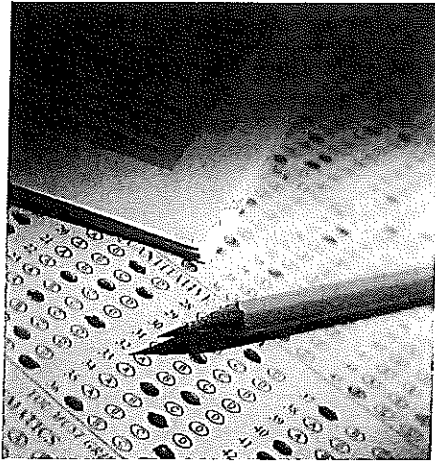
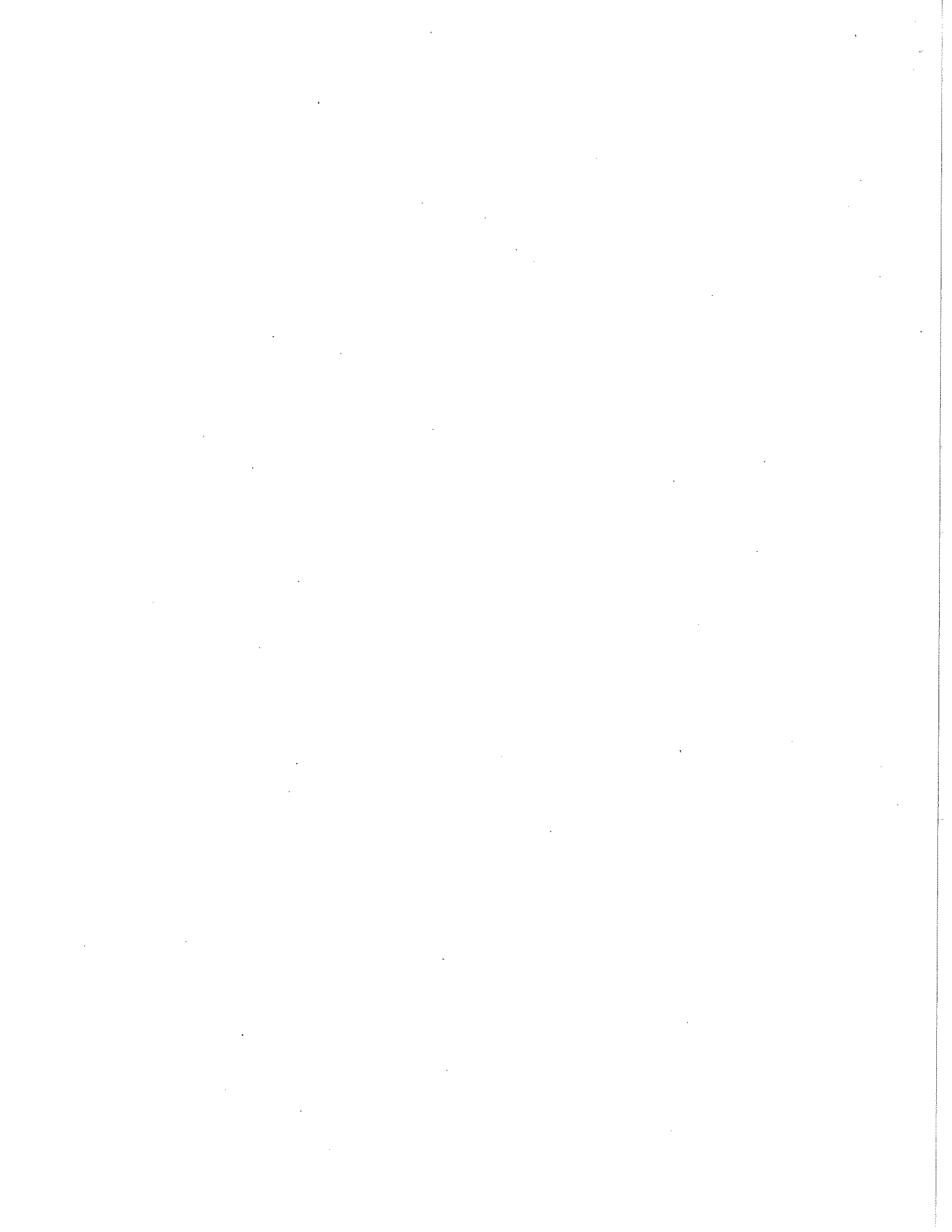


