

# Test Taking Tips

- Testing yourself repeatedly before an exam teaches the brain to retrieve and apply knowledge from memory; the method is more effective than re-reading a textbook. In other words, if you are facing a test on the digestive system, practice explaining how it works from start to finish, rather than studying a list of its parts. Review the toughest material right before going to bed the night before the test. This makes it easier to recall the material later.
- Taking pretests may feel like hard work but seeing steady increases in scores boosts one's confidence. Practice tests help with test-taking skills such as pacing and test format.
- **Sleep plays a role in test performance in two unexpected ways.** It is recommended that you do not wake up earlier than usual to study; this could interfere with the rapid-eye-movement sleep that aids memory and also impairs reasoning and memory for as long as four days. A common study habit—the all-nighter—is a bad idea. Although 60% of college students stay up all night at some point in school, based on a 2008 study lead by Dan Taylor, Director of the Sleep-and-Health-Research Lab at the University of North Texas in Denton, the practice is linked to lower grades.
- An estimated 35% of students are so nervous before high-stakes tests that it impairs their performance, says Richard Driscoll, a Clinical Psychologist who has researched text anxiety. Writing down fears and anxieties before the test frees the working memory and can prevent distractions during the test. To combat self-doubts such as 'I'm bad in math', remind yourself of proven personal traits and strengths that can propel you to success. Practice in advance facing all the pressures you will face on exam day, such as an unfamiliar testing room. Before the test, envision yourself answering questions calmly and with confidence.
- Everybody knows you should eat breakfast the day of a big test. High-carb, high-fiber, slow-digesting foods like oatmeal are best based upon current research. However, **what you eat a week in advance matters,** too. When 16 college students were tested on attention and thinking speed, then fed a five-day high-fat, low-carb diet heavy on meat, eggs, cheese and cream then retested, their performance declined while the students who ate a balanced diet that included fruit and vegetables held steady. According to Cameron Holloway, Senior Clinical Researcher at the University of Oxford, the brain requires a constant supply of energy and "has only a limited backup battery." The same can be said for hydration. When the body is not adequately hydrated, the brain's processing speed slows as well.
- While many teens insist they study better while listening to music or texting their friends, research shows the opposite. Information reviewed amid distractions is **less likely** to be recalled later, says Nicole Dudukovic, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Trinity College.

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