GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING FOR YOUR BOARDS

Many learners score fewer points on tests than their knowledge warrants because they lack a sophisticated approach to taking tests. Test-wiseness is the ability to use characteristics of tests to reach the full potential of one's knowledge and aptitude. These guidelines do not prepare you for the content aspects of your board exams--your program director can provide resources to help you with that. Instead, it assumes that you have mastered, or are in the process of mastering, the knowledge of your discipline, and may want some assistance in preparing for the actual test.

There is sound research to show that if you learn to take tests skillfully, keep your morale high and keep your anxiety low—you will significantly increase your test score.

MANAGING YOUR TIME

Basic principles of time management apply to some extent to all situations of preparing to take a test, and thus may help you during the period in which you are studying for your board exam.

Using Time Wisely

- Identify your best time for studying: Everyone has high and low periods of attention and concentration. Use your power times to study; use the down times for other tasks.

- Study periods are most efficient if they are intense and no longer than two hours. Maximum learning tends to occur in the first hour or two, and then diminishes with continued studying.

- Use distributed learning and practice: Study in shorter time blocks with short breaks between. This keeps you from getting fatigued and wasting time. This type of studying is efficient because while you are taking a break, the brain is still processing the information.

- Have a "to do" list. Write down things you have to do, then decide what to do at the moment and what to schedule for later.

Organizing Your Environment

- Study difficult subjects first: When you are fresh, you can process information more quickly and save time as a result.

- Make sure the surroundings are conducive to studying. This will allow you to reduce distractions that can waste time. If there are times when you know there will be noise and commotion, use that time for mindless tasks.

- Briefly map out the important ideas of the material and the relationships of these ideas. Summary notes should display lists and hierarchies of ideas.

- Record your notes and significant portions of text on audio tapes so you can review while walking, driving, or relaxing in a nonacademic environment

MANAGING ANXIETY

Peak performance involves learning how to control your thinking and learning how to stay reasonably relaxed. This section provides suggestions on how to do so.

Before the Test

Your anxiety level is likely to peak as the test date draws near. Use the following to help you relax.

- Do not study at all that morning. Your ability to answer questions correctly will be greater with a good rest because your analytical ability will be high and not overridden by specific recall which are acquired studying on the morning of a test.

- Your attitude, both before and during a test, can affect your scores. A negative attitude will foster procrastination before a test and will interfere with your performance during a test. A positive attitude will facilitate your preparatory efforts and enhance your performance during a test.

During the Test

- Throughout the test, it is important that you talk to yourself in a positive tone. For example, saying, "Good, I got most items correct on this page," at the bottom of each page will help maintain your morale. Do not prompt yourself with negative sentences such as "Don't feel anxious," but rather with "I can feel relaxed now"—a positive sentence.

- Breathe slowly and focus on your breathing for one to two minutes. Breath from your stomach area.

- First, answer all the questions you know that you know. Answering questions you are sure of first increases your confidence in answering questions you are unsure of later.

TAKING TESTS

Before the Test

- Overview all the work to be done and schedule time to do it.

  On the basis of your familiarity with the test, make a list of all the tasks you must complete to prepare for it. Given what topics you expect to be most important on the test, set priorities among your study tasks and plan to do the most important ones first

- Review actively.

  Integrate notes, text, and supplementary information onto summary sheets by diagramming, charting, outlining, categorizing in tables, or simply writing paragraph summaries of the information. Try to create a summary sheet for each study session, or for each main idea, or for each concept. The more of yourself you put into these sheets, the better you will remember the information.

- As you read, constantly ask yourself questions about what you are reading—read actively. This method of reading and reviewing that promotes high retention and recall of specific information.

At the Test

- Be prepared emotionally and physically as well as intellectually.

- Get into a "fighting" attitude, emotionally ready to do your best. Stay away from others right before the test. Anxiety is highly contagious. Focus on what you know rather than on what you do not know.

- Arrive at the test room early enough to arrange your working conditions, establishing a calm and alert mode. Select a seat where the lighting is the best (frequently in the front of the room) and where your view of other students will be minimized.

- When you receive your test, use the back to jot down all the information you are worried you might forget. Remember first to ask whether you can write on the test form itself.

- Preview the whole test before beginning to answer any questions. Make sure your copy has no missing or duplicate pages. Read the directions carefully.

- Plan your time, saving ten percent of the total time to review at the end.

Types Of Test Questions

Multiple-choice questions and true-false question have at least one thing in common - the correct answer is provided. Your problem as a test taker is to identify it.

There are three categories of these types of questions:

1. The ones you know. For these, read the question carefully, answer it and do not go back to it.

2. The ones you may know if you think about them or you know part of the answer. For these, eliminate the answers that you know are wrong and either mark your best choice and put down a mark to tell yourself to return to the question later.

