

Helpful Study Tips

Compiled and Edited
For
Cardinal Newman High School

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FOCUSING

Studying isn't just putting in time with a book in front of you. Worthwhile studying requires an attentive, active mind that's focused on the task at hand.

Environment

In order to get the most out of your study time, you need to work in an environment that helps you focus.

➤ **Turn off the TV and silence your cell phone.**

Television makes demands on your eyes and ears, so if you're 'studying' while you watch, you're shortchanging something. Either that Netflix show deserves more of your attention or a whole lot less.

➤ **Work out rules about study time.**

Work out rules about study time with your family so you can study without interruptions. If you have pets, train them to leave you alone at these times.

➤ **Find a place free of distraction.**

If you can study effectively in social environments such as cafes, fine. If you are distracted by people-watching, be honest with yourself and go to the cafe after you have studied. Reduce your exposure to things that compete for your attention. Don't study at your computer if social media is a distraction; don't listen to a Podcast while you study if you find you can't help getting distracted by the latest mystery.

- It's helpful to have a **specific study area** with good lighting. Whether it's a room in your home, corner of the library, or a shaded spot in your backyard, train yourself to go into study mode when you enter this space.
- **Libraries** are obvious candidates for good study spaces. They offer many supplementary resources, should you need them, and are otherwise relatively free of time-wasting temptations.

Procrastination

Procrastination can be doubly dispiriting; at the end of the day, not only have you not done the schoolwork you were supposed to, but you must also face the fact that you've spent three hours arranging your Spotify playlist to look like a rainbow spectrum. The guilt and dejection you feel can make it even harder to get started. You're better off recognizing your tendency to procrastinate-and combating it cleverly- than simply bemoaning it.

When faced with a big task such as a long paper or an impending final exam, you may feel you have no idea where to begin. Sometimes the result is paralysis. To avoid this and other, milder forms of procrastination, try the following:

➤ **Break the task into smaller parts.**

Study one unit of chapter. Memorize one subset of Spanish irregular verbs. Track your progress in these smaller units.

➤ **Tell other people what you are working on.**

It's easier to backslide when you alone know what you're supposed to do.

➤ **Do first whatever portion of the work you are most reluctant to do.**

➤ **Don't stop.**

If you get to a point where you realize you're avoiding the next step, don't stop. Give yourself a little procrastination time later as a reward for pushing past the difficult part and doing some portion of what you're avoiding.

➤ **Rewards in general are a good idea.**

Beating procrastination sometimes amounts to little more than bribing your inner child-giving him/her dessert if he/she eats the broccoli. If you were going to watch a little TV before you started that paper, make yourself write four paragraphs first, or a complete outline and an introduction. Then enrich your life with a rerun of your favorite show.

PLANNING

Budgeting your time is a key to being a successful student. Before you can think about how to use the time you spend studying, you need to ensure that you make time to study.

OBSERVE YOURSELF

Time is a resource, and before you change how you allocate it, you need to understand how you use it now. Though it may seem annoying, the best approach is to take a week and monitor your time use in half-hour blocks.

➤ **Have a small pad or a scrap of paper handy.**

When you finish an activity, or whenever it occurs to you, write down what you've been doing. (It's harder to remember everything at the end of the day.)

➤ **Be honest.**

The purpose of this exercise is to gain an accurate picture of how you use your time. *Only after you have an honest description of how your week passes can you evaluate your use of time and make decisions about changes.* Remember that the point is not to eliminate all non-study or nonproductive time, but to be conscious about where your time goes so you can make informed decisions.

➤ **Actions.**

How much time did you spend sleeping, eating, studying, sitting in class, participating in sports, working at a job, watching TV, playing video games, feeding your pet gecko lizards, or whatever? Are you surprised by the results? Are you spending more time doing some activities than you would like? Can you change this pattern?

➤ **Allocate.**

Now, take this information and put it to use. Plan the upcoming week.

BUDGETING TIME

Once you have an idea of how you use your time, look at your needs and obligations for the week and budget your necessary study time across the days. Be realistic. You can't carefully utilize every minute in the day-you need a little downtime, and the point is not to banish all spontaneity from your life. But knowing how much study time you need each week (and this is a figure you may have to adjust with trial and error), and how much time your other obligations require, can help you build your week around these needs, and know what consequences to expect if you do not.

