

Strategies for Taking Tests

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The strategies contained in this packet were prepared to improve your confidence and skills on multiple-choice tests. Test taking itself is a skill, which improves with experience. Please take the time to learn these skills and apply them on future tests. You won't be sorry!

The day before the test – Make sure you know where you will be testing.

This way, you will not be running around the morning of the test trying to figure out where to go.

Make arrangements in advance to insure that you get to school on time.

- ✓ Set one or even two alarms.
- ✓ Make sure that you have transportation.

Get plenty of sleep the night before the test and try to eat a healthy breakfast if you can.

Arrive early at the testing room in time to get the seat you want and to relax.

Use this time to check out the testing room for important details such as the location of the pencil sharpener, the clock, and even the tissues so you won't have to waste valuable time during testing.

Prepare mentally.

Think positive even if others around you say that tests are useless and unnecessary.

Stay relaxed and confident. Remind yourself that you are prepared and are going to do well.

Make sure that you have **enough room to work**. Try to maintain a comfortable posture and don't slouch.

Listen carefully and read all of the directions. Make sure you understand all of them.

This will help you avoid making careless errors.

If you find yourself getting anxious, take a few slow, **deep breaths** and to try to relax.

Do not skip the sample questions or answers. They give you valuable clues about how portions of the test are organized and how you should answer the questions.

Budget your time and pace yourself. If the tests or subtests are timed, listen carefully to the amount of time you are given for each part of the test.

Use all the support material permitted such as a formula page or scratch paper.

Don't try to do all the math problems in your head. Too many careless mistakes are made this way.

Break up complicated questions and directions into smaller parts. Mark tricky directions by circling them or underlining them so you don't forget to follow them carefully (if you are permitted to write in your test booklet).

Always read the questions first. This will help you to focus your attention and direct you to the parts of the reading passage that are most important for you to understand.

Make sure you understand exactly what each question is asking. STOP and take a moment to think about what you will need to look for in the reading passage or steps you will need to perform to answer the question. Sometimes it helps to put the question in your own words – just be careful not to change the meaning.

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Make sure that you have **answered all parts of each question** as some questions have more than one part.

Be sure to read all of your answer choices.

Even if you think the correct answer is A or B, keep reading through all of the choices because you might find a better answer below. Plus, many tests tell you *to choose the best answer* for each question, so you need to be able to compare the answer choices given and choose the best one.

Never choose an answer that contains any wrong information. If any part of an answer choice is wrong, do **not** choose this answer.

Watch out for tricky or negative words in the questions, such as *not, none, never, except, or least.*

These words are often overlooked. This type of question is telling you to select a choice that isn't true, and this is confusing to many test-takers. (This tip might help: You can answer all of the answers choices with a *yes* based on what you read in the passage – except one. The one answer choice that you can answer with a *no* will be the correct answer.)

Don't ignore the little words when you are reading – words like *but* and *yet*. They can really change the meaning of a sentence.

Do not let difficult questions affect your attitude and steal your valuable time.

For tests that are timed, do not spend too much time on any one question (unless you have finished this part of the test and are checking over your answers.)

If you are not penalized for wrong answers, **GUESS** on any of the questions you do not know.

Choose what you think is the best answer by eliminating the choices that do not seem correct.

You can put a tiny pencil mark next to the numbers that you guessed at and go back to them after you have finished. Be sure to erase any stray pencil marks on your answer sheet at the end of the test. (Do not try to keep these numbers in your head; you will only waste valuable testing time.)

If you find yourself stuck and unable choose any answer at all – or even make an educated guess - and you must skip a question for the time being, be sure to leave the space for that number blank until you can return to it at the end of the test.

Use your knowledge about word parts to make intelligent guesses about words you do not know –

Prefixes

Suffixes

Base Words (Root Words)

Make use of any foreign language skills you have to look for *cognates*. *Cognates* are words that have similar pronunciation and spelling in two languages and often have the same meaning. (Example: community = *comunidad* in Spanish) Train yourself to recognize cognates and use them whenever you can!

If you are not penalized for guessing, **do not leave any answers blank**, because a blank answer will be a wrong answer.

Make sure that the answer you choose answers the question you are working on.

Do not choose an answer just because you remember reading that sentence in the passage.

Reading it in the passage does not necessarily mean that it is the correct answer to the question you are working on **NOW!**

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Make sure that you fill in all the blanks completely so that the machine that grades the test can easily record your answers.

Don't expect to know all of the answers after only one reading.

Very few of us know all the answers after reading a passage just one time.

Good test takers learn how to go back into a passage again and again to find specific information.

Just be careful to budget your time!

Skimming means to glance quickly at a reading passage to get a sense of the topics and important ideas. It should never be used a substitute for careful reading of the passage.

