Tests: Prepping & Taking

When you take a test, you are demonstrating your ability to understand course material or perform certain tasks. Successful test taking avoids carelessness. To do well on tests, you must first learn the material and then review it before the test. These are techniques to better understand your material and avoid careless errors:

Learning:
- Attend all lectures/labs and actively participate
- Take good notes in your class lectures and textbooks
- Review your notes soon after class/lecture
- Review notes briefly before the next class
- Schedule some time at the end of the week for a longer review
- Utilize the professor’s office hours outside of class time to help understand difficult material

Reviewing:
- Take good notes, organize your notes, texts, and assignments according to what will be on the test
- Estimate the hours you'll need to review materials
- Draw up a schedule that blocks units of time and material
- Test yourself on the material
- Finish your studying the day before the exam

Review Methods:
- Create study checklists: Identify all of the material that you will be tested on—list notes, formulas, ideas, and text assignments you are accountable for. This checklist will enable you to break your studying into organized, manageable chunks, which should allow for a comprehensive review plan with minimal anxiety.
- Create summary notes and "maps." Briefly map out the important ideas of the course and the relationships of these ideas. Summary notes should display lists and hierarchies of ideas. Creativity and a visual framework will help you recall these ideas.
- Record your notes and significant portions of text so you can review material digitally. Having audio of important information will enable you to study while walking or relaxing in a nonacademic environment.
- Create flashcards for definitions, formulas, or lists that you need to have memorized – put topics on one side of the card, answers on the other. Flashcards will enable you to test your ability to not only recognize important information but also your ability to retrieve information from scratch.

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Prepare:
- **Be well-rested:** Give yourself a good amount of rest the night before the test. You will think clearer and be more alert.
- **Arrive early for tests:** Bring all the materials you will need such as pencils and pens, a calculator, a dictionary, and a watch. This helps you focus on the task at hand.
- **Be comfortable:** Choose a good spot and make sure you have enough room to work; maintain a comfortable posture but don’t slouch.
- **Stay relaxed and confident:** Remind yourself that you are well-prepared and are going to do well. If you find yourself anxious, take several slow, deep breaths to relax. Don't talk about the test to other students just before it; anxiety is contagious.

Test Taking:
- **Read the directions carefully:** This may be obvious, but it will help you avoid careless errors. If there is time, quickly look through the test for an overview -- note key terms, jot down brief notes.
- **Answer questions in a strategic order:**
  - First, easy questions: to build confidence, score points, and mentally orient yourself to vocabulary, concepts, and your studies (it may help you make associations with more difficult questions)
  - Then difficult questions or those with the most point value. With objective tests, first eliminate those answers you know to be wrong or are likely to be wrong, don't seem to fit, or where two options are so similar as to be both incorrect. With essay/subjective questions, broadly outline your answer and sequence the order of your points.
- **Review:** Resist the urge to leave as soon as you have completed all the items. Review your test to make sure that you have answered all questions, not mis-marked the answer sheet, or made some other simple mistake. Proofread your writing for spelling, grammar, punctuation, decimal points, etc.
- **Do not second-guess yourself** and change your original answers. Research has indicated that your first hunch is more likely to be correct. You should only change answers to questions if you originally misread them or if you have encountered information elsewhere in the test that indicates with certainty that your first choice is incorrect.
- **Analyze your test results:** Each test can further prepare you for the next test. Use your tests to review when studying for final exams. Decide on and adopt study strategies that worked best for you: Identify those that didn't work well and replace them.

Adapted from On Becoming a Master Student by D. B. Ellis and How to Study in College by Walter Pauk.