



State of California – Military Department
California Cadet Corps

CURRICULUM ON CITIZENSHIP

Strand C7: Study Skills

Level 11

This Strand is composed of the following components:

- A. Preparing to Learn
- B. Taking Tests**
- C. Building Your Learning and College Prep



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B. TAKING TESTS

OBJECTIVES

DESIRED OUTCOME (Followership)

Cadets will be able to prepare for and take the following types of tests with an effective strategy for success: Short Answer/Essay/Multiple Choice/True-False/Quantitative/Open Book/Oral Tests.

At the end of instruction, each cadet will be able to:

1. Identify test preparation and testing taking tips
2. Identify strategies for improving test performance
3. Describe how to effectively take Short Answer Tests
4. Describe how to effectively take Essay Tests
5. Describe how to effectively take Multiple Choice Tests
6. Describe how to effectively take True/False Tests
7. Describe how to effectively take prepare for and take Math Tests
8. Describe how to effectively take Open Book Tests
9. Describe how to effectively take Oral Tests

B1. Test Preparation and Test Taking Tips

- Prepare early. Don't **procrastinate** or wait until the night before to cram for a test. Give yourself enough time to study for a test so that you're confident you know the material.
- Have a study routine and stick to it.
- Take good notes. Compare notes with fellow students.
- Watch for clues from your instructor, both about what will be on the test and what types of questions.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before a big exam, and eat a good breakfast (not too much, though; if you have test anxiety, food may trigger nausea). Stay away from junk food and sugar.
- Show up early on test day. Listen for any tips, instruction, or insight from your instructor.
- Review the material with a group from your class.
- Prepare an outline of main topics and **concepts**, then study from it.
- Use/study visual aids and charts, especially if you're a visual learner.
- Stay hydrated and use the bathroom before taking the test.
- Listen or read attentively any instructions given before the test starts. Read the test directions carefully.
- Do a 'memory dump' as soon as the test starts. In other words, write down key ideas or formulas you think you might forget during the test, if it's okay to do so.
- Plan your time. Go through and answer easy questions, then circle back around to questions you don't know as well. Allow enough time per section to finish, and don't get bogged down. Pace yourself. If some questions are weighted more heavily, ensure you answer them!
- Plan to finish early and go back and review. Ensure you didn't skip any questions.
- Trust your instincts. Usually, your first **instinct** (answer) is correct.

The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.

- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.
(H. Jackson Brown, n.d.)

B2. Strategies for Improving Test Performance

These are not new. Most have been or will be covered in this strand.

- Take good notes. Use a system like Cornell Notes (*Study Skills section A5*).
- Prepare for class. Complete homework and reading assignments.
- Organize your binder with a section for each class and keep your notes in order.
- Review your notes before the next class and throughout the semester or during the gap between major tests.
- Ask questions in class or after class if you don't understand what was taught.
- Use a reading comprehension **strategy** (*Study Skills section A4*) when you do assigned reading

- ✓ Take good notes
- ✓ Prepare
- ✓ Organize
- ✓ Review
- ✓ Ask Questions
- ✓ Use Comprehension Strategy
- ✓ Actively Listen
- ✓ Manage Time
- ✓ Review & Plan A Week Ahead
- ✓ Practice With Test Taking Method
- ✓ Use Test Prep Tips

- Actively pay attention and listen in class. Nearly 50% of what a student learns in class is forgotten within the first 20 minutes and over 60% is forgotten after one day. A good reason why you need to take good notes!
- Manage your time. Use a semester, monthly, and daily schedule, and **prioritize** your time to make the most out of it. (*Study Skills section A7*)
- Start reviewing a week before a test and plan out how you'll study for each test.
- Study and practice using methods similar to the test you will be taking.
- Use the test preparation and test taking tips listed in B1.

B3. Short Answer Essay Tests

Many teachers use short answer essay questions, especially the higher you go in high school and college. This type of question allows you to show whether you understand the concept being discussed, and whether you can explain it. If you aren't good at writing, practicing writing out answers **MUST** be a part of your test preparation. You need to be able to briefly explain the answer to the question in a logical and understandable way.

