

## 07.05: Objective

### How Should I Approach Standardized Tests?



**These high school juniors and seniors are in a class helping them to prepare for the ACT and to fill out paperwork related to college. Prep classes like this one provide specific techniques that are helpful for a specific standardized test.**

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Testing is the primary way to evaluate performance. Besides school, you will take tests in other parts of your life, such as when applying for your driver's license, a new job, or professional certification.

There is no magical formula for success on every kind of test, but there are some helpful techniques for taking a test that you might find useful. Your success depends on your ability to approach a test in the way that feels the most comfortable to you.

In this lesson, you will learn some of the most effective strategies that successful students use.

- First, you will recognize the common misconceptions about tests.
- Next, you will learn how to study for a standardized test.
- Then, you will learn about seven test-taking strategies and how to use them effectively.
- Finally, you will assess your understanding of the strategies by matching them with examples of students in action.

## Objective 07.05 Misconceptions and Timed Testing

### Strategies

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- recognize common misconceptions about standardized tests
- be prepared for a standardized test

- use general test-taking strategies
- demonstrate the strategies and habits required for successful test taking

## 07.05 Misconceptions and Timed Testing: Common Misconceptions

### What Are the Misconceptions about Standardized Tests?

Do you wake up with butterflies in your stomach on days when you have to take major tests? Many students feel that type of anxiety on test days because of their misconceptions about tests.

A common misconception is that there is a "throw-away" answer that is included but meant to be disregarded right away. Standardized tests will likely have one answer choice that can be discarded because of your knowledge of a subject. However, you should remember that the test questions are carefully designed. While there is not a guaranteed throw-away answer, there will often be answers that you can eliminate. To find the right answer, you will use the process of elimination to rule out incorrect answer choices until you arrive at the correct one.

Another misconception is that there are patterns to the correct answers. Students sometimes look for patterns in the location of the correct answer. For example, it is a common myth that test writers make the correct answer "C" for the majority of the items on the test. The truth is that the location of the correct answer will be randomly placed. You'll be hard pressed to find a recognizable pattern. Your best course of action is to read each question carefully and thoroughly so that you can use your knowledge to find the correct answer. Explore the interactive below to practice the process of elimination for an exam question.

Interactive

### Eliminating Wrong Answers - Text Version

Even though there is not an intentional "throw-away" answer on standardized tests, there will often be answers that you will know are wrong immediately, as long as you know the test material. Here is the strategy you should use for the process of elimination.

Step 1: Read	Read the question and four answer options carefully. Look for keywords like the names of people, places, or theories. Notice important words such as <i>not</i> or <i>except</i> .
Step 2: Cross out	Remember there are three wrong answers and only one right one. If you know that some answers are definitely wrong, cross them out in your test booklet. You don't have to worry about them anymore.

Step 3: Examine	Study the remaining answer choices to see if they give you any clues. For example, words like <i>always</i> and <i>never</i> often indicate that a choice is too extreme to be correct. Also, look for choices that just do not quite seem to work with the question.
Step 4: Eliminate	It is okay to trust your gut when first eliminating choices. Then use your knowledge to eliminate the more complex answer choices. The more choices you can eliminate, the better chances you have of getting the item right.
Step 5: Choose	If you still have two answers left at this point, choose the answer that most directly matches the question. If you have to guess, it's a good idea to circle the question number in your test booklet so you can double-check it later, if you have time.

Now use the process of elimination to cross out the wrong answers to this multiple-choice question and star the correct answer choice.

Where did the Freedom Riders end their historical journey?

- A. Washington, D.C.
- B. Miami, Florida
- C. Montgomery, Alabama
- D. New Orleans, Louisiana

## 07.05 Misconceptions and Timed Testing: Studying for Tests

### How Do I Study for Standardized Tests?

Before you learn about the seven general strategies for taking a standardized test, consider this: You still must study! You can know all the testing tips, tricks, ways to reduce stress, and special strategies in the world, but if you do not study and prepare for the test, they will be of little advantage for you. You won't understand how to use your analysis skills and the test-taking strategies without knowledge of the material on which you are being tested.

The most important and versatile study tool is the flashcard. They can help improve your memory and boost your recollection of key concepts and vocabulary terms. To create a set of flashcards before an exam, start by reviewing your lesson notes and course materials to

identify the hardest areas for you to remember. Select certain terms, phrases, events, people, or places with which you are repeatedly confused.

On one side of the card, write the term or a question about the confusing material. On the other side, write the definition or the answer to the question. Then be sure to spend enough time before the test reviewing your flashcards. Once you can recall the information on the backside of the flashcards without looking at it, you are prepared for success!

## Flip Cards - Text Version

### Card 1:

Explore the interactive to see sample flashcards. You can create flashcards like this on your own using index cards or a word processing program on your computer.

Here is an example of a vocabulary flashcard. On one side is the term, and on the other side is the definition:

feminist

a person who supports or actively promotes women's rights

### Card 2:

Here is an example of a Q&A flashcard. On one side is the question, and on the other side is the answer:

How were the civil rights of Native Americans protected during the 1960s?

The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 protected the constitutional rights of Native Americans and recognized their right to establish laws on their reservations.

## 07.05 Misconceptions and Timed Testing: General Strategies

### What Are the General Strategies for Taking a Test?

Great test takers will tell you that to be successful on standardized tests, it is all about strategy. In this activity, you will explore seven general strategies that can be used for exams on nearly every subject matter. You might already be familiar with these strategies and use them without thinking deeply about them.

