Test Taking Strategies

Taking tests can be an anxiety-producing experience for many students. When you are anxious or feeling panicky, your content knowledge gets blocked and you find you are not able to adequately answer many of the questions. This, of course leads to added anxiety and the situation gets worse. If you have had trouble with previous tests in this subject you might feel a little scared that you are going to get another bad grade.

So, what can you do? Obviously the most important thing to do is to avoid this cycle of panic and anxiety. You've studied for your test and you felt you knew your work and now you really are prepared to do this test.

1. Try not to skim through the test when you first get it. This will increase your concern as you look at the questions and diagrams, etc.

2. Sit back and take 4 deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose, hold it a couple seconds and then slowly breathe out through your mouth.

3. Relax your muscles. Avoid creating muscle tension in your body. Tell yourself that you have studied and know your work, so the test is going to be a way to show what you know.

4. Now you are ready to begin answering the questions. Treat each question as if it were the only question in the test. Focus all your attention on that question.

5. The most important piece of answering a question is to be sure you understand what the question is asking. Reread the question to be sure you know this. You might want to actually underline the main components of the question itself. This is like diagramming a sentence.

   For ex: The large coal fields found in Pennsylvania provide evidence that the climate of the northeastern United States was much warmer during the Carboniferous Period. <u>This change in climate</u> over time <u>is best explained by the</u>

   You can see that the question is asking for an explanation for the change in climate. The other information about coal fields providing evidence of a warmer past is supportive information you now can look at. We only need to know it was during the Carboniferous Period to realize that was long ago. And the phrase "over time" is not really needed to understand the question but also suggests the past .

   The choices given are:

   (1) movements of tectonic plates
   (2) effects of seasons
   (3) changes in the environment caused by humans
   (4) evolution of life

   Now you can use your knowledge to select the best choice.

6. In answering multiple choice questions you're often given clues as to the kind of answer that is expected. But don't be fooled by selecting the first choice that makes sense to you. Read through **all** of the choices given before making a selection. After you have read the question and all the choices go back and read the question again. This reading will be more focused because you now have some idea of the kind of answers you should be thinking about. If you cannot come up with a clear selection try to eliminate an obvious wrong choice or even two. This will obviously increase your chances of making a correct choice.

7. If there are diagrams or charts or photos associated with the question ***carefully*** read the information provided about the diagram, etc. and then study the diagram, etc. Be sure you understand the diagram, etc. before going on to the question(s)

8. If you get stuck on a question do not spend a great amount of time on it. Usually a multiple choice question can be answered in less than a minute. If you find yourself taking more than a minute and at most two minutes, skip that question. And go on to the next question. Circle its number on the test and on any separate answer sheet so you don't get the answers out of place on your answer sheet.

9. Most tests are given with a time limit (one class period for example) so periodically during the test check your time to see that you are not leaving too little time to complete the test. If this happens you will be rushed and your anxiety level will increase making it harder to focus.

10. For constructed response questions follow the same techniques to be sure you understand what the question is asking of you by reading very carefully and underlining the main elements to the question. Now look at the space given to you for a response. If the response space is a short line, the answer requires a short response. If two or three lines are provided then a longer response is required. Use the space given to gauge the length of your response.

11. When answering a constructed response question **only give a response that directly answers the question**. Do not write more than is asked for. If you write in additional information and it is not scientifically accurate you will lose credit for the answer, even if what you wrote at first is correct! Don't think that if you write everything you know about the topic you will get the answer.

12. If the constructed response question is to construct a graph with labeled axes, study the data to be plotted and carefully follow the directions as to exactly how the graph is to be constructed – what symbols to use for plotted points, how to connect the plotted points, or if it is to be a bar or pie graph, etc.

13. In Earth Science be sure you are familiar with your Reference Table, that you know if the information asked for tin the question can be found by using the Reference Table. You should, of course, be knowledgeable about the correct use of all the information in the Reference Table.