “explain.”
- Before you start writing, use the margins of your paper to compose a quick outline of your key points, in the order in which you will present them, along with the evidence and ideas you will use to support the key points.
- Use your outline to guide your writing. In your essay, answer the question as directly as possible. Refer to the topics mentioned in the question and use the related vocabulary in your answer.
- Keep your handwriting as neat as possible.
- Proofread your work. Check your grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and make any necessary corrections.

To learn more about test-taking strategies, ask your college counselor or advisor about additional resources available on your campus.

Relaxation Techniques

When you feel the effects of stress, how do you usually calm your mind and body? Learning and practicing a few simple relaxation techniques can help you manage the mental and physical symptoms of stress.

Deep Breathing

When people are affected by stress, they sometimes take short, quick breaths instead of breathing deeply and slowly. Learn to breathe properly by practicing this deep-breathing technique two or three times a day for a few minutes. With daily practice, you can use this technique any time you feel symptoms of stress. Just a few deep breaths will help you calm yourself.

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the ground.
2. Breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose. You should feel your abdomen (not your chest) expand as you breathe in.
3. Now slowly breathe out through your nose. You should feel your abdomen sink in toward your back.
4. Wait a moment, then repeat. Do this about ten times.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

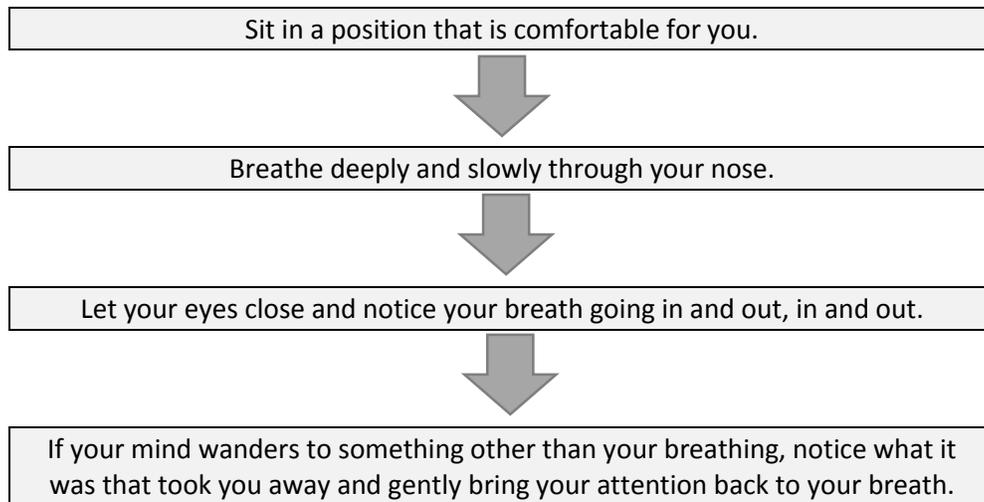
When people are affected by stress, they often tense their muscles. Become aware of the tension in your body and learn to relax your muscles. Combine this technique with deep breathing for a very good way to help calm yourself any time you feel symptoms of stress.

1. Begin by breathing deeply and slowly as described above.
2. After a few deep breaths, tense your shoulders for about five seconds, then relax them. As you are relaxing your shoulders, say the word “relax” to yourself. Notice the way it feels to relax your shoulders. Concentrate on making them feel as loose and relaxed as possible.
3. Now tense your forehead for five seconds, then relax it. Continue to notice the difference between what it feels like to be tense and what it feels like to be relaxed.
4. Repeat by tensing and relaxing your arms, abdomen, thighs, calves, and feet, one after the other.
5. Now return to breathing deeply and slowly. Become aware of any muscles in your body that feel tense, and relax them as much as possible. Continue breathing and releasing any tension you find.

To learn more about relaxation techniques, ask your college counselor or advisor about additional resources available on your campus.

Mindfulness Exercise

This simple breathing exercise is a way to help you deal with stress, keep distracting thoughts out of your mind, and stay as focused as possible on what you need to do. This technique is used by professional athletes, business executives, and other high achievers who recognize the value of being focused and relaxed.



Try practicing this technique for five minutes once or twice a day, and also use it any time you feel stressed or distracted to help you relax and focus.

