

Take a break

Try to avoid study marathons by taking frequent breaks. This will help refresh you before moving on to more material. Also, attempting to cram all of your studying into the night before your exam is not going to provide you with the results you are looking for. Avoiding this situation will allow you more time to get help with information you are unsure of, as well as to better understand the material you are unsure of. Study thoroughly over a reasonable period of time (e.g.: a week or two) so that you are fully prepared and confident upon entering the exam.

Relax! Don't freak out!

Too much anxiety can cause poor performance on exams. Keeping track of your accomplishments in the class (such as your current grade) as well as paying attention to the weight of the exam, can help put things in perspective. Loosening up your schedule by cutting back on job hours and doing something physical can both help to relieve some of the symptoms of stress. As well, eat and sleep properly, while maintaining your daily routines. Just before an exam, try to avoid people who stress and power study. During the exam leave a couple of minutes each hour to put down your pen and take a few deep breaths.

Preparing for Exams at University

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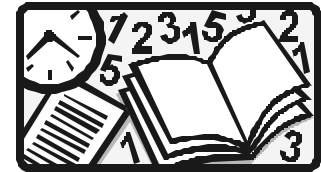
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Tips to help you make the grade!



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Why have Exams?

Though you may regard exams as instruments of torture, you might be better off viewing examinations as opportunities for you to consolidate your learning and come to know gaps in your knowledge.

Distributed Study

You'll optimize your learning if you work gradually through the course content, give yourself time to think through the ideas of the course, and leave yourself an opportunity to fill in any gaps in your understanding. Read and listen to lectures to identify main ideas, select relevant information, and understand course concepts. Develop a note-taking format that will save you the time of mindlessly re-writing stacks of notes at the end of term. As the term progresses, aim to integrate the readings, lectures, and assigned work of the course in light of your course outline. Make a learning schedule and stick to it so that you are not left cramming at the end of term.

Making sense of your course

Make connections between the course material and think critically and analytically about the course concepts. You must be clear about the course objectives in order to understand how ideas link together. For example, you could group the theories, essays, or books into specific themes, time periods, eras, types, subjects, foci, and so on. A good reference for this can be the course syllabus and outline. The professor may also place special emphasis on certain course

concepts, themes, and ideas. If there are sections of the course that you do not understand, work with a classmate, TA, or instructor to get things straight.

One step at a time

When exams cover large blocks of course work, or when multiple exams are scheduled in the same day or week, making final preparations for exam writing can feel monumental. It helps to subdivide the work associated with each course into smaller tasks that you work through one at a time. For example, the course breaks down into 13 weeks of lectures each term, or a number of themes, or a number of chapters. Taking on one of these smaller pieces of the work can help you to get started, see your progress, and concentrate more effectively.

Study groups

It is sometimes helpful, but not necessary, to organize study groups: work on questions together, review the material, and teach each other through "mini" lectures and discussions. Set weekly meeting times to discuss the course material to keep each other focussed and up-to-date.

Find the missing links

Go through your lecture notes and make sure they are legible and you are not missing any of them. It is also sometimes helpful to get together with another person in the class to check each others' notes for clarity and completeness.

Your study environment

In order to maximize your concentration and motivation while studying, find a study space suited to your needs. Some prefer the quiet of a library or college study hall. Some like music or "white noise" in the background, while others prefer quiet. Some feel more comfortable studying in the familiarity and comfort of their bedroom or dorm room; others need to be away from distractions. Just make sure that the environment you choose allows you to achieve your study goals.

The power of self-testing

Test yourself as you study. Try old exams, study-guide questions, and questions you develop. Create study questions from your readings and lecture notes to test your understanding and memory. Formulate questions based upon course concepts and their inter-relationships. The professor will likely have modeled how they expect you to think, through assignments, tests, and by asking their own questions. Use these hints as references as you prepare your own questions. It may also be a good idea to pool questions generated by you and your peers or to make use of old tests. Try to re-create the actual exam experience to prepare yourself. Doing so will help you pinpoint bits of information that are still weak and need to be studied a bit more. This helps you maximize your limited amount of study time.