

DIFFERENT TEST TYPES + TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

- (A) Multiple-Choice
- (B) Problem-Solving
- (C) Short Answer
- (D) Essay Exams
- All of the Above

Multiple Choice Exams

In a multiple choice exam, your instructor is testing whether you can apply course concepts to select the *most correct* answer from among several options. You may have 4 options that are separate and distinct answers; an “all of the above” option; or options that look like this: “Both A and B” “II and III, but not IV” etc.

Multiple Choice Exam Strategies:

- Keep it moving. On your first pass through the MC questions, answer only the questions where you know the answer for sure; circle or underline the number for questions you aren't sure about yet. Then, come back to the “unsure” questions on your second pass through.
- Analyze the question and circle key words/concepts, especially words like “always” or “never.”
- Read all of the answer choices: don't leap for the first answer that seems right!
- Answer all the questions, unless points are deducted for incorrect answers.
- Try to answer the question in your own head before looking at the choices.
- Cross out answers you know are wrong to eliminate choices.
- If you're not sure, look for hints in other questions in the exam.

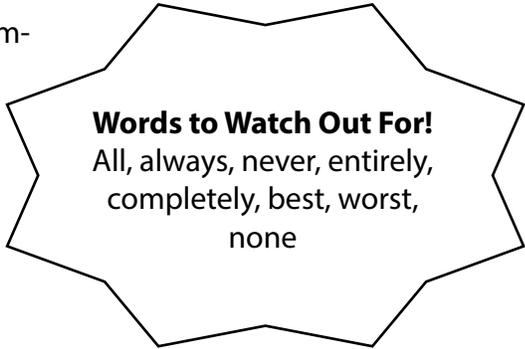
True/False Questions

First, mentally approach each statement as if it were true. Then, as you read the statement slowly, consider whether *any* part or component of the statement makes it false. A true statement must be 100% true.

Expert Tip: T/F questions containing words like always, never, or completely (called “absolute qualifiers”) are often **false**.

Problem-Solving Exams

Most common in STEM courses, problem-solving exams test your ability to identify and reason through how to solve a problem, to apply relevant formulas and course concepts, and to reach an accurate answer. Some exams (but not all) may allow you to bring in an index card or formula sheet with key formulas.



Words to Watch Out For!

All, always, never, entirely,
completely, best, worst,
none

Problem-Solving Exam Strategies:

- Prepare by going over practice problems, writing out formulas you will need to know on the exam, and working with a study group to quiz each other on concepts.
- Practice with problems out of context, e.g. from past exams. Try to identify what actions each type of question is looking for you to perform.
- Look over the whole test first to estimate how much time you should be spending on each problem. Then, start with the questions you feel most confident about before tackling harder ones.
- Estimate (or “guesstimate”) the range your answer should be in, and don't forget to **check your units** and orders of magnitude. Especially for Physics exams, make sure your calculator is set to radians or degrees as appropriate for the question at hand.



Short-Answer Exams

Short-answer questions require students to produce brief written responses on a variety of course topics. Different types of short-answer question may ask you to: define, list, compare/contrast, analyze, evaluate a claim, explain a concept, provide context for a quote, identify a character/vocabulary term, or a mixture of two or more of these.

- When you prepare for the exam, look over the material as though you were going to write the exam. Try to predict or create possible questions.
 - Short-answers usually require complete sentences, so don't use bullet points unless this is specified in the exam instructions or by the instructor.
 - Read the instructions: don't answer all 5 questions if the instructor wants you to choose 3 out of 5!
 - Before you start, assess the number of short-answer questions and the time you have so you know how much time to allot to each question.
 - Pay attention to what the question asks you to do. If you're asked to analyze how a concept fits into the larger course ideas, don't just give a definition of key terms; explain how they fit the bigger picture.
 - Avoid word vomit: if you feel like your answer is too short, resist the urge to throw in unrelated terms or definitions just to "prove that you know them." This usually doesn't help your score; it just wastes time.
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Essay Exams

Essay exams ask students to write a full, well-developed essay during the testing period. Instructors want to see whether you understand course concepts, use evidence and sources, and apply and synthesize what you have learned into a clear, thoughtful written argument.

Before the Exam:

- If your instructor has not given you a list of essay topics, come up with possible essay questions yourself. What themes and concepts have appeared multiple times in your course/readings?
- Pick a question and practice answering it. Write out an outline that includes your thesis, the main point of each paragraph, and a few bullet points of evidence.
- Write at least one essay draft under test conditions (the same amount of time you'd have on the test, with no notes). Did you finish on time? What slowed you down? Where does your knowledge on this topic have gaps? Where did you struggle to recall evidence or sources?

During the Exam:

- Read all the essay questions. Quickly jot down any related notes, concepts, ideas, and terms you think of - this can help you decide which question you know the most material about.
- Take a few minutes at the start to draft an outline of your essay on scrap paper or the white space in your exam booklet. This extra time spent planning will pay off later.
- Keep your introduction and conclusion paragraphs concise; these are often where students spend a lot of time "setting up" and "summarizing" the argument without actually getting to the main points.
- An effective thesis is **clear, specific, and debatable** - a strong claim that someone could argue against, not just an obvious "yes" or "no" answer, an answer that is too broad, or an answer that sits on the fence.
- Don't go on tangents because you feel like an essay "has" to be a certain number of pages long, unless there's a minimum page requirement. A concise 3-page essay with a powerful argument and strong evidence is more effective than 8 pages of rambling.