

# Improving Test Performance

Learning to perform well on exams requires **engaging in the entire process**, from **preparation to evaluation** of your completed exam. Here are some tips for what to do at each stage.

## Preparing for the Test

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### Manage Your Mindset

Replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations. Use a positive internal locus of control by taking full responsibility for your learning experience. Use statements that begin with “I want...”, “I can...”, and “I will...”

### Overprepare

Create a study plan in advance of the test and use a strategy to stay accountable to your plan. A study partner? A scheduled practice test? A study group?

### Study Effectively

Use specific study skills that work for the material you need to learn, the type of test, and your learning preferences. If you are not sure how to do this, see the *Learning Strategies* Info-sheet or meet with WSU’s Learning Specialist. **Practice Tests:** Research indicates that the number one study strategy to increase test scores is taking practice tests. Use the chapter tests in your text, online tests, or have members of study groups write test questions for one another.

### Practice Relaxation Techniques

Be sure your toolbox is stocked with strategies to overcome the fear response that often accompanies test-taking. Imagery, breathing, and muscle relaxation are excellent responses to stress and anxiety. Short guided videos are available at <https://counsel.wsu.edu/stress-management>. If you practice these techniques before the exam, the skill will be readily available to you if you need it during the exam.

### Exercise

Physical activity helps us to relieve stress and maintain focus. It optimizes the mind to improve alertness, attention, and motivation. It encourages brain cells to develop and neural pathways to be created. Maintain a regular exercise routine. Hint: Use low intensity activity time (like walking on a treadmill) to study concepts you’ve learned, but do not try to learn new concepts during intense activity.

### Sleep

We process information most efficiently during our sleep. This means that everything you have studied moves from your short term to long term memory primarily during your sleeping hours. We also problem solve in our sleep. Make sleep time just as important as study time.

## Day of the Test

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### Be Early

There is nothing more stressful than a late bus or a flat tire when you are on your way to an exam. Arriving early also allows you to **choose the best location** in the classroom. Avoid sitting near the door or a heat/AC vent. Choose a location that will have the least distractions.

### Bring Tools

Bring an extra pen/pencil, scratch paper, or any other supplies. It might be helpful to create a list of everything you want to bring and post it on your doorknob the night before.

### Manage Comfort

Dress in layers so you can adjust your body temperature if the room is cold or hot. Eat a meal before the test or bring snacks/water with you.

## During the Test

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### Manage your Mindset

Think positive thoughts only. Ignore anyone who turns in their test earlier than you. Being faster is not necessarily being better.

### Manage your Physical/Emotional Responses

If you feel anxious, use the breathing/visualization/muscle relaxation techniques you practiced.

### Use Test-Taking Strategies

Review the entire exam first. Underline key words and qualifiers (*only, except, and/or, not*). Answer what you know first, then use the rest of your time on questions you are unsure about. Review the entire test to be sure you followed all directions and answered all questions before turning it in. For strategies on specific types of tests (multiple choice, true/false, essay) reference the *Test-Taking Strategies* info-sheet.

## After the Test

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First, remember that **a test score is not a personal assessment**. Your test score is not a reflection of you as a person. Be kind to yourself and focus on what you can learn.

### Evaluate your Performance

- Reflect and take note of **how you were feeling and performing** during the exam.
- **What were your processing errors?** These are errors made due to missing key words, misinterpretation, over-thinking, or overlooking a question or section.
- **What were your knowledge errors?** These are errors specifically related to a lack of knowledge to answer the question correctly.

### Identify Trends & Create a Plan

Assess where you need to build your skill set and create an action plan for the next exam. What will you do differently to be more successful on the next exam?