

## 6.6 Using Test Results

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Effectively evaluate your test results and correct your mistakes.
2. Use your test results as a study guide.

So far, we have focused on how to study for and take tests effectively. This section discusses how to *use* test results to their greatest benefit. Some of your most important learning begins when your graded test paper is returned to you. Your first reaction, of course, is to see what grade you received and how you did compared with your classmates. This is a natural reaction.

Make sure you listen to the instructor as the papers are returned. What is the instructor saying about the test? Is there a particular point everyone had trouble with? Does the instructor generally think everyone did well? The instructor’s comments at this point may give you important information about what you should study more, about the value of review sessions, and even about possible questions for the next exam.

Although you may be tempted to throw away the exam, don’t. It is a very helpful tool for the next phase of preparing for learning. This is a three-step process, beginning with evaluating your results.

### Evaluating Your Test Results

When you receive your test back, sit quietly and take a close look at it. What questions did you get wrong? What kind of mistakes were they? (See [Table 6.2 "Exam Errors and How to Correct Them"](#).) Do you see a pattern? What questions did you get right? What were your strengths? What can you learn from the instructor’s comments?

Now think of the way in which you prepared for the exam and the extent to which you applied the exam strategies described earlier in this chapter. Were you prepared for the exam? Did you study the right material? What surprised you? Did you read the entire test before starting? Did your time allocation work well, or were you short of time on certain parts of the exam?

Table 6.2 Exam Errors and How to Correct Them

Type of Error	Examples	Corrective Steps
Study and Preparation Errors	I did not study the material for that question (enough).	Practice predicting possible questions better.
	I ran out of time.	Join a study group.
	I did not prepare enough.	Read the entire test before starting. Allocate your time.
Focus Errors or Carelessness	I did not read the directions carefully.	Allocate exam time carefully.
	I confused terms or concepts that I actually know well.	Give yourself time to read carefully and think before answering a question.

	I misread or misunderstood the question.	
Content Errors	I studied the material but couldn't make it work with the question	Seek additional help from the instructor.
	I didn't understand what the instructor wanted.	Go to all classes, labs, and review sessions.
	I confused terms or concepts.	Join a study group.
		Check and practice your active reading and listening skills.
		Schedule regular study time for this course.
Mechanical Errors	The instructor misread my writing.	Slow down! Don't rush through the exam. Take the time to do things right the first time.
	I didn't erase a wrong answer completely (on a computer-graded answer sheet).	
	I forgot to go back to a question I had skipped over.	
	I miscopied some calculations or facts from my worksheet.	

Based on your analysis of your test, identify the kind of corrective steps you should take to improve your learning and test performance. Implement those steps as you begin your preparation for your next class. If you don't learn from your mistakes, you are doomed to repeat them; if you don't learn from your successes, it will be harder to repeat them.

## Correcting Your Mistakes

The second step in making your test work for you is to correct your wrong answers. The last time you wrote the information (when you took the test), you created a link to wrong information in your memory, so that must be corrected.

- For multiple-choice questions, write out the question stem with the correct answer to form a single correct sentence or phrase.
- For true-or-false questions, write the full statement if it is true; if it is false, reword it in such a way that it is true (such as by inserting the word "not"). Then write the new statement.
- For math and science questions involving calculations, redo the entire solution with the calculations written out fully.
- You need not rewrite an entire essay question if you did not do well, but you should create a new outline for what would be a correct answer. Make sure you incorporate any ideas triggered by your instructor's comments.
- When you have rewritten all your answers, read them all out loud before incorporating your new answers in your notes.

## Integrating Your Test into Your Study Guide

Your corrected quizzes and midterm exams are an important study tool for final exams. Make sure you file them with your notes for the study unit. Take the time to annotate your notes based on the exam. Pay particular attention to any gaps in your notes on topics that appeared in the quiz or exam. Research those points in your text or online and complete your notes. Review your exams throughout the term (not just before the final) to be sure you cement the course material into your memory.

When you prepare for the final exam, start by reviewing your quizzes and other tests to

predict the kinds of questions the instructor may ask on the final. This will help focus your final studying when you have a large amount of coursework to cover.

## If You Don't Get Your Test Back

If your instructor chooses not to return tests to students, make an appointment to see the instructor soon after the test to review it and your performance. Take notes on what you had trouble with and the expected answers. Add these notes into your study guide. Make sure you don't lose out on the opportunity to learn from your results.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Working with exams does not end when your instructor hands back your graded test.
- Quizzes and midterms are reliable predictors of the kind of material that will be on the final exam.
- When evaluating your test performance, don't look only at the content you missed. Identify the types of mistakes you commonly make and formulate plans to prevent these mistakes in future assessments.

### CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. Take time to examine your notes for each course you are now taking. Are your exams and quizzes part of that package? If not, include them now. Review them this week.
2. Compare your exams across two or three courses. What kinds of mistakes do you make on a regular basis? Is there a trend you need to correct?

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