

Chapter 6 Test Taking



Mary Shier

Student Success
An Invaluable Resource for
College and University Students



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Note that page numbers reflect the page numbers in the full textbook.

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Introduction

Many students say they are terrible at writing tests. What does it mean to be terrible at writing tests? Does it mean that the student has put effort into studying but has difficulty under pressure? Does it mean that a student studies the wrong material? Is the student prepared but does not execute well? Could the student have a learning disability? Does the student have test anxiety? Is the student missing key strategies for taking tests? It could mean any of these things. But it certainly isn't something that needs to be permanent. Students willing to work hard and learn can improve their test taking skills and raise their confidence.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter on “Test Taking,” students will:

- Identify sources and effects of test anxiety.
- Use effective strategies to manage test anxiety.
- Use effective techniques leading up to a test.
- Use effective strategies during a test.
- Use effective strategies after the test.
- Identify common types of academic dishonesty and their consequences.
- List the advantages and demonstrate the importance of academic integrity.

6.1 Test Anxiety and How to Manage It



Taking tests and exams can be stressful. Some people get very anxious before or during a test and it can impact their test results.

Exercise: Testing Your Test Anxiety

Take the true-or-false quiz below (circle T for true or F for false). There are no wrong answers.

I have a hard time starting to study for a test.	T	F
When studying for an exam, I feel desperate or lost.	T	F
When studying for an exam, I often feel bored and tired.	T	F
I don't sleep well the night before an exam.	T	F
My appetite changes the day of the exam. (I'm not hungry and skip meals or I overeat—especially high-sugar items like candy or ice cream.)	T	F
When taking an exam, I am often confused or suffer mental blocks.	T	F
When taking an exam, I feel panicky and my palms get sweaty.	T	F
I'm usually in a bad mood after taking an exam.	T	F
I usually score lower on exams than on papers, assignments, and projects.	T	F
After an exam, I can remember things I couldn't recall during the exam.	T	F



Anxiety overwhelms

If you answered true to any of the statements in the table above, you have suffered some of the symptoms of test anxiety. Most people have experienced this. It is normal to feel stress before an exam, and in fact, that may be a good thing. Stress motivates you to study and review, generates adrenaline to help sharpen your reflexes and focus while taking the exam, and may even help you remember some of the material you need. But suffering too many stress symptoms or suffering any of them severely will impede your ability to show what you have learned. Test anxiety can be defined as “a state of uneasiness and distress before and during a test that often lowers performance.” Anxiety during a test interferes with your ability to recall knowledge from memory as well as your ability to use higher-level thinking skills effectively. To learn more about critical thinking and study skills, see

Chapter 5 Study Skills.

There are steps you should take if you find that stress is getting in your way:

- **Be prepared.** A primary cause of test anxiety is not knowing the material and not knowing what to expect. If you use good study habits and review regularly, this stressor should be greatly reduced if not eliminated. You should be confident going into your exam. Cramming at the last minute, or feeling unsure of your knowledge of course material can increase your stress level. Make sure to find out how the exam is structured and what material to study. Double check the exam time and location.
- **Address negative thoughts.** Your own negative thoughts—“I’ll never pass this exam” or “I can’t figure this out, I must be really stupid!”—may move you into spiraling stress cycle that in itself causes enough anxiety to block your best efforts. When you feel you are brewing a storm of negative thoughts, stop what you are doing and clear your mind. Go for a walk. Confide in a friend. Meditate. Do some deep breathing. Don’t go back to work until you feel the tension release. Sometimes it helps to take a deep breath and shout “STOP!” and then proceed with clearing your mind. Once your mind is clear, repeat a reasonable affirmation to yourself—“I know this stuff” or “I will study hard until I know this stuff”—before continuing your work.
- **Visualize success.** Picture what it will feel like to get the grade you want. Translate that vision into specific, reasonable goals and work toward each individual goal. Visualize success of each goal. Take one step at a time and reward yourself for each goal you complete.
- **It’s all about you!** Don’t waste your time comparing yourself to other students in the class, especially during the exam. Keep focused on your own work and your own plan. Exams are not a race, so it doesn’t matter who turns in their paper first. In fact, those who take more time have the ability to explain their points more fully or to check their work for mistakes. Worrying about why someone turned their paper in early is counterproductive and will only cause additional anxiety.

- **Have a plan and follow it.** As soon as you know that an exam is coming, you can develop a plan for studying. As soon as you get your exam paper, you should develop a plan for the exam itself. This will be discussed further later in this chapter. Don't wait to cram for an exam at the last minute; the pressure you put on yourself and the late night will cause more anxiety, and you won't learn or retain much.
- **Make sure you eat well and get a good night's sleep before the exam.** Hunger, poor eating habits, energy drinks, and lack of sleep all contribute to test anxiety. Going to bed early with the assurance that you worked hard to prepare for the test goes a long way to experiencing peace going into an exam.
- **Arrive early.** Trying to cram or leaving things to the last minute can cause a huge amount of stress if you end up frantically racing to the exam. It increases anxiety when you are worried about being late. It's even worse if you actually *are* late. You'll have the added stress of entering the exam room late and you'll lose valuable time that could have been spent doing the test. This kind of anxiety can last all the way through the test. Prepare for the unexpected so that a late bus or a traffic jam doesn't throw you into a state of anxiety. Be early!
- **Chill!** You perform best when you are relaxed, so learn some relaxation exercises you can use during an exam. Before you begin your work, take a moment to listen to your body. Which muscles are tense? Move them slowly to relax them. Tense them and relax them. Try it right now. Exhale, then continue to exhale for a few more seconds until you feel that your lungs are empty. Inhale slowly through your nose and feel your rib cage expand as you do. This will help oxygenate your blood and re-energize your mind. Go online for many more ways to deal with stress.
- **Get help.** If exam anxiety is persistent and debilitating, and if it is getting worse despite your best effort to address it, seek help from Student Services.

Video: “Calm Test Anxiety & Relaxation Breathing Technique” (length 3:23)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=163#oembed-1> (#oembed-1)

Exercise: Talking Back to Your Anxious Self

You've learned how negative thoughts contribute to test anxiety and keep you from doing as well as you can. Take some time to disarm your most frequent offenders. From the following list, select three negative thoughts that you have experienced (or write your own). Then fill in the second and third columns for each statement, as shown in the example.

Examples of negative thoughts:

- I don't know anything... What's the matter with me?
- If I fail this test, I'll flunk the course.
- I should have studied more... I'll never make it through.

- I just can't think... Why did I ever take this course?
- I know everyone's doing better than I am.
- If I fail this test, my spouse (or partner, parents, teacher, friend) will be mad or disappointed in me. I don't know how I can face them again.
- I'm going to be the last one done again... I must really be stupid.
- I'm getting really tense again; my hands are shaking... I can't even hold the pen.
- I can't remember a thing... This always happens to me... I never do well on anything.

What are your anxious statements?

