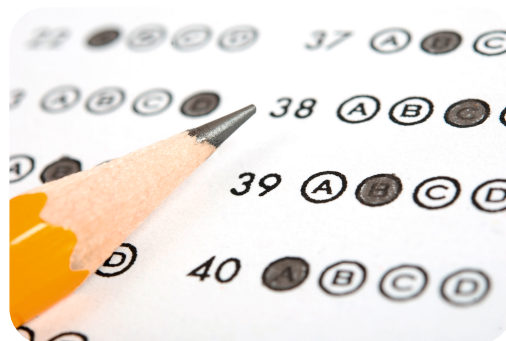


## 5. Test-Taking Skills

### Test-Taking: An Introduction

How do you feel when it's time to take a big test? If you're like many students, you might feel anxious, nervous, or even a sense of dread. Tests are the murky underbelly of education. Few students or teachers like them, and yet exams serve a very important purpose.



In a perfect world, tests make sure we know what we need to in order to advance in our education, career, or area of expertise. They indicate whether we have an understanding of key concepts and are ready to move on to the next topic. In addition, tests work to assure that we have basic competence. Think of a driving test, for example. It works to make sure everyone on the road is able to safely operate a motor vehicle. Similarly, tests used to certify the electrician who wires your home or the doctor who treats your illness actually help us by making sure that those who hold important positions are competent for the roles they occupy. In short, there are many reasons we need exams.

However, just because tests serve a purpose does not make them less stressful or exhausting. They are usually both, but if you plan to earn a college degree, you must learn to face them. Will you be ready? Chances are, if you've taken to heart what you've learned in *Stepping Up*, you will be. So far, you have learned to make use of resources that can help you at your college. You've also learned to manage your time, take notes from class lessons or course readings, and study effectively. Following these strategies in your classes should prepare you for most tests. But there is one additional step you can take to add points to your grades and reduce anxiety: You can develop test-taking skills. This last section of *Stepping Up* will show you how.

**An Important Cautionary Note:** *As you work, keep in mind that tests are not perfect!* Some are poorly written and confusing. Others contain hidden biases that can favor one population or age group over another. Still another problem with tests is that temporary issues that affect students—such as sickness, anxiety, stress, real-life distractions—can drive scores down and make the test an inaccurate measure of a student’s knowledge or ability. In addition, for a variety of reasons, some people just aren’t good test takers. If you are one of those people or if you’ve had a bad experience with an exam, you are not alone. Don’t be discouraged or equate test scores with your potential, value, or intelligence.

Instead, understand that testing is a limited but necessary part of college. Do your best to prepare for each exam you must take, using all resources available to you, including the strategies that follow. In addition, show up for class and put the work and time in wherever possible. That combination gives you the best chance of succeeding in college. In addition, this approach will help you grow as a student and as a person—which really is the ultimate goal of college. Good luck!

## **Getting Prepared for Test Day**

So exam day is fast approaching. You have attended class all semester, taken notes, studied them, quizzed yourself, and even worked in a study group. Great job! Now what?

There are actually some important steps you can take leading up to your exam to help you mentally and physically prepare. These general tips are discussed below and apply to all major tests. Later, *Stepping Up* will also provide strategies you can use when taking specific types of tests.

