Test Taking Strategies for BIOL 2 and 4

and Other Important Information About Exams

General advice

- Recognize that test taking strategies are helpful, but nothing can replace studying.
- Exams will cover information in proportion to how it was covered in class. If we spent a whole lecture on a topic, expect to see several questions on that topic. If something was briefly mentioned, you might see a question or two. Pay attention during lectures, you'll hear me give clues about where you should focus.
- Show up well-rested (study consistently from the first day of class, not the night before the exam).
- Wear comfortable clothing appropriate to the weather, layers are advisable in our classrooms.
- Develop coping strategies to reduce your anxiety. Leave a bit early so you'll be sure to be on time. Take a quick walk to clear your head. Focus on your breathing. Have a snack and sip some water before the exam. Remind yourself that you've worked hard and will do your best.
- When you arrive to the classroom, avoid looking at your notes. It's what you've studied from the first day of class that will make the difference, not the five minutes before the exam.
- Do not expect to be able to leave the room during an exam. Use the restroom ahead of time.
- Be prepared with all needed materials – pencils, eraser, scantron, etc.
- Turn off/silence and put away your phone and other electronic devices during exams.
- If you have habits that can be distracting for other students, do your best to avoid them. For example, things like loud gum chewing or shifting around in your seat are distracting.
- There will likely be verbal instructions as the exam begins – listening is more beneficial than trying to get a "head start."
- Read the questions carefully. You will save time by making sure you understand the question.
- Pay attention to how many points each question is worth. This will help you decide how much time to spend on it.
- When there are bonus questions, take advantage of that.
- Don't leave blanks. Try, even if you aren't sure. A wrong answer may still earn some points for the effort.
- Don't be tempted to cheat. If you do the work, you'll be fine. The world will not end based on one exam score. But, cheating could result in penalties to your grade, or an inability to get a good letter of recommendation in the future.

Multiple Choice exams

- Feel free to write on the exam packet to help you think through the questions.
- You are allowed to come to the front desk to ask questions, and sometimes I may be able to clarify or rephrase a question. I cannot tell you the meaning of any technical terms during the exam.
- Start by answering each part (a, b, etc.) as though it were a True/False question. There may be only one correct answer, or a combination of answers that is noted as one of the multiple choice options. For example, option "d" may be "both a and b" or "all of the above." You can only mark ONE answer on the scantron form. Make sure you mark the scantron properly.
- If the combination of answers you think are correct is not available, read the question again and adjust your answers as needed.
- Don't worry about how many "Bs" or "Ds" have been answers. I don't think about this when I write the exam.
- Take each question at face value. Each question is meant to cover particular information, not necessarily everything about a topic. If what is stated is true, then the answer is correct, regardless of

other pieces of information that may also be true, but are not mentioned. For example, if one answer is “cells synthesize many needed molecules,” that is still true, even though cells also do lots of other things.

- If you are struggling, skip the question and come back to it. Sometimes reading the other questions will remind you of the information you need.
- Typically there will be a few matching questions. Each answer is used only once.
- For True/False, mark “A” for true and “B” for false.
- There’s no such thing as a “trick” question in my class. There might be answers you aren’t sure about, and that’s okay.
- Multiple choice exams test not only your knowledge of the material, but your confidence in your knowledge. Trusting yourself will lead to the best possible outcome. Generally, stick with your first answer. Only change an answer if you have a clear, compelling reason.
- Watch for subtleties in the language used. Generally/usually/typically/mostly mean roughly the same thing. But they are different in meaning from sometimes/may be/occasionally.
- If a multiple choice option is something you’ve never heard of before, it’s likely a wrong answer.
- All multiple choice exams will have bonus questions that are “free write.” You are not confined to a particular structure for the answer, but be advised that complete sentences/paragraphs are likely NOT the best way to answer. Bullet points, tables, and flow charts are useful and clear. Make sure you address only what the question asks for. For physiology in particular, you will have questions that give you symptoms and ask you to state the problem and how the body will respond. Do not assume symptoms or other information that is not explicitly mentioned.

Anatomy Lab Practicals

- Pay close attention to what your instructor says at the beginning of the exam. This is the information you need to understand how the exam works and what is expected of you.
- While it is often acceptable to ask questions during a practical exam, it’s not the best use of your time. Only ask if it’s absolutely necessary. A label will be on the structure you are intended to name. Very small structures may have a label with an arrow pointing to the structure.
- Microscopes generally have a tissue or other structure centered in the field. If the pointer must be used, it will be noted at the lab station.
- Do not try to do a “knowledge dump.” Anatomy practicals are meant to have a single word or short phrase as an answer. If you can think of multiple correct answers, choose the one you are most confident in.

Physiology Lab Practicals

- Pay close attention to what your instructor says at the beginning of the exam. This is the information you need to understand how the exam works and what is expected of you.
- Microscopes generally have a tissue or other structure centered in the field. If the pointer must be used, it will be noted at the lab station.
- You’ll have a given amount of space to answer each question. Answers will range from a single word, to a short phrase, to a paragraph. Answer clearly and concisely – always THINK before you begin writing.
- Only address what the question asks for. There is usually not a need to write in complete sentences. For example, if the question asks you to name a location for a tissue, simply name the location. Do not write “the location of the tissue is…”
- An exception to the above point – if the question asks you to “explain” your answer, that is likely best done in complete sentences for clarity.