



How to Prepare for Exams

BEFORE THE EXAM

Determine remaining tasks and establish a study schedule

- Figure out what you need to accomplish, and estimate the time you need for each new task.
- Decide how you're going to divide your time between completing unfinished reading, reviewing reading and notes, identifying major themes and issues, etc.
- Next, sketch out a rough calendar of the time remaining before the test, and make note of the amount of time you **actually have to do the work**.
- Fit your tasks into the available timeslots.

Create Hierarchies

- Allow longer periods of study time for dealing with large relationships and concepts, and use shorter time intervals for review and reinforcements.
- Focus on difficult tasks first, and then reward yourself with easier ones.
- Take brief breaks every 45 minutes or 1 hour.
- Vary tasks and topics during long study sessions.

Use good study habits

- Find a place where you're productive; a residence hall or bedroom is rarely the best choice.
- Stick to a regular study schedule.

Manage unread material effectively

- First, gather all the necessary material together and establish your course of action. Then, decide what you must read.
- Before you tackle a huge pile of reading, spend time previewing it first. Divide it into manageable units to familiarize yourself with the material. Estimate how much time you'll need to read each unit.
- Once you're actually reading, try to stick to the time limits you've established. Sometimes you may have to skim material – but that's better than nothing.
- When you're finished reading, take time to review the material immediately, even for 10 or 15 minutes. Your chances of retaining the information will be much greater.

Use active reviewing techniques

- Try to integrate your notes and reading material.
- Concentrate on the "forest" first, i.e. large themes and big ideas. Then move on to the "trees," i.e. details.
- Don't waste time passively re-reading material. Instead, concentrate on key points of the text such as the author's thesis and topics of subheadings. Reinforce this information in your mind by reciting it out loud, repeating it to yourself, or writing it down.
- Anticipate potential questions, and then answer them. Pretend you're writing the exam, and select questions you'd be likely to ask. Review old exams to be as familiar as possible with the format.

DURING THE EXAM

Prepare yourself emotionally, physically, and intellectually

- Concentrate on what you know, instead of what you don't know. By thinking of the test as an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge, you'll emphasize your strengths and downplay your weaknesses.
- Prepare your brain to function optimally by taking care of yourself. Get a good night's sleep, eat well-balanced meals, and keep up with your exercise routine.
- Anxiety is highly contagious! Avoid talking to other students just before the test.

Arrive early

- Try not to rush to the exam; you'll just raise your anxiety level if you're running late.
- Choose a seat with good lighting, a comfortable seat, and a good writing surface.

Follow Instructions

- Make sure you understand the instructor's rules for writing notes on scratch paper, tearing pages out of blue books, etc.

Preview the exam first

- Before you start answering questions, make sure your exam has all its pages and is legible.
- This is essential: read the instructions carefully! Ask the instructor about anything you don't understand.

Map out your time

- Wear a watch, and keep a close eye on it.
- Try to decide which questions will take the longest for you to answer, and which carry the most points. Answer these questions first.
- Be sure to leave time at the end to review.

Read each question carefully

- Try not to spend, overanalyze, or over-interpret the questions; you'll end up looking for something that's not there.
- Answer the question as the instructor intends it. Remember to interpret it within the scope of the class.

Remain calm

- Don't panic if you encounter a question you didn't anticipate. Use what you've learned and your powers of reasoning to create a logical answer.
- Remember to go for partial credit whenever possible. If you've studied, you're bound to know something!