➤ **Decide how many hours you need to spend studying.**

This may change from week to week, but you should allocate a basic amount of time below which you will not drop. For weeks when you have major papers due, or before big exams, you might need to budget more time.

➤ **Map out your week.**

Every Sunday (or whenever your week begins), take fifteen minutes and map out your week, scheduling in study time around your obligations.

➤ **Know when you are at your most alert, and use this time to study.**

If you are tired at night, don't put your chief study time between 10pm and midnight. Experiment with getting up earlier to see if you are sharp in the morning.

➤ **Prioritize**

What schoolwork is most important? What is most urgent? The answers may be different each week. Not all school-related activities are of equal value or importance-you know this. When you are budgeting your time, make sure you allocate sufficient time for the most important and most urgent tasks. If you have long-term projects that are important, don't give them short shrift just because they are not yet urgent. *It may make more sense to spend time working on a big research paper weeks ahead of its due date and less time on a minor assignment due this week.*

➤ **Sleep is important.**

Your study time will be of little value if you are constantly tired. Nor will your play time be much fun.

DEAD TIME

You'll probably discover that you spend a lot of time just spacing out; waiting for people; or riding a bus in a car. These interludes are well suited to certain forms of study-particularly memorization and repetition. So develop some portable study aids. For a language class, make cue cards of vocabulary; for chemistry, formulae; for history, names and facts. Carry them with you when you leave the house and make use of your waiting time.

DOWNTIME

You need to have a level of activity that you can sustain, or else you'll just wear yourself down. That means time with friends, time listening to music, watching a movie, exercising, walking, and staring out the window. Any schedule that completely eliminates the activities is probably not a schedule you are going to stick to.

CALENDARS

You'll need several calendars.

➤ **Classes and standing obligations.**

A calendar with just your classes and standing obligations (the 'where-you-have-to-be' calendar)

➤ **Due dates.**

A calendar with just the due dates you know at the beginning of the term, from your class syllabi; midterm exams, final exams, final papers, etc. Display this prominently in your work area, so you can keep in mind the big picture for the whole semester.

➤ **Weekly assignments.**

A calendar or planner that you add to and refer to daily. This should incorporate the long-term deadlines, but also have your weekly assignments and their due dates.

➤ **To-do list.**

Make a quick to-do list in the morning, or before you go to bed, referring to your weekly calendar. Check them off

USING YOUR SCHEDULES

Unforeseen events take place, and situations change. Be as firm as you can, but adjust when you have to. At least you will know how much time you are putting in compared to how much time you need.

➤ Be aware of your priorities.

If you keep putting something off, recognize this avoidance-it's probably something you really need to do, something that you think is hard to do. Break it down into smaller parts and do a part of it today.

➤ Refer to your calendar.

Refer to your semester calendar and your syllabus so you can anticipate the demands on your time several weeks in advance.

REMEMBERING INFORMATION

It is easier to remember things when you understand them. In the long run, it's also more useful. If you are trying to remember something, check yourself. Can you define it? Can you give examples of it? Can you describe how it is related to other things? Some material requires rote memorization, but teaching today places less emphasis on remembering dates and names and more on understanding relationships and processes.

➤ **Mnemonic devices.**

This is a whole suite of memory improvement exercises and techniques. Some of these basic techniques are probably quite familiar to you. In general, it can be helpful to make associations with things you already know, so that what you know will remind you of what you've just learned.

➤ **Acronyms.**

Ex: HOMES = Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior (the Great Lakes)

➤ **Acrostics.**

Ex: Every Good Boy Does Fine = E, G, B, D, F (the notes that make up the staff lines in the treble clef).

➤ **Linking up physical locations.**

➤ **Word association.**

Associating information with words that sound similar.

➤ **Reviewing.**

A day later, you remember very little of what you have read. This doesn't mean you have totally forgotten the information. You see when you review it how quickly it comes back. Reviewing frequently reinforces those connections our brain makes, the mysterious machinery of memory.

TAKING NOTES

Taking notes in class and taking notes from reading material are quite different tasks, but ultimately, you will want to combine the two types of notes into concentrated study material.

With all types of notes:

- Review the notes soon, within 24 hours.

- Use a three-ring binder and write on one side only (so you can move pages around later).

- Refer back to notes as the course progresses. Ask yourself what still seems important, and what seems trivial.

- Periodically combine your reading notes and your lecture notes into a single set of notes, which you will use to study for the final exam.

