The process of taking a test actually begins long before you walk into the exam. You should have a regular semester study plan and a quiet place to work each day for every class. Then you will do more reviewing and less cramming the night before a test. For the BEST exam preparation method, you should spend the days before your exam predicting test questions and producing your responses. This is difficult to do unless you have been keeping up with your reading and reviewing on a regular basis. Here are more strategies to use once the tests are handed out:

**General Tips**

- Get to class 5 minutes early with any materials you need (notes, #2 pencil, text if allowed).
- Read the directions TWICE, very carefully to make sure you don’t miss anything.
- Scan the test quickly.
- Budget your time to spend the most time on the items that are weighed most heavily.
- See your instructor immediately if you don’t do well; he or she may have some tips for how to approach the material. Take this information to your tutor. At the very least, the teacher knows you are interested and motivated to improve your grade.
- Analyze your test answers to see what went wrong. Did you panic? (Test anxiety or poor preparation) Was the information not in your notes? (Compare with a classmate, take better notes) Did you forget information or know main ideas but not details? (Poor preparation) Maybe your answer wasn’t organized or you made a careless error. If you don’t figure out what you did wrong, you will repeat the mistake again. Just as athletes review films of previous games to improve performance, do the same for exam!

**Essay Test**

- **SURVEY THE TEST QUICKLY.** Discover what topics are covered and decide which questions you would like to answer and in what order.
- **KNOW WHAT THE QUESTION IS ASKING AND DO IT.** Be aware of terminology like cause-effect, compare, contrast, enumerate, discuss, trace the development of…, define.
- **BRAINSTORM & ORGANIZE YOUR ANSWER.** Spend a few minutes thinking through your answer and recall and jot down everything you know related to the topic. Quickly number your ideas in the order you want to cover them and then write. Organization counts!
- **BE CONCISE, BUT BE SPECIFIC.** *This is most important.* Avoid wordiness or unnecessary information just to lengthen your essay, but be sure to support all of your main points with references to incidents, author’s opinions, examples, and
facts. For example, don’t just say that there were economic causes to a war; lest specific examples from the book or lecture (trade rights, unfair taxation, depressed economy, greed for natural resources).

- **BE NEAT.** This is hard when you are in a hurry, but use your best penmanship. If you write on every other line, this is easier on the reader and you will have room to make changes.

- **UNDERSTAND THE INSTRUCTOR’S IDEAS.** Look for the instructor’s main ideas and work them carefully into your own words. Show the instructor that you understand the material by remembering his or her own ideas and using them in your answer.

- **PROOFREAD YOUR ANSWER.** Leave yourself 5 minutes at the end to reread and check for spelling, grammar, and development errors. You may have forgotten a point.

- **IF YOU CAN’T FINISH IN TIME…** draw a horizontal line across your paper, write “I ran out of time,” and quickly list the points you meant to cover. You may get partial credit!

### Objective Tests

- **SCAN QUICKLY.** Read through the whole exam rapidly.

- **READ ALL THE OPTIONS,** even if the first answer seems correct. Sometimes all the answers are somewhat true and you have to select the *best* one.

- **SKIP AROUND.** Answer only the questions you know for certain first. Put a mark in the margin by all questions you are not absolutely sure of.

- **REREAD UNANSWERED QUESTIONS.** Circle the key vocabulary words from notes or reading, and underline “only”, “never”, and “sometimes”.

- **ELIMINATE ANSWERS.** Read each option as a true/false question. Consider answers which make the statements true without exception and eliminate answers which are false in some instances. Words like “always” and “never” *usually* make a statement false; words like “usually”, “sometimes”, and “most of the time” may indicate a true statement.

- **SAVE TIME.** If “all of the above” is an option, you only need to find 2 correct answers among the choices to know that “all of the above” is the answer.

- **RESTATE THE QUESTION.** Use your own words if the original wording is confusing. It may also be helpful to turn a statement into a question using who, what, where, how, or why. For example, if the question states, “One of the following choices best describes the process of photosynthesis,” turn it into a question: “Which of the following…”

- **MATCHING QUESTIONS:** Match the questions you are sure of first (crossing them out to prevent confusion), and go back and complete what is left.
HINTS ON TAKING TESTS
First and Second Year Advising

- COMPLETION QUESTIONS: Look for consistency in the sentence structure. If “an” appears before the blank, the answer will begin with a vowel. If “a” appears before the blank, the answer begins with a consonant.
- USE LOGIC: Use your general knowledge to select an answer that makes the most sense.
- IF YOU ARE STUCK… read the questions again, stop and think of the answer, and then look for it. Or, read the question repeatedly with each separate answer.

TEST ANXIETY
- ANXIETY IS NORMAL. Adrenalin keeps you on your toes. Keep anxiety from getting out of hand by breathing deeply, stretching or tensing your muscles, and then relaxing them.
- USE POSITIVE SELF-TALK. When you find yourself saying, “I’m going to fail this” or other negative comments, replace these with ones like, “Let’s take it slow”, “I can complete this test”, or “This is familiar”. Visualize success while you are studying and saying “Worrying won’t help. I can learn this information”!
- AVOID CRAMMING! Review your notes periodically during the semester and anticipate test questions the night before and practice answering.
- SLEEP AND EAT. Get a good night’s sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. You can’t do your best if you are deprived for rest or haven’t fed your brain.