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15 TEST-TAKING SUGGESTIONS

1. Avoid rushing. Get to the test early.
2. Pick a good spot to sit and recite notes calmly. The best spot is usually your normal seat, which is hopefully close to the front, and away from distractions.
3. Get rid of undue anxiety by relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, and focusing only on the task at hand.
4. Wait for oral instructions. Do NOT begin the test as soon as you receive it. You may miss vital information or clues if you do not listen to instructions.
5. Jot down memory clues before you begin. If there are dates, names or other items you are afraid you may forget, jot these down on the back of the test. This may relieve some stress immediately.
6. Skim the entire exam, reading directions carefully. As you quickly look over the test, look for:
 - a. *Point Allotment* - Spending the most time on items worth the most points.
 - b. *Type of Questions* - Which will take more time for you? What order would be best to answer the questions?
 - c. *Clues* - Test questions often may have clues farther on in the test or you may even find the answer.
7. Ask specific questions if needed after the instructor has had time to explain AND you have had time to skim the test.
8. Do the easy questions first. This will help your confidence level and allow you to have the rest of the time to concentrate on the harder questions.
9. Skip the harder ones and mark them so you will remember to come back to them after you have completed the easier ones and warmed up.
10. Do all tests four times. You need to go through the following four steps to do your best:
 - a. Skim the test.
 - b. Do the easier questions while you mark and skip the harder ones.
 - c. Return to do the harder ones.
 - d. Look over the entire test to check that you have answered all questions.
11. Change your answer if needed. You need to analyze your pattern. If the answer was clearly just a guess, perhaps your first guess IS your best answer. But, if after second thought you feel the need to change the answer, do so.
12. Budget your time. In addition to considering the point value of each question, make sure you allow enough time to complete the whole test with time to double-check.
13. Never leave blanks! A guess is better than a miss.
14. Write answers clearly.
15. Make the test serve you after it's over. Don't purposefully try and put the test out of your mind. Talk about strategies with other students. Look up the questions you weren't certain about. You will remember the answer much longer than any other questions if you do.

Source: Ahuna, Kelly H. and Tinnesz, Christine G. (2003). *Methods of Inquiry: Applied Critical Thinking*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.



PREPARING FOR EXAMS

16. **Generate Questions** – Turn information that you have to learn into questions that you need to answer. Generate questions from your lecture notes, readings, supplementary assignments, previous tests and quizzes, etc. This will help you to be more set up for review. If you can't generate questions, you most likely don't understand the material.
17. **Concept Mapping** – Take the information that you need to learn and put it into a picture format instead of simply reading the material. You want to be able to SEE the whole picture, how it all fits together, and not see things as random.
18. **Create Mock Exams** – You need to predict the questions the teacher is trying to ask you. Therefore, you want to use test preparation that will allow you to practice the kind of questions that you will see on the test.

Ideas for Creating Mock Exams:

- Find out the kind of exam that you are going to be asked to take. Is it essay, multiple choice, etc.? You want to prepare in the same format and with the same length that you will receive for the test.
 - Generate and predict test questions. Think from the teacher's point of view and put yourself in the mindset of the teacher. Use the questions from your notes and text.
 - Practice the test. Time yourself. Make the conditions the same as what you will be given the day of your exam. If you experience test anxiety, try to put yourself in the same room where you will take the test and practice it.
 - Make sure you have an answer key for the test. Make a separate answer key to practice. Find out what you don't know. Look up answers in your notes, texts, etc.
 - Go to the professor with SPECIFIC QUESTIONS. For example, be able to say "I understand this section, but this other section is where I am confused" or "this is an example of where I am stuck."
19. Study with friends, especially with a friend who loves the class. You can also make mock exams and exchange them with other students for repetition and review.
 20. Review your mock exams daily and multiple days before your tests. Repetition helps memory and reduces anxiety. Nothing helps decrease stress as much as BEING PREPARED.
 21. Use previous exams. Use passed tests as tools for future tests. Why did you make mistakes? You want to make sure that you do not confuse familiarity with understanding the material. For example, maybe you did well on the first biology class because you already knew much of the material on chemistry, covered on the first test. Do not let that lull you into complacency for the second test.
 22. Follow your instructor's emphases. Notice the topics the instructor emphasizes in lectures, spends a great deal of time discussing, or seems interested in or excited about; these are likely to be important. Talk with other students who have taken the course. They may be able to tell you what kinds of information your instructor emphasizes.
 23. See your professor if you do poorly on a test.