My anxious statement	How rational is this thought? Do you have any evidence that it is true?	Reasonable reinforcing or affirmation statements you can use to replace it.
Example: I'm drawing a blank....I'll never get the answer...I must really be stupid.	I've missed questions on things that I studied and knew before (but still passed the test anyway.) OR It's not reasonable to think I'll never get the answer. I have forgotten things before that came back to me further along in the test.	I studied this and know it. I'll visualize where it's written in my notes to help me trigger my memory. I'll come back to this at the end and I should think of it by then. I'm not stupid. I will get this.

Key Takeaways

- Some stress before a test or exam is common and beneficial.

- Test anxiety is stress that gets in the way of performing effectively.
- The most common causes of test anxiety are lack of preparation and negative attitudes.
- The key to combating test anxiety is to try to reduce stressors to a manageable level rather than try to eliminate them totally.

Exercise: Managing Stress

1. List three (or more) things you should do before a test or exam to combat test anxiety.
2. List three (or more) things you can do during an exam to reduce stress.

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6.2 Test Preparation Techniques: Leading up to the Test

Pre-Test Strategies

When should you start preparing for the first test? Choose one of the following answers:

1. The night before
2. The week prior
3. The first day of classes

If you answered “3. The first day of classes,” you are correct. If you circled all three, you are also correct. Preparing to pass tests is something that begins when learning begins and continues all the way through to the final exam.

Many students, however, don’t start thinking about test taking, whether weekly exams, mid-terms, or finals, until the day before when they engage in an all-nighter. This is an inefficient way to study. Not only is it not enough time to learn a whole unit or chapter, but the brain can only process an average of 5-7 new pieces of information at a time. Additionally, unless memory devices are used to aid memory and to cement information into long term memory (or at least until the test is over tomorrow!) chances are slim that students who cram will effectively learn and remember the information.

Additionally, a lot of students are unaware of the many strategies available to help with the test-taking experience before, during, and after. For starters, take a look at what has helped you so far.

Exercise: Pre-test-taking Strategies

PART A:

Put a check mark next to the pre-test strategies you already employ.

- ☐ Organize your notebook and other class materials the first week of classes.
- ☐ Maintain your organized materials throughout the term.
- ☐ Take notes on key points from lectures and other materials.
- ☐ Make sure you understand the information as you go along.
- ☐ Access your instructor’s help and the help of a study group, as needed.
- ☐ Organize a study group, if desired.
- ☐ Create study tools such as flashcards, graphic organizers, etc. as study aids.
- ☐ Complete all homework assignments on time.

- ___ Review likely test items several times beforehand.
- ___ Ask your instructor what items are likely to be covered on the test.
- ___ Ask your instructor to provide a study guide or practice test.
- ___ Ask your instructor if part marks will be given.
- ___ Maintain an active learner attitude.
- ___ Schedule extra study time in the days just prior to the test.
- ___ Gather all notes, handouts, and other materials needed before studying.
- ___ Review all notes, handouts, and other materials regularly.
- ___ Organize your study area for maximum concentration and efficiency.
- ___ Create and use mnemonic devices to aid memory.
- ___ Put key terms, formulas, etc., on a single study sheet that can be quickly reviewed.
- ___ Schedule study times short enough (1-2 hours) so you do not get burned out.
- ___ Get plenty of sleep the night before.
- ___ Set a back-up alarm in case the first alarm doesn't sound or you sleep through it.
- ___ Have a good breakfast with complex carbs and protein to see you through.
- ___ Show up early to get completely settled before the test begins.
- ___ Use the restroom beforehand to minimize distractions.

PART B

By reviewing the pre-test strategies, above, you have likely discovered new ideas to add to what you already use. Make a list of them and use this list from here forward.

You will notice that many of the strategies listed above have already been mentioned in the Study Skills chapter. This is no co-incidence. Good study habits help lead to good test results!

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

— Benjamin Franklin

Discipline, Preparation, and Execution

Being successful at tests comes down to discipline, preparation and execution. Students wanting to be successful have to have the self-discipline to schedule time to study well in advance of the exam. They have to actually do the work – the preparation needed in order to have the best opportunity for success on the exam. Then they must execute – they have to be able to apply their preparation accordingly and perform well on the exam.

Preparation for an exam is not glamorous. It's easy to find other things to do that are more interesting and fun. Students need to keep themselves motivated with their “eyes on the prize.” Think of it like this:

If the most important event of your life was coming up and you wanted to perform to the best of your ability in that event, you would likely spend some time preparing for it, rehearsing for it, practicing it, etc. A student may argue that an exam would not be the most important event of their life, but if you're already spending the time, effort, energy and money to attend college, why not do it to the best of your ability?

It would be beneficial to spread this preparation and practice out over time and prepare periodically rather than wait until the last minute and binge study or cram. Your preparation would not be of the same quality and this will likely affect your test score. Binge studying and cramming also are not healthy. Staying up late puts stress on our brain and body, and not getting adequate sleep places our bodies at risk for getting sick.

“One of the most important keys to success is having the discipline to do what you know you should do, even when you don't feel like doing it.”

— Unknown

“The will to succeed is important, but what's more important is the will to prepare.”

— Bobby Knight

Everyone wants to be successful. When the exam is passed out, everyone wants to perform well. But what often separates successful students and less successful students is the preparation time put in.

Studying the right thing is a process and a skill. As you gain more experience, you will learn how to become better at knowing what to study. It can be very frustrating to spend a lot of time preparing and studying and then finding out that what you studied was not on the exam. You will see a lot of variance with exams due to different instructors, classes and types of tests. The better you become at predicting what will be on the exam and study accordingly, the better you will perform on your exams. Try placing yourself in your instructor's shoes and design questions you think your instructor would ask. It's often an eye-opening experience for students and a great study strategy.

The more information you have about the exam, the better you can prepare for content, allocation of time spent on aspects of the exam, and the more confident you will be in knowing how and when to attempt to answer questions.

Preparation for Exam Strategies

Find Out as Much about the Exam in Advance as You Can

Some professors and instructors will tell you how many questions there will be, what format the exam will be in, how much time you will have, etc., and others will not. Students should ask questions about

the exam if there is not information given. Students should also ask those questions before class, after class, in professors' office hours or via email if it doesn't happen during class.

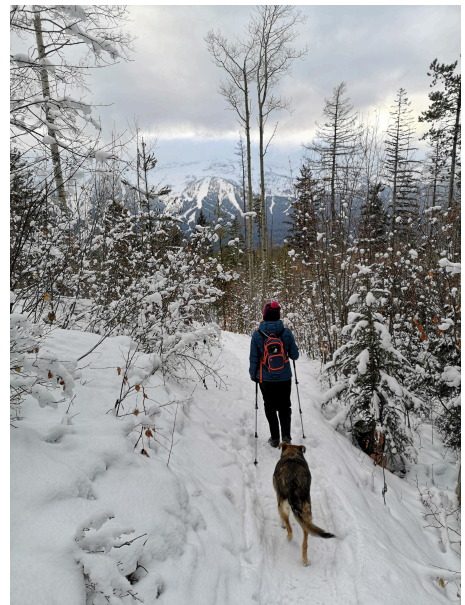
Ask about the format. Is it open book? Is it timed? What types of questions will be on it? What material will it cover? (e.g. chapters 1-3, or only chapter 3) If you're lucky an instructor will give you areas to focus your study on. How will it be scored? Knowing these things will make it easier to prepare for the test.

