

Tips for Different Kinds of Tests

True/False:

- Every part of a true sentence must be "true" If any one part of the sentence is false, the whole sentence is false despite many other true statements.
- Pay close attention to negatives, qualifiers, absolutes, and long strings of statements
 - If the question contains negatives such as "no, not, cannot," drop the negative and read what remains.
 - Decide whether that sentence is true or false.
 - If it is true, its opposite, or negative, is usually false.
- Qualifiers are words that restrict or open up general statements Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities of making accurate statements. They make more modest claims, are more likely to reflect reality, and usually indicate "true" answers.
- Absolute words restrict possibilities. "No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate "false" answers.
- If the sentence contains words you've never heard of, guess false.
- Long sentences often include groups of words set off by punctuation. Pay attention to the "truth" of each of these phrases. If one is false, it usually indicates a false answer.
- If you are reduced to taking a pure guess, choose "true." It is easier for an instructor to write a true statement; plus, most would prefer that you think about the correct answer.

Multiple Choice:

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or "stem" followed by three to five options:

- Read the entire question and options carefully
- Know if each question has one or more correct options
- Answer easy questions first
- Cross out any obviously incorrect answers, such as those intended to be humorous
- Read the stem with each option treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true."
- Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem (subject does not agree with the verb)
- If two alternatives seem correct, compare them for differences then refer to the stem to find your best answer
- Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you
- Question options that contain negative or absolute words. Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like frequently for always or typical for every to see if you can eliminate it
- "All of the above": If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility
- Number answers: Toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- "Look alike options": Probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing and thus cancel each other out
- Favor options that contain qualifiers: The result is longer, more inclusive items that better fill the role of the answer
- If the question is based on a reading passage, read the question and possible answers before reading the passage. Then read the passage looking for the answer

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Essay Exams:

Before writing out the exam:

- Read each question once and note if you have any choice in answering questions
- Set up a time schedule to answer each question and to review/edit all questions
 - If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each
 - If questions are “weighted,” prioritize that into your time allocation for each question
 - When the time is up for one question, stop writing, leave space, and begin the next question. The
 - incomplete answers can be completed during the review time
 - Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three complete ones
- Pay attention to how the question is phrased and to words such as "compare," "contrast," "criticize," etc.
- Write down their key words, listings, etc., as they are fresh in your mind
 - These ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions
 - This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety and fear which disrupt thoughts)
- Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words
 - Now compare your version with the original.
 - Do they mean the same thing?
 - If they don't, you've misread the question.
- Think before you write:
 - Make a brief outline for each question.
 - Number the items in the order you will discuss them
- Get right to the point
 - State your main point in the first sentence
 - Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay
 - Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail
 - Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings
- Begin with a strong first sentence that states the main idea of your essay and continue this first paragraph by presenting key points
- Begin each paragraph with a key point from the introduction
- Develop each point in a complete paragraph
- Use transitions, or enumerate, to connect your points
- Hold to your time -- allocation and organization
- Summarize in your last paragraph: Restate your central idea and indicate why it is important.
- Review and complete questions left incomplete but allow time to review all questions
- Review, edit, correct misspellings, incomplete words and sentences, miswritten dates and numbers
- If you begin to run out of time, outline your answers; you may be given some credit for the work even though your response is not complete.

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Fill-in-the-Blank

- Read the directions carefully.
- Unless the directions state you will be penalized for a wrong answer, always write something in the blank.
- Make sure your answer is grammatically correct for the sentence.
- The length of the line or number of lines may indicate whether the correct answer is one or more words.
- Because key concepts are often the answers to fill-in-the-blank questions, keep alert for these concepts elsewhere in the test. The answer you need may be part of another question.
- After inserting your answer, reread the sentence to make sure it makes sense.

Short-Answer Questions

- Always write something, even if it is a complete guess. Your instructor can't give you points if the question remains unanswered.
- Identify and circle the "guide word" in the question. Instructors expect you to develop the topic based on the guide word (see the next page for a list of 12 common guide words).
- Underline the topic in the question to help you stay focused on your short-answer.
- Jot down your any related ideas and supporting details on a scrap piece of paper.
- Begin your answer by turning the question into your main idea.
- Use supporting details, examples, evidence, explanations, and experience to flesh out your paragraph.
- Use other questions to develop supporting details for other short-answers if you are at a loss for supporting details.
- The space provided by the professor may indicate how much writing is expected (unless there's a note such as, "continue your answer(s) on the back of this page").
- End your paragraph with a brief summary.
- Proofread your paragraph for grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence flow, etc.

Adapted from *On Compass* by Skip Downing, 2nd edition 2014

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12 Common Guide Words for Short-Answer Questions		
Guide Words	What to Do	Example Questions
Analyze	Identify the parts of something and explain how those parts contribute to the whole	<i>Analyze</i> the skills of a test-smart student. <i>Analyze</i> the symbolism of the white whale Herman Melville's <i>Moby Dick</i>
Compare	Show similarities of two or more things (note: some instructors also want you to show differences as well)	<i>Compare</i> linear and graphic organizers. <i>Compare</i> democracy and socialism.
Contrast	Show differences between two or more things.	<i>Contrast</i> Creators and Victims. <i>Contrast</i> Flemish and Italian painters during the Renaissance.
Define	State the meaning of something.	Define a self-sabotaging script. Define standard deviation.
Describe	Tell about in some detail.	<i>Describe</i> an effective self-management system. <i>Describe</i> the efforts of England's King Henry VII to consolidate royal power.
Discuss / Explain Why	Provide a detailed account showing cause	<i>Discuss why</i> it is important to be an active learner. <i>Explain why</i> Chebyshev's theorem is important
Discuss / Explain Effect	Give the results of something.	<i>Discuss</i> the long-term <i>effects</i> of stress on physical health <i>Explain the effect</i> of global warming.
Discuss / Explain How	Provide the details of a process.	<i>Discuss how</i> students can maintain or increase their academic motivation. <i>Explain how</i> hydrogen and oxygen combine to make water.
Evaluate	Assess strengths and weaknesses, providing reasons.	<i>Evaluate</i> the quality of writing in your first creative writing course <i>Evaluate</i> a vegetarian diet.
Explain	Make clear of comprehensible.	<i>Explain</i> the three components of a logical argument. <i>Explain</i> the health risks of binge drinking
Illustrate	Offer an example.	<i>Illustrate</i> the use of the "Golden Rule" <i>Illustrate</i> the benefits of using cascading style sheets in the creation of a website
Summarize	Provide a condensed version, highlighting main points only.	<i>Summarize</i> the reasons that interdependence is important in the workplace <i>Summarize</i> the plot of <i>Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain

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