When you study for a short answer essay test, concentrate on understanding. It's not enough to just memorize lists of major points—you need to be able to explain them in a sentence or two. It helps to focus on sub-topics and concepts, which are usually clear through the lecture. It's still important to memorize facts and information, but you need to be able to explain them.

Write practice questions and have someone review your answers. Use **flashcards** that cover information within a concept, including definitions (*Study Skills section A6*).

In a short answer essay test, it's okay to make an educated guess in answer to a question you're not sure you know the answer. Some teachers give partial credit, and that can add up!

B4. Taking Essay Tests

Full on essay tests are rare in middle school and high school, except perhaps in English or writing classes, or in Advanced Placement exams. But they're more common in college, and it's good to be ready to be successful at them. Essay exams give you the opportunity to craft your response and concentrate on the parts of the topic you know well.



Essay exams are just like writing any essay. You need to follow a general format that includes Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. The Introduction is where you identify the purpose or focus to your reader and you state your **thesis** (a.k.a., theory, idea, notion, hypothesis). The Body is where you state and explain your main points. The Conclusion is where you restate your purpose and briefly summarize the points that support it. See the graphic in Figure 1 below.

Outline your topic before you start so your essay makes sense to read. Develop two or three main points and explain them well in your body. Provide as many details and specific examples as you can. Try to

keep your writing clear and to the point, and don't go off on **tangents**. Keep your outline in mind – cover your points and get out! Summarize in your conclusion by restating your main point and briefly (without repeating yourself) how your sub-points support your main point.

If you're in a class that will require essay exams, you'll probably be writing essays throughout the class. Use the results of each essay to improve your writing skills. Take the instructor's constructive feedback to heart and ask for clarification if you don't understand any criticism you may receive. Learn to outline your answer before you write anything, and always follow the format of Intro – Body – Conclusion.

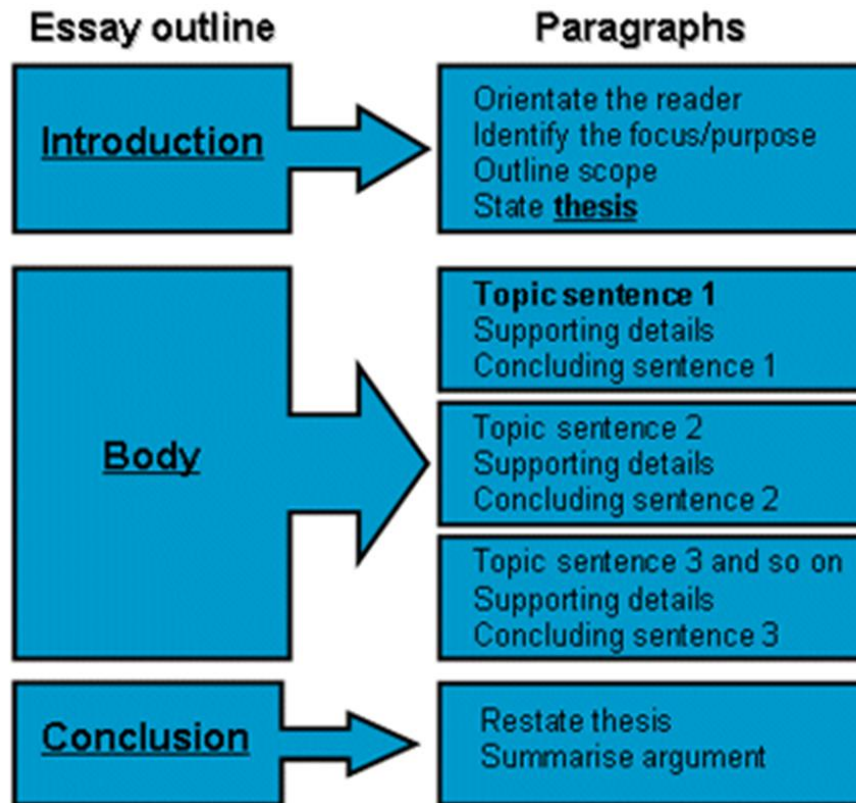


Figure 1: Essay Structure (Note: "summarise" is the British spelling of "summarize")

B5. Multiple Choice Test Taking Tips

Multiple choice exams, or multiple choice questions within an exam, are very popular, and you'll see a lot of them during your time as a student. Understanding how they're written can help you successfully **navigate** through them, sometimes when you're not all that clear about the subject. Use the following tips to improve your test-taking skills on multiple choice tests (See Figure 2 for a quick reference list):

- Pay attention to the question! Read the entire question before looking at the answers. Your best bet is to read the question and answer it in your head, then see if that is one of the choices. Don't skip over the question thinking you know what's being asked.
- Read every answer before making a decision, even if you see an answer you think is correct.

