

Exam Preparation Strategies

From the time you receive your syllabi at the beginning of the quarter you should be mapping out your exam preparation strategy. The earlier you begin to prepare and actively study the greater your outcome on your exam. Below are tips for examination preparation:

Plan a Study Schedule: set realistic and attainable goals for yourself and outline when, where, and how you will study (flashcards, independently, reviewing notes, working with class mates.) Review your notes weekly and plan to actively study for at least one week prior to the exam.

Determine what to study: ask your professor about the makeup of the exam (topics, cumulative, objective, essay) and then study unfamiliar and complicated material first, planning two hours of active review for each topic covered over at least five days.

Create a summary sheet/study guide: this will be a combination of your lecture notes and notes from your reading. This sheet can be used for review and helps with organizing the material you need to study. Keep this sheet with you to study thru out the day: waiting for a class to start or on the bus/train. Recite to yourself and/or outload when you study to aid in long-term potentiation. When you cram information only stays in your short term memory which can lead to poor recollection or completely “blinking out” during an exam. Consistent and repetitive review of information helps transfer from short term to long term memory.

Predict Questions: As you did during your pre-reading (see SQ3R reading tips) develop questions that may be on the test and study those questions. Once you have learned the concepts well, create questions that will help you practice applying them to a variety of scenarios that may be covered on the exam.

Self-Care: be kind to yourself during exam preparation and practice good self-care such as keeping a regular sleeping and eating schedule (avoid excessive sugar and caffeine), exercise daily, seek out social support from friends and family and engage in your “go-to” stress management strategy.

Exam day: get to the exam room early, try to avoid cramming last minute information which can interfere with information you already learned. Avoid groups of students quizzing each other right before the exam, this nervous energy can be contagious and can impact your confidence. Instead: eat a balanced diet, engage in stress reducing activities, and review concepts, remember to stop studying at least an hour before the exam to give yourself a mental rest before the exam.

Adapted from: Pauk, W. (2005). *How to Study in College* (8th Ed.), Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.