



Steps to Succeed on Any Test

It's not uncommon for people to experience their mind "going blank" during a test, even when you've adequately prepared. Here is how to prepare for tests in a way that allows you to perform at your best.

1. Evaluate your knowledge of the upcoming test and content.

- Ask the instructor what format the test will be in and how many questions.
- Ask the instructor for review materials or subject matter to study.
- Ask classmates what they know or what they are studying in preparation.
- Review the syllabus/schedule/Canvas/class materials for information about the upcoming test.

2. Ask for more help if you need it.

- Talk to a tutor, coach, classmate, or counselor if you're still having trouble.
- They can help you with test anxiety and other challenges.

3. Create a (realistic) study plan.

- Evaluate your current schedule between now and the test date—what dates and times will work best for you to review material and prepare?
- Don't overdo it—if you make your goals too lofty, you will simply not do them. So try to establish a realistic plan. Aim for smaller chunks of time on more days (rather than a large chunk of time on just one or two days).
- Break the material into smaller, achievable parts.

4. Make your study plan more effective.

- People learn better when they repeatedly encounter material in different contexts.
- Consider how you can switch up questions and answers.
- Revisit material after sleeping (time and sleep between practice sessions helps you remember material better and for a longer time).
- Using flash cards and quizzing yourself are helpful strategies. Mixing up these strategies is best.
- Complete practice tests or quizzes—the more similar to the real test, the better.
- Teaching someone else the material is a great way to ensure you understand it.
- Memory tricks are also effective—mnemonics and acronyms are helpful. For example, using "ROY G. BIV" or "Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain" to remember the colors of the rainbow (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet).
- Set up group study sessions with classmates to review material together.

5. Recreate the stress of the test itself in your study/practice sessions.

- The stress of the test itself is often where things can go wrong. Have different people quiz you. Have your friends or strangers be loud or distracting or insulting while you try to focus on the material.
- Making the practice more stressful will make the test feel less awful by comparison and will prepare you by helping you have a strong mental mindset on the day itself.

6. Have a test day routine.

- Eat a healthy meal and get a good night's sleep before the test.
- Do some light exercise to help you feel calm and focused.
- Listen to some music that gets you hyped, focused, and filled with swagger.

7. Establish a confident, focused mindset.

- Think through other moments in your life where you've accomplished something scary. What did you do to prepare your mental state on those occasions?
- You practice and study so that you can enter a "flow-state" on the test itself.
- Learn to psych yourself up for these moments. It is a useful skill to establish throughout your life!
- Practice deep breathing and mindfulness before and during the test.

8. Know what grade you want to achieve to keep from spiraling/catastrophizing on the day of the test.

- Knowing what grade you need should not stress you out—instead, use it to remind yourself of all the "wiggle room" you have on the test itself—*a perfect score is not achievable so you shouldn't expect it from yourself.*
- Be prepared to come across questions you don't know the answer to. Have a strategy for these:
 1. Start with easier questions and save some time for review and harder questions.
 2. Rule out obviously wrong answers.
 3. Read the question carefully for clues and insights in the question itself.
 4. Don't let a single question derail you—perfect scores are not going to happen, so let these "small failures" roll off your back. Small failures are a part of every single success you will have in life.

9. Take breaks (if allowed).

- Short breaks can make you feel less stressed and help you think more clearly.
- Set a personal, realistic pace for answering questions.
- Pause for a moment to relax and clear your mind if a question goes poorly or stresses you out.
- Take a moment to celebrate successes when you know you nailed an answer.

Keep practicing and remember that you can do it!