

Why Did I Get That Grade?

Using the results of your tests to learn, and to learn how to learn better

Just because you completed a test does not mean that you are done with the test or with the information in the test. For one thing, in college information tends to build on itself, so what you learned for this test will help you understand the next set of learning, whether in this course or another one. (It can even help you in a totally different subject, if you give it some real thought.) Also, by seeing what went wrong on the test, you can learn how you can do better on the next test. It's a great deal!

Did I have the information I needed to answer the question correctly?

If you didn't, where should you have acquired that information in the first place? Was the information presented in class, but it didn't get into your notes? If yes, you need to work on your note-taking. Was the information presented on a day that you did not attend class, and you did not get notes from someone else? Lesson learned, I hope. Was the missing information in your assigned reading? Always do the reading, and if you still miss things, work on your reading strategies.

Did I have the information but didn't study it because I didn't think it was important to study it?

If you weren't expecting the information to appear on the test, review strategies for detecting the most important information delivered during class and in reading assignments.

Did I study, but didn't retain what I studied?

Not remembering what you studied likely suggests one of three things:

1. You didn't learn the material deeply and lay down a strong enough memory trace in your brain for you to recall it at test time. You need a combination of time and deep learning strategy to overcome this.
2. You may have tried to cram too much into your brain just before the exam and not given your brain enough time to "digest" the information and store it in long-term memory. Distribute your study time ahead of the test and interleave your studying to improve your learning.
3. You studied hard and didn't cram, but you need to study "smarter" or more strategically.

Did I study the material but didn't really understand it or learn it deeply?

This suggests you may need to self-monitor your comprehension more carefully while studying to track whether you are truly understanding the material and move beyond "shallow" or "surface" learning.

Did I know the material but lose points due to careless test-taking mistakes?

If this happened, the solution may simply be to take more time to review your test after completing it and check for absent-minded errors before turning it in. Or, your careless errors may have resulted from test anxiety that interfered with your concentration and memory. If you think that was the cause, consider using strategies for reducing test anxiety.

Adapted from:

Cuseo, J. B., Thompson, A., Campagna, M., & Fecas, V. S. (2016). *Thriving in College and Beyond: Research-Based Strategies for Academic Success and Personal Development*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.