Test-Taking Strategies

Taking tests or exams in university may be a very stressful process. Here are some quick tips that may help you through!

**Before a Test**

a) Keep up with coursework

b) Start studying in advance
   - Create a daily study schedule

c) Use the 20/10 method
   - Study for 2 hours at a time
   - Within the 2 hour study time, study for 20 minutes straight
   - After 20 minutes, reward yourself with a 10-minute break where you do something fun and motivating (have a snack, chat with a friend, take a walk)
   - During the 10 minutes, make sure to evaluate:
     o Do I understand the information that I covered?
     o Was I able to focus for the whole 20 minutes?
     If you answer “no”, ask yourself: Do you need a longer break? Is your environment conducive to studying? Can you study for longer than 20 minutes at a time? If so, increase the amount of study time (20 to 25 minutes, for example).

d) Use specific study strategies
   - Organize material with summary sheets
   - Use visualizations, mnemonics, flashcards
   - Create charts, tables, figures, & concept maps
   - Predict test questions
   - Study with others

e) Prepare yourself psychologically
   - Get details of exam from TA/Instructor
   - Find out where test/exam is taking place
   - Use positive self-talk
   - Get at least 7 hours of sleep
   - Avoid drinking coffee the night before or day of test
   - Use visualization, deep breathing, and muscle relaxation techniques (for more information, check out “What’s StopWatch?”.)
During the Test

a) At the start
   - Before you receive the test
     o Arrive early
     o Use muscle relaxation, deep breathing techniques & positive self-talk
     o Review notes/mentally rehearse important information
     o Listen carefully to invigilators’ instructions
   - After you receive the test
     o Jot down important information on back of exam
     o Survey the test & budget your time (spend more time on questions with the most value)
     o Answer easiest questions first (or more difficult to get you started)
     o Read directions and questions carefully

b) Types of responses
   - Know answer right away
     o Mark answer, put a star next to it to indicate not to second-guess it later
   - Not sure of answer
     o Reread question
     o Think about what you know about subject, try to make associations
     o If unsure, mark the question and skip to the next one
   - Coming back to skipped answer
     o Identify key words & look for them in other questions to help trigger associations
     o Make an educated guess

After the Test

a) Go through mistakes
   - Look for patterns of mistakes
   - Correct your mistakes
b) Count up your correct answers
c) Read through all comments
d) Go see your professor!
   - Going to see your prof lets you get clarification on questions you were unsure of so you can get a better sense of what needs to be done for next time

References:
Diaz del Castillo, P. (2012). Create your own toolbox to manage your academic anxiety. [Powerpoint Presentation].

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McGill Office for Students with Disabilities (2016)