TEST-TAKING TECHNIQUES

A few days before the test or exam:

- At least a few days before the exam, make sure you do the following:
  - Plan out how much time you should spend on each section of the test.
  - By looking at past papers, get a feel for the types of instructions that will be on your paper.
  - Do some exercise so you can burn off the pent-up stress that can come before exams.
  - Look after your body – lots of water to juice up your brain, healthy food, decent sleep.
  - To calm nerves, make mental pictures of yourself sitting down and doing well in the test.
  - Purchase any equipment you may need, extra calculator batteries, pens, rulers etc.
  - Ensure you know what equipment is allowed in the test or exam.
  - Focus on reviewing the key points, perhaps a condensed version of your summaries.
  - Practise as many past test papers as you can get your hands on.
  - Check the timetable to ensure you have a clear picture of when each exam is being held.

The night before the test or exam:

- Pack your bag with everything you will need for the next day, ensuring you have all necessary equipment.
- Plan what time you need to leave to ensure you have plenty of time for unexpected delays.
- Don’t go to bed too late – you need to make sure your brain is fresh and alert.
- Don’t ring friends and discuss your preparation or the examination.
- Just before you go to sleep, look through your notes briefly.
- If you have a number of exams, check the timetable to doubly confirm the date, time and location of the exam.

The morning of the test or exam:

- Visualise success.
- Review your notes.
- Eat breakfast.
- Be on time.
- Avoid negativity.

At the start of the test or exam:

- Read the instructions carefully.
- Look through the whole paper.
- Quickly jot down anything you are worried you might forget.

During the test or exam:

- Have a plan of attack as to which questions you will do first.
- Take note of how many marks each question is worth.
- Read the questions carefully before answering.
- Brainstorm ideas before writing essays.
- Cross mistakes out neatly instead of scribbling or using liquid paper.
- If you have a mental blank leave the question and come back to it later.
- Set your work out clearly, write as neatly as possible and do nice large diagrams.
- Show all working and space your work out.
- When you finish go back and check all of your answers – don’t leave anything out.

Making a time plan before you are in the exam:

Once you are clear on the format of the examination and the marks awarded for each section of the paper, divide the number of minutes you have for the exam by the total possible marks. Now multiply this number by the marks in each section to work out approximately how long you should spend on each section. You may want to reduce each of these times slightly in order to ensure you have time at the end of the examination for checking.
Managing your time during the exam:
- Take your watch off and prop it up on your desk in front of you to help you stick to your plan.
- Take a few minutes to quickly look through the whole paper before you start.
- If you feel yourself getting bogged down, leave that question, put a mark next to it and return later.
- If you have struggled to complete an examination in the time required in the past, assess how well you knew the material. One of the best strategies for managing your time begins well before the examination commences – making sure you know the material really well.

Multiple choice questions:
- Read the instructions carefully to find out if there can be more than one answer.
- Do all the questions you are sure of first as quickly as possible.
- First instinct is usually right, but only if you read the question properly.
- Another good approach is to cover the alternatives and read the question carefully (underline key phrases) and try and work out the answer first.
- Watch out for the ‘common mistake’ alternative.
- Watch out for the trick ‘I’ve seen this before’ question.
- Read for understanding and not just recognition.
- Look for the best answer not just a correct one.
- Look for words like all, every, none, not, many, always, sometimes, never, least, most.
- If it is marked by computer, fill in the spaces completely and completely erase any errors. Otherwise, the computer will mark your answer to that question as incorrect.
- If you run out of time, guess! (Provided that you will not be penalised for guessing.)

Planning essays in exams:
- Read the question through carefully before starting, underline key words.
- Examine the key words and think clearly about what the question really means.
- Brainstorm your thoughts and ideas before you start.
- Then take your ideas and create a plan or outline for your answer.
- Write your essay: introduction, body, conclusion.
- Review your essay asking yourself if you have answered the question.

To deal with exam nerves:
- Use visualization regularly picturing everything going smoothly in the exam.
- Simulate exam conditions as much as possible at home when studying.
- Avoid standing around in a group discussing what people have and haven’t done.
- Instead find a quiet space and review your notes quietly one last time before you go into the examination.
- Keep yourself calm by:
  - sipping water
  - breathing deeply to bring the oxygen into your lungs
  - reminding yourself of all the things you DO know
  - thinking positive thoughts about your own abilities

So what could you do to improve your test-taking techniques?