NOTES FROM CLASS

Many instructors make it a point not to test students on material that hasn't come up in class. While there will probably be much material in the reading assignments that is inessential (both in terms of the main thrust of the course and in terms of what you will be tested on), this is less likely in lectures. When instructors speak, they do a lot of the work for you. They select what they feel is important and give the material and organized structure. Your job as a note-taker is to get down as much as you can. Decide later what you really need to focus on.

BE PREPARED

- Skim your notes from the previous class.
- Do the reading!
- Get to class on time.
- Check the boards.
- Bring textbooks.

MAKE FRIENDS

In general, it's good to make a regular habit of exchanging notes with a friend-particularly with a meticulous friend. See what they wrote down and decide if it seems important to you. *Your classmates can be your biggest resource.* Explaining the material to each other is an excellent way for both of you to ensure that you really understand it. Nothing forces you to think through what you have learned like having to explain it to someone else.

LECTURE COURSES

It can be difficult to keep up with what the lecturer is saying. These tips will make it easier on you.

➤ **Listen for a synopsis.**

Listen for a synopsis at the beginning of the lecture and a summary and the end.

➤ **Use abbreviations.**

Or some form of shorthand.

➤ **Listen for clues.**

Often teachers repeat important points, say them slowly, or return to them later on.

➤ **Learn the idiosyncrasies of your instructor.**

Does the teacher focus on details, or on bigger concepts? Where does your teacher place the emphasis?

➤ **Don't entirely ignore your critical faculties.**

Even while you're trying to be a human tape recorder, don't ignore your critical faculties. If you disagree with something, make a little shorthand note of it. You'll want to return to it later.

➤ **Pay attention to handouts.**

DISCUSSION COURSES

There are few differences between taking notes in a discussion course and taking notes in a lecture.

➤ Discussion classes often present less factual material and delve more in the reading. They usually explore complex issues from many angles. Getting down the WHO, WHAT, WHEN is not usually the main purpose. Instead, pay attention to various ideas of WHY and HOW.

➤ In small discussion classes, or in classroom sections of larger classes, you can stop the speaker and ask for a clarification or to repeat a point.

If you miss something or don't understand:

➤ Make a mark in your notes—for examples, a big question mark in the margin.

➤ Leave a blank space for something you haven't been able to write down. The space is a reminder that you've missed something and need to get the information from someone else in the class.

➤ Raise your hand, if appropriate, and ask for clarification or repetition.

➤ Approach the teacher after class with your question.

NOTES FROM READING

As opposed to note taking in lectures (when your main goal is to record the material being presented to you), taking notes while you read involves a more active intelligence and constant questioning. You need to think critically and interrogate what you read, continually asking questions of it and of yourself. Do not write your notes, or highlight or underline half of every textbook page. These practices do you little good.

BEFORE YOU REALLY START READING

➤ Ask yourself why you are reading the assignment.

Well, you want to learn something, and you hope to demonstrate what you have learned whether in a paper or on a test. If you are working on a test, what kind of test will it be? This dictates, to some extent, what material you will pay most attention to. What kind of answers will you be asked to give eventually?

➤ Figure out the main point of the assignment.

How does this reading fit into the course as a whole? Skim the chapter, looking at section headings and key vocabulary. Chapters in textbooks may be weighed down with details, but there are usually a few main points. Write them down before you read carefully, if you can, or be sure to do so afterwards.

➤ **Make a list of important terms and concepts.**

It may seem weird, but these are often found in the preface and introduction of novels and nonfiction books, and in the table of contents and chapter summaries of textbooks.

➤ **Get a sense of what you're reading before you read it.**

The point of studying is not the thrill of surprise but the practical process of getting the material. So try reading first and last chapters, first and last paragraphs in each section, and first and last sentences of each paragraph.

➤ **Note what questions this preliminary reading raises.**

Write those questions down—they will help you know what answers you'll be looking for.

➤ **Ask yourself what you already know.**

You might know quite a bit. Write this down as well. Think about your assumptions before you begin the reading.

AS YOU READ

➤ **Try to anticipate the author's next move.**

This is just part of being a critical reader. As you read, pay attention to *rhetorical structure* (the structure of an argument). See if you can anticipate the author's next move. You'll discover that there are some basic structures to textbooks that help you figure out where your text is going before it takes you there.

