

## How to Take NDSA Tests

The following suggestions come from How To Get Good Grades In College “Step Eight: Use Test-Taking Strategies” by Woodburn Press (2005).

In order to do well on any test or exam, you must study hard and be prepared. Having done that, you can further improve your test performance by using test-taking strategies.

**Get off to a good start.** Get to the test early, and be sure that you have everything you need (pencil, calculator, etc.). As soon as you get your test, write anything that you want to remember (facts, dates, equations, memory cues, etc.) in light pencil at the top of your test. Listen closely to any verbal instructions, and read the test directions carefully.

**Develop a plan.** Before you begin, quickly look over the entire test and develop a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes on each essay question, and 10 minutes checking over your answers.

**Mark the questions you want to return to.** Put a dot or light check mark by any answer that you’re not sure of. After you’ve gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones that you’ve marked and try them again. If you’re not sure of an answer, go with your first instinct.

Don’t panic if you don’t know the answers to the first few questions. Sometimes, it takes a few minutes for your brain to get in gear. Chances are, you’ll know the answers when you come back to them.

### **Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.**

- When you’re reading a multiple-choice question, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the answer choices.
- Read all of the answer choices. Don’t be tempted to mark the first one that sounds good.
- If you’re not sure of an answer, cross out the choices that you know are incorrect, and make an educated guess.
- If two of the choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.

### **Know how to approach essay questions.**

- Read each essay question and then start with the easiest one. This will help you gain confidence, and it will give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions. Be sure to note how many points each essay is worth and adjust the time you allot to each question accordingly.
- Before you do any writing, brainstorm. Jot down key words and ideas, along with the points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize these ideas and points into a simple outline; if not, just number them in the order you want to present them.
- Begin writing. Write legibly, and use clear, concise, complete sentences. (Studies have shown that when two identical essays are graded, the one that’s easier to read gets the higher grade.) In your opening paragraph, introduce your topic and tell the reader what he/she can expect to learn from your essay. In the middle paragraphs, present supporting ideas along with facts, examples, and details. In your final paragraph, summarize the main points, give a brief analysis, etc. Finally reread your entire essay and make any necessary corrections.
- If you don’t know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write what you can about the subject. You might hit on something and get partial credit. If you don’t have time to finish an essay, briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.

**Look for key words in True/False questions.** Statements with always, never, every, all, and none in them are usually false. Statements with usually, often, sometimes, most, and many in them are usually true. It is important to read True/False questions very carefully; one word will often determine whether a statement is True or False.

**Improve your math test scores.** The following tips will help you get the highest grade possible on a math test: 1) As soon as you get your test, write down the formulas, equations, etc. that you need to remember on the top of your test. 2) Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be. 3) If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or diagram. 4) Don't spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, do on, and come back to it later. 5) Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, if you were on the right track, you may get partial credit.

**Check your answers.** Check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have read the question wrong or made a careless mistake. If you're unsure, don't change your answer. Use all of the testing time to answer questions and to check your responses.