

# General Test Taking Strategies

To do well on a test, you must have good knowledge of the information that is being tested. But you must also have a strategy for taking the test that allows you to show what you know. The DETER strategy can help you do your best on any test. Each letter in DETER reminds you what to do.

## **D = Directions**

- Read the test directions very carefully.
- Ask your teacher to explain anything about the test directions you do not understand.
- Only by following the directions can you achieve a good score on the test.
- If you do not follow the directions, you will not be able to demonstrate what you know.

## **E = Examine**

- Examine the entire test to see how much you have to do.
- Only by knowing the entire task can you break it down into parts that become manageable for you.

## **T = Time**

- Once you have examined the entire test, decide how much time you will spend on each item.
- If there are different points for items, plan to spend the most time on the items that count for the most points.
- Planning your time is especially important for essay tests where you must avoid spending so much time on one item that you have little time left for other test items.

## **E = Easiest**

- The second E in DETER reminds you to answer the items you find easiest first.
- If you get stuck on a difficult item that comes up early in the test, you may not get to answer items that test things you know.

## **R = Review**

- If you have planned your time correctly, you will have time to review your answers and make them as complete and accurate as possible.
- Also make sure to review the test directions to be certain you have answered all items required.

**Using the DETER strategy will help you do better on tests and get better grades.**

# Reducing Test Anxiety

It is perfectly natural to feel some anxiety when preparing for and taking a test. In fact, a little anxiety can jump start your studying and keep you motivated. However, too much anxiety can interfere with your studying. You may have difficulty learning and remembering what you need to know for the test. Further, too much anxiety may lower your performance during the test. You may have difficulty demonstrating what you know during the test.

## Twenty things you can do to reduce test anxiety.

1. Use good study techniques to gain mastery of the material that will be covered on the test. This mastery will help you approach the test with confidence rather than with excessive anxiety. Employ the studying tips we provide at [Study Habits](#).
2. Maintain a positive attitude as you study. Think about doing well, not failing. Think of the test as an opportunity to show how much you have learned.
3. Go into the test well rested and well fed. Get enough sleep the night before the test. Eat a light and nutritious meal before the test. Stay away from junk foods.
4. Stay relaxed during the test. If you become tense, close your eyes, take a long, slow breath, and then let it out slowly.
5. Follow a plan for taking the test such as the DETER strategy we describe at [A Strategy for Taking Tests](#). Don't panic even if you find the test difficult. Stay with your plan!
6. Don't feel that you have to get everything right. You can get a high score even if you miss some questions.
7. Avoid drinks that contain caffeine before the test. Caffeine can make you jittery.
8. Don't make more of the test than it's worth. As important as a test might be, your entire future is not on the line.
9. Think about what is causing you to be anxious. Often the cause is not rational and you can come up with a rational counter-thought.
10. Think positive thoughts such as "I can do this" throughout the test.
11. Learn all you can about what to expect on the test so you will feel ready to take it on.
12. Don't panic that you will not have enough time to complete the test. In most cases, tests are designed so they can be completed within the time allotted.
13. Don't arrive too early for the test. The anxiety expressed by other students can be contagious and add to your own.

14. Don't arrive late for the test. This will raise your anxiety and cause you to rush your answers and make careless errors.
15. Focus on the test and ignore other things around you. Force yourself to not let your mind wander away from the test.
16. Answer the questions that are easiest for you first. This will build your confidence for the other questions.
17. Use guided imagery before the test to help you relax. Imagine yourself in a peaceful place, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells of this place.
18. Don't panic when other students start handing in their tests. There is no reward for finishing early. Just work at your own pace.
19. Once you finish the test and hand it in, don't worry about it. There is nothing more you can do until the graded test is returned to you. Turn your attention and effort to new assignments and tests.
20. When the graded test is returned to you, analyze it to see how you could have done better. Learn from your mistakes and from what you did well. This will help you be better prepared and less anxious for the next test.

**To do well on a test, you must have mastery of the material the test covers. But you must also control any anxiety you may have in order to show what you know.**

## Predicting Test Questions

An effective way to study for tests is to predict the questions that will be on the test. Predicting test questions will help you to focus on the most important information to know going into the test. The key to predicting test questions is to identify the most likely sources of information from which your teacher will construct test questions.

