TEST-TAKING

BEFORE: the “Rehearsal”

Be academically ready - have a complete set of notes and the reading done.

Find out about the test format and focus - ask in class or extrapolate from past tests.

Use the syllabus and textbook table of contents - ready-made study guides...

Anticipate the question - based on lecture emphasis, past tests, reading focus, try to zero in on what will be asked and then practice beforehand with your books open.

Check with other students - both practice on, and pool your resources with, a formalized study group or just assorted classmates.

Be physically ready - get a good night's sleep (take the all-nighter 2 nights before), eat something, arrive on time (not too early and not too late), have all the necessary materials.

DURING: the “Performance”

Scope out the test - skim over the entire test, assessing the format and value of all questions, gauging your time demands (including for editing), choosing which to answer if there's a choice and deciding where to start.

Dump out your information - along the test margins or in a spare bluebook, quickly spill out what you've memorized and any buzzwords from the test wording itself. Sketch an outline or a "map" of this material for any essay questions.

Begin - start with the easiest stuff and get some points on your scoreboard, circle or underline key words in questions to keep you focused, re-word questions to make them more concise or obvious, try to discover what the professor must be trying to get at....

Edit - finalize objective questions you marked to return to (and the odds aren't good on answer changing); make sure you didn't skip any. For essay questions insert transition words and extra info that has occurred to you, do some paragraphing and try to fix illegible stuff.

AFTER: the “Reviews”

Immediately - look up answers while it's fresh in your mind and imprint the correct material for later use even if you missed it on the test and consider designating in your text and notes the material that was actually used.

On the test's return - examine WHAT you missed (a type of question, a kind of content, from text or lecture) and WHY (misread, ran out time, careless computation, wrote too much or too little, poorly organized, etc.).

- Also note and reinforce what you got right (accidentally or via good guessing). Now is the time to clear up any confusions, get correct explanations, and ideally see model answers. Get specific criticisms and improvement suggestions.

- If you're allowed to keep the questions and/or answers, save and annotate them for later on.