Success Center

Directed Learning Activity

Test Taking Strategies:

Responding to Different

Types of Test Questions

SS005.1

Directed Learning Activity – Test Taking Strategies: Responding to Different Types of Test Questions

Description: ***When you take a test, you should match your strategies for responding to the types of questions on the exam. In this Directed Learning Activity (DLA), you will learn strategies for responding to four different types of test questions – true-false, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and essay.***

Materials: ***A dictionary may be needed to complete Step Four.***

Step One: Learning Strategies for Responding to True-False Questions

Since there are only two possible answers, *true* or *false*, you have a 50 percent chance of getting these questions correct. With these guessing strategies, however, you can attempt to increase your chances of selecting the correct answer to the question if you don't know it.

- Assume a statement is false if it contains ***absolute terms*** such as *always, never, invariably, none, no one, all,* or *everyone*. These words do not allow for exceptions. Therefore, they are almost always false.

- Assume a statement is false if any part of it is false. If part of a statement is untrue, then the whole statement is untrue. For example, "Apples, oranges, and carrots are fruits" is a false statement because carrots are not fruit. Carrots are vegetables.

Use the true-false test taking strategies you just learned to decide whether these sample statements are true or false. Indicate your response by checking the appropriate box after each item.

	True	False
1. The heart contains a left and right ventricle.		
2. All fears are acquired at an early age.		
3. The numbers 2, 4, 6, and 8 are even numbers.		
4. Making note cards is the only way to study vocabulary.		
5. Most violent crime today is drug related.		
6. Animals that live in complex social structures usually have larger brains than animals that are solitary.		
7. College graduates will always be able to find good jobs.		

Answers: Questions 2, 4 and 7 are false. How did you do?

Look closely at Question 2. What word is a clue that this statement is false?

Look closely at Question 4. What word is a clue that this statement is false?

Look closely at Question 7. What word is a clue that this statement is false?

Step Two: Learning Strategies for Responding to Multiple-Choice Questions

A multiple-choice question has four parts: The ***stem***, the ***options***, the ***distractions*** (the incorrect answers), and the ***correct answer***.

Which one of these is a fruit?	**(*stem*)**
A. carrot	**(*option – distraction*)**
B. bonanza	**(*option – distraction*)**
C. apple	**(*option – correct answer*)**
D. application	**(*option – distraction*)**

First, try to answer the question in the stem in your head; then, sort through the options to find the correct answer. If you don't know the answer to the question, however, these guessing strategies can increase your chances of selecting it.

- Eliminate the answers that are obviously wrong, and choose the answer from the remaining options. The more you eliminate, the higher your chances of answering correctly.

- Options that state "all of the above" or "none of the above," are often the correct answer.

- If there are two answers that look similar, one of them is probably the correct answer (as in C and D above).

- If an option is more complete, detailed and contains more information than the others, it may be the correct one.

- When you are guessing, you are more likely to choose the right answer if you choose an answer that is familiar to you.

- Be aware of answers that are there to distract your attention from the correct answer.

A word of caution: A well-written multiple choice test will take all of these strategies into consideration to make guessing difficult. The best way to tackle a multiple-choice question is to study hard ahead of time.

Use these sample multiple-choice questions to practice the strategies that are appropriate to try when you do not know an answer. On the line below each question, explain why you did choose the answer and/or didn't choose the other answers.

1. A marriage may have a better chance of succeeding if the spouses have which characteristic(s) in common?

a. similar levels of education
b. similar social and economic backgrounds
c. shared interests and goals
d. all of the above

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2. A balanced diet should include:

a. milk, cheese, and fruit.
b. bread, cereal, and whole grains.
c. milk, fruits, vegetables, meats, and whole grains.
d. vegetables, fruits, and meat.

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3. Which of the following words is a synonym for (a word that means the same as) *intractable?*

a. synergistic
b. acerbic
c. exacerbating
d. stubborn

Answers: 1. d, 2. c, and 3. d. How did you do?

Step Three: Learning Strategies for Responding to Fill-in-the-Blanks Questions

This type of test requires you to recall an answer from memory to fill in the blanks intentionally left in statements about the subject. If you can't recall the correct answer, however, these strategies can increase your chances of earning at least partial points.

- If you don't recall the complete answer, but do remember something, write that down. You may get partial credit if you are partly correct. Leaving a blank will get you nothing.

- Give general responses if you don't remember specifics. For example, if the correct answer is "1904," you can write an approximate, and potentially acceptable, response by filling in "1900s."

- Use proper grammar in completing the sentence. Pay particular attention to requests for ***plural responses*** – for example, *causes*, *changes*, *examples*, or *types*.

