TIPS FOR TEST-TAKING

The truth about tests is that most people worry too much about tests. Tests are a measure of how well you can recall specific information at a specific time and in a specific way. You can learn to be less stressed about tests if you understand that the scores you get on any tests are not going to show up in the history books 50 years from now! Put the importance of tests in perspective and tests will become less intimidating. Here are some tips on controlling test anxiety.

I. COPING WITH TEST ANXIETY

A. **RELAX!** A year from now even YOU won’t remember a particular test score!

B. **PUT THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE!** The fate of the world does NOT depend on whether or not you pass a test! No history book will ever record a statement like this—“On this date, TVI student _____________ flunked a test.”

C. **BECOME AWARE OF HOW YOU TALK TO YOURSELF!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL DIALOGUE</th>
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<td>Many students have an internal dialogue that goes something like this:</td>
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<td>“I’m so stupid!”</td>
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<td>“I’ll never learn all this material.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I just know I’m going to flunk the test.”</td>
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| “Whether you think you CAN or you CAN’T, you are probably right!” |
| --Henry Ford |

Studies have shown that students who think positively achieve positive results. Your brain can be talked into or out of success. Try really hard not to say negative things about yourself! Give yourself credit for having attended classes, for having read the material, for having studied. You deserve it!
D. **USE YOUR IMAGINATION!** If you start to get nervous before or during a test try this tip:

**CLOSE YOUR EYES AND...**
- Visualize how happy you will be when you pass the test!
- Day dream--Visualize a favorite place or experience; imagine you are there and are very happy and relaxed.
- Take a deep breath in through your mouth; hold your breath for a moment; then exhale slowly through your nose and say, “I can do this!”

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E. **USE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR**
1. Visualize the worst thing that could happen.
2. Then exaggerate it to the point where it becomes ridiculous!

**Example:** “Oh, my gosh! Look at this horrible test! If I fail this puppy, I might fail the course, lose my financial aid, and get kicked out of school. Then I won’t be able to get a job anywhere, so the bank will repossess my car. Pretty soon I’ll start drinking and be a bum on skid row. In fact, I’ll probably be written up in all the history books so that every student on earth will have to study my poor example and learn from it. Then the Martians and the Alpha Centaurians will hear of my failure and attack the earth. There will be interstellar war, the universe will end, and I alone will be responsible for all the death and destruction!”

Now, this is a pretty intense scenario, but is it likely to happen? Go backwards through your scenario until you find a statement that is reasonable and ask, “Can I survive that?” Unless the class is skydiving and your test involves packing your own parachute, the answer will usually be “yes.” If your answer is no, try another relaxation technique.
II. WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE TEST

A. Attend class regularly.
B. Set aside a regular time and place to study.
C. Take notes in class.
D. Tape lectures, if your instructor allows this.
E. Spend a few minutes each day keeping your notebook organized.
F. Read the assigned chapters/handouts.
   1. highlight important information.
   2. summarize or outline chapters.
   3. pay attention to specialized vocabulary.
   4. see if you can answer the questions at the end of each chapter.
G. Create a test on the material you’ve learned and see if you can answer the questions. Learn to anticipate what types of questions the instructor will be asking.
H. Ask the instructor what kind of a test will be given and ask to review material a day or two before the test. (Most instructors will already be doing this, so the class session before the test is NOT the class to miss!) Some instructors will also give out copies of old exams or a review sheet.
I. Study regularly throughout the term. Cramming is not a good way to study for a test.
J. Make connections with classmates so that you can get (and give) notes from missed classes.

III. WHAT TO DO DURING THE TEST

K. Use your internal dialogue positively! See above relaxation techniques.
L. Read the instructions carefully, and ask questions if you do not understand them. Pay close attention to verbal directions, too.
M. Scan the test immediately for the following information:

- How many points is each section worth?
- How much time am I going to need to complete each section?
- Budget your time so that you spend the most time accumulating the most points!
D. Write down memory aids such as formulas, grammar rules, equations, facts or other material you think you might forget during the test.

E. Do the easy questions first; this will give you confidence to tackle the harder ones! Be sure to mark the questions you are putting off so that you can find them easily when you come back to them.

