

A LINE ON LIFE

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Reducing Test Anxiety

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As soon as you mention taking tests to some people, they panic. However, knowing *how* to take a test can reduce their anxiety. We will only discuss objective tests – true false, matching and multiple choice – since these types of test items are more common.

First, as with any task, **read the directions carefully**. Don't assume that you know what to do just because you had a similar type of test previously. If you don't understand the directions, ask the instructor.

Next, **read each question carefully**. Many students miss a small word (like "not"), which completely changes the meaning of the question. In addition, read it *completely* through before you answer it. Although choice "B" looks correct, there may be a later alternative that says, "*Both B and D.*" If the latter choice is correct, you will probably not receive credit if you answer "B." Another way of dealing with multiple-choice items – where more than one alternative may be correct – is to treat *each* alternative as a true-false question.

A prime rule for any objective test is to **answer the easy questions first**. If you have to spend more than 30 seconds thinking about an objective item after you have read it, go on to the next question. This assures that you will have answered all the questions you know in the allotted time. If you repeatedly spend several minutes on hard questions, the teacher may announce, "*One more minute to go,*" when you still haven't even read the last 16 items. That is not enough time to even read the questions – and definitely not enough time to correctly answer them! If each is a four-alternative multiple-choice item, statistically you might manage to guess 4 of them. However, if you had answered all the easy questions first – even if you only knew *half* of them – you would have gotten 8 of the 16 correct!

In addition, later items may give you clues that may remind you of answers to previous hard items. However, if you never get to those remaining items, you won't get those clues. After you have answered all the questions you know, go back and try to answer the other questions.

Sometimes, you may find a multiple-choice question for which you do not know the correct answer. Rather than merely guessing, **eliminate wrong alternatives first**. If you merely guess among the 4 choices, you will have a 25% chance of being correct. If you can correctly eliminate 2 choices before guessing, your chances jump to 50%. Every once in a while, you may be able to correctly eliminate 3 of the 4 alternatives. This means that your chance of getting it right is 100%!

Often a guess is a good answer that you doubt.

After you have done all this, **guess like mad! Never leave any questions unanswered!** If it is not answered, you have *no chance* of getting it correct. However, even a pure guess has a 25% chance. (The only time you should not guess is if there is a *penalty* for guessing. If you have any doubts about this penalty, ask your instructor.)

These hints work for *any* objective test, not merely ones that students take in school. So if you have a civil service exam or any exam for a job promotion, these hints can help you – if you use them.