3. The ones that you leave blank—that you do not know at all. For this type, put down an answer according to the clues below:

Decide what the key concepts are. Circle all the key concepts in the question, such as: symptoms, lab tests, whether the question is a negative form. See if the answer you choose fits in with the key point of the question.

Use the following clues to the wrong answers:
a. An answer that "does not fit" with the other answers.
b. A wordy answer that is unclear or does not read well.

c. An answer with the words "always" or "never."
d. An answer that is ungrammatical with the question.

Use information obtained from other questions and answers to assist you with the ones that are giving you trouble.

Finally, if you cannot answer a question, guess the answer because in the long run your chances of gaining points are greater than your chances of losing points.

Multiple Choice

Multiple choice may assess the following goals of learning: knowledge of terminology or specific facts, knowledge and application of methods and procedures, ability to apply facts and principles in a given situation, and ability to interpret cause and effect relationship.

Most multiple-choice questions are of the incomplete-statement type. A partial statement (called the stem) leads grammatically into four or five sentence endings, or options, listed directly under it. One of the options is the correct answer. The other (incorrect) options are called distractors or decoys.

Example: (stem) The almost perfect walls of granite boulders surrounding some lakes in Iowa were formed by

decoy	a. American Indians
decoy	b. prehistoric men
decoy	c. huge meteors
answer	d. thick ice

This incomplete-statement question exhibits good construction in the following ways:

- all options are grammatically consistent.
- the stem is long, and the options are short.
- extraneous material is excluded from the stem.
- the stem contains one central problem.
- double negatives are not used.
- all options are plausible.
- the correct answer is no longer or shorter than the others.
- only one option is the correct or best answer.

There is a strategy for approaching multiple choice questions, based on how they are constructed. First, read the stem of the question (the question itself as opposed to its options) all the way through, then read each possible answer all the way through. One of the possible answers might provide you with a hint as to what the question is about. There might be information in the options themselves.

Cross out answers that you know are wrong.

Use the following tips in deciding among the remaining responses, if you are not sure which is correct.

1. Watch for 100 percent words (those that do not allow for exceptions, like never, no, none, best, worst, always, all, every), and be wary of choosing an option that contains these words.

2. Circle negative and extreme words (such as not or except) in the question stem or options. Be sure to take them into consideration when you choose your answer.
3. If the responses are or contain numbers, eliminate the high and low numbers, focusing in the middle range numbers.
4. Check for similar sounding or appearing options, to find the most inclusive option--that which contains the most information.
5. Check for look-alike options. Test makers sometimes include two options that are alike except for one word. Such a pair seems to indicate where the test maker's interest was focused, so it is logical to assume that one of the pair is the correct answer.

   Example: The author considers himself an authority on

   a. touring the Middle East
   b. Middle East rug dealers
   c. Middle East rug bargains
   d. behavior patterns of tourist.

   Since B and C seem to be the focus, you would therefore choose one of them.
6. Longer answers (e.g. alternatives that are described in more specific terms than the others) tend to be correct slightly more than chance.
7. Note that "All of the above" answers are often correct. If you know two of three of options are correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility.
8. Finally, since your first choice is usually correct, don't change your answers unless you are sure of the correction. If you want to come back to a question to think about it, mark it the first time through the test; otherwise, leave a finished question alone.

True-False

1. Many concentrated hours of study to force facts into your memory is the best way to prepare true-false questions.

2. When you do not know or can't remember information to determine the truth of a statement, assume that it is true. There are generally more true questions on true-false exams than false questions. If there is specific detail in the statement, it may also tend to be true. For example, the statement "There are 980 endangered species worldwide" has specific detail and is likely to be true.

3. Carefully read each question, looking for any factor that will make it false. Students often read the question and see some truth and assume that the entire statement is true.

4. Look for extreme modifiers that tend to make the question false. Extreme modifiers (such as those listed below) make it more likely that the question is false:

all	none	best	absolutely
always	never	worst	absolutely not
only	nobody	everybody	certainly
invariably	no one	everyone	certainly not

5. Identify qualifiers that tend to make the question true. Qualifiers (listed below) make the question more likely true:

usually	frequently	often	sometimes
some	seldom	many	much
probably	a majority	apt to	most
might	a few	may	unlikely

6. Watch out for negative words and how they may affect the truth. Statements containing negative words may be true or false but you must see them to make that determination. The prefixes (un-, im-, miss-) will alter the meaning of the statement. Double negatives make the statement true. For example "not uncommon" actually means common. Don't let this language dilemma cause you to make a mistake.

7. Questions that state a reason tend to be false. Words in the statement that cause justification or reason (since, because, when, if) tend to make the statement false because they bring in a reason that is incorrect or incomplete.