

Tips for Different Kinds of Exam Questions

Exams often use a variety of questions to ensure that students can show their understanding in multiple ways. This requires students to develop strategies to deal with understanding different exam formats. Here are some tips to try when handling different types of exam questions.

Multiple Choice

Try to answer a question in your head before looking at the possible answers. This way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.

Eliminate answers you know are incorrect. Reducing the selection of answers makes it easier to decide which one is correct.

Read all the choices carefully before choosing your answer. Underline key words to help focus your reasoning.

Don't change your answer unless you misread the question. Change answers if you have a good reason, but if you are unsure, trust your gut feeling.

If you are confused by the wording of a question, ask your professors to clarify. They can't tell you the answers, but that doesn't mean they can't help you to better understand the questions.

Don't get stuck on individual questions. If you can't decide on an answer, move on and save time to come back to it later.

For questions that require calculations to find the answers, don't estimate the value and look for the closest option; complete the calculation.

If you can write on the exam paper, use whatever markings you need to gain a clearer understanding of the question.

Unless you are penalized for incorrect answers, be sure to answer every question. When making an educated guess, look for similar choices.

Don't let the trickiness of any multiple choice question undermine your confidence in the material. Your knowledge is ultimately more important than any test score. No exam can test everything you know, and nobody knows everything, so don't let a little adversity discourage you.

Short and long answer

Read carefully to ensure you understand the focus of the question. The wording of a question will often provide directions for how it should be answered. Pay close attention to the verb in the question to guide your answer.

Aim for quality not quantity. Lengthy answers are only effective when each sentence is relative to the question. Don't just write to fill up the page, but understand the scope of the question.

Questions with greater weight require more writing, so ensure you use your time accordingly.

Pay attention to style, grammar and spelling. Professors are less inclined to give high marks to answers with sloppy writing, even if they have good content. However, don't let attention to neatness take precedence over getting your answer written down.

Reread the question to ensure you have responded to every part of the question.

Move onto another question, and if you have time, go back and proofread your writing to ensure clarity.

Problem-solving

Most questions will ask you to solve for a certain unknown variable. Write that variable down and underline or highlight it as a reminder that it is the focal point of the question.

Write down any information provided in the question that is necessary to solve the unknown. If there is unnecessary information in the question, ignore it.

Write down any formulae you think may be useful in solving your unknown. Sometimes these formulae are obvious; other times they are subtle. Remember that there must be an answer to the question, and the challenge is to find that answer through your knowledge of course material.

Sometimes a question contains information that is needed to derive other information. Remember to think critically and creatively, outside the box.

If a question has multiple parts, take it one part at a time, treating each part as a question in itself. Treat each part individually, but remember that they are interrelated.

After you have solved your unknown, check over the steps that led to your solution and think about whether or not your answer makes sense.

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