

Ten Top Test-Taking Strategies

Center for Academic Success and Achievement (CASA)



1. Study early and often!

The most effective studying is done in small increments over a long period of time.

2. Reading isn't studying.

Learn actively, like by using flash cards, talking through topics out loud, quizzing yourself or your classmates, or creating concept maps on paper or a whiteboard.

3. Take regular breaks.

Your brain can't focus forever! Functioning at your best requires rest. But also create boundaries for your breaks to ensure that they don't eat up your study time.

4. Work from the known to the unknown.

Go through your syllabus and identify topics you feel more confident about—you may not need to study them as much. Identify the ones that are more difficult for you, and focus your attention there. Go back to the other topics if and when you have time.

5. Find the best working environment for you.

If you work best in complete silence, don't go to a coffee shop for test prep. But, if you prefer to have a hum of background noise, going out and about to study may be best.

6. Do what works. Ditch what doesn't.

If you've found a study strategy that works for you, use it! And if your last test didn't go well, that's a sign that you need to take stock of your approach and try something new.

7. Mindset matters.

First off, you're not defined by your success or failure on an exam. Don't put that kind of pressure on yourself. Make a real effort to study—do your best! And then sit down for your exam with the mindset that you've done all you can, and the results are out of your hands. This frees you up to really put forth your best effort.

8. During the exam, budget your time and force yourself to keep moving.

Give as much time to the questions as those questions are worth in point value.

9. Mark questions you're unsure about, and go back to answer them if you have the time.

10. Take care of your body by getting enough sleep and eating healthy.

You won't remember what you studied late the night before on three hours of sleep.