

# Test Taking Strategies

(adapted and revised from *Study Strategies Made Easy*)

## Strategies for Subjective Tests (Essay Tests)

Subjective tests often involve writing essays. Essay tests involve you generating the answer to questions without the help of optional answers. You must answer each question completely and accurately in order to earn maximum points. Most essay tests do not involve merely writing about a topic but responding to a specific prompt related to a topic.

Questions that include the following words and others like them require you to write all the relevant information you know about the subject: describe, outline, discuss, prove, explain, review, list, state.

Questions that include these words require you to write specific facts in a specific way:

- Compare: Write about the likenesses **ONLY** of the subjects
- Contrast: Write about the differences **ONLY** between subjects
- Compare and Contrast: Write about **BOTH** the likenesses **AND** differences of the subjects
- Define: Write the meaning of the word or subject given
- Illustrate: Give examples that would explain vividly, which in some cases involves drawing a picture about the topic
- Diagram: You generally do not need to write in sentences but only to draw and carefully label charts, tables, time lines, etc.

Questions that include these words require you to write your opinion backed up by facts (usually facts that were studied in class): criticize, evaluate, interpret, justify, persuade.

### **Suggestions for Completing Essay Tests:**

1. Read all of the directions and questions carefully. You may want to make a separate list or highlight each item/part that you need to include in your response.
2. Decide how much time you will spend on each essay (if there is more than one).
3. Consider the order in which you plan to complete the essays (if there are multiples). You may want to begin with the essay easiest for you, which will enable you to relax, gain confidence, and recall facts. On the other hand, you may want to begin with the most difficult essay in order to complete it while your brain is still fresh.
4. Jot pertinent ideas in the margins (if you are allowed to write on the test) that you may want to use in your essay. Number the ideas in the order you plan to use them. Otherwise, outline your response mentally.
5. Begin each response with a lead sentence or paragraph that somehow restates the topic on which you are to write.
6. Use the information you wrote in the margins to write main ideas first. Then fill in supporting details.
7. Leave space between answers (if possible) so that you can go back and add information that you remember later.
8. Reread both the question and your response to make sure you answered the question thoroughly and accurately without leaving any parts unanswered.
9. Put something down for each essay question. Even if you do not know the answer to all parts of a question, at least respond to the parts you know or think you know. Use logic and common sense to make an educated guess.
10. Be specific and use relevant facts. In other words, write on the specific topic you are given.
11. Proofread for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and neatness, making sure your answer is in the format requested.
12. Remember that teachers prefer concise, well-organized answers.

### **Suggestions for Formatting Your Essay:**

1. Write a brief outline of the main points you want to include. If you do not have anything to write it on, at least outline your essay mentally.
2. Reread the essay question and restate it without saying exactly the same thing. This often works well as your opening or lead sentence. This sentence should lead the reader toward the details of the essay without revealing all of them. (Ex. *Many causes led to Romeo and Juliet's deaths.*)
3. Write the essay by following your lead sentence with the facts in your outline.
4. Remember to conclude the essay without leaving the reader hanging. This might involve summarizing your main points or restating your objective. Be careful not to give exact repetitions of sentences/statements you have already made. (Ex. *In their own ways, the Capulet/Montague feud, Romeo and Juliet's rash decisions, and Friar Laurence's crazy plan each contributed to the deaths of the two young lovers.*) Do not conclude your essay with statements such as "The End" or "That's all I can remember."

## Strategies for Objective Tests

Objective tests require that you recall specific factual information such as definitions, dates, people, places, and events. Objective tests have either a right or wrong answer. The four most commonly used types of objective tests are matching, fill-in-the-blanks, true/false, and multiple choice. Usually these answers are readily available in your textbook, lecture notes, or additional readings assigned by the teacher.

### ***When you take any objective test, follow these general rules:***

1. Determine how many questions there are and how much time is allowed for the entire test.
2. Estimate how much time to spend on each question.
3. When beginning the test, always read all of the directions. Do not make assumptions that you already know what you need to do.
4. Determine the order in which you plan to answer the questions. Depending on the format of the test, you may not have to answer questions in numerical order. Some ideas:
  - a. Answer the easiest questions first to get more comfortable with the test.
  - b. Start with the questions whose content you are most likely to forget if you wait until later in the test to answer them (especially if it is something you studied at the last minute).
  - c. See which type of test question you want to start with (if the test contains multiple parts).
  - d. Remember that some test questions might answer themselves in another question, so do not forget about previously answered questions as you take the test. If a test builds on previous test questions, you will want to go through the test in numerical order.
5. Unless you are penalized for wrong answers, make an educated guess. Do not leave any questions blank.
6. If you have to write your answers on a separate answer sheet or fill in bubbles, make sure you are doing so in the correct spot.
7. Read each statement or question very carefully so you can better determine which response is the most accurate.
8. Watch for key words that will help trigger your memory of the topic.
9. Make sure your response is logical and relevant to the topic and details you have been studying in class. This is especially true with multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank tests.