1. Pros and cons.

If the textbook describes some positive outcomes of the Treaty of Ghent, what might come next? Probably some negative outcomes

2. Continuity and change.

If a chapter section talks about how the advent of the railroad changed life on Long Island in the nineteenth century, what might come next? Probably a short description of what remained the same, despite the new technology.

3. Rules and exceptions.

Often a textbook will state a rule and then list any exceptions to said rule.

4. Causes and effects.

If a textbook describes the issuing of the *Magna Carta* by King John in 1215 as one of the most important events in the shaping of British law, likely a discussion of the historical influence of the *Magna Carta* on British lawmakers will follow.

5. Lists and descriptions.

If a textbook lists the three types of blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets, it will probably describe each of those three types next.

➤ Look for answers to the basic questions: who, what, when, where, why and how.

Check yourself after you read-can you give succinct answers to these questions?

➤ Think critically about the information.

Is it being presented as fact or as opinion? Whose opinion is it? What is the point of view? What associations does this information evoke (does it remind you of anything)? Analogies are excellent tools for understanding connections and reinforcing memories

➤ Ask yourself what information is important.

This is a difficult task. Pay attention to bold words and graphs (not necessarily the specific data in the graph, but the idea-a point important enough to deserve a visual aid-that the graph is meant to illustrate). Read the end-of-the-chapter questions beforehand, and look for information that helps you answer these questions. Pay attention to anything that provokes a reaction from you. This may be something you don't understand or something with which you disagree. Or, it may be something that suddenly clarifies a cloudy issue.

➤ Don't highlight masses of text.

You've done very little processing or evaluating if you've highlighted half the page. Read ahead and then look back at what strikes you as the meat of the argument and the essential details.

➤ **Try to paraphrase and condense the information**

But don't go sentence by sentence, because without a larger context, you don't know what's important yet. Read a paragraph or section, and then write down the main points, using your own words. When you write these down on a separate sheet of paper in your own words, you are engaging the material more fully.

➤ **Consider how new material relates to information you already know.**

Don't just take your notes and stick them in a binder until test time. Once you've processed new information, take a step back and see how it relates to the information before it. Updating and reconsidering your notes is better than just reading them over and over again at the end of the term.

Organizing Information

Your method of organizing should have some structure that makes sense to you and helps illustrate relationships in the material

DIAGRAMS

Diagrams can be extremely helpful in illustrating relationships. You will want to make groupings of information and then link them to others. You may wish to diagram:

➤ **Causation:** How one event leads to another

➤ **Transformation:** How one thing becomes something else.

➤ **Opposition:** How one thing (e.g. idea, event, fact) contradicts or is the opposite of another.

TABLES

Many people find it helpful to make tables. You might want to use graph paper

IN-CLASS DISCUSSION

You want to learn the most you can from the discussion experience, and you want your participation in class to be both useful and recognized (particularly in classes that give grades for class participation).

➤ Do the reading.

It's obvious, but it needs to be said: DO THE READING. You will have something informative to say, you will have reactions to express, and you will have questions to ask about points that weren't clear in the reading (this is one of the great benefits of discussion).

➤ If you can't do all the reading.

If you can't do all the reading, make sure you have a general idea of its contents and read a small portion in detail. That way you will be able to make a specific, text-based comment.

➤ Lecture notes.

If the class is the discussion section of a larger lecture course, review your lecture notes before each section. Again, while taking notes, you should indicate your questions in the margins or by leaving blank spaces. Find those questions before discussion sections and bring them to class.

➤ Questions.

Remember, intelligent questions are as useful to the class (and as indicative of your engagement in the material) as intelligent answers. Sometimes really simple questions need to be asked as well.

DISCUSSION ETIQUETTE

A good class-discussion experience, and good class-discussion etiquette, involves finding a happy medium between the extremes of ninja-like invisibility and incessant yammering that annoys everyone around you, including your instructor.

➤ As a bare minimum, prepare one thing to say for each class.

Do not try to out-wallpaper the wallpaper. Maybe you are shy; maybe there are overbearing blowhards in your class-still, make the effort to have your say. Raise your hand if you have to. *Try never to let an entire class go by without making some contribution.*

➤ **On the other hand, don't feel you have to comment on every subject.**

Just be aware of your contribution and try not to dominate the discussion. You probably recognize that some of your own comments are more interesting than others, and *if you find that you are doing the most talking, do a little self-editing.*

➤ **Comments should be grounded in class material.**

Try to keep your comments grounded in the class materials, or least relevant to the topic at hand.

