

be short answer, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, true-false or "machine graded," concentrate on developing thematically arranged lists of the bits and pieces of the subject on which such tests depend. If the test will consist of problem-solving questions, devise representative hypothetical problems and prepare model solutions. If the test is an essay in form,

What you will be graded on is your ability to see the subject matter from the instructor's perspective.

prepare sample essays on an appropriate variety of the topics to be tested and drill yourself on the important points and illustrations for each.

The key to these exercises is practice, practice, practice. You want to take aim on a test the way the football team prepares for a game: run the plays you think will work until they become almost automatic. Then, when the time comes, use what you've practiced if at all possible. Particularly in the case of essay tests, it is frequently possible to revise or redirect the question to fit the answer you came prepared to write. If you have prepared an adequate sample of answers to a reasonable guess about what the questions will be, it is more than likely that many of those answers, with their finely tuned arguments, comparisons, illustrations, observations and conclusions, can be employed to advantage.

While you're at it, try a team approach. Though some amount of individual reading and study is unavoidable, frequently the most productive way to prepare is to form a team with one or two other students in the class. The team approach not only provides a division of labor for writing sample essays or making lists of key facts, dates or formulae, it also prevents you from becoming locked inside your own head and requires the kind of objective expression and discussion that the test will require later. Frequently, students who study alone develop a deceptive kind of inner monologue: they hear the material in their head, think they know it, but come test time they are unable to verbalize it.

The team study approach can offer a way out of the box of solipsism (particularly when employed during the entire course) and is perhaps the surest way to respond to Rule Number Three of the test game: *Don't fool*

yourself about what you do and don't know. The opportunity to discuss and criticize the sample answers is an excellent way to assess your grasp of the subject matter.

Rule Number Four is a corollary to Number Three: *Know what you can and cannot say about a subject in a given period of time.* (Obviously, this rule applies primarily to essay and discussion tests.) How many paragraphs can you write in 10 minutes, 30 minutes, and 60 minutes? Essay answers consist of an opening paragraph to state the problem (as you think it ought to be stated), a concluding paragraph to display how you have dealt with the problem in a significant way, and a variable number of intermediate paragraphs depending on the time allotted and your own particular writing speed. Again, a little practice with sample essays will tell you a lot.

Once the test itself has begun, most of the rules of the test game are common sense:

Rule Five: *Read the directions and test questions very carefully.* Make sure you understand the kinds of answers expected, and how they will be scored. Ask the examiner for help when you do not understand the directions.

Rule Six: *Budget your time.* Always take a watch to the test so you can periodically check to make sure you are working rapidly enough to answer all the questions. Try to save a few minutes to review your answers at the end of the test—so you can make corrections and add details. Remember that most tests attempt to evaluate not only your knowledge of the subject matter, but also your ability to organize that knowledge quickly and efficiently.

Rule Seven: *Answer the "easy" questions first.* If you go through the entire test answering those questions for which you are best prepared, you may be able to budget more time for the questions which will require more reflection and labor.

Rule Eight: *Answer every question.* You should attempt at least a partial answer even to those questions which draw a blank (except in the case of some machine-scored tests which penalize "guesses").

Many students give up too soon on questions which do not elicit an immediate response. Reread the question with care, and wait (briefly) for something to come. Visualize the place where you studied for this test: frequently you can find a clue stuck on the wall above your desk, or recall an irrelevant image that will provoke a more useful thought or impression.

Rule Nine: *There is a difference between a correct answer and a best answer.* It is on this difference that many multiple choice questions depend (e.g., D. H. Lawrence was (a) a poet (b) a novelist (c) a sex fiend (d) the British author of *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), but essay tests also exploit this distinction to discriminate between varying levels of comprehension (e.g., "What were Monet's primary contributions to Impressionism?").

Take care to select the *best* answer from those which are available.

Rule 10: *Write legibly and clearly.* There is no truth to the widespread rumor that graders give the student the benefit of the doubt on answers they cannot read. Answers should be double-spaced, with wide margins, and should employ the most concise, straightforward syntax possible.

The last two rules are less obvious than the others, but no less important:

Rule 11: *The proper response to a test is not a mechanical reissuing of information, but a performance.* Many students regard tests as cruel and unusual punishment to be endured as stoically and passively as possible, or as a kind of machine-like exercise in which they are required to regurgitate (the image illustrates the attitude) in a routine fashion the same material the teacher recited to them.

It is almost impossible to perform well on tests with such an attitude. A negative or, at best, neutral approach is inherently self-defeating.

The test must be viewed as a performance in which knowledge (the subject matter) is shaped according to demand (the test questions) and necessity (the time limits).

View yourself as a performer who is ready and willing to display your wares, to argue vehemently and passionately, to match wits with the test,

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and to take on all comers. This is essential for three reasons: it will sustain your efforts to prepare adequately; it will provide you with persistence and energy to assemble an answer to a difficult test question that you didn't anticipate; and it will kindle the alertness and determination needed to do your best.

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