

Preparing for Exams – General Info

In general:

1. Success is unlikely if course material is selectively studied. Review all relevant course material.
2. Illusion of knowing - when students believe they know the material when, in fact, they do not. Students must create and answer possible test questions in order to be adequately prepared.
3. Self-Test - “Looking over” course materials is easy, comfortable, temporarily reassuring. . . and usually wasteful of your time. Sight recognition is seldom sufficient for good performance on a test. You must instead find a variety of ways to test yourself as you review. Reciting is one of the most powerful ways to learn and remember. Constantly practice restating, repeating, putting into your own words what you’ve just learned.
4. Prepare through critical thinking – this promotes greater understanding, because you are processing meaning into the concepts. As you study...
 - a. connect ideas to examples
 - b. analyze causes and effects, similarities and differences
 - c. look at issues from a different perspective
 - d. record notes in your own words (this makes it more meaningful to you)
5. Review lecture notes daily throughout the semester. This greatly reduces study time for test because you do not have to *relearn* the material.
6. Keep up with text readings. You should not be reading chapters for the first time while you are preparing for a test.
7. Throughout the semester students should be studying 2 hours for every hour in class.
8. Do difficult tasks first--then reward yourself with easier ones.
9. Take brief breaks—don’t study all the time. The brain remains active—sorting and reworking while you are on a break.
10. Vary tasks and topics during lengthy study periods. Rework notes, then read; alternate history with math, etc.
11. Find a special place to study and use it only for that. Make it become a stimulus just to study; if you’re daydreaming and not studying, then walk away for a few minutes
12. Stick as much as possible to your own regular study and work hours. Adhere to your own biological clock of peak study times rather than adopting someone else’s bizarre schedule.
13. Recite - Don’t waste your time passively rereading. Instead, review the table of contents or the chapter subheadings; try to recall the important points. Recite them, write them, say them, hear them, think them. Reinforce by using as **many senses** as possible. **Spend more time actively reciting** and less time rereading.

Develop a Study Plan

1. Determine the content and question format of the exam.
 - a. Course Syllabus – shows the exact content to be covered
 - b. Textbook – assess which chapters you understand and which need more in-depth studying.
 - c. Lecture Notes – make sure you have all the notes – ask questions about confusing parts.
 - d. Previous exams and quizzes (if available). What level questions does the instructor use?
 - e. Instructor’s handouts – This information will very likely be on the test.
 - f. Information from the last class before the exam – review the content before hand and be prepared to ask questions, instructors usually discuss format and content, listen to other student’s questions.

2. Organize and separate the content into parts – integrate information from lecture notes, textbooks, handout, etc. and group them according to themes. Rework notes and text into one “whole,” so that you’ll be aware of the forest before concentrating on the trees. Arrange major points chronologically or topically. **Construct overall diagrams, charts, or outlines.**

3. Identify Specific Study Strategies –(See handout “Test Prep Techniques”)
 - a. Prepare lower level and higher level questions – get from notes and text.
 1. Lower - facts, dates, terms, lists
 2. Higher – solve problems, analyze, compare and contrast, make judgments, justify.
 - b. Prepare concept cards
 - c. Review / Study Sheet – Outline
 - d. Charts / Matrix
 - e. Mapping
 - f. Hierarchies
 - g. Problem Solving for Math or Science
 - h. Take a pretest
 1. Create your own test
 2. Answer in test like conditions – quiet, no books or notes, time yourself
 - i. Go to any review sessions offered.
 - j. Speak to other students

4. Determine time needed for each strategy and set a study schedule
 - a. Allow plenty of time – up to two weeks or more
 - b. Write your study schedule – you will be more likely to follow it.
 - c. Break large task into smaller sub-tasks.
 - d. Allow longer study periods for grasping total relationships and concepts; use shorter time intervals for review, self-testing, reinforcement; routinely use spare time (waiting for bus, walking to library) for periodic recall and review.

Prepare Physically

1. Get enough sleep – it helps your memory
2. Eat light, well-balanced meal before the exam
3. Continue your daily habits as usual. Too much or too little sleep, changes in eating habits—anything unusual or different in your schedule may modify physiological functioning so that you are “not yourself” during the examination

Adapted from:

Dembo, M. (2004). *Motivation and learning strategies for college success*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., Inc.

Ellis, D. (2003). *Becoming a master student* (10th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.