Anticipate Questions

What kind of questions would you include if you were the instructor? What areas did the instructor personally show the most interest in? Brainstorm possible questions with your study group. Look for possible questions in your notes. Review past quizzes and test to see what kinds of questions the instructor likes to ask. Above all, take it seriously whenever your instructor says, "This will be on the test." or "Make sure you know this for the test." They are giving you a huge study hint. Make sure to have your highlighter handy for these occasions.

Take Care of Your Body

Before the exam, it is important to prepare your brain and body for optimal performance for your exam. Do not cram the night before. Cramming is not a substitute for doing your assignments and studying consistently over time. Get a good night's sleep. It is far more important to get a good night's sleep and face your test fresh and well rested so that you can think clearly. Make sure you eat (nutritiously) before the exam to give you energy and concentration to do well on the exam. Include brain foods, such as those rich in omega-3 oils, and avoid heavy foods that are rich in fat and sugar. (After the exam, you can celebrate with a cheeseburger, fries, and milkshake – but not before the exam!) It's healthy to exercise the day before and if possible a few hours before the exam, even if it's just going for a walk outside. You can use the time to summarize concepts and recall things in your mind. (e.g. as you are walking you can list the parts of the respiratory system as you visualize the diagram in your mind.) This is a great way of reviewing.



Go for a short snowshoe with your dog and review the parts of the digestive system in your mind to prepare for your biology test tomorrow.

Types of Tests

All tests are designed to determine how much you know about a particular subject at a particular point in time. But you should be aware of differences in types of tests because this will help guide how you prepare for them. Tests can be grouped into various categories based on how they are delivered. Each type has its own unique strategies.

- **Paper tests** are still a very common type of test, requiring students to write answers on the

test pages or in a separate test booklet. They are typically used for in-class tests. Neatness and good grammar count, even if it's not an English exam. Remember that the instructor will be reading dozens of test papers and will not likely spend much time trying to figure out your hieroglyphics, arrows, and cross-outs.

- **Open-book tests** allow the student to consult their notes, textbook, or both while taking the exam. Students often mistakenly think that they don't have to study much because all the information will be in front of them. The contrary is true. Instructors often give this type of test when they are more interested in seeing your thoughts and critical thinking than your memory power. Be prepared to expose and defend your own viewpoints. You'll need to understand the themes and main ideas about the text. When preparing, know where key material is located in your book and notes; create an index for your notes and use sticky notes to flag key pages of your textbook before the exam. Another strategy is to highlight key sections in your index so you can easily find them. People who don't know their text book well, will spend fruitless precious time searching through the book for that thing they are trying to find.
- **Multiple-choice tests** affect the way you should prepare. You will not have to memorize the names of terms and their spelling, but you will have to recognize them and know what they mean. This impacts studying techniques.
- **Take-home tests** are like open-book tests except you have the luxury of time on your side. Make sure you submit the exam on time. Know what the instructor's expectations are about the content of your answers. The instructor will likely expect more detail and more complete work because you are not under a strict time limit and because you have access to reference materials. Be clear about when the test is due. (Some instructors will ask you to email your exam to them by a specific time.) Also find out if the instructor allows or expects you to collaborate with classmates. Be sure to type your exam and don't forget to spell-check!
- **Online tests** Find out if you will be allowed to move freely between test sections to go back and check your work or to complete questions you might have skipped. Some testing software does not allow you to return to sections once they are "submitted." Unless your exam needs to be taken at a specific time, don't wait until the last minute to take the test. Should you have technical problems, you want to have time to resolve the issues. To avoid any conflicts with the testing software, close all other software applications before beginning the test. Watch the time carefully. They will often have a clock counting down for you. Many online tests will submit the test at exactly the time the test is over, so make sure you've finished prior to the clock running out.
- **Electronic tests in the classroom** are becoming more common as universities install "smart classrooms" with technology such as wireless "clicker" technology that instructors may use to get a quick read of students' understanding of a lecture. This testing method allows for only true-or-false and multiple-choice questions, so it is rarely used for summative assessments. When taking this kind of quick quiz, take notes on questions you miss so that you can focus on them when you do your own review.
- **Presentations and oral tests** are the most complete means for instructors to evaluate students' mastery of material, because the evaluation is highly interactive. The instructor can (and likely will) probe you on certain points, question your assumptions, or ask you to defend your point of view. Make sure you practice your presentation many times with and without an

audience (your study group is good for this). Have a clear and concise point of view and keep to the allotted time. (You don't want to miss delivering a killer close if your instructor cuts you off because you weren't aware of the time!)

Key Takeaways

- Stay caught up throughout the term and review often.
- Make a study schedule before the test and stick to it.
- Prepare for exams and quizzes by getting plenty of rest, eating well, and getting some exercise the day before the exam.
- Cramming is seldom a good strategy.
- Before the exam, learn as much as you can about the kinds of questions your instructor will be asking and the specific material that will be covered.

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6.3 Techniques During a Test

You've done all you can within reason and within your circumstances to prepare for the test. You've studied hard, practised questions, and got a good night's sleep; you ate nutritiously, and arrived to the test early and prepared. Now it's time to write the test. There are specific strategies you can use in the midst of the test that will help you do the best you can do.



During-Test Strategies

Here is a list of the most common—and useful—strategies for test-taking.

- **Choose your seat wisely.** Sit where you are most comfortable. Scan the room and look for considerations that might affect you (e.g. sitting away from windows or doors that may be drafty or distracting). That said, sitting near the front has a couple of advantages: you will hear directions more easily; you may be less distracted by other students; and if a classmate comes up with a question for the instructor and there is an important clarification given, you will be better able to hear it and apply it, if needed.
- **Cut down on distractions.** Wear ear plugs, if noise distracts you. Put your phone on *do not disturb* before you arrive.
- **Bring water.** This helps calm the nerves, for one thing, and water is also needed for optimum brain function.
- **Listen** carefully to instructions given by the instructor or test invigilator.
- **Write it down.** Take a couple minutes to write down key facts, dates, principles, statistics, concepts, memory cues and formulas that you memorized to help you on the test. Write them on a piece of scratch paper or in the margin of the exam paper. Do this right at the start. Then you can refer to these notes as you take the exam.
- **Scan the test.** Before starting to do any of the questions, scan the test so you know how many test items there are, what types there are (multiple choice, matching, essay, etc.), and the point values of each item or group of items. There is nothing worse than getting a big surprise when you have no time left to do anything about it. You don't want to think you've almost finished the test, and then with five minutes left, you discover the last question is a forty mark essay.
- **Mark the questions** as you scan the test. Star or highlight the questions that you know really well. Put question marks beside the ones that you might have more trouble with. Always focus your attention on the questions you know well first. It ensures that you get the

questions done that you have the most chance of getting high marks on, and it builds your confidence from the start. Spending time on a question that you are struggling with is wasting your time which could be spent answering the questions you know the answers to. Skip the ones you don't know and come back to them later if you have time. You might even get some clues to the answers from some of the other questions covering similar information. On computerized tests or answer sheets where you can't or shouldn't make marks – write down the numbers of the questions you skipped or weren't sure of on scrap paper so you can find them easily later.