F. In the case of multiple choice questions:

- Read ALL the answers before you make your decision. Often students will miss questions because they read the answers only until they find one which sounds reasonable.
- Once you have read all the questions, ELIMINATE the answers you know are wrong. That way, if you can’t decide between two answers, your chances of picking the correct one will improve.

G. True/False questions are usually not worth very many points, so you should
1. Answer them quickly.
2. However, you still need to read the questions carefully, since one word can make a statement inaccurate.
3. If ANY PART of the statement is false, the entire statement is false.
4. Look for qualifiers like all, most, sometimes, never, or rarely. These are key words on which the question depends.
5. Absolute qualifiers such as always or never generally indicate that the statement is false.

H. Machine graded tests (Scantron forms)
1. Pay attention to the numbers on the form and be sure they correspond to the numbers on the test.
2. Fill in the “bubble” completely.
3. If you make a correction, be sure to thoroughly erase your original answer or the machine may misinterpret your answers.

I. Open book tests are usually the most difficult type of exam, so prepare thoroughly for them.
1. Place tabs on important pages of the book, so you won’t have to waste time flipping through the table of contents or index. You can also use paperclips.
2. If you plan to use notes, number them and write a short table of contents.
3. Be sure that you have highlighted important information in the chapters to be covered. This is where your margin notes and other annotations come in handy!

J. Short-answer or fill-in-the-blank questions are the ones that are easy to answer if you have studied REALLY well. Concentrate on key words in the question and be brief in your answers.
K. Essay questions
   1. Be sure you understand EXACTLY what the question is asking.
   2. If you have several choices, pick either the one that is easiest to answer or the one that you are most interested in.
   3. If the question has several parts, ALL must be addressed in your essay.
   4. Pay attention to key words in the question. For example, if the question asks you to COMPARE two items, you will not receive credit if all you do is EXPLAIN what each item is.
   5. Plan how you will budget your time. You should allot some time at the beginning to outline what you plan to write about, some time in the middle to actually write, and some time at the end of the period to review what you have written.
   6. Remember that you need to have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion in each essay you write.
   7. Get to the point quickly, and write clear, concise sentences. An in-class essay is not the time to try to impress your teacher with your extensive vocabulary and ability to write complex sentences!
   8. Be sure you have good supporting ideas, examples, and facts.
   9. Write legibly and double space. This will allow space for you to make corrections if you need to. Also, double spaced handwriting is easier for the instructor to read.
  10. Use a pen. Pencil is difficult to read and may smear.
  11. Write on only one side of the paper.
  12. Do NOT try to rewrite your essay to make it neater! You won’t have time.
  13. By the end of the course, you will know what types of errors you commonly make, so check for those first when you proofread your essay.
  14. Proofread for major mistakes first:
      ● Completeness of your answer—have you answered all the parts of the question?
      ● Organization—is your paper logically organized?
      ● Major sentence errors—do you have comma splices, run-on sentences, or fragments?
      ● Other grammar, punctuation and spelling errors

IV. WHAT TO DO AFTER THE TEST
   A. Go over the questions you missed.
   B. Ask yourself why you missed those questions.
      1. Did you rely on cramming instead of studying regularly?
      2. Did you change your answer on the test? Was your first choice the correct one? This will help you learn not to second-guess yourself!
      3. Is there a specific type of question—definitions, interpretations, discussions, facts, etc.—that you missed consistently? Check to see where these questions are from: lectures, textbooks, outside readings, class discussions, etc.
C. Go over the questions you got right.

D. Ask yourself why they were correct and how you learned this information. This can help you learn to study more effectively.

E. Figure out which study methods worked for you and which didn’t. Adjust your study habits accordingly.

F. Ask the instructor if you have questions about the test or about any of your answers.

G. If you didn’t do so well, promise yourself you will study more next time around! Don’t waste time belittling yourself!

H. If you did well, reward yourself!

Don’t forget to congratulate yourself for the questions you answered correctly! Too often we get caught up in beating ourselves up for what we did wrong that we forget about what we did right!