

Tips for Success

Successful Beginnings, Angela Provitera-McGlynn, Atwood Publishing, 2001

Preparing for and Taking Exams

- Be sure about what material the exam will cover, and what type of questions (essay, multiple-choice, short-answer, matching) will be asked.
- Study from the beginning of the course, a little bit each day (Boyd 1988).
- Try to relate information to your own experience or to what you've previously learned. Chapter outlines and summaries will help you organize and remember the material.
- Study with a partner, or organize a small (three- or four-person) study group. Plan to meet after you've all studied the material individually so that you can compare notes and quiz each other.
- Use the proven effective "SQ3R" method of study. SQ3R stands for: **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecite, and **R**eview. Lester A. Lefton (2000) adds "Write and Reflect" to this list and calls the approach the "SQ3R Plus System." Here's how the system works:
 - **S**urvey the chapter(s) you'll be tested on by paying attention to the chapter outlines, topic headings, tables, graphs, and other special features, particularly the summary and review sections.
 - Develop **Q**uestions based on topic headings within each chapter. In other words, change the topic headings into questions. This will help you become an active learner as you search for the answers.
 - **R**ead each chapter slowly and carefully and answer the questions you've posed. Take notes as you read and highlight key points. Make the material relevant to your personal life.
 - **R**ecite what you've learned from memory, putting the material into your own words.
 - **R**eview what you've learned. Try pulling together key terms and concepts. Check the accuracy of your recall by testing yourself.
 - **W**rite and **R**eject: Write a summary of the key terms and concepts in your own words and think about how they relate to your life. Lefton says that when you reflect on your own learning, you're an active learner and a critical thinker.

Adapted from Lefton (2000, 646a).

Guidelines for Student Success

To be successful in college, you'll need to be prepared, develop effective study skills, and manage your time productively.

Be Prepared and Organized

- Buy the textbook and any accompanying supplements, such as workbooks and study guides, as soon as your course begins.
- Use a pocket calendar or an appointment book to keep track of your classes, assignments, due dates, work schedule, and any appointments you make with your instructors, counselors, or advisors.
- Use a notebook with pockets, a binder, or folders for your courses to have a place to take class notes, and to keep copies of your course syllabi, handouts, and any other pertinent materials.
- Always be prepared for class with pens and pencils, your notebook, and any other books required for class.
- It's helpful to carry around a good paperback college dictionary.

Student Behavior That Contributes to Success

- Attend all of your classes and be on time.
- Read assigned material before class.
- Ask questions if you're not sure about assignments or the material covered.
- Show your interest in the subject by sitting near the front of the class, establishing eye contact with your instructor, and taking notes.
- Participate in class discussions.
- Avoid whispering or talking with classmates in side conversations while the instructor or another student has the floor.
- Complete your assignments on time.
- If you unavoidably miss a class, be responsible by informing your instructor; ask a classmate or your instructor what was covered, and make up the missed work.

Adapted from *Passport to Success*, by Patricia Anne Carr, Mercer County Community College Press.

More Tips for Test Preparation and Test Taking

Get a good night's sleep before the exam so that you can think clearly. Eat a healthy breakfast before taking a morning test. If your exam is in the afternoon or evening, make sure you're rested and that you haven't missed a meal.

- Always follow directions very carefully when you take an exam.
- Bring all the supplies you'll need to the test — e.g., pencils, pens, paper (Boyd 1988).
- Arrive early for the test.
- Try to relax. Take a few deep breaths, stay calm, and listen carefully to instructions.
- Budget your time so that you'll be able to complete the test.
- If time permits, go over your test to double-check your answers.
- Know how you'll be tested so you can practice the necessary skills:

- For example, if you'll be taking an essay test, sometimes instructors will give you preparation essay questions to do at home, and will then select one or two for you to write about in class. If you don't get practice essays from your instructor, look for some in your textbook and practice writing the answers. Make up your own essays based on what material will be covered on the test, and then try answering them. On the day of the test, if you're given more than one essay to write, read all of the questions first before starting to answer any of them. Boyd (1988) says that reading all of the questions before starting to write your answers may help refresh your memory, and may help you choose which questions to answer if you have a choice. He also says that the questions themselves often have valuable information that may be helpful when you write your answer. Start with the question you know the best. Manage your time so that you're able to finish writing the whole test. Boyd (1988) also suggests underlining key verbs in each question since essay questions usually focus on one or more key verbs. Some key words that often appear in essay questions include: *compare*, which means to examine similarities and differences; *summarize*, which means to give the main points; *discuss*, which means to analyze in detail; and *relate*, which means to emphasize connections and associations. Boyd says that these key words will give you hints about the type of information the teacher is requesting. He also suggests making a brief outline before you start writing, since good organization is an important trait for a successful essay. Make sure you answer the questions thoroughly. Be neat, use standard English grammar, and proofread what you've written.

- If you'll be taking a multiple-choice exam, practice multiple-choice questions beforehand. During the test, make sure you read each entire question before selecting an answer. Read all of the alternatives as well. Look for clues in each question so that you're better able to recognize the correct alternative. Note that some words, such as *all*, *none*, *always*, and *never* indicate that the statement is an absolute without exception, so be careful when you see those words. Unless there's a penalty for an incorrect answer, take a guess on a multiple-choice test rather than leaving a question blank. You have a 20 percent to 25 percent chance of being correct by chance alone, depending on whether there are five or four alternatives. Pace yourself so that you finish the test on time. Go through the test the first time answering all the questions you know for certain. Leave the ones you're unsure of for your second time through the test. Review your work before turning in your exam. Check your answers carefully to make sure you've answered all of the questions. Make sure you've put your marks in the correct spaces if the test is machine-graded, and check to be sure you haven't made any careless mistakes.
- If you're preparing for a short-answer or matching test, practice those skills by creating short-answer and matching questions from your textbook information and class notes.

Adapted from Carr (undated); Boyd (1988);
Office of the Dean for Academic Affairs
and the Office of the Dean for Student Services,
Mercer County Community College (1996-1998).