Positive Self-Talk Exercise

It is not uncommon to have thoughts and beliefs about ourselves run through our minds. When the thoughts are positive, it can lead to feeling a sense of achievement. However, if the thoughts tend to be negative, they can begin to get in the way of one's successes.

Thus, it's important to replace the negative (and, in most cases, untrue) thoughts and beliefs about yourself with positive ones. For example, you may think, "I'll never understand algebra." Instead, turn that around and say to yourself, "I can learn algebra."

Even highly successful people—athletes, executives, and other professionals—use positive self-talk. It helps to maintain their confidence and leads them on the road to continued success.

Some tips on positive self-talk are listed below.

- Use active "I" statements, like "I am...," "I will...," and "I can...."
- Avoid negative words like "no," "not," "never," "can't," "don't," and "won't."
- Make your statements short and clear.
- Believe what you say – it's true!

On the next page, you will find an exercise designed to help you practice using positive self-talk.

In the left column, write down any negative thoughts and beliefs you have about yourself. In the right column, dispute each negative thought and belief with a positive statement about yourself.

Negative Thoughts and Beliefs	Positive Self-Talk Statements

Now read the positive statements aloud to yourself. You might want to do this in front of a mirror. Use your best posture. Breathe deeply. Speak with a strong voice. Imagine what it feels like to be the person you are describing. Focus on those positive feelings and a positive image of yourself. Recognize that this is the person you can be.

Throughout the day, notice your own thoughts. If you find they are becoming negative, breathe deeply, then replace negative thoughts with positive ones. For example, before a test, you may find yourself thinking, "I didn't study enough, and I'm going to fail." Replace this thought with a positive statement: "I am prepared to take this exam and will get a good grade." Over time, with practice, your self-talk will naturally become more positive.

To learn more about positive self-talk, ask your college counselor or advisor about additional resources available on your campus.

Coping Statements

The purpose of this exercise is to help you learn how to stop negative thoughts and to begin to think more realistically about a particular event or situation.

When you feel stressed or anxious about something, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. If you use and practice this coping exercise, you'll learn how to deal with your thoughts and fears in a more level-headed way. You'll soon realize that you are equipped to deal with the stresses of your life.

Directions: When you find yourself in what seems to be a difficult situation, it is important to think logically. In the exercise below, you will be challenged to develop coping statements for a series of situations. Coping statements should be realistic, short, and simple. (See the first two examples statements that are already filled in.) The statements should be in your own words and directly related to your original thought. After you complete the exercise, try to replace some of your own unrealistic thoughts with coping statements.

<u>Original Thought</u>	<u>Coping Statement</u>
"If I stutter during my presentation, everyone will think I'm unprepared and awkward."	"Most people will understand me if I stutter while giving my presentation. It's not that bad."
"If I don't make the team, I'll feel embarrassed."	"Most people will accept me even if I don't make the team. It's not that bad."
"I might say something foolish during my interview."	
"I'm worried I won't know anyone in my class."	
"I'm nervous that I won't make the dean's list this term."	
"When I feel embarrassed, I blush."	

Below is a blank worksheet. Use it when you need to reframe your thinking and cope with your fears. You should use this worksheet whenever you sense anxiety, are preparing for a stressful situation, or feel overwhelmed or unprepared.

<u>Original Thought</u>	<u>Coping Statement</u>

Self-Monitoring Productivity

Directions: The purpose of this exercise is to help you become more independent and feel more in control of your tasks by continually evaluating your progress. You can complete this sheet daily, weekly, or monthly.

Below you will see a chart with two columns. In the Example Objective column, you should list something you need to complete or do in the near future—finish a homework assignment, exercise, do laundry, attend study groups, etc. Then, in the column that follows, rate your progress on each activity by using the following scale.

- 0 – Did not attempt
- 1 – Put forth some, but minimal, effort
- 2 – Made good effort toward task
- 3 – Put forth maximum effort toward task

EXAMPLE OBJECTIVE	RATING
Find resources for history term paper	1
Meet with sociology group to discuss presentation	2
Go grocery shopping	3
Go to the gym	1
Get Mom’s birthday present	2
Pick courses for next semester	0
Complete math take-home test	3

At the end of each day (or week or month), review your ratings. Reflect on whether you had the opportunity and time to put more effort into completing your objectives. Answer the questions that follow the table to help you think about this.

