

## Common Test Taking Mistakes

There are several mistakes that college students commonly make that lower test scores. Examine the list below to see which mistakes may be lowering your test scores. On the back of this page, see what “A” students do to avoid these errors.

1. Did not follow the directions.
2. Didn't calculate how much time to spend on each question to have time to do all of them.
3. Did not read questions carefully.
4. Did not go back and check over answers.
5. Accidentally marked the wrong item or box.
6. Changed an answer from correct to incorrect after.
7. Remembered going over the material but could not recall it.
8. Did not understand a question and didn't get clarification from the instructor.
9. Wrote lots of words but didn't answer the question.
10. An answer was disorganized.
11. Hand writing was illegible.
12. Made careless errors.
13. Did not support points with evidence, facts, statistics, research or proof.
14. Did not know the subject matter well.

**The number 1 test-taking technique is KNOWING THE MATERIAL WELL.**

### What can you do about each mistake?

1. **Did not follow the directions for the test.** Always read test directions before beginning to answer questions. Instructors may change directions from test to test and sometimes they include omitters. Omitters are directions that say something like “*only do the 1<sup>st</sup> five questions*” or “*only to the even numbered questions*”.
2. **Didn't calculate how much time to spend on each question to have time to do all of them.** Divide the number of questions into the number of minutes you have to take the test. Be sure to allow more time for essay answers and problem solving.
3. **Did not read questions carefully enough.** Circle and underline key words in test questions and use them as a check to see if you answered all parts of the question. This also reduces the chances of you reading more into the question than is there.
4. **Did not go back and check over answers.** Always leave time toward the end of a test to read over answers to check for careless mistakes. Overall, students who do this earn higher grades.
5. **Accidentally marked the wrong item or box.** Ditto.
6. **Changed an answer from correct to incorrect after reconsideration.** Research shows that students who change test answers earn lower grades overall than students who don't change test answers.



Do not change answers unless you are positively certain you have recorded the wrong answer. First impressions are more often correct than second guesses.

7. **Remembered going over the material but could not recall it.** This is a sure sign that you did not review the material enough times. Set up your notes to make repeated and frequent reviews fast and easy.
8. **Did not understand a question and didn't get clarification from the instructor.** Ask the instructor or test proctor for clarification. All they can do is clarify things for you or shoot you. Problem solved.
9. **Wrote lots of words but didn't answer the question.** Same solution as #3. But if you have to guess, write something as closely related to the question as you can and then pray a lot.
10. **An answer was disorganized.** This has a direct connection with how you studied the material. If notes or studying of them was disorganized, it is normal for test answers to be likewise.
11. **Handwriting was illegible.** Print or write slower.
12. **Made careless errors.** See the remedies for #3, #4 and #7.
13. **Did not support my points with evidence, facts, statistics, research, or proof.** You will answer test questions pretty much the way you practice learning the answers. If you review material before a test and do not include evidence, facts, statistics, research, or proof, are you surprised that a test answer will lack these important elements? You are normal.
14. **Did not know the subject matter well.** Take good lecture and textbook notes. Review these notes 3 to 4 times per week. Join a study group. Get tutored on unclear material. Ask your instructor questions. Answer the questions at the end of a chapter. Go to review and Supplemental Instruction sessions. Sound like work? So is making hamburgers if you flunk out of college. Which job will help you reach your goals the quickest? Learning is work but work that can pay off big!