

Tips on Taking Tests

Taking tests in this course is quite easy, as they are all take-homes. That does not mean, however, that you don't have to study or that you don't have to take the testing process seriously. The test questions are very serious, and most are intended to involve you in the thought processes that you will be facing when you leave Cleveland State.

In theory, the justification for testing should be for you to demonstrate what you *know*. But what does this mean? There was a time when *knowing* something could be measured in terms of how much you stored in your head – facts, principles, relationships, algorithms, stuff like that. But in these Days of Google and Wikipedia, the stuff you store in your head is much less important than how well you can *use* the stuff you have at hand, whether it's in your head or at your fingertips. *Knowing*, therefore, means your ability to *use* information, and testing – if it is to have a meaningful role in any course – should concentrate on your ability to synthesize materials from various parts of a course to reach a valid conclusion. That is, if you are presented with a scenario, how would you deal with the problem it presents? If you are presented with a process, can you describe it well enough to suggest that you actually know what is going on.

In order to do this, you need to develop a meaningful perspective on the materials of the course, and to demonstrate that you have a thorough understanding of the material. The key, of course, is ultimately understanding. Most of you do not need to memorize terms. What *is* important to *all* of you is to be able to address and deal with problems *scientifically* and to understand how the processes that affect the earth affect your lives. You need to be able to deal with meaningful situations in a rational and logical way.

This means several things. I will generally set forth a scenario in a test question for you to evaluate. You will evaluate the scenario and assess both its significance and the aspects of the problem it presents that are amenable to some sort of control. You may be asked to come up with a recommendation for an action or a policy. ***But remember that this is a science course, not a policy or engineering course. Your recommended policy or action is much less important than the scientific rationale or justification you make for it.***

You will find that the questions I ask will very likely have no “right” answer (or many possible right answers). They will, however, have a large number of “wrong” answers. In order to assist you in avoiding the latter, here are some do's and don't's:

DO

- Every question is related to one or more parts of the course. Be *sure* that you understand these connection(s) and that you emphasize the connections in your answer.
- Concentrate on the **scientific** rationale or justification for any conclusions you reach. *I'm not nearly as interested in your conclusions as I am in the science underlying them.*
- Answer the question! I am not interested in generalities surrounding a particular phenomenon; I want to know how you would face a problem and deal with it. You are not a politician running for public office; you are in the position of somebody who will provide the politician with a foundation that will insure his or her success – and you will be blamed if it doesn't.
- Write succinctly and clearly. Use the English language effectively – and correctly. Make sure that your conclusions (or whatever) are logically justified. Make sure that your grammar and spelling are correct! **Proofread your answers!**

Don't

- Do NOT give me a “kitchen sink” answer. That is, don't give me everything you know about a phenomenon in the hope that you will get something right in the process. Kitchen-sink answers suggest that you don't have a clue about what you're being asked to evaluate, and they will be graded very harshly.
- Do NOT blather. That is, don't tell me what you think without supporting your opinions or

conclusions with solid scientific observations, tests, relationships, or whatever else would be important if you were faced with the problem posed in the question. Like Kitchen-sink answers, blather answers suggest that you don't have a clue, and they will be graded harshly.

- Do NOT resort to emotion in your answer. The point of this course is to help you learn how to apply science to real-world problems. If you were in a public hearing as an expert witness and tried to deal with a real-world environmental issue with emotion rather than science, you would be laughed out of the room. See the first 3 "do" points, above.
- Do NOT use the English language in such a way that would make you look like a total fool if you presented it in a public forum.
 - Decorative apostrophes are *always* inappropriate and make you look stupid
 - Check your spelling
 - Check your grammar
 - Check your logic
 - Make sure that your verb tenses and singular-plural agreements are OK

All questions on each test will be scored using the following grading scale:

A+	1	B+	4	C+	7	D	10	F	15
A	2	B	5	C	8	D+	11		
A-	3	B-	6	C-	9	D-	12		

Your grades for all of the questions asked during the semester will be averaged, and your final grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A: 0-2.5	B+: 3.5-4.5	C+: 6.5-7.5	D: 9.5-12.5	F: > 12.5
	B: 4.5-5.5	C: 7.5-9.5		
A-: 2.5-3.5	B-: 5.5-6.5			