

Study Tips

General Exam Tips

Preparation

1. Try to prioritize the material by importance and study the most significant topics first. The instructor only has a limited amount of time to test your knowledge, so keep in mind that the problems cannot be extremely complicated, and are most likely not going to be obscure.
2. Read the textbook assignments before the lecture(s) over them. Doing so will help you identify and better understand the concepts as the instructor goes over them in lecture.
3. Immediately after a lecture, if possible, review your notes. This further helps you understand the material while it is still fresh in your mind. If you can review with other students right after class, even better because they may have better clarification about something than you do, and that can help clear it up for you.
4. Study in a way that suits you best:
 - Study alone versus in a group.
 - Study the most difficult and important material during a time of the day that you are most alert.
5. Summarize or outline the test material in your own words. Writing a summary forces you to examine the subject matter and also provides a condensed version to review just before the exam.
6. Each set of study sheets should summarize the readings, your class notes and any handouts.
7. Type the study sheets so they are easy to read. Use enough bold type and spaces to make important ideas stand out.
8. For the two weeks before the exam, read through your study sheets three times every day. Just read the sheets without trying to memorize the information. Revise information as necessary.
9. Do a major review of the test material far enough in advance in order to identify any problem areas and still be able to meet with the instructor about them.
10. If the instructor has been known to give similar exams and you have access to old exams, study them. However, don't be fooled into thinking that by being able to work through an old exam you'll be able to understand everything currently being tested over without having to study it.

The Night Before the Exam

1. Read your study sheets as usual.
2. Go to bed early and get a good night of sleep.

The Day of the Exam

1. Set your alarm and get up early. Give yourself plenty of time to get to class.
2. Eat a good breakfast that is balanced with all the food groups. Eating a balanced meal will help maintain your blood sugar at a stable level during the exam. This is important

because your brain runs on sugar, so you want to be full.

3. Caffeine has been proven to increase alertness and performance, but only to a point. If you use caffeine regularly, be sure to get your usual dose before the exam. However, if you do not usually use caffeine, it is not wise to have any before the exam because it will make you jittery and unfocused.
4. Take a piece of fresh fruit with you to eat during the exam. This will help boost a dropping blood sugar level.
5. Bring your own paper and a watch.
6. Fight exam anxiety.

Starting the Exam

1. If you're feeling tense, take a deep breath and remember that you know the material. Be confident in yourself.
2. Read the instructions thoroughly and carefully before you start working.
3. Skim over the entire exam prior to beginning work.
4. Don't feel you have to do the problems in order. First answer the questions you feel confident about. Then note how the problems are weighted (point value) and turn to the questions where you think you can earn pick-up points most easily. Leave the most difficult to understand questions until the end.
5. Think before writing. You might start to write immediately but end up going in the wrong direction. Allowing yourself a couple of seconds to think first may take your thoughts in a more correct direction, actually saving you time in the long run.
6. Do exactly what is requested of you. Specifically, do not waste time on things that you will not receive credit for.
7. Pace yourself through the exam. Be aware of the time and number of problems left.
8. Most graders use nonlinear grading, meaning the early points of a problem are easier to get. Because of this, you should always write something meaningful down for every problem, even if it's only a little. There are diminishing returns in terms of points-per-effort in trying to write down every last point out of a given problem. If time is running low, it may be best to move on.
9. If you're running out of time, write down the steps of the problem you would perform if you were to continue working on it. This demonstrates your knowledge of the appropriate steps.
10. Show your work and make clear your reasoning so that you have a chance of receiving partial credit.
11. Be neat in your writing. If a grader can read your work easily, they are more likely to give you a slightly better grade than if your work is messy and illegible.
12. In courses on subjective material, simply state the material from the class and the text. Offering your own opinions may seem like a good idea, but unless the exam specifically asks you to do so, there is a risk of your opinion opposing that of the grader. In addition, restatements from the class/test material are easy for the grader to recognize as something worth credit.
13. Always check over your answers if you have time. Don't rush through the exam just so

you can leave early. Use the entire amount of time given to you.

14. Make sure your name is on the exam before turning it in.

Further Suggestions

1. Simplify your knowledge. Textbooks and lectures tend to present material sequentially. Take the extra step of understanding the material in your terms, which may involve recognizing relationships that could not be conveniently expressed in the order presented by the text or in lecture.
2. Nearly all logically consistent topics are simple at their foundations. Attempt to recognize the simple underlying relationships in the subject at hand; these are often left unstated by instructors and textbooks.
3. Try to learn general principles and methods.
4. Learn as many methods of problem-solving as you can.
5. Ask yourself questions. Explore your own ideas. Try to understand the material in detail.
6. It is said often that the best way to learn something is to teach it. If you can explain the material clearly and completely for someone else to understand, then there's a good chance that you understand it well yourself.
7. Learn by observing others. Notice what works for them and consider incorporating those methods into your study routine.
8. Think about and question everything.
9. For maximum efficiency, have several projects going on at once. That way, if you get tired, frustrated or bored with one, you can easily move to a different one and still be productive. This also gives you time to work out problems with the first project subconsciously.
10. Anticipate.
11. Don't bother pulling "all-nighters." This simply borrows time from the next day, in which your level of functioning will be considerably lower. You want to be at maximum performance for exam day, not dragging.

About This Page

The information available on this page is intended to help students become effective and efficient learners. The pages were adapted from material presented on two Web sites:

AcademicTips.org and Study Guides and Strategies.

If you are interested in obtaining additional help, you might visit either of those two sites as well as these others:

- Study Guide Zone
- StudyTips.org