
What to Do: Before the Test

Tips for Test Preparation

Manage Your Review time.

- **Daily Reviews**
 - Include short reviews of lecture notes before and after class. This type of behavior will help convert information from your long term to your short-term memory. Concentrate on what you have just learned as well as material that involves simple memorization.
- **Weekly Reviews**
 - Spend about 1 hour studying per subject. This is the perfect time to begin making review tools and revisiting reading assignments. Try making and answering practice questions during this time also. Don't wait until the week of a major test to begin this kind of structured studying.
- **Major Reviews**
 - These review sessions are longer and should happen within the week or two before finals and other major exams. Major reviews should span two to five hours with sufficient and relatively frequent breaks to stay attentive. Utilize your review tools, and work on recalling information. Also try to draw on the relationships between concepts and deepen your understanding of the material for a given class. If you have been reviewing all semester, you should know most of the basics, so work on taking things further and thinking critically about the course material.

Create Review Tools.

- **Study Checklists**
 - Determine all of the subjects that you need to review and list them (as well as their parts).
 - Include assignments, important lectures, diagrams, and formulas. Check an item off of the list when you understand it, can recall it, and have answered any remaining questions you have about it. Do not ignore items once you have checked them off, but don't revisit them until most of the items on your list have been checked off.
- **Outlines, Mind Maps, Concept Maps, Cornell Notes, etc.**
 - All of the above tools are variations of the same kind of tool. They are comprehensive and structured to work with varying personality and learning styles. These tools will help you manage all of the information you are responsible for in a way that capitalizes on the way you learn. Use these tools as visual queues and incorporate connections between ideas and critical thinking.

Modified from:
Becoming a Master Student 8th Edition, Dave Ellis.

- **Flash Cards**
 - Use these like portable test questions. Begin making them early in the semester and continue to do so throughout. Incorporate these into your daily and weekly reviews; they are great for material that needs to be memorized, like vocabulary, formulas, and dates.

- **Plan a Strategy.**
 - **Do a dry run.**
 - One of the best ways to prepare for a test is to practice the tasks you'll actually have to do. If you need to label a diagram of the brain or write an essay comparing two characters then study by doing those things. For multiple choice and true/false based tests, create practice questions and compile them into the same format of the test you'll be taking. Then take your mock exam with your books closed, over a fixed time period. Take time to think about (and ask your professors) what type of questions you'll have to answer. You'll want to adapt your study methods differently for a test that will call mostly for memorization than for one that will require application and analysis.
 - **Ask the instructor what to expect.**
 - Most instructors will answer question about the kind of test you'll be taking, some even give detailed study guides. Focus your anxiety about the test into questions about the test that will help you study better, and then don't be afraid to ask. Take time to think about (and ask your professors) what type of questions you'll have to answer. You'll want to adapt your study methods differently for a test that will call mostly for memorization than for one that will require application and analysis.
 - **Get copies of old exams.**
 - Not all professors provide copies of old exams, but many do. You might try asking students who have already taken the course, or another professor. Utilize practice tests and study questions in your textbook as well. Try not to rely too heavily on old exams since they may not include information the instructor has included on more recent tests or they may have come from another instructor altogether.

- **Manage Your Stress.**
 - **Take study breaks.**
 - The human attention span does not lend itself well to studying for hours on end. So plan to take breaks and take them often. A break should be no longer than 10 minutes, but should be long enough so that you are attentive when you return to studying. Pay attention to how long it takes for your mind to wander while studying, at this point take a break. Plan your breaks every 20 to 30 minutes, depending on your attention span, and stick to your schedule. It might feel like you are wasting time, but you will waste a lot less time studying effectively and attentively than if you are trying to stick it out through a marathon of studying. Efficiency in your studying may improve your pretest confidence and reduce your anxiety.

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- **Relax**
 - Don't let stress overwhelm you and find ways to cope with it that are good for you. Try breathing exercises (like those found here http://healthed.uconn.edu/stressfree_zone.html). Take a walk, call a friend or family member, or get coffee with a roommate; do what it takes to put you at ease and get you ready and focused on exam preparation. Sometimes the best way to manage stress is to have a plan and follow through with it.

- **Adjust your attitude.**
 - If you believe that you will fail, or that you cannot perform at the level you need to then those are the results you will see. Don't get caught up in imagining worst case scenarios or dwelling on past bad grades. You have the choice to create the results you want, so begin by believing that you deserve what you want and are capable of attaining it.

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