

The Anatomy of an Exam

1. Parts of an Exam

While the exact structure of an exam can vary depending on the subject and instructor, most exams include some or all of the following components:

- **Instructions** – Provide crucial information about time limits, permitted materials, and specific guidelines.
 - **Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)** – Often test recall, understanding, and the ability to distinguish between similar concepts.
 - **Fill-in-the-Blank** – Require exact recall of terms, formulas, dates, or definitions.
 - **Short Answer Questions** – Call for brief but complete responses demonstrating comprehension.
 - **Essay Questions** – Assess critical thinking, organization, synthesis of ideas, and depth of understanding.
 - **Matching Sections** – Evaluate your ability to connect related concepts.
 - **Problem-Solving Tasks** – Common in STEM subjects, these test your application of knowledge to real-world scenarios.
 - **Practical or Performance-Based Tasks** – Used in skills-based subjects like art, music, or lab sciences.
 - **Review Section** – Time at the end to revisit and refine your answers.
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2. Approaching Various Sections

Multiple Choice

- Read all instructions carefully before answering.
- Read the question stem fully before looking at the answer choices.
- Eliminate obviously incorrect options to increase your odds.
- Watch for qualifiers like *most likely*, *best*, or *primary reason*.
- Avoid changing answers unless you have a clear reason.

Fill-in-the-Blank

- Use context clues from the surrounding sentence.
- Recall specific terminology from your study materials.
- Double-check spelling if it matters.
- Keep answers concise.

Short Answer

- Answer in complete sentences unless otherwise instructed.
- Include key terms to show your understanding.

- Stick to the point and avoid unnecessary detail.

Essay Questions

- Read all essay options and pick the one you feel most confident about.
- Spend a few minutes creating an outline before writing.
- Start with a clear thesis statement.
- Use evidence and examples to support arguments.
- Organize into paragraphs with logical flow.
- Leave time to proofread.

Matching

- Start with the terms or definitions you are most confident about.
- Use process of elimination for tougher matches.

Problem-Solving

- Read the problem entirely before starting.
- Identify what is being asked and what data is provided.
- Show all work for partial credit.
- Check calculations and units.

Practical/Performance Tasks

- Review requirements before starting.
- Manage your time efficiently.
- Make your process as clear as your final result.

3. Tips for Success

Before the Exam

- Get enough rest the night before.
- Eat a balanced meal beforehand.
- Arrive early and bring all allowed materials (pens, pencils, calculator, ID).

During the Exam

- Skim through the entire test to see the types of questions and their point values.
- Allocate time according to point value.
- Start with easier questions to build momentum.
- Stay calm; if stuck, move on and come back later.
- Keep track of time and pace yourself.

- Use scrap paper to organize thoughts and calculations.

Before Submitting

- Review for unanswered questions.
- Check calculations.
- Make sure your handwriting and answers are legible.
- Unless there's a penalty for wrong answers, guess instead of leaving blanks.