## PREPARING FOR TESTS

**Preparing to Study for Exams**

Students sometimes have difficulty in "getting started" studying for tests. The following steps should help you get going by knowing what and how you should study and how you can best use your study time.

### Step One: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE TEST?

Knowing the various aspects of the testing situation is valuable in deciding what to study, in how much detail to study and what level of learning you should do.

#### Questions to Answer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What kind of test will it be?</td>
<td>Objective, short answer, essay, multiple choice . . .</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Objective tests will necessitate your learning more specific facts and being able to recognize answers. Subjective (essay) tests mean you will have to have an overall understanding of the material with less emphasis on learning specific facts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How many items will be on the test?</td>
<td>Knowing the number of items to be asked in proportion to the amount of material to be covered gives an indication of the extent of coverage.</td>
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<td>3. How much time will you have for the test?</td>
<td>Compare the number of questions to be answered to the amount of time. This will tell you whether you will have to recall quickly or can take more time to think.</td>
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<td>Knowing what will be covered on the test and to what extent will help you to gear your study time in the most important sources.</td>
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<td>4. What is the relative importance of course requirements? Will text be covered more heavily, will lecture notes be on the test, are lab experiments to be covered, etc.?</td>
<td>Budget your study time accordingly. Learn the heaviest portions first.</td>
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<td>5. What is the emphasis on the various topics? If all of the lectures and text readings are to be covered, which topics are most important?</td>
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6. Who is writing the test? The professor, T.A., or is it a departmental test?

If you know who is writing the test and what their biases are, you will know how to gear your studying and how to word your answers.

7. Who will grade the test?

What are the grader’s biases – does s/he check for spelling, prefer lengthy discussions, etc.?

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**Step Two: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?**

You probably know right now if you are caught up, pretty well caught up, or way behind. To find out just exactly what there is to do, answer the questions below:

**READING TO DO**

Required Readings:

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Optional Readings:

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

**LECTURES**

**DATES TO GET OR REDO**

What lecture notes need to be redone?

________________________________________________________________________________

Which lecture notes are missing?

________________________________________________________________________________

**OTHER**

**TO DO**

What other assignments, labs, problems related to the test need to be done?

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
With this information you can now make some decisions about what to do with the reading and assignments not yet completed based on your assessment of what the test will cover. If you have large amounts of material yet to do and little time to do it, you will have to find some ways to cut corners in your studying—perhaps eliminating reviewing lecture notes if they are not too important, skimming the textbook instead of word-by-word reading, reading chapter summaries to pick up key points, memorizing key terms and skipping lesser facts. Whatever—begin first, though, by knowing what will be on the test. Then make your decisions on what to study and what to skip. Follow Step Three in planning your study time.

**Step Three: PLANNING YOUR STUDY TIME**

To prepare a time schedule, begin by asking just how long (number of days) do you have before the test. Start by listing all of your set obligations such as classes, labs, work hours, church, and other commitments which cannot be put off until after the test. Now total the remaining hours to tell you your possible number of study hours. Begin to fill in study hours—if there is too little time available, look for "hidden times" such as breaks at work, time between classes, time riding on the bus to and from campus, lunch hours, etc. Be sure to schedule time for social activities and study breaks—you must allow yourself some time to unwind and relax!

Writing a daily schedule while preparing for a test might be particularly helpful in keeping you focused on your time and study. Use the "Daily Schedule".

**General Tips for Test Study**

"Quickie" Preparation

1. List all topics sure to be part of the test. List important subtopics for each.

2. Survey or skim all the materials to be covered, checking those to be more intensively studied.

3. Read or reread all materials not understood; use a specific purpose when reading.

4. Develop an outline summary of key points or a table to summarize the information most likely to be on the test.

5. Ask questions over those ideas from different viewpoints. Orally recite or write answers.

6. Memorize those facts or ideas most needed.

7. Space your practice to allow the material to "jell" even if only by ten to thirty minute breaks.

Make Exam Questions

Develop your own exam questions to keep you alert and thinking actively about the material and to decide on the importance of each piece of information and how it fits into the overall scheme. When you test yourself on these questions,
you are getting practice in taking the exam. It is true that your questions may not be exactly like the professor's but they will help you to handle the material more efficiently.

