

# Studying for Exams and Test-taking Strategies

## 1. Prepare for the exam.

- Create a study checklist: Identify all of the material you will be tested on – notes, formulas, reading, etc. Use the checklist to design a study plan that is manageable.
- Use your resources to create questions that are likely to be on the test – and prepare answers.
- Review your notes. Use the “recall column” (from Study Skills Part I Workshop) of your class notes to test yourself. Look at the handouts you were given, the questions and notes in your book, old quizzes, etc.
- Form study groups – ask everyone to come up with 5 questions to test the group. Teaching material to someone else is a fantastic review. Group review provides opportunity to cover material you might overlook on your own.
- For a test on several chapters, work with someone else and make up your own tests on individual chapters – use these to review for the exam.
- Break up studying into manageable chunks - studying 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the evening is more effective than studying 4 hours in one stretch. Studying while you are mentally fatigued is usually not effective.
- If you are working and become overly stressed, STOP, take a little break, walk around, stretch, get a glass of water or take a quick shower.
- If you know a test is coming up and have been reviewing each week, you will go into studying for the exam with much more preparedness and more confidence.

## 2. Be an effective test taker.

- Decrease test anxiety once you arrive for an exam by doing some deep breathing. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth – this will slow your heart rate down and soothe your nerves.
- View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you’ve studied and to receive a reward for all of your hard work.
- If you feel that you have not prepared as well as you would have liked, don’t waste time worrying – you will still do better if you do not punish yourself for what you did not do.
- Don’t take an exam on an empty stomach. Fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Foods that can increase stress and should be avoided include: junk food, candy, soda, fried foods, etc.
- Don’t try to do a last minute review if you think it will stress you out right before the exam.
- Read all of the test directions carefully – twice – so you do not miss anything. Research shows that low performance is often caused by misunderstanding directions.
- Always read through the questions first – this may reduce anxiety because there will not be any “unknowns” anymore.
- Look over the test and figure out how much time you have to spend on each section. Spend more time on sections worth more points.

- Read each question twice, then answer it.
- Go through and answer everything you know first. Mark the questions you do not answer right away so you can come back to them.
- Next, go back and answer everything you think you know – you will be right more than you think.
- Finally, if you have time, go back and make an educated guess on those you do not know.
- Never change an answer unless you are 100% sure you wrote the wrong answer. The first answer is almost always right. Individuals commonly report “I had it right and I erased it.”
- If your mind goes blank, take a few deep breaths and exhale. Try to think of some material that you do know – this will often lead to recall of other information.

#### **4. Tips for essay exams**

- When you figure out how much time you have to spend on each question, take into account extra time to review/edit questions after you have written all of your answers.
- Read through all of the questions once. Jot down key concepts, listings, etc. while they are fresh in your mind. If you wait to write them later, you may not remember them.
- Before answering a question, put it in your own words. Now compare your version to the original. If they don't mean the same thing, you misread the question. This is common.
- Make a brief outline for each question. Make your argument in the first sentence. Give an overview of your essay in the first paragraph. Each body paragraph should discuss one main point to support your argument. Points should be supported with specific information, examples or quotes from reading and notes. The last paragraph should restate the central idea and why it's important.
- Cover only the points you are asked about. Do not add unrelated information just to try to fill up the page.
- When time is up for one question, stop writing, leave space and begin the next question. Incomplete answers can be completed during review time. Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three complete answers. However, it is best to check whether your instructor gives partial credit on partially complete answers.