Success Center

Directed Learning Activity

Test Taking Strategies:

Developing a Test Taking Strategy

SS006.1

Directed Learning Activity – Test Taking Strategies: Developing a Test Taking Routine

Description: ***How do you study for tests? Do you need to improve your preparation for them? The strategies in this Directed Learning Activity (DLA) will enable you to prepare for exams with confidence by helping you to decide what to study and to develop a test taking routine.***

Materials needed: ***It will be helpful if you have a recent copy of a graded exam as well as a syllabus with upcoming exam dates on it.***

Step One: Understanding Why You Need to Develop Your Test Taking Skills

Why is it important to know about strategies for test taking? A test is one way a teacher can ask you to demonstrate your knowledge and intelligence. One critical factor, however, influences your grade on a test besides how much you know: your skill at taking tests. Without this skill, your grades may only vaguely represent how much you know or how intelligent you are.

Step Two: Analyzing Your Present Test Taking Skills

Place a checkmark next to the test taking skills you have now. Be honest. This activity will help you to find your strengths as well as areas where you need to improve.

I do the following:

_____Attend every class session (or almost every class session).

_____Have a copy of the course syllabus with test dates.

_____Start test preparation early and study a little at a time.

_____Do not generally cram for exams.

_____Have a quiet place to study.

_____Participate in at least one study group.

_____Review immediately after learning something.

_____Review previous notes and assignments on a regular basis.

_____Know how to predict test questions.

_____Get enough rest before a test.

_____Visualize my success on the exam.

_____Skim through the test and read all directions carefully before starting the test.

_____Answer the easy questions first and then return later to answer the difficult questions.

_____Check over my test before handing it in.

_____Review my returned tests to improve future test preparation.

_____ Make sure my writing on the test is readable.

Using this test taking checklist, analyze your skills by answering the following questions.

My strengths in test taking skills are:

Some areas where I need to improve are:

Step Three: Deciding What to Study

Test questions can, and do, come from a variety of sources. There are several places you should go in order to look for possible test questions. Here are some materials you should focus on when studying.

- ***Lecture Notes –*** The notes you take during lectures usually reinforce information from a textbook chapter and usually follow topics from the syllabus or course outline.

- ***Textbook Chapters –*** Review your underlining, highlighting, and margin notes. Your careful annotation in texts will be very helpful when studying for exams.

- ***Textbook Notes and Study Guides –*** Review any notes, maps, outlines, note cards, or other study materials you have made. Because you wrote these materials in your own words, you will remember them the best.

- ***Graded Tests, Papers, and Assignments –*** It is important to look at past tests and assignments. Teacher comments can point out weaknesses you may need to work on while studying for the exam. In addition, past tests can help you become familiar with the way in which your instructor designs exams.

- ***Teacher Handouts –*** Anything your teacher hands out is very important. The instructor usually summarizes information that is important for you to understand concerning the concepts presented in the course.

Now that you are aware of what you need to help you study, think about a test you will soon be taking for one of your classes. Complete the following "before test" strategies checklist below. Taking time to predict what you will need to know and what topics and questions might be on the exam can greatly increase your success when taking a test.

Write the name of a course you are currently enrolled in: _____

What do you need to study for the test?

_____Textbook

_____Handouts

_____Calculator

_____Notes

_____Past exams and assignments

_____Pens, pencils, and/or paper

_____Study guide

_____Supplemental readings

_____Other _____

Will you study alone or with a group? _____Alone _____Study Group
(*A word of caution about study groups: Make sure they are more about studying than socializing. Set an agenda.)*

Predict two possible test questions.

What do you need to take the test?

_____Pens, pencils, and/or paper (lined, unlined, graph, bluebook)

_____Calculator

_____Ruler

_____Notes – Can I use my notes during the test?

_____Textbook – Is the test open-book?

Step Four: Developing a Test Taking Routine

You can do better on tests by developing a routine to follow that helps you stay calm, avoid distractions, and demonstrate your knowledge. Your test taking routine should include most of the following steps:

- ***Arrive on Time –*** Choose a seat where you won't be distracted by others.
- ***Control Your Attention –*** Avoid looking at other students and comparing how quickly you are completing the exam. Maintain a positive attitude.
- ***Jot Down Memory Cues –*** If you are likely to forget facts, formula, or vocabulary, write them down quickly on the back of the test as soon as you get it. Knowing that the memory cues are there will boost your confidence during the exam.
- ***Survey the Test –*** Determine how many questions there are, the types of questions you need to answer, and the points each question is worth.
- ***Read Directions –*** Read all directions before beginning the exam. If the instructions are unclear, ask the instructor to clarify them for you.
- ***Plan Your Time –*** Spend the most time answering the questions that are worth the most points. Allow sufficient time for essay questions.
- ***Answer Easy Questions First –*** This will increase your confidence in your ability to answer the difficult questions. In fact, the easy questions might remind you of how to answer the difficult questions.

- ***Guess –*** If there is no penalty for wrong answers, do not leave an answer blank. Your chances of getting the answer correct or partially correct are better if you make your best guess.

- ***Check Your Work –*** Make sure you have completely answered every question.

Perhaps you are already using some of the strategies listed above when you take an exam. List the routines that you already use when you take a test.

List the strategies that you plan on trying out when you take your next exam.

Step Five: Analyzing a Recent Test

Test preparation does not end when you hand in your test. Start preparing for your next exam by doing an "after test" analysis. This last step asks you to think about one of the most recent tests you took and received a grade/score for.

Write the name of a course in which you recently took a test: _____

What were you most prepared for? What part of the test was the easiest?

What were you least prepared for? What part of the test was the most difficult?

Why do you think you think you were not as well prepared for this particular test as you could have been?

What were your greatest strengths in preparing for the test?

_____Your notes **_____Your homework** **_____Tutoring sessions**

_____Your study schedule **_____Your study group**

_____Your study environment **_____Other_____**

What were your greatest weaknesses in preparing for the test?

_____Ran out of time during the test **_____Did not expect this type of test**

_____Studied the wrong material **_____Did not start studying early enough**

_____Other_____

Grade or score you expected to receive_____

Grade or score you actually received_____

How can you improve your preparation for the next test? Develop a plan using strategies presented in this DLA. Write at least three things you plan to do to prepare for and to take an exam successfully.

PRINT STUDENT NAME **STUDENT #**

Tutor Feedback:

_____ In Step Two, the student identified the test taking skills he/she uses now. After reflecting on the checklist, he/she wrote about test taking strengths as well as areas in need of improvement.

_____ In Step Three, the student filled out the "before test" strategies checklist, predicted two test questions, and identified materials needed to take the test.

_____ In Step Four, the student identified test taking routine strategies already in place as well as new strategies to help develop a consistent test taking routine.

_____ In Step Five, the student completed an analysis of a test recently taken and developed a realistic plan for improvement.

Additional Comments:

PRINT INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR NAME **DATE**

INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR SIGNATURE