

Test Taking

OVERVIEW- GENERAL TIPS

- You are going to have to take exams – get used to it.
- The tests you will take in college are likely different than the ones you took in high school. This can be nerve wracking, but if you develop effective test prep/test taking strategies now, you will have an invaluable skill that will serve you well in your academic pursuits at Cortland.
- Resources are EVERYWHERE. Use them!

IN THE BEGINNING

- When you receive your syllabus, look at the portion of it where the professor explains his/her test policy.
- Identify things like:
 - What are the dates of my exams? Highlight each test date.
 - What percentage of my final grade do exams count for?
 - Are there pop quizzes?
 - How much material will be covered on each exam?
 - What happens if I am sick or have an emergency and have to miss an exam?

A WEEK BEFORE

- Is there a study guide?
 - Complete it and ask for help if you cannot find answers.
 - Try to take the information and make it into your own practice test.
- Are there review or SI sessions?
 - If you can, go! A different perspective can always help.
 - Your SI leader or TA probably did very well in the class and are in this position for that reason. Learn from them!

THE NIGHT BEFORE

- Look over any notes, flashcards, diagrams, etc.
- Try to get a good nights sleep so that you will have a clear mind when taking your test.
- If possible, try to avoid cramming.
 - Try to make the night before a solid review of all of the information you have, not a frenzied panic to pack everything in your brain.
 - There will be times when studying last minute is inevitable. If this is the case:
 - Don't pull an "all-nighter."
 - Before you start studying come up with a brief plan, and be realistic about the situation.
 - Use this as a learning experience and re-evaluate your time management skills.

TYPES OF TESTS

- MULTIPLE CHOICE
- SHORT-ANSWER
- ESSAY



MULTIPLE CHOICE

- Multiple Choice depend on your recognition memory.
 - That means it is asking you to recognize the correct answer among four or five choices.
 - Well written multiple choice questions typically include one correct answer, 2-3 obviously incorrect answer options, and at least one incorrect answer that *looks* like it might be correct.
 - Read the question and all the answer options before selecting one. If the right answer stands out, select it.
 - If you must decide between two answers that look like they might be correct, take time to think about it, and select the option that best answers the question.
 - If you do not see obviously correct answer, and you have to go on your intuition, trust it!
 - Be careful about changing answers later. Here is a good rule of thumb. **DO NOT CHANGE YOUR ANSWER**, unless you have a very good reason (i.e. you realize that you misread the question, or you remember reading the right answer. Otherwise you are usually better off relying on your first guess.

SHORT ANSWER



- Short answers depend on your recall memory.
 - You are given a prompt and asked to draw information from your memory store.
 - Make sure you read and understand the question the question.
 - Be concise, and make sure answer the question.
 - Use key terms whenever possible, and make sure you spell them correctly.

ESSAY

- Essay exams also ask you to rely on recall memory.
 - Read the entire question, and make sure you answer all parts of the question.
 - Use key terms and concepts whenever possible. Remember, the goal is to demonstrate your understanding of the material, not your ability to B.S. when you don't!
- Professors might provide you with a few possible essay questions that could be on the test. If so, prepare for all of them.
 - Make/memorize outlines so that when the test comes, you don't have to write an entire essay from scratch.
 - This will not only increase your confidence going in, but provide you with the most amount of time to write a clear, coherent essay.

TEST TAKING STRATEGIES I

- If you don't know the answer right away, skip it and come back to it
 - Information in other parts of the test could trigger your memory
 - Don't spend forever on one question
- Think about using the prediction method
 - First cover up the answer choices, read the question, and “predict” your answer.
 - Then look at the choices and see which one best matches your prediction.
- Don't rely heavily on D) “all of the above ” but don't completely discount it either
- Read ALL of the answer choices.
 - Don't jump on the first answer choice that seems correct, read the question carefully and read through everything!
 - One answer may be more correct than the others or an answer choice may say “both A&B” or “both B&C”

TEST TAKING STRATEGIES II

- Follow your instincts—don't go back and change your answers
 - Unless you can provide yourself with a firm reason as to why your initial choice was incorrect, don't change it because chances are you are probably right.
 - A moment of self doubt could be the difference between an A and a B, or a passing grade for that matter.
- Don't leave anything blank.
 - With MC, it can't hurt. If you leave it blank, you will definitely get it wrong. You have a 1 in 4 (or 5) chance of guessing correctly. So, give yourself some credit.
 - With short answer, at least try to write something down. A teacher may give you partial credit for trying (but don't always count on this).

TEST TAKING STRATEGIES III

- Don't compare yourself to others
 - Everyone works at a different pace
 - Just because someone finishes in 20 minutes does not mean that they know the material better and are guaranteed an A.
 - Everyone processes information at different speeds
 - Take as much time as you need (or are allotted)
- Check your work
 - By the time you complete the test, you will probably want to leave, but take a few extra minutes to look everything over.

TEST TAKING ANXIETY

- Take a few deep breaths before you start
- If you have a “lucky” shirt, bracelet, pair of jeans, etc. wear it if it will make you feel more at ease.
- Try to have some confidence.
 - Remind yourself that you have studied and all you can do is try your best
 - You may be pleasantly surprised at how well you know the material
- Try to remind yourself that:
 - A score does not determine your overall value as a person.
 - One bad test (or a few bad test grades) is not indicative of failure, nor does it have that much bearing on your future.

AFTER THE TEST

- When you get your score:
 - Happy with it:
 - Good job!
 - Try to identify the things you did that really helped and continue to practice applying these to all of your courses
 - Don't use it as an excuse to start slacking
 - Unhappy:
 - If you did poorly, it is likely that you still have a chance to do well. It is highly improbable that your grade for the class is determined by one exam grade.
 - It is not the end of the world—college exams are probably much different (and require different thinking skills) than your high school exams
 - Look at the exam and try to identify what didn't work
 - What was on the test that you didn't study? And What did you study that wasn't on the test?
 - Go talk to the professor and ask for guidance.