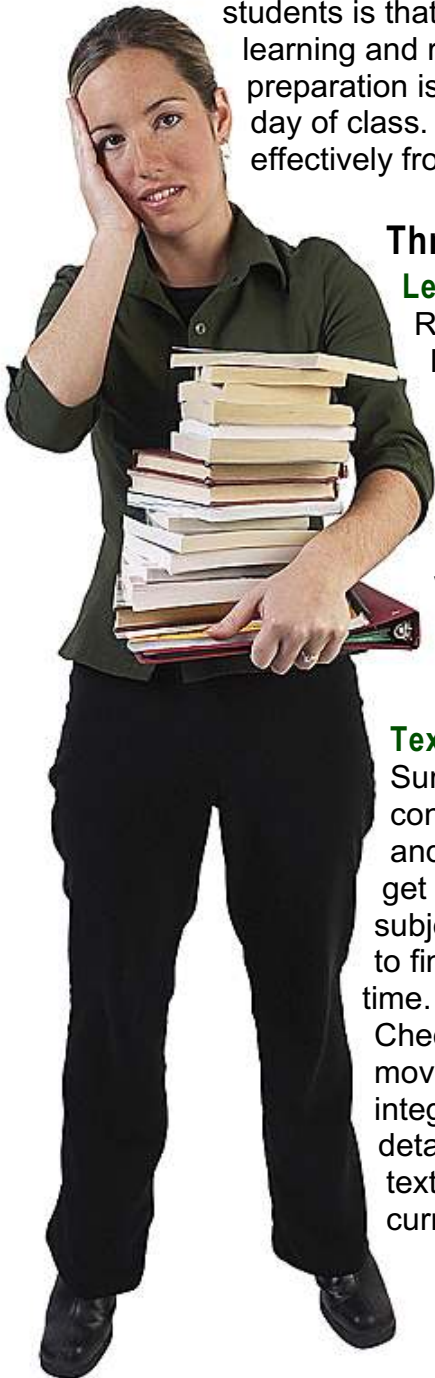


Preparing for

EXAMS

“I take detailed notes in every class. I keep up with my assigned chapters, and even read the entire textbook again before the exam! I studied for hours, and still didn't do as well as I would have liked.” Does this sound familiar? A common problem for students is that they don't spend enough time throughout the year actively learning and reviewing course material. The secret of successful exam preparation is to start studying, not the night before the exam, but on the first day of class. Below are some strategies that you can use to study more effectively from the beginning of the term right up until the final exam.



Throughout the Term

Lecture Notes:

Review your lecture notes as soon as possible after class.

Make corrections and fill in details while the lecture is still fresh in your mind. Identify key words which represent the main points of the lecture, and jot these down in your margins. Using these key words as prompts, try to recall and recite detailed information from your notes. Review your notes to check for accuracy. Write a brief summary of the lecture at the end of your notes. Once a week, or whenever a series of lectures dealing with a particular topic has concluded, combine your daily summaries to create “topical” outlines of the major themes that were covered in class.

Textbooks

Survey each chapter before reading it, to get a sense of how the content is organized. Look at major headings, subheadings, pictures, and words in boldface or italics. Read the chapter summary first to get an overview of the main points that will be covered. Turn each subject heading into as many questions as you can think of, and read to find the answers to your questions. Read only short sections at a time. With your questions in mind, try to recite key points from memory. Check for accuracy, and when you have mastered one small section, move on to the next. Make notes on your readings, and once a week, integrate these with your lecture notes. Use your textbook notes to add detail to your topical outlines. Periodically review your lecture and textbook notes, particularly your topical outlines, to keep the content current in your mind.

Other sources of information

Meet with your instructor throughout the term to seek clarification on any information that you don't understand. If you are having particular difficulty with a concept, check your library to see if there are other textbooks which may explain the information more clearly. Do any extra reading that your instructor has assigned, even if it was not covered in class. You never know! It may be on the exam.

Attend the class before the exam, as well as any extra review sessions

Instructors often give valuable information about the exam during the last class. They may give clues as to what to study, such as "pay particular attention to..." or "be sure to look over..." or even "this will be on the test." Find out as much as you can about the format of the exam.

Ten Questions to Ask about the Exam

1. How long is the exam?
2. What percentage of the final grade is the exam worth?
3. What types of questions will be asked? (essay questions, short answer, fill in the blank, matching, multiple choice)
4. Is the exam cumulative, or will it cover only material that has not yet been tested? Will more weight be given to recently completed content?
5. What sources should be reviewed? (textbooks, additional readings, handouts, study guides, etc)
6. Are old exams available for students to look at?
7. What can students bring to the exam? (calculators, dictionaries, outlines, extra paper, etc)
8. What main topics should be reviewed?
9. Can students ask questions during the exam?
10. What is the policy on deferring or rewriting an exam?

Two to Three Weeks Before the Exam

Plan your study time

Students often make the mistake of over preparing for their first exam, and then running out of time (and steam!) for exams that are scheduled later. Make a master timetable of all of your exams, and schedule adequate study time for each test. Be sure to set aside more time for difficult subjects.

Organize your review

Gather all of the sources that you will use to prepare for your exam (lecture notes, textbooks, study guides, handouts, outside readings, old tests, etc). Make a list of the main topics that you will need to review. Use your course outline, your textbook

headings, and your lecture summary sheets as guidelines for identifying topics. Write the title of each topic at the top of a separate piece of paper. Now list all of the textbook chapters and pages, lecture dates, and other readings that relate to each separate topic.

Set study goals

Divide the material that you need to study into manageable chunks, and assign a time period to each unit. Put your plan in writing, and stay on track. Schedule several shorter sessions, instead of long marathon sessions. If you will study different subjects in a single night, don't study similar subjects back to back. For example, if you plan to study Psychology, Sociology and Math in one night, sandwich Math in between Psychology and Sociology. Build some flexibility into your schedule, in case you need to spend more time than you anticipated on certain areas. Test yourself regularly on the material that you are studying. If you have mastered a topic, don't spend more time on it than necessary. Set aside extra study time for complex or detailed topics. Be sure to plan breaks as well! Get up, stretch, and walk around for ten minutes after every hour of studying. Give yourself rewards for accomplishing your study goals.

Use active study strategies

Rather than passively reading and reviewing, become engaged with your course material. Recite what you know out loud. Record yourself, and listen to your tapes when you are on the bus, waiting for an appointment, etc. Explain what you have learned to someone else. Draw charts and diagrams which summarize complex information. Hang your charts in a prominent location in your study area, so that you look at them often. Make flashcards, and flip through them whenever you have a spare minute. Quiz yourself by thinking up possible exam questions, and then writing down the answers. Using as many senses as possible while studying reinforces memory, and makes recall much easier.

The night before the exam

You should not study any new material on the night before the exam. Use this time for a final rehearsal of key points, and a final review of the most difficult content. Be sure to get a good night's sleep so you are alert and relaxed at the exam!