- Eliminate answers that you're sure are incorrect before settling on the correct answer. Quickly tell yourself why each answer is not correct. This will help ensure your answer is the correct choice.
- Once you eliminate the answers you're 100% sure are incorrect, focus on the remaining answers.
- Select the best answer. Sometimes other answers seem correct, or might be correct in certain situations, but one answer is the correct one. In class, the instructor may have **emphasized** a certain aspect of the topic – that may help you find the best answer.
- Answer the questions you know first. If you're not sure, mark it and come back to it once you've answered all the easy questions. You'll kick yourself if you take too long and don't get to the end of all the questions when some of the ones you didn't answer turn out to be easy ones you knew!
- If it doesn't count against you, make an **educated guess** in the end. Don't leave a question unanswered.
- Pay attention when the question or answers contain these words:
 - Not (changes the meaning of the sentence)
 - Sometimes (makes the occurrence possible)
 - Always (an absolute)
 - Never (another absolute)
 - All of the Above (often a right answer, but you have to be sure all answers are right!)
 - None of the Above (often a right answer, but you have to be sure there isn't a correct choice)
- It's usually best to stick with your first choice, but not always. Answer options often contain the most common wrong answer, which can get tricky.
- If two answers are correct, and All of the Above is an option, it's probably the right choice
- If there's a choice between a positive option and a negative option, and you're not sure, it's more likely to be the positive.
- If you're guessing, and one answer contains more information than the other options, it's a good choice to pick.

Figure 2: Multiple Choice Quick Tips

Multiple Choice Quick Tips

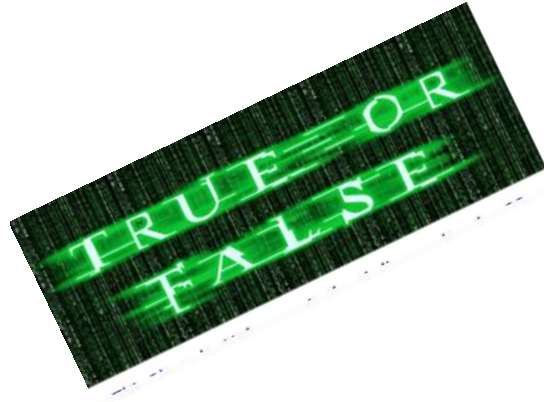
- ✓ Read entire question before looking at answers
- ✓ Read every answer before making a choice
- ✓ Eliminate answers you're sure are incorrect
- ✓ Once incorrect ones eliminated, focus on remaining answers
- ✓ Select the best answer
- ✓ First answer questions you know, then go back to other questions
- ✓ If possible, make an **educated guess**
- ✓ Don't leave unanswered questions
- ✓ Pay attention to these words:
 - Not
 - Sometimes
 - Always
 - Never
 - All of the Above
 - None of the Above
- ✓ Usually best to stick with first choice, but not always
- ✓ If two answers correct, "All of the Above" is probably right choice
- ✓ If choice between positive & negative options, likely to be the positive
- ✓ If guessing, pick answer that contains the most info

B6. True/False Tests

It's always best to take True-False tests and multiple choice tests when you know the material well. But you can improve your performance on these tests if you understand how they're put together, and follow these tips:

- Look at each statement as if it were true, then determine if any part of the statement is false. Just one false aspect of the statement will make the entire statement false. For a statement to be true, all parts of it must be true.
- Negative statements can be confusing. If a T/F sentence contains a negative, drop the negative word then read what remains. Figure out if the sentence is true or false without the negative. If the sentence without the negative is true, then the correct answer would be False.
- Watch out for double negatives. For example, "It is unlikely the battalion will not win the drill competition" is the same as "It is likely the battalion will win the drill competition."
- The following **qualifiers** or key words are important in selecting the right answer. Carefully consider how these words affect the given statement:
 - Always
 - Never

- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Seldom
- Often
- Generally
- Ordinarily
- All
- Few
- Many
- Entirely
- Completely
- Best
- Worst
- None



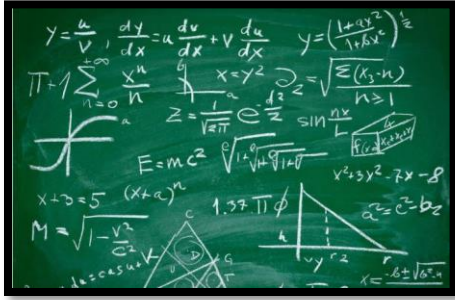
- Always or Never more frequently reflect a false statement or answer. Less absolute qualifiers like sometimes, frequently, etc. more often reflect a true statement or answer.
- Be extra careful with long sentences—go through each phrase and make sure it says what you think it says. If one phrase in the sentence is false, the answer is False. Long sentences are more likely to be false.
- If you're completely unsure of the answer, it's more likely True than False
- Statements that include a reason (identify these by the use of 'because', 'reason', 'since', etc.) are more likely to be false.
- Plan your time. Go through the whole test and answer the questions you know, then go back and tackle the ones you're not sure about.

B7. Math Test Taking and Preparation Strategies

Math tests can be challenging unless you're a math whiz! But like with other tests, there are things that you can do that will make you better at taking them and will help you succeed.

Practice, practice, practice! This is true with most material, but even more so with math. Make sure you understand the concept, then practice doing the type of problems that will be on the test. Go back through the problems in your book, notes, and homework. If you're getting them wrong, go back to the concept/theory, and get help—maybe you don't quite understand what you're supposed to do after all.

Some math tests will require you to provide a logical explanation about how you arrived at your answer. Since this can be a very challenging thing to do, it will be critical for you to focus on understanding the principles and the step-by-step procedures needed to work through an equation and to be able to explain the process. A good thing to do as part of your study and preparation time is to practice writing out the explanation of your processes.



Math is **cumulative**, so you have to keep on top of it. If you don't understand a concept, you can't just move on to the next concept or **theory**. You need to get help and master each one as you go. Mathematical processes often build upon each other, and you won't understand the next one either if you don't get the current one.

Keep a list of all the formulas you learn on one piece of paper and memorize them. When you're taking a test that includes certain formulas, as soon as you receive the test, it's good to

write the formulas down from memory on the side of your paper or on your worksheet so you won't forget them during the test.

Study in groups and use the cumulative knowledge of all the students to make sure you have a good grasp of the concepts you're studying. Share and work through problems together to make sure you're doing the work right. Go back through homework problems without looking at the solutions to practice as much as you can.



Read the test and question instructions carefully and pay attention to detail. Show your work, even if you don't think you're getting the right answer. Sometimes you'll get partial credit for the work even if you didn't get the right result.

B8. Open Book Tests

Sometimes you'll have instructors who give open book tests. This is great, right?! You have the answers right in front of you! But often open book tests require much more than closed book tests, since you have access to the information. Open book tests usually have a time limit that makes it impossible to look up every answer. They require careful preparation and knowledge of where the information you may need can be found so you can quickly verify details.



The nature of the resources that cover the material will affect your preparation. If everything is contained in a textbook or resource book, you may be able to adequately **tab** the text so that you can quickly find details. But many times, in open book tests you'll have to give the answer mostly from memory and rely on your understanding of the material. Save your time for the questions you know the least; when you know the answer, be confident in yourself and go with it!

In addition to tabbing text in your resources, you'll benefit from organizing your notes so you can easily find things and putting together an outline of the material that includes where to find specifics if needed. You should also include key formulas or **precepts** on your note page—anything that helps you zero in on the information you need to answer the question on the test. If you are spending minutes during the test searching for that critical piece of information, you've failed in your preparation.