- **Create a Plan.** Evaluate the importance of each section as you scan the test. Determine which way you want to approach the test. Some students start with the easy questions first, that is, the ones they immediately know the answers to, saving the difficult ones for later, knowing they can spend the remaining time on them. Some students begin with the biggest-point items first, to make sure they get the most points. Determine a schedule that takes into consideration how long you have for the test and the types of questions on the test. Essay questions, for example, will require more time than multiple choice or matching questions. Keep your eye on the clock.

Create a Test Plan

Look for opportunities where some areas of the exam are worth more points than others. For example: An exam consists of 21 questions, with 10 being True/False, 10 being multiple choice, and one essay question. The T/F questions are worth 1 point each (10 points), the multiple-choice questions are worth 2 points each (20 points), and the essay question is worth 30 points. You know that the essay question is the most valuable (it is worth half of the value of the exam). And we should allocate our time for it accordingly. Do a quick analysis of time to be able to spend your time on the exam wisely. You want to spend some time with the essay question since it is so valuable, without sacrificing adequate time to ensure the T/F and multiple-choice questions are answered.

Often, the order of the exam in this scenario will be: T/F first, multiple choice second and essay third. Most students will go in the chronological order of the exam, but you may want to start with the essay, or at least decide on the essay question (if there is a choice between given options) and write the outline (plan) for the essay with key points before diving into the rest of the exam.

If this exam were to last for 40 minutes, a student could make a rough plan to spend 15-20 minutes on the essay question, ten minutes on the multiple choice, three-five minutes on the T/F and 5-10 minutes reviewing answers, checking over the essay, and going back to questions that were skipped.

- **Read the directions carefully.** Then reread them. Do you understand what is expected of you? If not, re-read the questions, or ask the instructor to be sure you are clear. Common errors from not reading directions carefully include either missing one part of the question (e.g. answered the first part but forgot about the second part) or not noticing that you only needed to answer 3 out of 5 of the short-answer questions (hence wasting time that could have been spent somewhere else on the test). Too many students lose points simply by not

following directions completely!

- **Read the questions carefully.** Underline key words in each question. Think about where you have heard these key words before. Think about other questions on the test for clues. When you have finished writing your answer, go back and read the question again to make sure you actually answered it. (It is not uncommon for students to go off on a tangent and then not actually answer the question.)
- **Do the easy questions first.** By getting the easy questions out of the way, you'll feel more confident about the test and have more time to think about the tougher questions. Start with the objective sections of the exam first (multiple choice, true or false, and matching columns). As you answer these questions, keep an eye out for facts, terms, or concepts you may want to use later in an essay question. You'll know because you read the essay question already and did your outline. Circle key concepts and jot them into your essay outline as you answer questions throughout the test.
- **Keep an eye on the time.** Keep as close to your plan as possible. If you see that you are running out of time, don't panic. Move to those questions you think you can still answer accurately within the remaining time.
- **Move.** Try to stretch in your chair from time to time to relieve tension and assist the blood to the brain! Roll your shoulders, circle your feet and hands, clench your butt, circle your neck.
- **Reduce anxiety.** Remember to employ strategies to reduce test-taking anxiety (covered earlier in the Chapter 6.1 Test Anxiety and How to Manage It).
- **Check your work.** This doesn't mean going through all your calculations again. Start by ensuring that you have *complete* answers according to the directions. Then look for other common mistakes, such as a misplaced decimal point, dropped words (especially those that can modify the answer, like "not"), and any incomplete or incomprehensible phrases.

Video: "Mr. Bean – The Exam" (length 5:56)



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Exercise: Test-taking Tips

Write a letter of advice to Chen incorporating 10 test-taking tips and strategies you think will help him.

Chen believes he is good at organization, and he usually is—for about the first two weeks of classes. He then becomes overwhelmed with all of the handouts and materials and tends to start slipping in the organization department. When it comes to tests, he worries that his notes might not cover all of the right topics and that he will not be able to remember all of the key terms and points—especially for his math class. During tests, he sometimes gets stuck on an item and tends to spend too much time there. He also changes answers sometimes but finds out later that his original selection was correct. Chen is also easily distracted by other

students and noises which makes it hard for him to concentrate, and, unfortunately, he does admit to occasionally “cramming” the night before.

Strategies for Specific Exam Formats

As well as using the above strategies during the test, it is important to be aware of the five principal types of questions on tests and to know specific strategies for each type to help maximize success.

True or False Questions

Look for qualifiers. A qualifier is a word that is absolute. Examples are: all, never, no, always, none, every, only, entirely. They are often seen in false statements. This is because it is more difficult to create a true statement using a qualifier like never, no, always, etc. For example, “All cats chase mice.” Cats may be known for chasing mice, but not all of them do so. The answer here is false and the qualifier “all” gave us a tip. Qualifiers such as: sometimes, many, some, most, often, and usually are commonly found in true statements. For example: “Most cats chase mice.” This is true and the qualifier “most” gave us a tip. Here is another example. “Delia flirts with every man she meets.” Though the statement may seem true because you know Delia, there was a time 5 years ago that she met a man named Bob, and she didn’t flirt with him. Though the temptation is to say, “true”, the one instance that it didn’t happen (when she met Bob) makes the actual answer, “false”. Similarly in a test, if you can think of one exception in a statement with an absolute qualifier (i.e. even one instance that the statement wouldn’t be true), then the answer is false.

Make sure to read the entire statement. All parts of a sentence must be true if the whole statement is to be true. If one part of it is false, the whole sentence is false. Long sentences are often false for this reason.

If students don’t know the answer, they should guess on True or False questions unless there is a penalty for an incorrect answer. There is a fifty percent chance of guessing correctly! And if you have to guess, guess the one that seems to make the most sense to you, and if you still have no idea, guess True, because most tests include more true statements than false.

Multiple Choice Questions

It is important to read each statement carefully. Think of multiple choice questions as four (or five) true or false statements in one. One of the statements is true (the correct answer) and the others will be false. If you have options such as “all of the above,” or “both A and B,” make sure each item is completely true (no exceptions) before selecting those options. If you know your material well, you will be able to pick out the true statements. If you are unsure of the material, there are some strategies to help you come up with the right answer.

