



How to study for exams, tests and other trivia

by AAP Student Service

"Depend on it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Samuel Johnson might well have been talking to students about pre-examination time and that gnawing feeling of foreboding! Examinations can concentrate one's mind wonderfully, but in a positive, practical manner that will not only increase your learning potential but help your performance.

The key to both success in exams and enjoyment of college work lies in the ability to use time wisely. A pattern of good study habits begins as the term begins, but nowhere do you need them more than at examination time. You will be able to handle exams with a minimum of stress if you observe these six suggested steps:

- Make a term study plan
- Use good review techniques
- Develop a confident attitude
- Organize pre-exam hours
- Pace the exam carefully

Reassess your work.

Make a Term Study Plan

At the beginning of each term develop a daily schedule. Allocate time for class preparation, study, review, recreation, eating and sleeping.

A study area is important. Have on hand the texts, study guides, outlines, dictionaries and reference books, paper, pads, notebooks, that will allow you to concentrate without interruption.

Study and review differ from each other. Study refers to learning something for the first time. Review is critical because it strengthens your retention of this new knowledge by viewing it as part of a whole.

Forgetting takes place most rapidly right after learning. Review and recall, therefore, are more effective soon after study. After each class go over the main points for ten to fifteen minutes to reinforce them in your mind.

Don't overtax your memory or stamina. Research shows that most people can absorb and retain just so much knowledge at

one time. It's important to study day by day, week by week. Each period of study should be no longer than one or one and a half hours, followed by recreation.

Take legible class and study notes. Throughout the term underline your textbooks and make pertinent notes in the margins.

Use Good Review Techniques

Preparing for exams is largely a question of review. The time needed is not as extensive as some students think, provided you have been consistent in your work. You should be able to review for weekly quizzes in no more than fifteen minutes, for a mid-term hour exam in two to three hours, and for a final exam in five to eight hours.

Your preparation for a final exam should be carefully scheduled into the two weeks prior to exam day. Organize a plan that does not interfere with your regular study for on-going classes.

Plan your review systematically. Use textbook chapter headings or your instructor's outline as guides. Go from chapter notes to class notes, recalling important headings and ideas. If some points are unclear, then reread the textbook. Don't plan to learn something for the first time.

Making summary notes is helpful. In four to eight pages, outline the main points of your detailed class and text notes. This helps reinforce the major ideas and important details.

Summary notes can also serve as a self-test toward the end of your preparation for exams. Put a sheet over each page and slowly uncover the first heading. See if you can remember the main points listed there.

Try to predict the exam questions. Be alert throughout the term to the emphasis instructors put on certain topics, ideas or aspects.

Ask your professor what he recommends for pre-examination work. Use these comments as a guide but don't try to outguess him or her.

Group reviewing can be helpful. Limit discussions of significant points and possible test questions to thirty or forty-five minutes, with no more than four or five people.

Avoid cramming. If you have followed a regular schedule of study and review, you should not have to cram.

Develop a Confident Attitude

Tests to serve a purpose. They give you an opportunity to check your progress. Students who have formed good study habits throughout the term should be confident. Exams will help your understanding of important ideas and your ability to express them.

The day before an exam, review a maximum of three hours. Question yourself as you review. Reread text passages only when you have difficulty

remembering them.

Eat and sleep well so that you are refreshed for the exam.

Get up early to avoid rushing on the morning of the test.

Shower, have a good breakfast, exercise, go for a walk.

Arrive in the examination room a few minutes early.

Listen to the instructions and read through the entire test. Organize your thoughts.

Budget time for each question. They might be equal in length, so answer the easy ones first. Remember to number answers to match the questions.

Think carefully about each question at a time. Your first sentence should be clear and contain some, if not all, of the main points in your answer.

Jot down key words and phrases. Indent paragraphs. Number points under each heading, or make a rough diagram or outline.

Write legibly. If the instructor cannot read your work easily, your mark might suffer.

Short-form or objective questions demonstrate your ability to recognize details and your ability to choose among alternatives. Pay attention to words like: all, none, never, might, should.

Avoid leaving blanks. An answer might be correct even though you are not sure. An omission will probably count against you. In multiple choice questions, cross out what you know is wrong and think about what is left. Be sure to completely erase if you change an answer.

Essay questions test your ability to express yourself, interpret and organize material. Important cue words will indicate what or how much your instructor is asking for. The most frequently used are: analyze, compare, contrast, criticize, define, describe, discuss, elaborate, enumerate, evaluate, explain, illustrate, interpret, justify, list, outline, predict, relate, review, state, summarize, trace. Each one of these terms calls for a specific type of material, so think about the meanings in advance.

Finish each question as best you can and go on to the next. Leave room at the bottom of each answer for possible additions later.

Make answers as concise and clear as possible. Try not to repeat yourself.

Reread everything carefully. You might have left out a word or want to add other points.

Take a last look at your summary notes, unless it makes you nervous.

Be sure you have all the supplies you need.

Reassess Your Work

When you receive your grades and get back exam books, read your answers. Compare them with your textbook and class notes. If you don't understand your instructor's marks, ask him where you went wrong.

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