

ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER

STUDY SKILLS LIBRARY

Test Preparation Suggestions

What Do You Know About the Test?

Knowing the various aspects of the testing situation is valuable in deciding what to study. This includes knowing how much detail to study, and what information to cover. Ask the instructor, the teacher's assistant, fellow classmates, or former students.

What Kind of Test Will it Be?

Will it be an objective, short answer, essay, multiple choice, or a combination test? Objective tests will necessitate learning specific facts and being able to recognize answers. Subjective (essay) tests require an overall understanding of the material with less emphasis on learning specific facts, although knowing specific information is important.

How Many Items will be on the Test?

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.

How Much Time will you have to Process the Test?

Compare the number of questions to be answered to the amount of the time available on the test. This will tell you whether you will have to recall information quickly or you can take more time to think about answers.

What is the Relative Importance of Course Requirement?

Will text material be covered more heavily? Will lecture notes be on the test? Will lab experiments be covered on the test, etc.? Knowing what will be covered on the test and to what extent will help you focus your study time in the most important sources.

What is the Emphasis on the Various Topics?

If all the lectures and text reading are to be covered, which topics are most important? Budget your study time accordingly. Learn the most important sections first.

Who will Write the Test Questions?

Will it be written by the professor, teaching assistant, or is it a departmental test? If you know who is writing the test and their biases, you will know how to approach your studies and how to word your answer.

Who will Grade the Test?

What are the grader's biases? – Does he or she check for spelling; do they prefer lengthy discussion, etc.

What Needs to be Studied?

Make a list of the required reading and optional reading that you have yet to do. Look over your lecture notes. What notes are missing, and which notes do you need to review? What other

assignments, lab problems, or homework need to be looked over? Write all of this down. Using this information, make decisions about the reading and assignments not yet completed based on your assessment of what the test will cover. If you have large amounts of material to cover and little time, you must cut corners on your studying. Perhaps eliminate 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. Begin by knowing what will be on the test. Then make your decision on what to study and what to skip.

Plan Your Study Time

Determine how many days you have before the test. List any obligations such as classes, labs, work hours, and other commitments that cannot be put off. Total the remaining time which are your study hours. If there is too little time available, look for "hidden times," such as break at work, time between classes, time to and from campus, etc. Be sure to schedule in time for nutrition, social activities and study breaks. Allow yourself some time to unwind. Use a Things To Do list or Weekly Schedule to help you plan and organize study time.

Review the Subject

List all topics sure to be part of the test and their subtopics. Survey or skim all the materials to be covered, checking those to be studied in-depth. Read or reread all material not understood. Be sure to use a specific purpose when reading such as: asking questions over those ideas from different viewpoints, orally reciting or writing answers, or memorizing those facts or ideas most needed.

Make Exam Questions

Develop your own exam questions to help you think 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. Your questions may not be exactly like the professor's but, they will help you to handle the material more confidently. Suggestions:

1. Write test questions when you first read the material.
2. Write questions appropriate to the subject and like those expected to be on the test.
3. Develop objective-type questions appropriate for test content.
4. Short essay questions are particularly useful because they challenge your thinking and are not hard to write. One essay question can cover one large section.
5. Recite your answers orally if you need to save time. Write brief outlines.

Use Flash Cards as Memory Aid

Use flash cards to learn specific facts such as vocabulary, formulas, equations, definitions, dates, names, etc. Use flash cards to learn general principles such as main ideas on a given topic, lists of characteristics, cause-effect relationships, or categorizing groups of items. Coding flash cards by text page or lecture date will help you verify the information source. Coding by topic or subject may test your understanding and expand the use of the cards during review. Suggestions:

1. Prepare the cards well in advance of the test date.
2. Review cards often for short intervals of time. Carry them with you to class or work.
3. Spend the most time studying the cards you don't 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 cards by topics or relationships to keep the overall course organization in mind.
6. Think of a question you believe will be on the exam and sort through the cards for the answer. This will help you retrieve information from different points of view.
7. Shuffle the cards frequently to avoid learning them in a certain order.

Bibliography

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