

General Tips for Taking Standardized Tests

Preparation: Using Time Wisely

In preparing for a standardized test, it is very important to plan carefully and use your time wisely.

Apply for the test and begin your preparation for it as early as possible.

Set aside as much of this time as you can for preparation, but be sensible. Always get a good night's sleep and eat properly. Do not neglect other responsibilities. Do allow yourself some time for relaxation.

Make a study schedule. Plan to study regularly for a definite period of time. Be realistic, however. Set aside a period of time that is long enough to accomplish something, but not so long that you are exhausted the next day.

Plan to study at the same time each day, and do not let other activities interfere with your schedule.

Choose an appropriate place for your preparation. It should be quiet, well lit, and comfortable. Choose a place where you are not likely to be interrupted or distracted, and where you can stretch and move from time to time.

Using Practice Materials

Study general information about the test, such as length and the kinds of questions.

Take practice tests and check your answers. Look carefully at what you got wrong and analyze why.

Determine your strengths and weaknesses. Spend more time with new and unfamiliar material, rather than reviewing familiar areas.

Consider the areas for which you could locate more practice materials.

If grammar concerns you, concentrate on specific areas like verb tenses or pronoun reference.

If vocabulary is a worry, assign yourself several words from a word list to work on each day.

If reading is a concern, practice skimming for main ideas and general concepts, then concentrating on clarification and more detail. Develop the skill of using context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

If computation is a concern, identify which processes need improving and spend time practicing.

Don't:

Try to memorize questions or answers.

Try to absorb everything in the study guide in a short period of time.

Concentrate on answers only.

Do:

Make generalizations of the kind of thinking required in the questions.

Take time to go over each part of the practice material. Several short sessions are better than one long one.

Look at the questions and answers together and focus on what acceptable answers are to certain types of questions.

Just Before the Test

The day and night before you take a test are in many ways the most critical part of your preparation period. How you spend those 24 hours can have a very great effect on your test performance. Here are some important considerations:

Things to Do:

Get a good night's sleep. It is vital that you be alert when you take your test.

Make sure you have everything you will need on the day of the test: admission ticket, identification, sharpened pencils, an eraser, and be sure to wear a watch.

Review the instructions you have received about the test. Don't plan to take along anything that is not allowed in the testing room such as your notes, a tape recorder, or study guides.

Eat a nourishing, unhurried breakfast, one that is substantial enough to give you plenty of energy, but light enough to keep you from getting sleepy.

Allow yourself enough time to get to the testing site early.

Review the notes you made during your preparation period, but only if you have sufficient time. If there is not enough time for one final review, concentrate on relaxing for a least one hour rather than attempting some last-minute cramming.

Take time to relax before the test begins. It is essential that you be calm and alert when you start the test.

Things Not to Do:

Do not stay up all night just before you take a test. This will only slow you down and make you less alert during the testing period.

Do not take medications to keep you awake, give you more energy, or to calm down. Taking such drugs can interfere with your health and judgment.

Do not spend the last few hours before the test trying to learn what you didn't learn in your preparation period. Doing this will only serve to make you more confused, nervous, and frustrated. You probably won't remember this information anyway.

At the Testing Site:

Choose a seat where you will be able to hear the proctor read the directions.

Sit where you can see a wall clock.

Make sure you aren't going to be distracted by being too hot or too cold, due to sitting by a heating vent or an open window.

Make sure you have room to write.

Behavior During the Test

Don't do anything that might be interpreted as cheating.

Ask questions only of the proctor.

Don't copy down questions on scrap paper.

If you finish a part early, do not try to sneak a look ahead. Spend time reviewing your answers.

Keep your eyes on your own paper.

Taking the Test: Following Directions

For some tests, the proctor may give you directions for what to do on each part of the test. For others, general directions may be given, but reading the specific instructions for each part of a test will be your responsibility. For still others, it will be up to you to understand all directions, both general and specific, and follow them exactly. Misunderstanding what you are expected to do can result in incorrect answers and, therefore, a lower score.

For most tests there will be time allotted for you to read through the directions and to ask questions if you do not understand. However, whether or not such time is specifically set aside, reading over the directions is a good idea. Don't guess at what you think you are supposed to do on a test. Read the directions carefully so you'll know what is expected.

The following are a few general suggestions for making sure you understand directions and can follow them exactly.

Read through all the directions before you decide that you don't understand them. Very often something that seems confusing in one part will be made clear later. If you still are unclear about something, then ask the test supervisor.

Be sure you know exactly what to do. Are you required to answer every question the same way, or do different questions require you to do different things?

If the directions contain examples, study the examples so you know why the answers given are considered correct. This will show you the kind of thinking you need to do in order to answer other questions on the test.

Watch for underlined or italicized words. These are signals for something of special importance.

General Strategies for Choosing the Correct Answer

Be aware of how much time you have to devote to each question. (You can determine this by dividing the total amount of time for the test by the number of questions.)

Consider all the choices before selecting the best answer.

Go through the questions as quickly as possible:

If you are unsure of an answer, skip it and go to the next question. Mark the test booklet lightly. Go back after you have answered all the other questions.

When you are ready to go back, check the amount of time remaining, and divide among the remaining questions.

If there is no penalty for guessing:

Read all the possibilities carefully. One word can make all the difference between a correct answer and one that seems correct.

Eliminate choices with obvious errors.

Narrow down remaining choices by looking for clues, such as: time words, descriptive words, punctuation, modifying clauses and phrases, subject/verb agreement.

Make an educated guess.