

Timing your exam

Before you begin to write...

Scan the **entire** test. Note the value and style of each question and how many of each style there are (e.g. 50 multiple choice). Highlight **instruction words** in short and long answer questions (e.g. “discuss,” “compare”).

Budget your time

You need adequate time for reading each question carefully. Professors say most marks are lost at this stage, i.e. students are in such a hurry to answer the question that they misread it.

Budgeting time for multiple choice!

Poor reading of the question or ‘stem’ is particularly problematic with multiple choice exams. Because there are many questions, students may feel pressured to get through them. In their haste, they miss critical words in the stem such as **qualifiers** (e.g. “some,” “in most cases,” etc.) Therefore, you must budget exact time to reread and paraphrase each question.

A rule of thumb: Take 1 minute to read the question and an additional 30 seconds to answer it. However, if multiple choice style is difficult for you, you’ll have to allot even more time.

Sample time budget: For a 3-hour (180 minute) exam, there are 50 multiple choice, 4 short answers, and 1 essay.

Activity	Time allotment
Read over entire exam	10 minutes
50 multiple choice @ 1.5 minutes	75 minutes
4 short answers worth 5 marks	40 minutes
1 essay worth 20 marks	40 minutes
Proofread entire exam	15 minutes
Total:	180 minutes (3-hour exam)

While you’re writing...

Stick to your planned budget as much as possible. Keep a watch on the desk. If you finish a question faster than expected, adjust the plan and spend more time on difficult ones.

After you’ve finished... Proofread!

Proofreading your exam before handing it in will probably glean you more marks. You might find, upon reflection, that you’ve missed a point, or you now remember more, or a sentence simply doesn’t make sense. Change it! But what about the old adage that you should never change an answer because your first instincts are usually correct?

Research has shown this is NOT true. If you see your answer is clearly wrong, then change it!