Like all other tests, you need to manage your time. When you receive the test, review it so you know what it consists of before you start answering questions. Depending on the type of test (multiple choice, short answer essay, etc.), use the same **techniques** we've already discussed: answer the easy questions first, then go back to the ones you don't know as well. Keep an eye on the clock and where you are on the test, and don't allow yourself to get bogged down. Determine by the number of questions about how much time you have per question and try to progress quickly enough through the questions—without getting lost looking for that one piece of important information—so you'll be able to fully complete the test.

Even if your time to answer is limited, if the test is an essay, don't **plagiarize** passages directly from your resource material. Use your own understanding of the ideas and concepts you're writing about to convey the answer to the question. When you get stressed, sometimes it's hard to think on your own, but force yourself back into outline mode, and answer the question yourself.

B9. Oral Test Taking, Boards, and Interviews

Do you have oral exams in your classes? Possibly not, but you do in the Cadet Corps! Even Performance Task Assessments (PTA) are an informal type of oral exam, but once you become a Cadet Staff Sergeant, you'll also undergo Promotion Boards, and that seems like an oral exam to me! The skills you develop in this process will stand you in good stead when you apply for jobs later in life or participate in other kinds of interviews where you may have to defend your work, explain concepts, and show off your presentation, speaking, and **interpersonal communication** skills.



Whether it's a more informal process, or a formal test or board, oral exams are a mix of checking to see if you know the material and how well you present yourself to the board/examiners. To prepare for an oral exam, you need to practice your presentation and speaking skills along with your mastery of the required subjects. This preparation is the key to your success.



The better mastery you have of the material and the self-confidence that you DO know it, the better you'll perform. It can be scary to present yourself for an oral exam or board or interview, but your knowledge and self-confidence will carry the day if you've properly prepared.

Go through during your preparation and verbally answer all the questions you think the examiner might ask. Research possible questions you may be asked, then practice answering them. If you don't like how you phrased something, work out how you'd like to say it, then practice that over and over. Get your friends or more senior ranking Cadets to quiz you on questions that might be asked and go over your answers until you're satisfied. Can you bring anything into the exam that will help you? That may depend on whether it's an exam or board or interview. If you have something that will impress the board, then present it!

Here are some more tips for boards and oral exams:

- Make sure you're on time! Never be late for a board, interview, or exam if you want to succeed.
- Work on your first impression. For a Cadet, that's entry into the room and properly following the reporting procedure. Practice your customs and courtesies—call the board members Sir, Ma'am, or Sergeant, and do it throughout the WHOLE board, not just at the beginning.
- If you're in uniform, make sure it's correct and sharp (Figure 3). Have someone familiar with the proper wearing of the uniform look you over before you enter the board.
- Bring a notepad to jot notes. When asked questions, make sure you remember what the question was, especially if it has multiple parts (that's the time to jot notes that will keep you on track).
- Listen carefully to anything the examiner or board members say and respond appropriately. If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- Cadet Promotion Boards are outlined in Cadet Regulation 1-5.
https://cacadets.org/sites/default/files/Regulations/CR_1-5_Cadet_Appointments_Promotions_as%20of%201FEB17%5B5378%5D.pdf Don't go into a board without reviewing what is supposed to be covered. Be fully prepared with that information.
- Pay attention to body language and posture. If offered the opportunity to sit, do so formally, keeping your posture upright—don't slouch back in the chair.



Figure 3: Correctly Worn Uniform



If standing and told to be At Ease, don't move around. Stay in the At Ease position as you answer questions. Don't cross your hands over your chest or put your hands in your pockets or on your hips.



- In an interview or board, you are likely to be asked if there is anything you'd like to ask the board or anything to add to the discussion you've had. Think about this ahead of time and prepare a brief statement about why you feel you've earned the promotion or how your receiving a position could benefit the battalion, etc. Don't repeat ideas you've already **conveyed** during the board but do take the opportunity to add to the impression you've made. Thank the interviewer, examiner, or board for taking the time to interview you.
- When you're done, assess how you think you did, and write down some notes as a review. Next time you're called for an oral exam, board, or interview, review those notes as part of your preparation process. If they're open to giving you feedback, ask your instructor or the board members how you might do better in your next board.

References

H. Jackson Brown, J. (n.d.). *Preparation Quotes*. Retrieved from BrainyQuote:

https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/h_jackson_brown_jr_382774?src=t_preparation