**Each of the following is a likely source of test questions.**

- Any sections in your textbook that your teacher covers in class.
- Information provided by your teacher that is not in your textbook.

- Questions that your teacher asks in class.
- Information that your teacher writes on the chalkboard.
- Information that your teacher provides in a PowerPoint presentation.
- Anything that your teacher reads aloud.
- Verbal cues such as information that your teacher repeats.
- Visual cues such as information that your teacher provides after checking his or her notes.



**Here are some things you should do to further help you predict test questions.**

- Ask your teacher what material will be covered on the test. This will help you narrow the field of possible questions.
- Ask your teacher what types of question formats will be on the test. The questions you predict will be different for an essay test than for an objective test such as multiple-choice or true/false.
- Have a designated section in your notebook in which you write possible questions and their answers. Review these frequently.
- Use a symbol such as an asterisk (\*) to highlight information in your textbook (if allowed) and in your class notes that you are almost certain will be tested.
- Work with a study group and brainstorm possible questions along with the other members of the group.
- Review previous tests that were given by your teacher. This will help you identify the kinds of questions your teacher writes.
- Imagine that you are the teacher. What questions would you write?
- Last, but not least, pay careful attention whenever your teacher says, "This will be on the test." You can be sure that this information will be represented by one or more test questions.

**Predicting test questions accurately will help you do well on a test.**

## Essay Test Taking

### Studying For an Essay Test

**Essay tests** assess your mastery of themes and overall ideas. When you study for essay tests, your goal should be to recall broad information in an organized way. Your studying for essay tests should be related to this goal.

**Here are the steps to follow when studying for an essay test.**

1. Assemble the materials that contain the information that will be covered on the test. This includes your textbook, your textbook notes, and your class notes.
2. Read these materials to identify themes and overall ideas. Each time you identify one, label an index card with the name of that theme or overall idea. You will often find the same theme or overall idea in one or more places, but use just one card to represent it.
3. For each card you prepare in Step 2, carefully review your textbook, textbook notes, and class notes and add written details about the theme or overall idea to the card.
4. Once you have completed Step 3 for each card, review your cards several times. Doing this will give you a working familiarity with the information that is most likely to be the basis of questions on the test.
5. Now is the time to think like your teacher. Try to predict the questions your teacher will ask on the test. Write each question on its own index card. When writing the questions, [include direction words](#) often used by teachers, such as explain or compare.
6. For each card you prepared in Step 5, write a response to the question on that card (write on the back of the card and on additional cards if necessary). Use the cards you developed in Step 3 to help you answer each question. When you complete Step 6, you will have a set of study cards, each containing a possible test question and a written response to that question.
7. Carry the study cards you developed in Step 6 with you so that you can review them frequently. Be sure to review these cards the evening before the test.

**Essay tests can be scary. Take the scare out of them by following the study steps above.**

### **Directions Words in Essay Tests**

Most essay test items are not presented in the form of a question. Instead, they are often presented as a statement that includes a **direction word**. The direction word tells you what you should do when you write your answer to the item. Look for the direction word and be sure to do what it tells you to do.

Here are the direction words that are most frequently used by teachers when they write essay test items. The meaning of each direction word is provided and is followed by an example of an essay test item using that direction word. Get to know what each of these direction words tells you to do.

- **Analyze** - *Analyze* tells you to break something down into its parts and show how the parts relate to each other to make the whole.  
*Analyze* the factors that contribute to good health.
- **Compare** - *Compare* tells you to show how two or more things are BOTH similar and different.  
*Compare* the forms of government found in the United States and in China.
- **Contrast** - *Contrast* tells you to show how two or more things are different.  
*Contrast* the Republican and Democratic political platforms.
- **Define** - *Define* tells you to explain the meaning of something in a brief, specific manner.  
*Define* what is meant by "living life to the fullest."
- **Describe** - *Describe* tells you to present a full and detailed picture of something in words to include important characteristics and qualities.  
*Describe* what it was like to live in ancient Rome.
- **Diagram** - *Diagram* tells you to illustrate something by drawing a picture of it and labeling its parts.  
*Diagram* a modern commercial jet airplane.
- **Evaluate** - *Evaluate* tells you to present both the positive and negative characteristics of something.  
*Evaluate* the impact of rap music on American youth.
- **Explain** - *Explain* tells you to provide facts and reasons to make something clear and understandable.  
*Explain* why the American Civil War occurred.
- **Justify** - *Justify* tells you to provide reasons and facts in support of something.  
*Justify* the need for the federal income tax.
- **List** - *List* tells you to present information about something as a series of brief numbered points.  
*List* the ingredients needed to bake bread.
- **Outline** - *Outline* tells you to present the most important information about something in a carefully organized manner.  
*Outline* what it takes to be successful in school.
- **Summarize** - *Summarize* tells you to present the main points about something in a brief form.  
*Summarize* how Thomas Edison's inventions have made our lives better.
- **Trace** - *Trace* tells you to present the order in which something occurred.  
*Trace* the major events that led to America's Declaration of Independence.