- Finally, consider the number and length of the blanks to be filled in as possible clues to the lengths of your answers. If the instructor leaves half a page for your answer, be sure you fill it – and not with conspicuously large handwriting.

Without looking back at the previous sections about true-false, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the blanks tests, complete these sample fill-in-the-blanks statements to practice these guessing strategies.

1. **Words such as "always, "never", and "only" are called_____.**

2. **A true-false statement is false if any part of it is _____.**

3. **Incorrect answers to multiple-choice questions are called_____.**

4. **On fill-in-the-blanks tests, if you don't recall the complete answer, but do remember something, you should write it down. How will this help?**

Answers: 1. "absolute words," 2. "false," 3. "distractions," and 4. "You may get partial credit if you are partly correct." How did you do?

Step Four: Learning Strategies for Responding to Essay Questions

The responses to essay questions can come in the forms of either short answers or complete essays. You can usually tell how long an answer is expected to be from the directions on the exam, the amount of space or number of lines supplied for you to write your answer, and/or by the number of points a question is worth. If you are not sure how much you should write or how detailed your instructor expects your answer to be, ask.

Here are some strategies for earning the maximum amount of points when answering short-answer questions.

- Read the question carefully and make sure you understand what the question is asking.

- Watch for ***task and topic words***. Short answer questions often ask you to supply specific pieces of information such as *definitions* or *examples*. (For examples of task and topic words, look at the italicized terms in the sample essay question on the next page.)

- Avoid stating your opinion or making judgments unless the question asks you to do so.

- Restate the question in your answer. Doing this makes it easier for your instructor to read and follow your explanation. Always stay on topic.

Here are some strategies for earning the maximum amount of points when answering questions that require a *complete essay*.

- Make sure you understand what the question asks you to do. If necessary, ask the instructor for an explanation.

- Think about what you will write before beginning. Plan your answer.

- Incorporate the question into your first sentence.

- In your essay, provide enough details to support your answer and to demonstrate your knowledge of the material.

- Save time at the end of the exam to proofread your essay and correct errors.

As you plan your answer to an essay question, it is a good idea to come up with an outline. To understand what that looks like, consider this sample essay question and the outline for a multiple-paragraph response to it.

> **How can a student learn to improve *time management? Discuss* the effective use of a *semester schedule,* a *weekly schedule,* and a *daily list.***
>
> **Paragraph 1: Briefly introduce and restate the question. Briefly state your answer.**
> **Paragraph 2: Discuss semester schedule.**
> **Paragraph 3: Discuss weekly schedule. Paragraph**
> **4: Discuss daily list.**
> **Paragraph 5: Summarize what you have said.**

In this sample prompt, *time management* is the *topic*, the subject the teacher wants you to write about. It is broken down into three types of schedules or lists: *semester schedule*, *weekly schedule*, and *daily list*. The *task word, discuss,* is the verb that indicates what the teacher wants you to do with the subject. This particular term, *discuss*, indicates that you need to supply reasons, facts, or details to explain these types of schedules.

Discuss, however, is not the only task word you will commonly encounter in the questions for essay exams. Understanding the following terms, which tend to appear in the phrasing of essay questions, will help you compose an appropriate response.

Define the following terms. If you don't know the meaning, consult a dictionary to find the definition. Some words have been defined for you as examples.

1. *Analyze*:

2. *Compare/Contrast*: To discuss the similarities and differences between subjects. If the instruction is to *compare*, emphasize similarities. If the instruction is to *contrast*, emphasize differences.

3. *Define*:

4. *Discuss*: To examine carefully, often by supplying reasons, facts, or details

5. *Enumerate*: To write a list or outline, giving points concisely one by one.

6. *Evaluate*:

7. *Justify*: To provide reasons in support of an act, attitude, statement, or thesis.

8. *Prove*:

9. *Relate*: To **s**how how things are related to – or connected with – each other, how one causes another, or how one is like another.

10. *Summarize*:

PRINT STUDENT NAME **STUDENT #**

Tutor Feedback:

_____ In Step One, the student identified the false statements and the three clues that indicated that they were. (For example, in Question 2, "*all* is an absolute term that does not allow for exceptions.")

____ In Step Two, the student explained in writing his/her reasoning for selecting the answers to the sample multiple-choice questions. (For example, in Question 1, "*all of the above* is often the correct answer.")

_____ In Step Three, the student supplied the correct answers for the sample fill-in-the-blank practice questions.

_____ In Step Four, the student defined the remaining task words – using a dictionary, if necessary.

Additional Comments:

PRINT INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR NAME **DATE**

INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR SIGNATURE