Apply the same strategy toward qualifiers as you did in the True False questions. If you see an absolute qualifier in one of the answer choices, it is probably false. If a statement says something “always” happens and you can think of even one exception, then it is false. Try to identify the true statement, but before you choose it as the right answer, always read the other statements because you may find another

statement that sounds true. Eliminate answers you know to be false. Then discern between the two true-sounding statements. While working through a question, it is helpful to x-out the ones you know are false; it will save time if you need to go over the question again.

If there is no penalty for incorrect answers, guess if you are not certain of the answer. If there is a penalty for incorrect answers, common logic is to guess if you can eliminate two of the answers as incorrect (pending what the penalty is). If there's a penalty and you cannot narrow down the answers, it's best to leave it blank. You may wish to ask your instructor for clarification.

Answers that are strange and unrelated to the question are usually false. If two answers have a word that looks or sounds similar, one of those is usually correct. For example: abductor/ adductor. If you see these as two of the four or five choices, one of them is usually correct. Also look for answers that are grammatically incorrect. These are usually incorrect answers.

Matching Questions

Although less common than the other types of exams, you will likely see some matching exams during your time in college. First, read the instructions and take a look at both lists to determine what the items are and their relationship. It is especially important to determine if both lists have the same number of items and if all items are to be used, and used only once.

Matching exams become much more difficult if one list has more items than the other or if items either might not be used or could be used more than once. If your exam instructions do not discern this, you may wish to ask your instructor for further clarification.

Students should take a look at the whole list before selecting an answer because a more correct answer may be found further into the list. If one column is short phrases and the other column is single words, work from the column with phrases and look for the single words to match (not the other way around). If both columns have single words, group them by parts of speech (nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs etc.). Mark items when you are sure you have a match and cross out these options to eliminate answers for the remainder of the matching. Guessing (if needed) should take place once you have selected answers you are certain about.

Short-Answer Questions

Short-answer questions are designed for you to recall and provide very *specific* information (unlike essay questions that ask you to apply critical thinking to that information.) Read all of the instructions first. Budget your time and then read all of the questions. Answer the ones you know best or feel the most confident with. Then go back to the other ones. If you do not know the answer and there is no penalty for incorrect answers, guess. Use common sense. Sometimes instructors will award partial credit for a logical answer that is related even if it is not the correct answer.

Make sure to look at the marking system. If short answer questions are worth 3-5 marks out of 100, then likely the instructor is looking for about 2-3 relevant sentences, not a full paragraph. If they are out of twenty marks, you'll want to include more information in more depth.

Author's Story

I have a tendency to write too much on short-answer test questions. I want to write down everything I know about the topic. It's great because I'll usually get full marks on the question, but an instructor once told me that I would have had full marks with my first few sentences. The trouble is that if you spend too long on a short-answer question, you may run out of time for other questions, especially a long-answer essay style question that really does require you to go into depth. Write down a few of the most relevant things on your short-answer question and come back and write more later if there's time at the end.

— Mary Shier, College of the Rockies

Essay Questions

Knowing the format of the exam can help you determine how to study. If you know that you are taking a True-False or Multiple Choice exam, you will need to discern whether a statement is True or False. You will need to know subject content for the course. But if you are studying for short answer and especially for essay questions, you must know a lot more. For essay questions, you must have much greater content knowledge and be able to make a coherent argument that answers the question using information from textbooks, lectures or other course materials. You will have to connect themes with examples. Essay questions evaluate your thinking and reasoning skills applied to the course material. You will have to place a lot more time and thought into studying for an essay exam than for True-False or Multiple Choice exams.

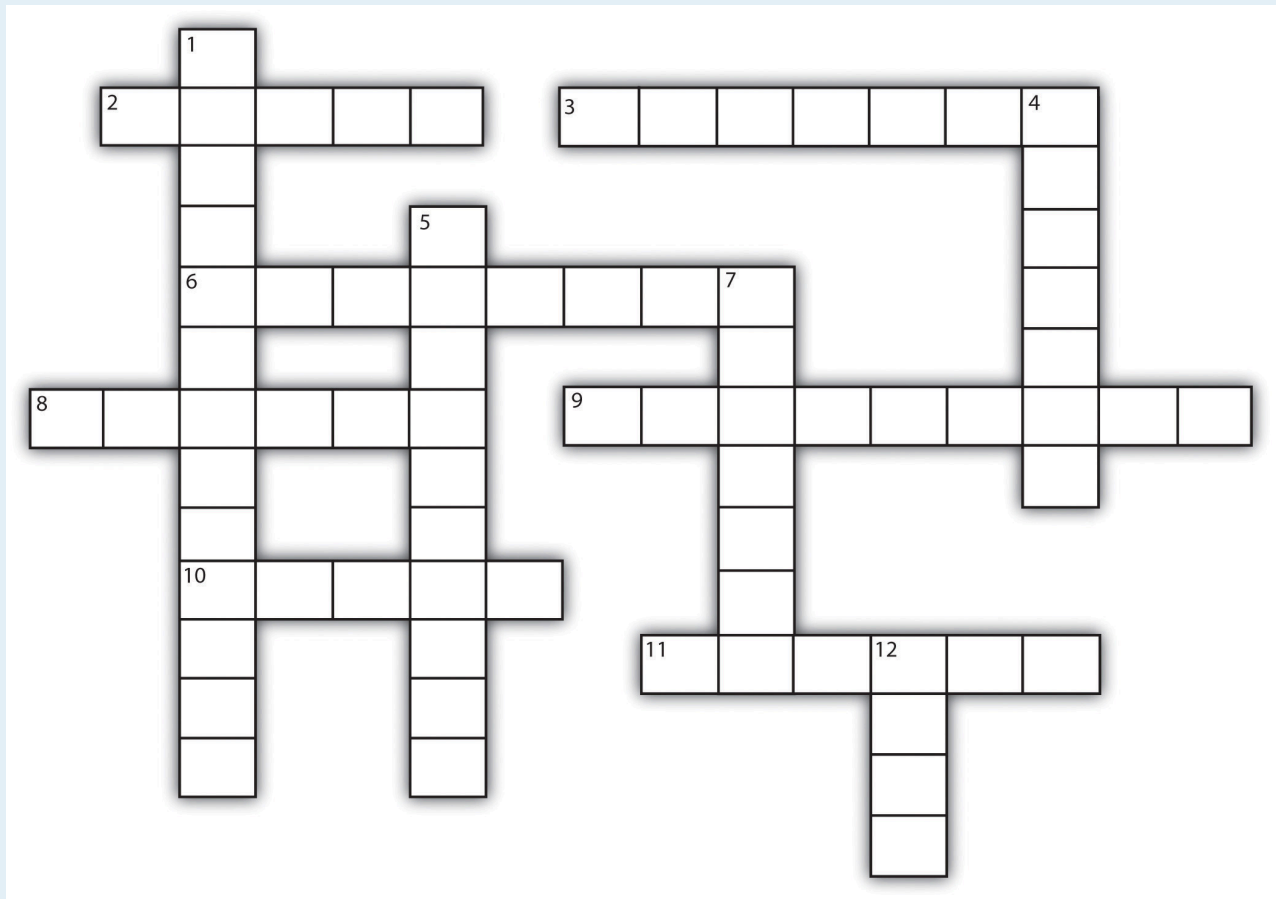
Read the essay question(s) and the instructions first. Underline or circle key words in the question. Plan your time wisely and organize your answer before you start to write. Make a quick outline to organize the essay and include all key points. Address the answer to the question in your first paragraph and reiterate it in your last paragraph (conclusion). You would be surprised how many essays are written that discuss all kinds of things about the topic, but actually never answer the question! It may help to restate the original question. Write clearly and legibly. Instructors have difficulty grading essays that they cannot read. Clearly state what you are trying to say. Don't expect that the instructor knows what you mean. Write the essay as if you are explaining it to someone who knows nothing about the topic. Please note that essay questions often have multiple acceptable answers, so don't question whether your answer is correct or not. Just make sure you've backed up what you've said.