**Recognizing these direction words and knowing what they tell you to do will help you do well when taking an essay test.**

## Writing an Essay Test Answer

An essay test item requires you to recall and organize information and to communicate the information in an extended writing form. Your response to any essay test item should be:

- **Focused.** Write specifically to the question. Think about what you want to convey before you begin to write your answer. Don't pad your answer with all kinds of information in the hope that some of the information will be relevant to the question.
- **Organized.** Plan what you want to write before you actually begin to write your answer. Don't write your answer in a haphazard "think-as-you-go" manner. It is very helpful to prepare an outline that contains all the necessary points you want to have in your answer. Following the outline will help you produce a fluid answer that is easy for your teacher to follow.
- **Supported.** Do more than just state your points. Provide evidence for what you write. Using examples is an excellent way to bring your points across.

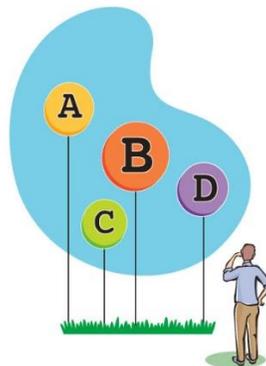
**Here are some tips that will help you do your best when responding to an essay test item:**

- Look to see if there is a direction word that tells you what you need to do to respond to the item.
- Write your answer legibly so that you do not have to waste time rewriting it.
- Budget your time if the test includes more than one item that must be answered. Don't spend so much time on one item that you have to rush to respond to the remainder of the test. In general, spend the most time on the items that count for the most points.
- Don't give your personal opinion unless the item calls for it.
- Use an approximation if you are not sure about an exact date or number. For example, rather than "1748," you could write "in the middle of the 18th century."
- Cross out anything you write but want to delete. This is faster and neater than trying to erase it.
- If you have time left after answering everything required, proofread your work quickly to correct any errors in spelling and mechanics, or any factual errors.

**Most important of all, study well to master the information you need to know for the test.**

## Studying for a Multiple-Choice Test

Essay tests assess your mastery of things and overall ideas. When you study for an essay test, your goal should be to recall broad information in an organized way so that you can *produce* an answer. **Multiple-choice tests**, in contrast, require you to *recognize* a correct answer among a set of options. You should study differently for a multiple-choice test than the way in which you [study for an essay test](#).



**Here are some things you should do when studying for a multiple-choice test.**

- Assemble all of the materials that contain the information that will be covered on the test. This includes your textbook, your textbook notes, your class notes, and any teacher handouts.
- Ask your teacher what content areas will be emphasized on the test.
- During classes that lead up to the test, be attentive for clues that something will probably be on the test. Examples of clues include anything the teacher repeats, writes on the board, or asks a question about.
- Reduce the information to be covered on the test to short, specific questions that can be answered in a few words or a sentence.
- Write each question on its own index card. Write the answer to the question as briefly as possible on the back of the card.
- Review the questions and answers on the cards as often as possible. Because success on a multiple-choice test requires recognition, overlearning is important.
- Learn the meanings of any words or terms you are unsure about. Use the glossary of your textbook and a print or online dictionary to do this.
- Read the portions of your textbook that will be covered on the test as often as possible. It is not unusual for a correct answer choice on a multiple-choice test to be similar to the way in which information is written in the textbook. Reading your textbook frequently will make you familiar with this language.
- Review any previously returned multiple-choice tests. Doing this will help you recognize the types of items your teacher writes as well as the kinds of errors you may have made.

**The key to success when studying for a multiple-choice test is to keep in mind that success requires recognizing correct information.**