

Test Taking Strategy by John Merrill, EXCEL Tutor



A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TAKING AN EXAM

The problem

Students have been taking tests for years – hundreds of tests, perhaps thousands - but many people have never thought or been presented a systematic approach to taking those tests. The following is one such method. While the details of taking a particular exam may differ from those of taking a different exam, there are some guidelines that often help people approach any exam in a systematic way that makes sense.

THE 3-PASS SYSTEM FOR TAKING TESTS

AS YOU FINISH STUDYING FOR THE TEST:

Pretend you're in the test room. See yourself confidently working through the test and handing it in. (This can help lower test anxiety during the test itself.)

AS YOU ENTER THE TEST:

Take a deep breath and remind yourself that "You're prepared for this!". (This can also help lower test anxiety.)

Step 1 of the 3-Pass System. GO THROUGH THE TEST QUICKLY THE 1ST TIME:

- Do the items you can do immediately.
- Mark the other items as:
K = Know how but takes time.
N = Needs more thought and concentration.

Step 2 of the 3-Pass System. GO THROUGH THE TEST THE 2ND TIME:

- Do the items marked K.
- Jot down any quick ideas about the items marked N.

Step 3 of the 3-Pass System. GO THROUGH THE TEST THE 3RD TIME:

- Do the items marked
- Check all your answers.



AS YOU LEAVE THE TEST:

Take a deep breath and tell yourself that "You're done with that and ready for the next thing!", (This tends to complete the test-taking pattern of thinking, including test anxiety, and gears you towards whatever is next to be done.)

Why the 3-Pass System is useful

The 3-Pass System can form the basis of strategically approaching any exam. Many students have never considered a generalized, systematic approach which maximizes the use of time in order to maximize the total credit received. Students can build on the 3-Pass System for their own uses and can customize the approach for particular kinds of tests. A lab exam in Biology may differ from a multiple-choice exam with "show your work" in a Mathematics course but the basic 3-Pass approach can be useful in both situations. Thinking about a generalized strategy for approaching any test allows a student to think broadly about the appropriate strategy for that test.

When to use it & when not to bother

The 3-Pass System works for most types of exams for which you are not required to complete one item before considering the next item. The system is not effective for oral exams. On the other hand, it is particularly effective for exams in which one gets partial credit for an item by getting some things correct. The system allows one to concentrate on the more difficult portions after completing those items for which full-credit is very likely.

Conclusion

For a general approach to taking exams, the 3-Pass System can be a place to start – particularly in test situations in which partial credit is given. Also, thinking about test-taking in a strategic way is itself good because when people have a strategy they feel more confident and perform better. ✨

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