

# STUDY LESS AND GET BETTER GRADES! PART TWO

## TAKING A TEST!

The most important tools for the test, besides a writing utensil and being in the right place, are **CONCENTRATION** and **CONFIDENCE**. If your “class-action” and study method were good, then you have every reason to feel confident... you are prepared! You need a good night sleep. Some eager beavers love studying all night. They may survive the test, but they will be chopped liver for the next three days. On the other hand, you may not have had time to study adequately due to unforeseen circumstances. Either way, mastering the following steps will still increase your test score.

- 1) **Do not study the day of the test** unless something really “bugs” you. Sometimes, out of the blue, you’ll have a question haunting you. Go ahead and find the answer. However, on the day of the test, it is more important to have a clear, rested mind than to try and cram. Cramming often produces confusion. Sing, pray, play... whatever it takes to block out anxiety over the test and the subject. You are prepared so don’t worry! Even if you are not prepared (*you are one of the owls mentioned earlier*), cramming the day of the test or quiz is not a good idea.
- 2) **Keep your attitude positive** and lighthearted. Talk to yourself to keep calm. Joke around without being a nuisance to others, but **prevent debilitating anxiety**. Excess fooling around is a sure sign that you are too nervous. So is cutting yourself down, like, “I’m going to fail or do poorly on this test.” Resolve to do the best you possibly can under the present circumstances. Determine to be confident rather than anxious. Students often do not realize that they may do poorly at the beginning of a course, but if they are consistent in their action in the course, they will automatically improve their grade over time. Test anxiety usually is rooted in: a) a lack of preparation, b) a lack of confidence, or c) a lack of experience in this type of test. Confidence can be built by strategies and preparation. The Bible often talks about “arming ourselves” or “girding ourselves” (1 Peter 1:13; 4:1), meaning we actively take steps to prepare for “battle” (taking a test in this case). Passivity often yields poor performance.
- 3) Once you enter the test area, **calm yourself down**. Try to be quiet vocally, but also physically. This **prepares** and frees **your mind to concentrate** as hard as you can, conserving your energy. Whether you studied or not is no longer the major concern at this point. Your focus should be on doing the best that you can on this test, giving your whole heart to it (Colossians 3:23). Taking a test requires a lot of mental energy and if you are anxious or expending energy elsewhere, this energy is no longer available for your mind.

## THE TEST

The absolute rule, the foremost and utmost statute, the incredibly essential aspect, what is positively a must... do you get the idea this may be important? ... DO NOT BEGIN THE EXAM THE MOMENT YOU RECEIVE IT!

- a) Take thirty seconds to one minute to calm down and get “psyched” for the test or quiz. Ask the Lord for a clear mind and for His will to be done.
- b) Skim the test quickly to get an idea of questions you feel confident in answering first, BUT do not begin answering them, yet.
- c) After skimming, relax for a final few moments. The key is not to allow anxiety or panic to rule you, but to convince yourself that you will do the best you can in this situation.
- d) Make a conscious decision to begin the test. For example, look at the clock and note when you start the exam. Then, follow the format below:

You will go through the exam  
THREE separate times

The most important aspect of learning is “evaluation” or prioritizing. Students often do not discriminate when they take tests. They treat all questions the same. They are NOT the same. Some questions are deeper and harder than others. Therefore, they take more thought, energy, and time. Learning to prioritize on tests is the best way to improve one’s ability to do well. Also, always know WHY you chose the answers you chose. Never guess mindlessly because that eliminates any learning.

1. It is a good idea to skip the first couple of questions on the test to avoid panic. Skim the entire test, looking for the questions that are “easier” for you. Then, answer only the questions you are relatively POSITIVE are correct. Do not answer ANY questions you are not relatively sure of. You may only answer 20-30% of the questions (3 out of 10; 10 out of 30; 20 out of 60, etc.), but you are confident that your answers are correct. Do not worry about the questions that you were not sure of at this point. This will help you to relax and will bring to mind what you have learned from classwork, previous study, or common sense.
2. Go through the exam the second time exactly as the first time. Answer only the questions you know. DO NOT GUESS at answers. If you are relaxed and this is not “one of those days” (*sometimes we just do not do well*), you will invariably remember a lot more information the second time through and you will have gained even more confidence. Questions you have already answered will bring to mind other answers or relevant concepts. NOTE: *anxiety, panic, restlessness, etc. all reduce our ability to perform at optimal capacity especially in reflecting and recalling information.*
3. The third time through (and final time I might add) is what I call the “**educated (logical) guess**” stage. You must answer all the remaining questions whether you feel

you know the answer or not. Since you must answer the question, you may as well feel confident it is right (even if it isn't).

- A- Convince yourself that the answer you chose is the best answer using whatever “pops” into your head **from class discussions, previous study or common sense**. Another way of saying this is “go with your gut feeling.” If something seems remotely related based on class and studying ...use it! So many times, students would get answers correct, but they convince themselves that they could not know the answer because they either did not study or they have little confidence or both.
- B- For Multiple Choice questions, mentally discuss (with yourself) information about a question. Make up answers that make sense. Do this **BEFORE** you look at the actual answers. Then, **eliminate the obvious wrong choices** before you choose the answer. Usually, a multiple-choice answer has one or two answers that are obviously wrong. This increases your chances of getting the correct answer. For “Fill Ins” or “essay” questions, use the approach in “A.”
- C- **Relate to the words in a question**. So many students see a “big” word or words they do not understand and then quit on that question. By the way, *quitting is the same as guessing*. Sometimes you recognize the “root” of another word and can, therefore, figure out the meaning of the word. For example, the term “hydroelectric” may seem foreign until you think about the roots: “hydro” means water and “electric” refers to electricity. Therefore, hydroelectric involves a dam like Hoover dam or Niagara Falls.
- D- As a last resort, **make up your own reason** for why you chose the answer you did. It is imperative to answer every question and **to know why** you answered it the way you did. This helps you remember for future exams and review.

## FINAL THOUGHTS:

- 4) **Never second-guess an answer** that you have thought out. In other words, **DO NOT change answers**. The only exception is when you know that you misread the question or answer choices. For example, you thought the question stated “*Sixty-six sheep were in the field and one died, how many are left?*” You answered “65.” But the question really stated, “*Sixty sick sheep were in the field and one died, how many are left?*” so the answer is fifty-nine (59). Remember, if you followed this format, you would not have guessed until the end...so all of your answers are well thought out.
- 5) Remember to **take short mental breaks** about every fifteen minutes. You must give your mind a break or it will “short circuit” ... alias “*blanking out*.” This is when you cannot seem to remember anything relevant.
- 6) **Always correct exams when returned to you**. This ensures that you will not repeat a former mistake, it gives insight on how the instructor assesses you, and it expands your learning

## *Study Skills Part 2: Taking a Test*

capacity as you reflect on your thought processes that led you to answer the way you did. Learning is really centered on mastery and mastering a content area is a process that cannot be measured by one test. (*I'll never forget the time I studied 180 pages in a textbook and sixty pages of class notes for one Biology exam. One of the questions asked who coined the term Genetics in 1905. But to this day I remember James Bateson, 1905, coined the term "Genetics." Too bad I didn't know it then.*).