Take a moment to review these strategies, even if they're obvious to you. They are organized here in the order in which you should use them when taking a test. These strategies should become part of your test-taking plan.

Interactive

## Terms and Definitions - Text Version

### Memory Dumping

"Memory dumping" means quickly writing down all the information you feel like you may forget or confuse while you are taking the test. For example, if you fear you'll forget someone's name, an important date, mathematical formulas, or essential statistics, first jot down all that information on the back of the test as soon as you receive it. It is also helpful to include mnemonics, such as the common one "Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally" for the order of operations in mathematics. They will help you remember difficult concepts along with the other organizational aids and memory devices you jot down. Then, while you are answering questions, you can refer back to the "dumped" information for assistance.

### Reading Directions

On all sections of the test, read the directions very carefully. Pay attention to small but important words like *and*, *or*, *have to*, *may*, and *best*. For example, there is a major difference between answering "questions A and B" and answering "question A or B." Should you "circle the best answer" or "circle the correct answer"? Notice what type of answers is required, if answers may be used more than once, and if there is a possibility of having more than one answer.

If the directions seem complicated or confusing, try breaking down the sentences into smaller parts. Circle or underline the tricky parts of the directions so that you don't forget to follow them. For example, you could be required to circle your answers, while another section could require you to write your answers on blanks. Some instructors want multiple-choice answers written in uppercase letters; others prefer lowercase. It depends on the instructor, but sometimes they will deduct points if answers are not given how the directions stipulate they should be given.

Also, be sure to notice how the test will be scored. Usually only the questions answered correctly are used to calculate the score. However, there are some standardized tests that penalize you for an incorrect answer. The final score is calculated by subtracting the wrong points from the right points. If partial credit is given, you should use this to your advantage. You should also use all supporting material indicated in the directions, such as notes, scrap paper, or a calculator.

### Scanning the Test

Once you have read the directions, spend a minute or two scanning the entire test. How complex are the multiple-choice questions? You're looking to identify the number of questions and the amount of information required to answer each. Also take note of the point values for each question or section. Try to categorize sections as easy or difficult by jotting down a quick note in the margin. Before you write in the margins, be sure that you are allowed to mark in your test booklet. After you have marked the sections, you might want to go through and answer the questions you have categorized as easy first. Then, you can go back and tackle the harder questions.

### Planning Your Time

Next you should quickly develop a schedule for completing the exam. Budget your time carefully for each section, and stick to the schedule you create. For many standardized tests, you can find out how many questions you will be expected to answer in a given timeframe. For example, if you have 60 minutes to answer 60 questions, then this means you can spend one

minute answering each question. Before you take the exam, you should practice answering questions quickly and accurately to make sure you are comfortable answering questions against the pressure of a clock.

You might want to wear a watch on the day of an exam. Before you wear a watch into the exam room, check with your instructor or test administrator to make sure watches are allowed. You may want to find out if there are any other restrictions on what you can or cannot bring with you. During the test, check your watch or the clock frequently, such as after every section or each page, to stay on schedule. Don't rush while taking an exam. Use the entire time period allowed.

### **Reading the Questions**

Be sure you don't automatically skip over the sample questions and answers. They may give you valuable clues about how the answers should be given or what the teacher expects from you. Ask the instructor to explain or reword a question if you don't understand it. Don't make interpretations of what question is looking for, and don't try to discover hidden meanings. You can break down the more complicated questions into parts which make sense to you. Then work on each part individually. If you use this strategy, number each part of the question to make sure you answered all of them.

### **Making Educated Guesses**

Sometimes you might not know the answer to a question right away. If you encounter this obstacle, circle the question so that you can return to it later. If you stress and worry over something you don't know, you're wasting valuable time. On the other hand, avoid rereading the same questions over and over again because this also wastes time.

If the answer is not clear, look for clues in the questions and the answer choices to make an educated guess. The main clue is the grammar because the correct answer must be grammatically correct. You should examine the verb tense (because the past, present or future tense should match between the question and correct answer), the word type (because the question could be asking for a noun, not a verb), and the number (because the singularity or plurality should match between the question and correct answer). Try using simple words to substitute for difficult or unknown words. To decipher unknown words, use context clues or your knowledge of language elements. Search for content clues in other test questions.

Sometimes two answers may seem correct. However, if the directions indicate that there is only one correct answer for each question, you should pick the most obvious answer. If no answer seems absolutely correct, choose the one closest to what you think the correct answer should be. If all else fails, make an educated guess at the answer, but only if you're not penalized for incorrect answers or if partial credit is given.

### **Avoiding Careless Errors**

After you complete each section of a test, reread the directions to make sure you have correctly completed it. If you have time, go back over the questions to see that you read them accurately the first time. Do you understand what they are asking?

Once you have finished the entire test and the stress is reduced, check your answers. Reread the answers to see that you actually wrote what you intended to write or filled in the answer sheet as you intended to. Did you answer all parts of the question?

Verify that all your answers are in the right place and that all questions have an answer,

unless you're penalized for wrong guesses. When filling out the answers by hand, be sure that all numbers and letters are clearly legible. Sometimes 2 and 5 can get confused as well as 4 and 9. For lowercase letters, the tricky ones are *a* and *d* as well as *t* and *f*.