**Suggestions:**

1. Write the questions when you first read the material.

2. Write the kind of questions appropriate to the subject and like those expected on the test.

3. Generally avoid objective-type questions, especially multiple choice, as these questions take too long to write.

4. Short essay questions are particularly useful because they challenge your thinking and are not hard to write. A small number can cover one large section.

5. Recite your answers orally to save time. Write brief outlines.

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**Flashcards As An Aid to Memory**

Flashcards can be used effectively to learn both large amounts of specific facts and general principles. Factual flashcards can be made for vocabulary words, formulas, equations, definitions, dates, names, etc. General principle flashcards might be made for main ideas on a given topic, lists of characteristics, cause-effect relationships, categorizing groups of items, etc.

Coding the flashcards by page where the information can be found or date of the lecture is a good idea for later use. Coding by topic or subject in the corner may also test your understanding and expand the use of the cards during review.

Frequent review of cards is what makes them effective. Short reviews frequently repeated will usually be more effective than long sessions of cramming.

**REMEMBER:** The writing of the cards is in itself an aid to memory.

**Suggestions:**

1. Review cards often. Carry them with you to class or work.

2. Prepare the cards well in advance of the test date.

3. Spend the most time studying the cards you don't know or are not sure of. Don't waste time studying the cards you already know.

4. When learning cards for the first time, break them up into small groups, learn one group at a time and review all the cards from time to time.

5. Sort by chronological or sequence order. Make sentences from the vocabulary cards in a foreign language. This helps you to apply what you are learning.
6. Sort the cards by topics or relationships. This helps keep the overall organization of the course in your mind.

7. Ask questions you think will be on the exam and sort for the answers. This will give you practice on retrieving information from different points of view.

8. Shuffle the cards frequently and flip through them rapidly. Do this to avoid learning the cards in a certain order.

**General Memorization Techniques**

The following two techniques may help to develop your ability to memorize. First, note how each is defined. Then apply them to your coursework.

**Memory Search:** Search your memory by asking yourself if anything in your past experience or knowledge relates to the term you want to learn. If you can recall any related information, you probably can remember the definition of the new term by connecting it with other information.

**Artificial (mnemonic) Connection:** Aid your memory by some artificial device or connection.

1. Does the term sound or look like any work you already know? If so, can you make up some sort of imaginary connection between the two?

2. If (1) doesn't work, does the first syllable of the new term match the first syllable of any words you know that could be used to make connection?

3. If that doesn't work, is there any other way you can make a connection between the new word and the one that you already know (perhaps a word that rhymes with the term) or if memorizing a list or sentence, take the first letter of each item and see if it makes a word you can remember?

For example: Beans, apples, squash, eggplant, sugar. The first letters of each item spell BASES.

To make the work of applying memory searches and artificial connections worthwhile, you must review and self-test often. The first review should be immediately after setting up the associations for your memory work. This should be followed by spaced reviews daily or weekly depending on the time available until the test.

**Some Tips to Combat Test Panic**

Another concern at test time is the anxiety that many students feel. To help combat those fears, try the following:

1. Get a good night's sleep. Sleep is one of the few activities which does not interfere with learning.
2. Eat a good breakfast or lunch. This may help calm the nervousness in your stomach and give you energy. (Don't overeat though—it will make you sluggish; avoid greasy and acidic foods.)

3. Allow yourself enough time to get to the test without hurrying. If your heart is already pounding, you are more easily susceptible to test panic.

4. Don't swap questions at the door. Hearing anything you don't already know may weaken your confidence and send you into a state of anxiety.

5. Leave your books at home. Flipping pages at the last minute can only upset you. If you must take something, take a brief outline that you know well.

6. Take a watch with you or ask the instructor to write the time on the board periodically throughout the test.

7. Answer the easy questions first. This will relax you and help build your confidence, plus give you some assured points.

8. Sit apart from your classmates, if possible. You will not be distracted by others' movements.

9. Don't panic if others are busily writing and you are not—your thinking may be more profitable than their writing.

10. Don't be upset if other students are finishing their tests before you do. Use as much time as you are allowed and feel you need. Students who leave early are not always the best students.

11. If you still feel nervous during the test, try some emergency first aid: inhale deeply, close your eyes, hold, then exhale slowly. Do this several times throughout the test if you need to.