TAKING TESTS
When taking tests it is important to focus on how you will prepare before the exam, what strategies you can use during the exam, and finally what you can do after the exam to help you in the future.

Before the Exam:

1. Find out what the exam will cover. This will give you a "set" for reviewing. No exam covers everything taught in the course.

2. Find out what kind of exam it will be: objective, essay or a combination of both.

For essay exams: find out whether there will be several short questions, one or more long questions or both.

For objective exams: determine what type of objective exam it will be (multiple choice, fill-in the blank, definitions)

3. Review for the exam:

Start reviewing methodically and fairly early. Do not leave it until the last minute.
Separate review time from work on daily assignments.
Review in short chunks every day, at most two hours at a time.
Divide the raw material in each course into logical sections and concentrate on one at a time.
Relieve your mind by reviewing your worst subject early.
Review your toughest subject just before the exam - the day before, or even the night before. This is a sensible form of cramming, because it is really review.
If you have not been reviewing periodically throughout the semester, begin reviewing about 2 weeks before a major exam.

4. Make sure you know certain elementary facts about the exam, such as when it is, where it is, and what you are expected and allowed to bring with you.

Then get there early with the appropriate materials.

During the Exam:

1. Before you start writing
Glance over the whole exam. This gives you a "set" for the exam: what it covers, where the emphasis lies, what the main ideas seem to be. Many exams are composed of a version of short questions all related to one particular aspect of the subject, and then longer one developing some ideas from a different area.
Observe the point value of the questions. Determine a rough time allowance. If the total point value of the test is 100, then a 50-point question is worth about half your time, regardless of how many questions there are. Underline all significant words in the directions, such as "Complete 2 out of 3 essays."

2. When you begin your work
Tackle the questions in the order that appeals to you most. There is nothing sacred about the order in which the questions appear. Doing well on a question that you feel relatively sure of will be reassuring and will free your mind of tension. Keep point value and time allowance in mind.

Work methodically. If you tend to rush, slow down. If you tend to run out of time, pace yourself.

3. When you are finished
Check over your entire paper. This will allow you to see if you have left out any questions and ensure that you have followed directions. Catch careless errors, but don't change your answers unless you are certain you have made a mistake.

After the Exam:

An excellent way to learn how to take exams is to analyze what you have done on a previous exam. When you get your exam back, go over it, noting not only what you did wrong, but why. An hour or two spent in this way may be extremely valuable. See if you detect where you tend to lose points, such as getting the main idea and then rushing sloppily through the proofs, or simply not following directions, or dwelling on relatively unimportant items, or misreading questions entirely. The next time you face an exam, consciously watch yourself for these weaknesses.

Also note what you did right! This may save you hours of worry the next time around. That question on the English test that haunted you for the next several days may prove to be the one you did the best on. Why did it get such a good reception? Often, such analysis proves genuinely reassuring.