TEST TAKING SKILLS & STRATEGIES



A guide for developing better test preparation and test taking skills for different exam formats... before, during, and after exams.

*UW-Sheboygan is the **U** for you!*



Test Taking Skills

Anticipating Test Content

When entering into any exam its always better if you have some idea of what is actually going to be on the test. Knowing what will be on the test will help you to better know what to focus on when studying and the study strategy you should use.

Pay particular attention to any study guides

that the instructor hands out in class before the exam, or even at the beginning of the course! For example: key points, particular chapters or parts of chapters, handouts, etc.

Ask the instructor what to anticipate on the test
if he/she does not volunteer the information

Pay particular attention--just prior to the exam--
to points the instructor brings up during class lectures

Generate a list of possible questions

you would ask if you were making the exam; then see if you can answer the questions

Review previous tests

graded by the instructor

Confer with other students

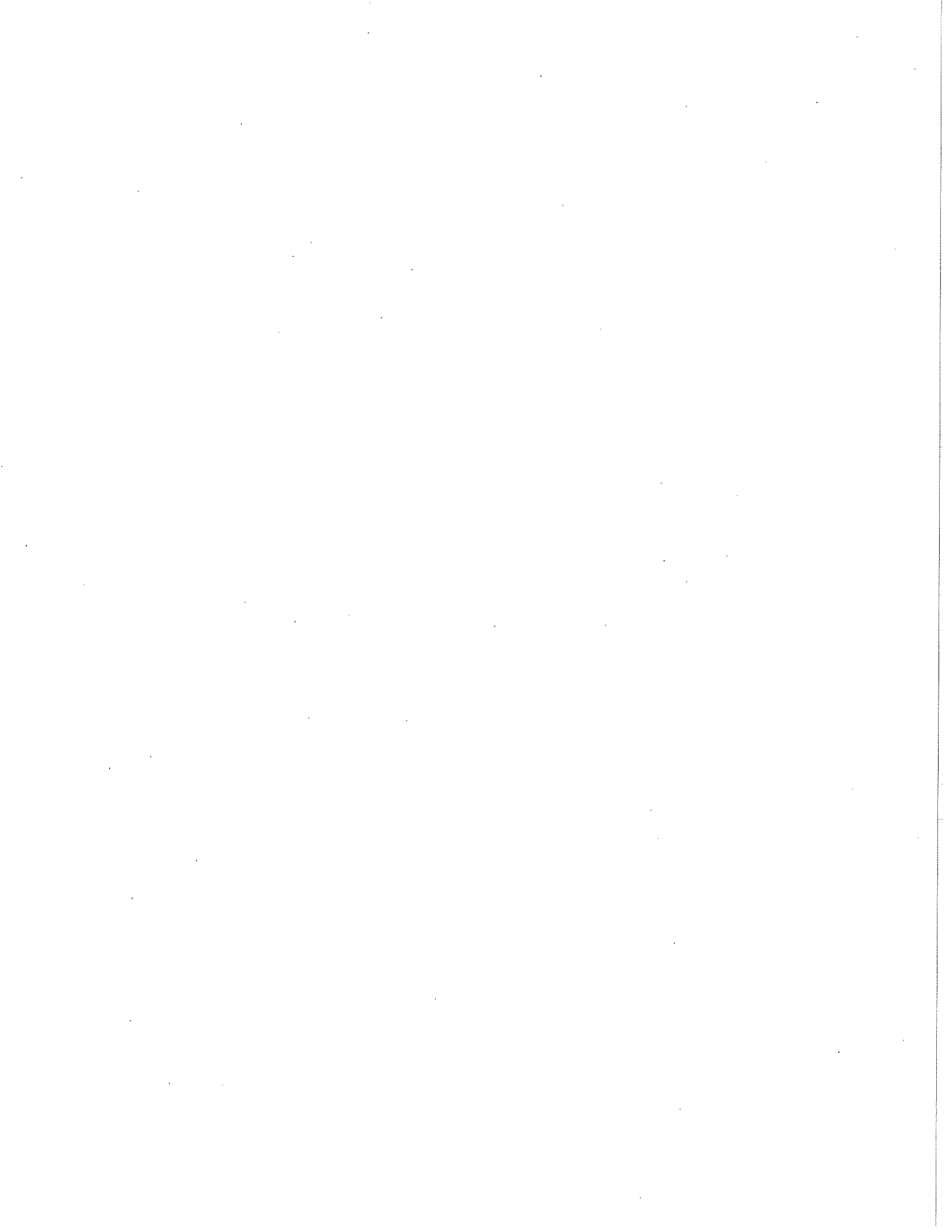
to predict what will be on the test

Pay particular attention to clues

that indicate an instructor might test for a particular idea, as when an instructor:

- says something more than once
- writes material on the board
- pauses to review notes
- asks questions of the class
- says, "This will be on the test!"

Now that you know what will be on the test, it's time to start preparing for it. It's best if you start preparing the first day of class. Make sure you know when and where the exams are going to be. Read your syllabus carefully. Here are some good studying ideas to help you prepare.



Attend class regularly. A large majority of students that did poorly on a test, weren't not present for some of the information.

Plan reviews as part of your regularly weekly study schedule; consequently, you review over the whole quarter rather than just at exam time. This will help to prevent cramming which adds to stress level.

Reviews are much more than reading and rereading all assignments. You need to read over your lecture notes and ask yourself questions on the material you don't know well. (If your notes are relatively complete and well organized, you may find that very little rereading of the textbook for detail is needed.) You may want to create a study group for these reviews to reinforce your learning.

Review for several short periods rather than one long period. You will find that you retain information better and get less fatigued.

Turn the main points of each topic or heading into questions and check to see if the answers come to you quickly and correctly. Try to predict examination questions; then outline your answers.