➤ **Chime in!**

If the instructor asks a question and everyone else is sitting around like garden gnomes, chime in!

➤ **Listen attentively.**

Respond to what people say; refer to previous comments if they relate to yours.

➤ **Respect other people's opinions.**

Outwardly: go easy on the eye-rolling, snickering, snorting, and hysterical mocking laughter. Inwardly: acknowledge that, if nothing else, you are learning interesting things about how other people think and how they interpret the same material you are all studying.

➤ **Basic ideas of good communication apply to classroom discussion.**

Speak up. Don't cut people off. May eye contact with people who are speaking to show your interest in what they have to say.

IF YOU DIDN'T DO THE READING

Make a general comment or ask a general question early in the class (i.e. ask a classmate to be more specific or clarify what they just said). This avoids the problem of being conspicuously silent; it also reduces the chances that you will be called on later, to your embarrassment.

READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

To a large extent, the relationship between your level of fluency and the difficulty of the text will determine how much trouble you have reading understanding.

➤ **Go easy on the dictionary.**

Much of learning a language comes from figuring things out from context. If you look up every single word you aren't sure of, the task may become unbearable. Read ahead to see if you get any clues. Let some of the small details go if they seem inessential. Become comfortable with a certain level of vagueness in your understanding, so long as you get the gist of what you're reading. This might mean knowing or looking up all the verbs, but letting some of the adjectives and adverbs slide, or skimming paragraphs that seem to be describing the weather, or soccer.

➤ **Make abbreviated vocabulary lists.**

You aren't going to remember every word you look up, every time you read. Write down the ones that seem most useful or most interesting and memorize this smaller, manageable list. If you encounter a word several times, look it up and write it down.

➤ **Read out loud whenever you can.**

Give your tongue and ears the same exercise your eyes are getting.

➤ **Patience, patience, patience.**

Frustrating as it is that a two-year-old in San Salvador or Osaka speaks better than you do, you need to remember that learning a foreign language, for most people, takes years and years of struggle. You are in it for the long haul, so don't be hard on yourself in the short term.

THINGS NOT TO SAY IN CLASS

➤ **"Well I didn't get to read the book, but it seems to me..."**

- 1) You are announcing to your instructor that you didn't do the work.
- 2) You are rhetorically weakening whatever you're about to say.
- 3) You are angering the people who actually did the reading.

➤ **"That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard."**

This remark is just not in the spirit of mutual respect and open mindedness that a good class discussion requires. It introduces a competitive element. For example, others in the class may have said stupider things, and they will feel slighted by your judgment.

REFERENCES

ONLINE RESOURCES

While there are many amazing learning tools on the Web, there is also a lot of outdated, misleading, misapplied, deceitful, or simply false information out there. Anyone can post any kind of information, and search engines are not designed to discriminate between the reliable and the unreliable. While books are clearly not infallible, there is simply nowhere near a comparable level of oversight or accountability on the Web. Which is just another way of saying: be savvy and be skeptical of what you read.

Some things to look for:

➤ Agenda

Try to determine if a website has a clear political, religious, or social agenda, and see how this agenda affects the site's content.

➤ Update

See if the website has been updated lately. Frequent updates can be a good sign. Do the site's authors identify themselves? If so, try to get a sense of whether they can be considered authorities on the site's subject matter.

➤ Affiliations

Sites affiliated with universities/colleges-and particularly with specific departments or classes, as opposed to individual students-are generally more reliable than your average hobby website.

➤ Other sources

Talk to classmates or to your teachers about good web resources in their field.

➤ Libraries

In general, it's worth visiting your school library's website. School and public libraries subscribe to comprehensive (and expensive) online resources in many fields. As a student and library user, you have access to these resources, which can be very useful. For example, *Lexis-Nexis* has the full, searchable text of articles in thousands of periodicals going back, in some cases, twenty years or more.

ONLINE DICTIONARIES/THESAURUS

➤ If you're at a computer and you need to look up a word, online dictionaries can be a great help.

EXAM PREPARATION

You should be reviewing your notes throughout the semester, continually asking yourself what is important and how each topic fits into the big picture of the semester. However, when exam time rolls around, these strategies will help you prepare.

STRATEGIES

➤ **Find out what kind of material is being tested.**

Is it mostly from the textbook? From outside reading? From lectures? Labs?