Save some time for review when you have finished writing to check spelling, grammar and coherent thought in your answer. Inevitably you will find things that need to be clarified. Write your essay double-spaced. This leaves room to add in words or phrases in the proof-reading stage without making a mess of your paper. Finally, make sure you have addressed all parts of the essay question.

Words to Watch for in Essay Questions

Word	What It Means	What the Instructor Is Looking For
Analyze	Break concept into key parts.	Don't just list the parts; show how they work together and illustrate any patterns.
Compare	Show similarities (and sometimes differences) between two or more concepts or ideas.	Define the similarities and clearly describe how the items or ideas are similar. Do these similarities lead to similar results or effects? Note that this word is often combined with "contrast." If so, make sure you do both.
Contrast	Show differences between two or more concepts or ideas.	Define the differences and clearly describe how the items or ideas are different. How do these differences result in different outcomes? Note that this word is often combined with "compare." If so, make sure you do both.
Critique	Judge and analyze.	Explain what is wrong—and right—about a concept. Include your own judgments, supported by evidence and quotes from experts that support your point of view.
Define	Describe the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept.	Define the concept or idea as your instructor did in class—but use your own words. If your definition differs from what the instructor presented, support your difference with evidence. Keep this essay short. Examples can help illustrate a definition, but remember that examples alone are <i>not</i> a definition.
Discuss	Explain or review.	Define the key questions around the issue to be discussed and then answer them. Another approach is to define pros and cons on the issue and compare and contrast them. In either case, explore all relevant data and information.
Explain	Clarify, give reasons for something.	Clarity is key for these questions. Outline your thoughts carefully. Proofread, edit, proofread, and proofread again! Good explanations are often lost in too many words.
Illustrate	Offer examples.	Use examples from class material or reading assignments. Compare and contrast them to other examples you might come up with from additional reading or real life.
Prove	Provide evidence and arguments that something is true.	Instructors who include this prompt in an exam question have often proven the hypothesis or other concepts in their class lectures. Think about the kind of evidence the instructor used and apply similar types of processes and data.
Summarize	Give a brief, precise description of an idea or concept.	Keep it short, but cover all key points. This is one essay prompt where examples should not be included unless the instructions specifically ask for them. (For example, "Summarize the steps of the learning cycle and give examples of the main strategies you should apply in each one.")

Exercise: Test Your Knowledge



Cross Word Clues

Across	Down
2. “Always,” “never,” and “every” are words that usually indicate the answer is _____.	1. It helps to group words in matching columns by _____.
3. A way to organize your thoughts for an essay	4. Clarify, give reasons for something
6. Short answer questions require a _____ answer.	5. Essay questions often have more than one _____ answer.
8. Describe the meaning of a word	7. Show similarities and differences
9. Give a brief, precise description of an idea or concept	12. Most common answer in true and false questions
10. Type of question used to evaluate thinking and reasoning	
11. Since instructors need to read many essays, it is important to write _____.	

Key Takeaways

- Be prepared. Get a good night's sleep! Arrive early and get comfortable.
- Scan the entire exam before starting to answer questions.
- Develop a plan (including a “time budget”) for completing the exam.
- Read questions carefully. Underline keywords in questions, particularly in essay questions and science questions.
- Do the questions you know well first.
- Unless points are deducted for wrong answers, it pays to take educated guesses.
- Pay attention to specific strategies for different types of questions.
- Keep a close eye on the time. Don't be caught off guard.

Lastly, if you finish the test early, use the remaining time to review your answers and make corrections or additions before submitting your exam.

Make sure you have written your full name on the test. It's shocking how many students write their first name only and expect the instructor to figure it out. It's also shocking how many students forget to write their names at all. You don't want to go through all that preparation and stress and then not get credit for your work. Lastly, make sure to hand your paper in!

Video: “Funny school video of kid taking a test” (length 1:04)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=170#oembed-2> (#oembed-2)

Answers to crossword puzzle above:

Across: 2. false; 3. outline; 6. specific; 8. define; 9. summarize; 10. essay; 11. neatly

Down: 1. parts of speech; 4. explain; 5. acceptable; 7. compare; 12. true

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6.4 After the Test

So far, we have focused on how to study for and take tests effectively. This section discusses how to *use* test results to their greatest benefit. Some of your most important learning begins when your graded test paper is returned to you. Your first reaction, of course, is to see what grade you received and how you did compared with your classmates. This is a natural reaction.

Make sure you listen to the instructor as the papers are returned. What is the instructor saying about the test? Is there a particular point everyone had trouble with? Does the instructor generally think everyone did well? The instructor’s comments at this point may give you important information about what you should study more, about the value of review sessions, and even about possible questions for the next exam.

Although you may be tempted to throw away the exam, don’t. It is a very helpful tool for the next phase of preparing for learning. This is a three-step process, beginning with evaluating your results.

Evaluating Your Test Results

When you receive your test back, sit quietly and take a close look at it. What questions did you get wrong? What kind of mistakes were they? (See Table 6.41 “Exam Errors and How to Correct Them” below.) Do you see a pattern? What questions did you get right? What were your strengths? What can you learn from the instructor’s comments?

Now think of the way in which you prepared for the exam and the extent to which you applied the exam strategies described earlier in this module. Were you prepared for the exam? Did you study the right material? What surprised you? Did you read the entire test before starting? Did your time allocation work well, or were you short of time on certain parts of the exam?

Exam Errors and How to Correct Them

Study and Preparation Errors

Examples	Corrective Steps
I did not study the material for that question (enough).	Practice predicting possible questions better.
I did not prepare enough.	Join a study group. Create a study schedule. Review the study skills chapter.