It may seem "old-fashioned", but flashcards may be a helpful way to review in courses that have many unfamiliar terms. Review the card in random order using only those terms that you have difficulty remembering.

Study from old tests if allowed by the professor.

Ask about the test's format.

If you can teach the material to someone then you can be sure that you know it.

It's OK to over learn the material because then you will be able to recall it more quickly on exam day.

Make sure and relax before the test, get a good night's sleep.

Avoid caffeine and junk food, they steal energy from you and caffeine raises anxiety.

OK. So now you've gotten prepared for the test and you know what sort of test it's going to be. For each kind of test there are certain ways to study. Studying the way you would for an essay test won't do you any good if it's a true and false test.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or stem followed by three to five options:

Test strategies:

- Read the directions carefully
- Know if each question has one or more correct option
- Know if you are penalized for guessing
- Answer easy questions first

Answering options

Improve your odds, think critically:

Cover the options, read the stem, and try to answer
Select the option that most closely matches your answer

Read the stem with each option

Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true"

Strategies to answer difficult questions:

- **Eliminate options you know to be incorrect**
- **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem**
- **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you**
- **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.**
Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it
- **"All of the above:"**
If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility
- **Number answers:**
toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- **"Look alike options"**
probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out
- **Echo options:**
If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct
- **Favor options that contain qualifiers**
The result is longer, more inclusive items that better fill the role of the answer
- **If two alternatives seem correct,**
compare them for differences,
then refer to the stem to find your best answer

Guessing:

- **Always guess when there is no penalty** for guessing or you can eliminate options
- **Don't guess if you are penalized** for guessing and if you have no basis for your choice
- **Don't change your answers** unless you are sure of the correction
- **Use hints from questions you know** to answer questions you do not.