Self-Monitoring Productivity Exercise

Directions: People sometimes find that they are not always as productive as they set out to be. The purpose of this exercise is to help you become more independent and feel more in control of your tasks by continually evaluating your progress. You can complete the sheet daily, weekly, or monthly.

Below you will see a chart with two columns. In the Objective column, you should list something you need to complete in the near future – a homework assignment, exercise, laundry, attending study groups, etc. Then, in the column that follows, rate how you did at each activity, using the following scale:

- 0 – Did not attempt
- 1 – Some, but minimal effort
- 2 – Good effort toward task
- 3 - Maximum effort toward task

OBJECTIVE	RATING

At the end of each day (or week or month), review your ratings. Reflect on whether you had the opportunity and time to put more effort into completing your objectives. Answer the questions that follow to help you think about this.

1. How would you describe your overall progress toward meeting your objectives?

2. If you did not meet all of your objectives, what was the reason?

3. What could you do in the future to ensure that your objectives are met, especially the most important ones?

Explore the content in the Social Support Resource Library for more tips and tools on juggling the demands in your life.

Activity and Mood Chart

Directions: In the table below, you will include several pieces of information that will help you better understand your moods over the period of one week. In the row for Major Activities, you will list the activity (or activities) where you spent most of your time for that day (e.g., at class, at work, shopping) and then indicate below how you felt overall that day, by checking the most appropriate box (positive, normal, or negative). In the Hours of Sleep column, record the number of hours of sleep you had that previous night. Feel free to record anything unusual (e.g., traffic jam, snow day) that happened in the Notes category for that day.

At the end of the week, review to see if there are any patterns between the activities you participate in and your mood. If you notice certain activities consistently leave you in a negative mood, try to counterbalance them by also doing an activity that leads to a positive mood. For example, if your art class always leaves you in a good mood, try to do an activity (e.g., laundry) that usually leads to a negative mood beforehand. You may also notice that on days when you had more sleep the night before, your mood is more normal or positive than on days when you had less sleep the night before.

DAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MAJOR ACTIVITIES							
POSITIVE MOOD							
NORMAL MOOD							
NEGATIVE MOOD							
SLEEP							
NOTES							

Tips and Tricks to Relieve Stress

When life gets busy, it's normal to feel stressed or anxious. Balancing course work, family obligations, work, financial pressures, and personal commitments can be difficult and lead one to feel overwhelmed. Below are several tips you can try to help you relieve your feelings of stress both quickly and easily.

<p>Take a walk. Whether the walk lasts a few minutes or an hour, getting out and being active will help you clear your head and reenergize you.</p>	<p>Breathe. When you start to feel stressed, your breathing can get shallow and off track. Slow down for a few minutes. Close your eyes and take some long, deep breathes. When done correctly, you will feel better quickly. Try the relaxation techniques in the Self-Management section of the Resource Library for more information on this.</p>
<p>Create a schedule. Taking a few minutes to plan out your day can help relieve some stress because making a realistic plan for your day can help you stay on track and avoid becoming overwhelmed.</p>	<p>Write! In this digital age, there is more than one way to express your feelings. You could write your feelings in an online blog, a journal, or in an e-mail to yourself. No matter what avenue you choose to write about your stress and anxiety, be sure to be honest. Expressing your thoughts will help you address your stress and push through it.</p>
<p>Talk about it. Call, e-mail, or text a family member or a friend and let them know how you're feeling. Talking it out with someone you care about can really help reduce some stress.</p>	<p>Think good thoughts. When you are having trouble managing stress and you need a break, do something that reminds you of a less stressful time. For instance, you may find that listening to music that reminds you of a good event or time in your life calms you. Reading a favorite quotation might leave you feeling inspired again. Close your eyes and recall a relaxing moment from a vacation. These quick and easy actions can lift your mood and decrease your level of stress.</p>

Explore the content in the Social Support Resource Library for more tips and tools on dealing with stress, balancing demands, and working with others.

Decision-Making Exercise

From time to time, you may find yourself faced with having to make difficult decisions. The types of decisions you must make will vary—from choosing which school assignments to begin first, deciding whether to be a full-time or a part-time student, or selecting which extracurricular activity to join. This exercise is designed to walk you through the decision-making process, no matter what type of decision you must make.