➤ **It also helps to know what kind of test it will be.**

If you ask these detailed questions of your teacher, do it in a way that is neither aggressive nor obsessive—you are simply trying to find how to best make use of your study time.

- Will the questions test our knowledge of facts or analytical skills?
- Will the format be multiple choice, short answer, or essay?
- Will you be able to choose which questions you wish to answer (e.g. “Answer three of these five questions”)?

➤ **Look at copies of old tests, if possible.**

Tests from previous years may be available in the library, or you may know someone who has taken the course in the past. These will help you get a sense of the kinds of questions asked.

REVIEWING

➤ **Attend review sessions.**

Come prepared with a list of questions so it won't be a waste of your time.

➤ **Be able to say something about the main point of the course.**

What are the basic themes? What are the most essential terms? What are the big issues?

➤ **As you review your notes, ask yourself the questions you asked while reading.**

If you don;t know the answers, make a list of information you need to find out.

- What is this related to?
- Why did this happen?
- What happened because of this?

➤ **Master at least one topic within the course.**

Even while you're struggling to get a handle on an entire semester's worth of material, it can be worth it to go deeply into one topic. This gives you the opportunity to demonstrate a deeper understanding on at least some portion of the exam.

CONDENSING

As you prepare for the exam, condense your notes to the essential. See if you can get everything you absolutely need to know onto one sheet-and then make it your duty, as a bare minimum, to own that material.

STUDY GROUPS

Some people work better on their own, some in groups. It may be that you study most effectively with a partner or two. If this is the case, pair up with a classmate or form a small group. Study on your own first, then come prepared with questions to quiz each other. Trade stacks of questions; keep at it until you can all answer each other's questions and explain the answers.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

➤ Review before you go to bed, then go to sleep with the material still fresh in your head. Your brain still works while you're asleep. Get a normal night's sleep if you can.

➤ Review casually in the morning. You're not going to do serious learning or quizzing at this point.

➤ You can try to cram a few last-minute things you haven't memorized right before the exam. These materials will fade quickly, so write them down in the margin as soon as the test begins.

CRAMMING

Although cramming is not an optimal way to learn, some last minute tricks such as flash cards and knowing your instructor's test style can save you some points. Don't be hard on yourself, you know you will do better next time. For now do the best you can.

TAKING TESTS

In theory, tests measure what you've learned. In practice, tests often measure how well you take tests. Unfortunately, there is no perfect, practical way to measure learning. Tests are a fact of life. So for better or for worse, learning how to take tests well is an extremely beneficial life skill. How well you take tests involves how well you understand the test, and how well you perform in the test room, under pressure and with the clock ticking.

GENERAL TEST-TAKING TIPS

➤ **Be calm.**

Whether or not you feel calm, approach the test calmly. If you've crammed some last-minute information into your short term memory, calmly write it down as you begin.

➤ **Use your nervousness.**

If you simply are not calm, try to use your nerves. Your adrenaline can keep you on edge and heighten your awareness. Don't spend time and energy worrying about being nervous. Tests are performances, and, as in any performance, your nervous energy can be your fuel. However, the goal is a controlled burn, not an explosion.

➤ **Scan.**

Scan the test before you wail away at the first question. See what kinds of questions you have ahead of you. Ideally you will have time to give every question the attention it requires. Realistically, you may not. Some questions are worth many more points than others. An experienced test-taker will recognize this and factor it into the decisions they make during the course of the test.

➤ **Read the directions.**

Read the general directions and the directions for each question. So many mistakes are made by test-takers not reading the directions. For example, sometimes you are only required to answer some of the questions.

➤ **Budget your time.**

Don't spend too much time on questions you know the least about. You need to budget your time intelligently. You want to be able to really nail the stuff you know, so don't leave it to the end and struggle through the stuff you don't know and not have enough time to answer what you do know.

➤ **Check the time.**

As you finish each question, quickly ask yourself how best to use the time you have left. You may have to revise your strategy, leave certain questions for last, spend more time on the questions worth more points. *The best move at any given moment is whatever makes the best use of the remaining time.*

➤ **Show work.**

Show your work! If you make a small mistake on a math test (if you forget a minus sign, for example) and your answer is wrong, but you've applied the correct formula and taken the right steps, you may get very close to full credit. After all, you've demonstrated that you know how to answer the questions; you've just made a small, careless mistake. If you don't show your work, your teacher has no idea how you came up with your answer and can't award partial credit.