However, it can be an important strategy, which you can use throughout the test.

Here's an example: A test question asks about the setting of a story. Once you have read the passage all the way through, go back and skip through the paragraphs that discuss other ideas or events. Skim the paragraphs until you find the ones that discuss the time and the place, which together would make up the setting. Now, read *this* part of the passage carefully.

Be aware that information relevant to one question is sometimes “given away” in another test item.

Watch for related questions that may help you *get* other answers.

Keep your eyes on your own paper! Be careful not to give any impression of cheating.

Always make sure that you are bubbling your answers on the correct line.

It's really easy to skip a line or bubble two answers on the same line if you're not careful.

About every 10 answers or so, check your answer sheet with your test booklet to make sure that you have been bubbling on the correct lines. Don't wait until the end of the test to check over your answer sheet or you could have a big problem.

Something like this can affect all the answer choices after your mistake. Plus, you might not erase the wrong answers completely enough when you discover what happened.

Use all of the time given for the test. If you have extra time, go back and check over your answers in this part of the test. Be sure to go over the ones you guessed at first.

It is OK to change an answer if you have good reason to believe you were wrong the first time.

Chances are that if you are like most people, you were a little bit nervous when you went through the test the first time. When we are nervous, we do not always remember things or think as clearly as we would like. Plus, we are also concentrating on finishing the test. But once you know that you have already bubbled in all of the answers, you start to relax and remember things you have learned. This is a good time to go back over the questions you guessed at first, and if you still have time, go over the whole test.

Here are some MATH TIPS:

- ✓ **Use all of the information given to you in the problems.** It's there for a good reason.
- ✓ **Thoroughly study any graphs, charts, and diagrams.**
- ✓ **Be sure to check all decimal places and signs carefully.**
- ✓ **Organize your work and your desk.**
- ✓ **Identify the formulas you will need to use to solve the problems, and keep that formula sheet handy.**
- ✓ **Work on the easiest problems first before you do the hard ones.** This strategy will help to remain calm and relaxed, which is important to help you think more clearly.
- ✓ **Determine what you are supposed to figure out and calculate.**
- ✓ **Make sure you have answered all parts of each question and have used the correct units of measurement.**

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MATH TIPS:

- ✓ **Estimate answers whenever you can by doing some calculations on your scratch paper.** This should help you to eliminate incorrect answer choices.
- ✓ **Try to visualize what the word problems are asking.** This will make them easier to understand.
- ✓ **Create pictures or some other form of visual representation** to help you understand the problems better.
- ✓ **Work smart! Number the questions on your scratch paper as you are working** so you can refer to them later on when you are checking your work.
- ✓ If you need more scratch paper, ask for it.

Please **don't be disturbed if other students finish before you do.** Take your time, don't panic, and you will do much better on the test.

AFTER THE TEST –

Remember to check over your answer sheet to make sure all questions are bubbled in correctly and that you have completely erased any places where you changed an answer or made any marks on your answer sheet.

Please **do not disturb** other members of the class if you finish before the allotted time. Have a book handy to read after you have turned in your test – if this is permitted.

TROUBLESHOOTING:

When an answer is not clear, look for some of the following **clues** in the questions and the answer choices:

Grammar Clues: Only the correct answer is grammatically correct.

Verb Tense Clues: The correct answer will use the same verb tense as the reading passage.

Word Type Clues: Parts of speech should match between the reading passage and the answer (noun vs. verb). Look for the same part of speech in the answer choice.

Singular vs. Plural Clues: If the reading passage describes a singular subject, you should look for an answer choice that is singular – not plural – and vice versa.

Gender-Pronoun Clues: Pay attention to gender (male or female). If the subject of the passage is a little girl, look for an answer choice using the pronoun *she* – not *he* or *they*.

Substitution Clues: Substitute simple words for difficult words in the questions or answers.

Context Clues for Vocabulary: These are the words, sentences, and phrases that surround a word you do not know. When you have to choose the correct meaning of a word, it is helpful to read -

- **The sentence the word the word is in**
- **The sentence right before**
- **The sentence right after**

Also, be sure to substitute each of the answer choices in the context of the passage.

Many tests contain **verbal analogies** questions. (Writers use analogies to help us relationships and connect ideas. **Analogies test your vocabulary and your ability to figure out relationships between words.**

Tests often show one pair of words related in a certain way and you must pick another pair of words related in the same way. (Example: morning: evening :: beginning : end)

To answer analogies questions:

- ✓ **Always figure out the relationship between the first pair of words.**
- ✓ **Try putting the analogy words into a sentence related in the same way.**

Remember – it is only a test! Believe it or not, everything in your life will be just as it was before after you leave the testing room – except you will be a little wiser and also a more experienced test-taker.

Good luck and happy test taking!



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