TRUE/FALSE

Every part of a true sentence must be "true"

If any one part of the sentence is false, the whole sentence is false despite many other true statements.

Pay close attention to

negatives, qualifiers, absolutes, and long strings of statements

Negatives can be confusing.

If the question contains negatives, as "no, not, cannot"

Drop the negative and read what remains.

Decide whether that sentence is true or false.

If it is true, its opposite, or negative, is usually false

Qualifiers are words that restrict or open up general statements.

Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities of making accurate statements. They make more modest claims, are more likely to reflect reality, and usually indicate "true" answers.

Absolute words restrict possibilities.

"No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only"

imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate "false" answers

Long sentences often include groups of words set off by punctuation.

Pay attention to the "truth" of each of these phrases.

If one is false, it usually indicates a "false" answer

Guessing:

Often true/false tests contain more true answers than false answers. You have more than 50% chance of being right with "true". However, your teacher may be the opposite. Review pasts tests for patterns...

ESSAY

Before writing out the exam:

**Set up a time schedule
to answer each question and to review/edit all questions**

- If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each
- If questions are "weighted", prioritize that into your time allocation for each question
- When the time is up for one question, stop writing, leave space, and begin the next question. The incomplete answers can be completed during the review time
- Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three, complete ones

Read through the questions once and note if you have any choice in answering questions

- Pay attention to how the question is phrased, or to the "directives", or words such as "compare", "contrast", "criticize", etc. See their definitions in "Essay terms"
- Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions

Write down their key words, listings, etc, as they are fresh in mind. Otherwise these ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).

Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words

- Now compare your version with the original.
Do they mean the same thing? If they don't, you've misread the question. You'll be surprised how often they don't agree.

Think before you write:

Make a brief outline for each question

Number the items in the order you will discuss them

- **Get right to the point**
State your main point in the first sentence
Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay.
Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail.
Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings and notes
- Teachers are influenced by compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer
- Writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time-consuming and usually futile
- To know a little and to present that little well is, by and large, superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly--when judged by the grade received.

Writing & answering:

Begin with a strong first sentence

that states the main idea of your essay.

Continue this first paragraph by presenting key points

Develop your argument

- **Begin each paragraph**
with a key point from the introduction
- **Develop each point**
in a complete paragraph
- **Use transitions,**
or enumerate, to connect your points
- **Hold to your time**
allocation and organization
- **Avoid very definite statements**
when possible; a qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated person
- **Qualify answers when in doubt.**
It is better to say "toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you can't remember, whether it's 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly.

Summarize in your last paragraph

Restate your central idea and indicate why it is important.

Review:

Complete questions left incomplete,
but allow time to review all questions

Review, edit, correct

misspellings, incomplete words and sentences, miswritten dates and numbers.

Not enough time?

Outline your answers

MATH EXAMS

Preparation:

- **Begin preparing early**
Pay attention during class: every minute you daydream in class is many more

minutes of studying later.

Do assigned homework problems: math is a building process and in order to understand the next step you need to comprehend the present, and previous, ones

- **Simulate test conditions**

After you have studied and think you know the material, practice it under test conditions. Solve unassigned homework problems and see if you can finish them in the allotted time for the exam

- **Know your professor**

Study a copy of the exam of a previous class if available;
Talk with someone who taken the professor before, preferably someone who has succeeded in the same class

- **Form a study group of 3-4 dedicated students**

Not only will other students be able to help you with problems, but by helping others you will better learn the material. If you are unable teach another student a topic you believe you know, chances are you don't know that topic very well after all. If you can't teach it, you don't know it!

Testing:

Read through the exam

With reading through the whole exam you can

know what is expected of you;
prioritize items on the test;
pace yourself.