➤ **For math and science.**

For a math or science problem, make a logical estimation of what the answer will be before you start to work. If your answer turns out to be nothing like your estimate (and you feel you know how to do the problem), suspect that you've made a careless mistake and check for it.

IF YOU'RE STUCK

➤ **Rephrase a question in your own words.**

➤ **Clarify.**

If it's acceptable, raise your hand and ask for clarification on the wording of a question.

➤ **Get something down on paper.**

Don't sit and struggle with everything you've learned in this maddash, rich pageant we call life in your head. You'll only grow more and more frustrated. Getting something down on paper can help you think. Ultimately, only what's on paper counts when you turn the test in.

➤ **Approximate.**

If you can't remember something precisely, give your best approximation.

➤ **Running out of time.**

If you're running out of time, note this in the test and outline as thoroughly as you can the remaining points you want to make. You can't get away with doing this on every question, or even more than one, but show that you know the main points and can put them in a logical order.

➤ **Don't wait until the very last minute.**

If you're really running out of time, you'll have to leave some questions blank. Don't wait until the very last minute to take this step. If you have to leave questions blank, do so sensibly, by leaving blank the questions about which you feel least confident.

IF YOU HAVE NO CLUE

Well you're kind of out of luck, but here are a few things to do.

➤ Say what you'd do if you knew.

➤ Try writing down what something isn't, if you really don't know what it is (in the context of the class, of course). This process of elimination may remind you of something relevant or generate ideas for another part of the test. You might even hit upon a defining characteristic that's good enough for partial credit.

➤ Shrug your shoulders, laugh ruefully at the injustice of it all, and move on.

TIPS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEST QUESTIONS

ESSAYS

When you write an essay, you want to: demonstrate that you understand the issue, take a stand, make an argument, consider the alternatives, and conclude

➤ **Read the directions carefully.**

Pay special attention to the verbs. Does the question ask you to summarize, outline, refute, compare, state, trace, describe, criticize, or contrast? Keep these directives in mind as you write.

➤ **Take a moment to outline your essay.**

Use a general outline if necessary. An essay question is meant to evaluate not only what you know but whether you can organize your knowledge compellingly-this takes a bit more structure.

➤ **Make distinct paragraphs.**

Paragraphs should be visually separate from one another, and each should follow the standard rules of composition by treating one main point.

➤ **Begin strongly.**

Deliver your verdict starkly, then back it up with subtleties. End strongly, if you can.

➤ **Write on one side of the page and in pen.**

This will make the essay easier for the grader to read.

SHORT ANSWER AND FILL IN THE BLANK

Your ability to flesh out an issue is not really on display here, nor are your full rhetorical powers. You want to keep your answers succinct and factual. State the answer clearly and, if appropriate, briefly give the reasons.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

When you take a multiple-choice test, you have the benefit of knowing that the correct answer is in front of you. You need to recognize it and recall it, but this is much easier than having to understand it or being able to explain it.

➤ **Read the question VERY carefully.**

To make the exam more challenging, multiple-choice and true/false questions will distract you with answers that are also familiar but do not quite fit the question at hand.

➤ **Try to answer the question on your own.**

Try to answer the question on your own, without looking at the multiple choices. This will help prevent you from choosing the first familiar-looking answer.

➤ **Read all of the choices.**

There might be an answer that sort of fits, and then one that fits better (this isn't good test-writing but not all tests are written well)

➤ **If you don't know the answer, employ a process of elimination.**

By eliminating the answers you know are wrong, you greatly increase your chances of guessing successfully.

➤ **Extreme answers.**

If you have to eliminate and have no other basis of doing so, eliminate the extreme answers (the highest and the lowest numbers, for example).

➤ **Similar answers.**

If there are two answers that look very similar (while the others do not), the correct answer is often one of them.

➤ **Don't agonize if you can't figure out the answer.**

Mark the question, move on, and then come back to it. Subsequent questions might give you a clue or jog your memory.

➤ **Existential Crisis.**

Don't overthink the deep implications of a multiple-choice question, deconstructing its meaning, wondering what exactly "is" meant. The questions are usually straightforward.

➤ **Simple.**

If the question is just too ridiculously simple, you might be missing something. Re-read the question again carefully.

Good luck and happy studying!!