Focus Errors or Carelessness

Examples	Corrective Steps
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I ran out of time.	Read the entire test before starting. Make a plan and allocate your time. Watch the clock.
I did not read the directions carefully.	Read carefully and reread to ensure you got it right.
I misread or misunderstood the question.	Read carefully and reread to ensure you got it right.
I confused terms or concepts that I actually know well.	Read carefully and think before answering a question. Go back and check answers at the end and you will often catch these mistakes.

Content Errors

Examples	Corrective Steps
I studied the material but couldn't make it work with the question.	Seek additional help from the instructor.
I didn't understand what the instructor wanted.	Go to all classes, labs, and review sessions. Get caught up on any missed classes.
I confused terms or concepts.	Join a study group. Review concepts throughout the term.
I didn't understand why I got the question wrong.	Ask your instructor for clarification.
Everything seemed to be a jumble in my mind and I mixed up what connected with what.	Don't cram. Schedule regular study time for this course.

Mechanical Errors

Examples	Corrective Steps
The instructor misread my writing.	Slow down! Don't rush through the exam. Take the time to do things right the first time.
I didn't erase a wrong answer completely.	Cross things out clearly rather than use an eraser. It is more time efficient.
I forgot to go back to a question I had skipped over.	Use the last 5 minutes of a test to go over it and check you have answered all the questions.
I miscopied some calculations or facts from my worksheet.	Copy things carefully. This is a frustrating way to lose marks.

Based on your analysis of your test, identify the kind of corrective steps you should take to improve your learning and test performance. Implement those steps as you begin your preparation for your next class. If you don't learn from your mistakes, you are doomed to repeat them; if you don't learn from your successes, it will be harder to repeat them.

Correcting Your Mistakes

The second step in making your test work for you is to correct your wrong answers. The last time you wrote the information (when you took the test), you created a link to wrong information in your memory, so that must be corrected.

- For multiple-choice questions, write out the question stem with the correct answer to form a single correct sentence or phrase.
- For true-or-false questions, write the full statement if it is true; if it is false, reword it in such a way that it is true (such as by inserting the word “not”). Then write the new statement.
- For math and science questions involving calculations, redo the entire solution with the calculations written out fully.
- You need not rewrite an entire essay question if you did not do well, but you should create a new outline for what would be a correct answer. Make sure you incorporate any ideas triggered by your instructor’s comments.
- When you have rewritten all your answers, read them all out loud before incorporating your new answers in your notes.

Integrating Your Test into Your Study Guide

Your corrected quizzes and midterm exams are an important study tool for final exams. Make sure you file them with your notes for the study unit. Take the time to annotate your notes based on the exam. Pay particular attention to any gaps in your notes on topics that appeared in the quiz or exam. Research those points in your text or online and complete your notes. Review your exams throughout the term (not just before the final) to be sure you cement the course material into your memory.

When you prepare for the final exam, start by reviewing your quizzes and other tests to predict the kinds of questions the instructor may ask on the final. This will help focus your final studying when you have a large amount of coursework to cover.

If You Don’t Get Your Test Back

If your instructor chooses not to return tests to students, make an appointment to see the instructor soon after the test to review it and your performance. Take notes on what you had trouble with and the expected answers. Add these notes into your study guide. Make sure you don’t lose out on the opportunity to learn from your results.

Key Takeaways

- Working with exams does not end when your instructor hands back your graded test.
- Quizzes and midterms are reliable predictors of the kind of material that will be on the final exam.
- When evaluating your test performance, don't look only at the content you missed. Identify the types of mistakes you commonly make and formulate plans to prevent these mistakes in future assessments.

Exercise: After the Test

1. Take time to examine your notes for each course you are now taking. Are your exams and quizzes part of that package? If not, include them now. Review them this week.
2. Compare your exams across two or three courses. What kinds of mistakes do you make on a regular basis? Is there a trend you need to correct?

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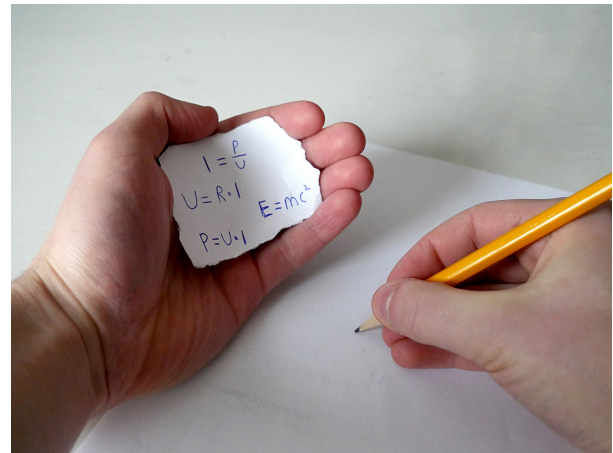
6.5 The Honest Truth

Academic Integrity and Academic Dishonesty

Throughout this book, we have focused on the active process of *learning*, not just on how to get good grades. The attitude of some students that grades are the be-all and end-all in academics has led many students to resort to academic dishonesty to try to get the best possible grades or handle the pressure of an academic program. Some cultures have a much more relaxed attitude towards cheating, and with the rise of international students in Canadian post-secondary institutions, students must be aware that Canadian institutions take this very seriously. No matter what your reason, it is never OK to cheat.

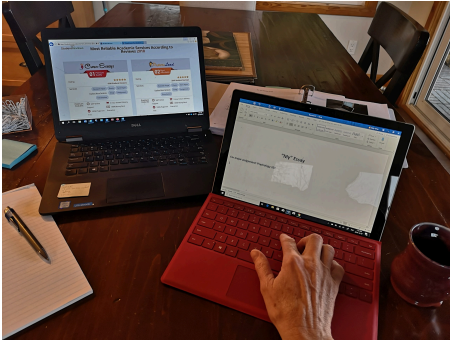
Although you may be tempted if you've heard people say, "Everybody does it," or "It's no big deal at my school," you should be mindful of the consequences of cheating:

- **You don't learn as much.** Cheating may get you the right answer on a particular exam question, but it won't teach you how to apply knowledge in the world after school, nor will it give you a foundation of knowledge for learning more advanced material. When you cheat, you cheat yourself out of opportunities.
- **You risk failing the course or even expulsion from school.** Each institution has its own definitions of and penalties for academic dishonesty, but most include cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification. The exact details of what is or is not allowed vary somewhat among different universities and colleges, and even among instructors, so you should be sure to check your school's website and your instructor's guidelines to see what rules apply. Ignorance of the rules is seldom considered a valid defense.
- **Cheating causes stress.** Fear of getting caught will cause you stress and anxiety; this will get in the way of performing well using the information you *do* know.
- **You're throwing away your money and time.** Getting a university education is a big investment of money and effort. You're simply not getting your full value when you cheat, because you don't learn as much.
- **You are trashing your integrity.** Cheating once and getting away with it makes it easier to cheat again, and the more you cheat, the more comfortable you will be giving up your integrity in other areas of life—with perhaps even more serious consequences.
- **Cheating lowers your self-esteem.** If you cheat, you are telling yourself that you are simply



Cheating raises test anxiety which impedes performance.

not smart enough to handle learning. It also robs you of the feeling of satisfaction from genuine success.



