

Help! It's almost exam time!

Writing and Study Skills Program

With exams fast approaching, you are probably getting that nagging feeling that you should be doing something to get ready and you are right. Maybe we can help. The following information is a sample of the advice students receive when they set up a tutoring appointment at the Writing and Math Center. Read on, and if this sounds like the type of information you could use more of, call and set up an appointment with one of our tutors (453-4646).

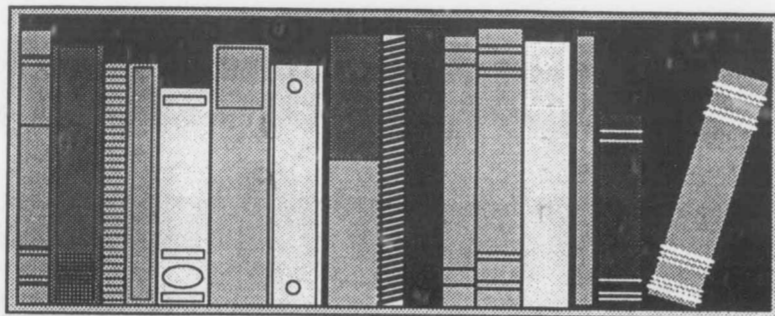
How Should I schedule my study time?

The first step to successful exam preparation is to schedule your study time. It's important to review material a couple of times before classes end, so you can ask crucial questions and resolve problems early. If you don't understand something, don't wait until the last minute to get help. Remember to consider all of your courses, the amount of material involved in each of them, your comfort with the course material, the amount each exam is worth, and the time you have between exams when you work out your schedule. If you're uncertain about how to schedule study time effectively, make an appointment with a Writing and Study Skills tutor (don't forget to bring relevant information about the dates of your exams and what they are worth).

How do I decide which material is most important?

Picking out which material to emphasize when you study is the next and perhaps most difficult step to successful exam preparation. It involves taking a careful look at the course content and making some tough decisions about how the material was treated in the course. Here are some suggestions that may help:

-Ask your professor to give your class a preview of the exam or a quick review of the course material. Listen carefully for hints that may be dropped by your professor during the last two weeks of the term. Consider which material received the most emphasis. If



something about the exam or the material you are responsible for is unclear, ask questions that will clarify your study concerns.

-Consider your professor's special research interests. Could this interest be reflected in the exam questions?

-Consider how the course material was developed from week to week and month to month. What was the purpose of the organization of material? Does the course develop a main theme? Is field/lab work highlighted over textbook chapters? You should evaluate your professor's approach to structuring and presenting course material.

-Consider what you would emphasize if you had to teach the same material what seemed most significant to you? Did you know that prepared and attentive students can anticipate 75% of exam questions? Did you know that many students find working in study groups has a significant impact on exam performance.

-Think critically about your course material and your strategy.

If you are not sure how to execute these suggestions, make an appointment with a Writing and Study Skills tutor.

How do I summarize 8 months of lectures and readings?

Making summary sheets from your notes in the third step to successful exam preparation. While you want to relax the night before the exam, it is also important for you to stay focused. A brief review of your now familiar summary sheets might be helpful, but don't start second guessing your preparation. Although you may feel that a late night of last minute cramming is appropriate, a good night's sleep is a

better choice. Regardless of nervous butterflies, you should also eat something in the morning. Take some time to prepare your supplies for the exam (watch, pens and paper, calculator [if permitted], etc.) . Allow yourself lots of time to get to the exam location (if it is unfamiliar to you, check it out ahead of time). Beware especially of peer pressure immediately before the start of the exam. Other students will be second guessing their preparation; don't let yourself be drawn in to this counter-productive activity. A few deep breaths and some positive thoughts will stand you in much better stead. Once you are allowed into the exam room, pick a chair away from the door (you don't want to be distracted by other students coming and going), avoid drafty window seats and areas with poor lighting; a good view of the clock is essential if you don't have a watch.

How can I deal with exam stress?

Exam-related stress is a side effect known to virtually all students. While you can't rid yourself of stress, you can manage it effectively. A certain amount of stress will help to keep you focused on your studying and exam writing. This is good stress and you can use it to your advantage. Too much stress can have a paralyzing effect on your performance. In order to manage stress, you must consider what causes your stress: high expectations; peer, family and social expectations/pressures; difficulty of material; long term goals etc. Once you've identified the source of your stress, tackle it head-on. Is it realistic to expect an A+? Unrealistic expectation have built-in failure. After you've confronted the causes of your stress, consider the effects of it: sweaty palms, butterflies,

shortness of breath, loss of appetite, etc. Can you find ways of relaxing? Deep breathing and muscle relaxing exercise can be helpful. For more information on dealing with exam related stress, book an appointment with a Writing and Study Skills tutor.

What Strategy should I use to write my exam?

Writing your exam may not be simple as starting with question one and working your way through to the end. The following suggestions can help you write a better exam.

-read the entire exam once. Read the instructions and questions carefully. the most common error students make on the exam is to misread the instructions/questions. Know how many questions you must do and what order to do them in, etc., etc.

-Briefly schedule your writing time. To do this, you should consider the value of each question and the degree of difficulty.

-If you're certain of the answers to some questions, but not others, plan to answer what you know first since the marks for these questions are like money in the bank.

-If you do questions out of sequence, be sure to number them carefully. Leave lots of space between written answers for afterthoughts, etc.

-As you begin answering questions, consider the type of response the exam questions require. If you are answering an essay question, you should first consider developing an outline. If you are answering a math derivation question, then you should sketch a concept summary. Math students should also be aware that small calculations mistakes at the top and bottom of problems are the leading cause of errors on math exams.

For more information on how to answer certain types of questions and general strategies for exam writing, book an appointment with a Writing and Study Skills tutor.