Carefully read the instructions

Make sure you are answering the question that is being asked!
Often students know how to solve a problem, but they misread or misinterpret the question itself;

Check that you have correctly rewritten the problem

If you use a scratch piece of paper make sure that you correctly rewrite the problem.
Don't skip steps. Start from the beginning;

Clearly write each step of the solution

Be neat and don't rush writing numbers down.
Keep checking your solution as you are working.
Neatness makes it easier to recheck your work;

Double check your math, especially your calculator entries

Double check your calculator work immediately.

The chances of hitting a wrong number are high, but the chances of hitting the same wrong number are not;

Don't Dilly Dally

If you get stuck on a problem move on and come back to it later.

When you are finished, recheck all your work.

SHORT ANSWER

An instructor's primary purpose

in giving a short-answer test is to cover the material.

Go over your notes and the assigned reading:

- **Prepare for the test**
by studying off of summary sheets that are packed with information within condensed space. Try to categorize the material
- **Use grammatical clues**
within a statement as hints for the correct answer
- **If you can think of several answers**
for a blank or short answer question, let the instructor know.
The instructor may give you a clue to the correct answer he/she's looking for
- **A guess made with common sense**
could get you more test points than if you leave an answer blank.
Don't be a smart aleck if you guess
- **Write your short answers in simple**, telegraphic sentences.
Packing as much information as you can is more important than literary style

TERMS OR DIRECTIVES

These words are "directives" and ask you to answer, or present information, in a particular way. These terms will often be seen on an essay exam. These words can better guide you on how to write the exam.

Compare:

Examine qualities, or characteristics, to discover resemblances. "Compare" is usually stated as "compare with": you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.

Interpret:

An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem.

Justify:

When you are instructed to justify your answer you must prove or show grounds for decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.

List:

Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or tabulation. Such answers should always be given in concise form.

Outline:

An outline answer is organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omitting minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.

Prove:

A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.

Relate:

In a question which asks you to show the relationship or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in descriptive form.

Review:

A review specifies a critical examination. You should analyze and comment briefly in organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.

State:

In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear narrative form. Details, and usually illustrations or examples, may be omitted.

Summarize:

When you are asked to summarize or present a summarization, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, illustrations and elaboration are to be omitted.

Trace:

When a question asks you to trace a course of events, you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such narratives may call for probing or for deduction.

Contrast:

Stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems.

Criticize:

Express your judgment or correctness or merit. Discuss the limitations and good points or contributions of the plan or work in question.

Define:

Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. Details are not required but limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates the particular object from all others in the class.

Describe:

In a descriptive answer you should recount, characterize, sketch or relate in narrative form.

Diagram:

For a question which specifies a diagram you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Generally you are expected to label the diagram and in some cases add a brief explanation or description.

Discuss:

The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and entailed answer.

Enumerate:

The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

Evaluate:

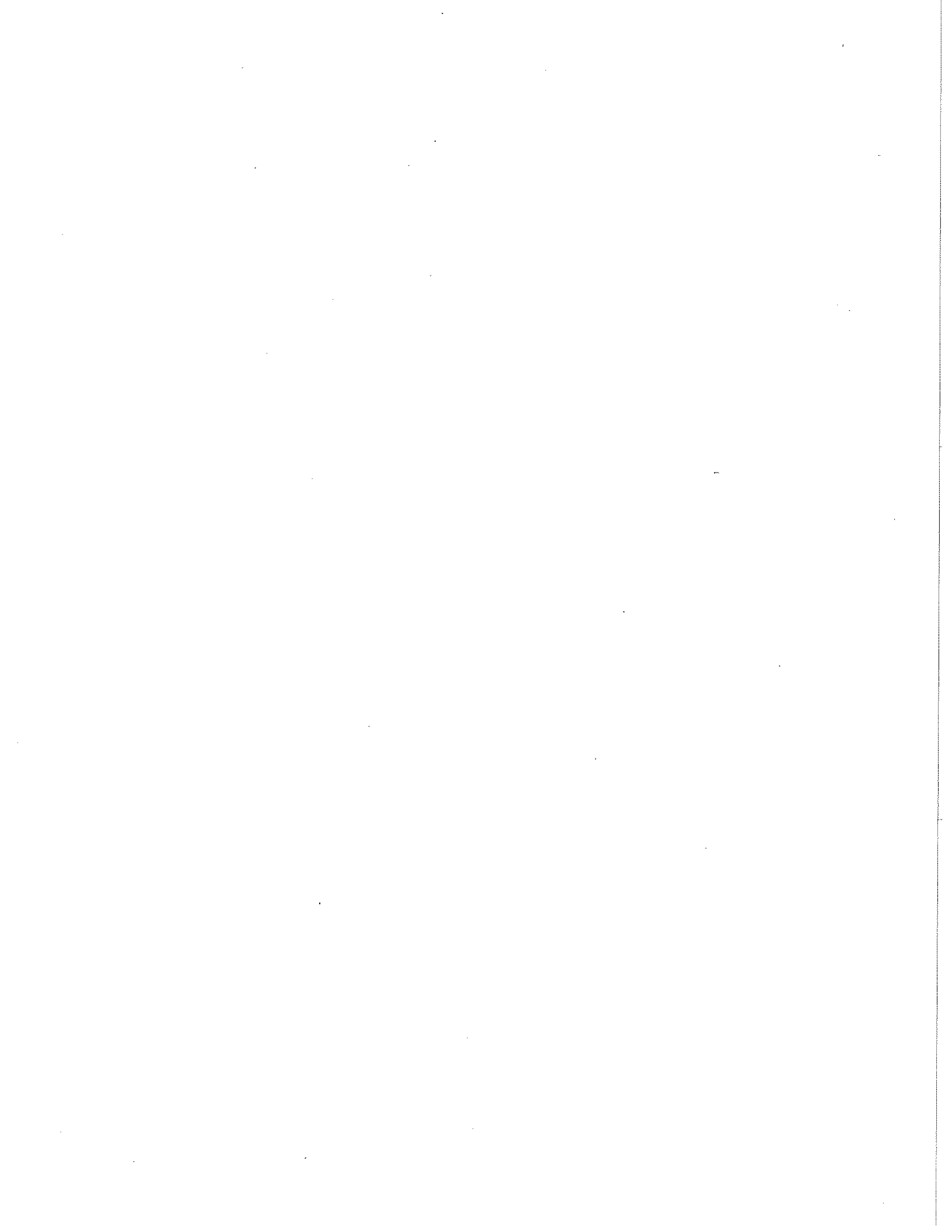
In an evaluation question you are expected to present a careful appraisal of the problem stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations.

Explain:

In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify and interpret the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the "how or why," reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.

Illustrate:

A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example.



Acknowledgements/Resources

Information in this packet provided by:

www.iss.stthomas.edu

www.d.umn.edu

www.southwestern.edu

Other Internet sites to check out:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~studskl/teststrat.html>

<http://www.eop.mu.edu/study/>

http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/test_take.html

<http://www.d.umn.edu/student/loon/acad/strat/>

<http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/tstprp.htm>

<http://ericae.net/edo/ed302558.htm>

<http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/>

<http://www.testtakingtips.com/test/index.htm>

<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html>

<http://ericcass.uncg.edu/virtuallib/achievement/9011.html>

<http://www.richland.cc.il.us/james/misc/testtake.html#prep>

<http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/help/teststrt.html>

<http://www.act.org/aap/testprep/>

http://www.byu.edu/ccc/Learning_Strategies/test/strategy.htm

<http://euler.slu.edu/Dept/SuccessinMath.html>

<http://www.amby.com/worksite/taketest.html>

<http://www.state.tn.us/education/tsteststrategies.htm>

<http://mthwww.uwc.edu/wwwmahes/courses/music/jws3.htm>

<http://www.collegeboard.com/ap/students/english/prep001.html>

<http://www.waunakee.k12.wi.us/intermediate/Test-taking.htm>