Resist the temptation to cheat by “borrowing” others’ work from the internet.

Technology has made it easier to cheat. Your credit card and an internet connection can procure a paper for you on just about any subject and length. You can copy and paste for free from various websites. Students have made creative use of texting and video on their cell phones to gain unauthorized access to material for exams, but be aware that technology has also created ways for instructors to easily detect these forms of academic dishonesty. Most universities make these tools available to their instructors. Instructors are also modifying their testing approaches to reduce potential academic misconduct by using methods that are harder to cheat at (such as in-class essays that evaluate *your* thinking and oral presentations).

If you feel uneasy about doing something in your university or college work, trust your instincts. Confirm with the instructor that your intended form of research or use of material is acceptable. Cheating just doesn’t pay.

Examples of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty can take many forms, and you should be careful to avoid them. The following list is a clear and complete compilation of what most institutions will consider unacceptable academic behaviour:

1. **Cheating:** using unauthorized notes, study aids, or information on an examination; altering a graded work after it has been returned, then submitting the work for regrading; allowing another person to do one’s work and submitting that work under one’s own name; submitting identical or similar papers for credit in more than one course without prior permission from the course instructors.
2. **Plagiarism:** submitting material that in part or as a whole is not entirely one’s own work without attributing those same portions to their correct sources.
3. **Fabrication:** falsifying or inventing any information, data or citation; presenting data that were not gathered in accordance with standard guidelines defining the appropriate methods for collecting or generating data and failing to include an accurate account of the method by which the data were gathered or collected.
4. **Obtaining an Unfair Advantage:** stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining access to examination materials prior to the time authorized by the instructor; stealing, destroying, defacing or concealing library materials with the purpose of depriving others of their use; unauthorized collaboration on an academic assignment; retaining, possessing, using or circulating previously given examination materials, where those materials clearly indicate that they are to be returned to the instructor at the conclusion of the examination; intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student’s academic work; or otherwise

undertaking activity with the purpose of creating or obtaining an unfair academic advantage over other students' academic work.

5. **Aiding and Abetting Academic Dishonesty:** providing material, information, or other assistance to another person with knowledge that such aid could be used in any of the violations stated above, or providing false information in connection with any inquiry regarding academic integrity.
6. **Falsification of Records and Official Documents:** altering documents affecting academic records; forging signatures of authorization or falsifying information on an official academic document, grade report, letter of permission, petition, drop/add form, ID card, or any other official university document.
7. **Unauthorized Access:** accessing computerized academic or administrative records or systems; viewing or altering computer records; modifying computer programs or systems; releasing or dispensing information gained via unauthorized access; or interfering with the use or availability of computer systems or information.

Key Takeaways

- Being dishonest can have major consequences that can affect not only your university career, but also your life beyond university.
- “Everybody does it” and “It’s no big deal at my school” are not valid reasons for cheating.
- When you cheat, you are primarily cheating yourself.

Exercise: Academic Dishonesty

1. What are the most common forms of academic dishonesty you have heard about at your school? What should be done about them?
2. What resources do you have on campus to learn about correct forms of referencing other people’s work in your own?

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6.6 Chapter Review and Activities

Exercise: Chapter Review I

1. What is test anxiety? What are the three causes of test anxiety you would like to work on controlling?
2. When should you start studying for an exam?
3. Why would an instructor assign an open-book exam? What types of things should you pay attention to if you are taking an open-book exam?
4. How might you predict the kinds of questions that will be on an exam?
5. What should you do right after the instructor hands out the exam?
6. List five words to watch for in multiple-choice and true-or-false questions.
7. List five words to watch for in essay questions.
8. List the five most common types of errors made on exams.
9. What should you do with your exam after it has been graded and returned to you?

Exercise: Chapter Review II

The following test will allow you to practice the strategies for each question type outlined in Chapter 6:

I. Multiple-choice section (10 points)

1. All actions on this list are examples of words to watch for in essay questions except:
 - a. analyze
 - b. prove
 - c. erase
 - d. illustrate
 - e. summarize
2. After getting a test back, you should:
 - a. analyze the types of questions you got wrong
 - b. correct your wrong answers

- c. integrate your test into your study guide
- d. identify any possible study and preparation errors
- e. all of the above

II. True-or-false section (10 points)

1. ____ You should never use examples when an essay question asks you to illustrate.
2. ____ Beds are a good place to study because they are comfortable and quiet.
3. ____ It's smart to schedule a specific and consistent time for studying for each course.
4. ____ In true-or-false questions, it is safer to mark true than false if you don't know the answer.
5. ____ One advantage of studying in a group is that students will encourage each other to do their best work.

III. Matching column section (10 points)

____ 1. Define	A. A test where the student can consult notes and/or textbooks
____ 2. Study group	B. To describe pros and cons and compare them
____ 3. Open-book test	C. To describe the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept
____ 4. Discuss	D. Your own personalized study guide
____ 5. Class and assignment notes	E. Three or four students from a class who meet regularly to review class material and encourage each other

IV. Short answer section (15 points)

1. List three things you should do before a test to prepare your body to perform effectively.
2. Name at least three of the characteristics of successful study groups.
3. List at least four steps you should take before you start writing the answer to an essay question.

V. Essay section (55 points)

1. Compare and contrast effective studying and cramming.

Exercise: Make an Action List

Make an action list to prepare for your next test.

List two things that you will do to...

1. Reduce your test anxiety.
2. Improve your studying effectiveness.

3. Improve your performance on exams.

When making your list, write down the date you expect to take each action and how you will know when you accomplish each action.

Action list

What I will do to...	Description of action	Date I expect to take each action	How I will know I accomplished each action
Reduce my testing anxiety (action 1)			
Reduce my testing anxiety (action 2)			
Improve my study effectiveness (action 1)			
Improve my study effectiveness (action 2)			
Improve my performance on exams (action 1)			
Improve my performance on exams (action 2)			

Key Takeaways

Test taking is stressful, but salient concepts and strategies help make it go smoother. Rather than thinking of it as a stressful source of angst, think of it as an opportunity to demonstrate all that you have learned.

- Recognize test anxiety and be pro-active in reducing it by being well-prepared for tests and by re-aligning negative attitudes.
- Use key strategies for test preparation *prior* to your tests. Keep up throughout the term. Stick to your study plan. Prepare well for your tests.
- Use key strategies *during* your tests to ensure you use your time efficiently and that you get the

most marks that you can.

- Learn from your mistakes on tests and from the types of questions that your instructor usually asks. Incorporate this into your future study plans *after* each test.
- Academic dishonesty including cheating and plagiarism has serious consequences and is *never* worth it.

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