

Study Skills Tips: Exam Preparation

Tests and examinations are a fact of college life, and serve a variety of purposes. They are an incentive for you to learn the material (if you know there will be a test, would you learn as much?). They also serve as a "reality check" to let you know how well you are learning material. Think of exams as a way to prove how much you have learned. This page explains ways to prepare for exams, and provides some strategies to use during the exam itself.

Preparing for the exam

Prepare throughout the quarter

- Review lecture notes soon after each class, and again right before the next lecture.
- Review and preview your notes from reading assignments.
- Always keep up with assignments and homework; the toughest way to learn is when you are attempting to play catch up. Playing catch up is especially difficult when your class is taught in an online format.

Organize your time

- When you set your study schedule at the beginning of the quarter, include time for exam review.
- Schedule time for work, meetings, class, sleep and social plans (also see Study Skills Tips: Time Management.)
- Check due dates for upcoming assignments. Scheduling them will give you an estimate for the time available for exam preparation.

Investigate

- Know how much information will be on the exam (last chapter, the last unit, the quarter so far, etc.), and what source materials the exam will cover (text, articles, lecture).
- Fine out the format of the exam (essay, true/false, multiple choice).
- Ask if you may use books, notes, or other materials during the exam.

Organize Information

- Use your syllabus as a guide.
- List the prerequisite readings, actual lecture/lab notes, handouts, quizzes, and any other related material for each topic/section.
- Be realistic about the amount of time you will need to spend reviewing these materials.
- Divide the material into manageable segments for study.

Create Summary Sheets

- For each topic in a course, design summary sheets with important ideas, facts, formulas, and supporting details.
- Review the source of information. You may be surprised how obvious the main topics and ideas become.
- Recite the summary sheets aloud to assist your memory.
- Have someone quiz you on the information from the sheets.

Anticipate Exam Questions

- As you study, ask yourself what questions the instructor might ask.
- Use parts of your study time to answer these questions.
- Check to see if your answers are complete and accurate. This ensures that you have mastered the information.

Think Positively

Your attitude influences how you perform with anything, especially an exam. Being prepared goes a long way in establishing a healthy mental attitude. This should help you reason through areas of the test where you feel less prepared.

Last Minute Preparations

Ok, you have been preparing all quarter, organizing your time, investigating what material will be on the test and then organizing that material, you have created summary sheets with anticipated exam questions and you have been thinking positively all week long. Your test is near, what do you do? Whether you are well prepared for your test or have to cram, there are a few final things you can do to prepare for the exam.

The Night Before the Exam

- Do not re-read entire chapters.
- Complete your exam review right before bedtime. Your mind will go on working after you go to sleep.
- Thoroughly review your summary sheets.

The Day of the Exam

- Eat a nutritious breakfast, and allow some time to relax.
- Briefly review your summary sheets.
- Arrive early and find a good seat. Don't sit near friends - they can interfere with your concentration.

- Pay attention to all instructions, both written and verbal. They may not be what you expect.
- Take a *deep breath* to help you relax and think positively!

During the Exam

- Preview the exam. Make sure you know exactly what it includes.
- Budget your time. Look at the points awarded in each section, then divide the time available accordingly. Stick to these limits.
- Preview essay questions. You can think of how to answer them while you work on other areas of the test.
- Write down formulas, key words, and important concepts right away while they're fresh in your mind. They may serve as memory clues later in the test.
- Answer the easiest questions first. You'll have some right answers, in case time runs out, and it will build your confidence for the rest of the test. You may also find or think of answers to the more difficult questions while answering the easier ones.
- Check your answers before handing in the test; you may have made mistakes or learned the correct answer in another part of the test.

Cramming

Sometimes, for whatever reason you find yourself in a situation where you need to CRAM before a test. Cramming is **NOT** something anyone can be consistently successful with- however sometimes cramming is a necessary part of life. Research shows that people do not learn well or retain information through cramming. If you need to do some last minute cramming for whatever reason, the following system will help you get the most from the little time you have available.

BE SELECTIVE

- Concentrate on essentials facts only.
- Use your time remembering these essentials facts, not learning new material
- Avoid trying to learn too much new information.

MAKE SUMMARY SHEETS

- Skim your textbook chapters to determine main topics and ideas; identify key words.
- Use this material to write summary sheets in your own words.