



Test Preparation

Strategies

Focused study: You will study more effectively and efficiently without distractors. Remove external distractors (turn off TV, music, phone, etc.) and internal distractors (worries, complaints, daydreams). Make a conscious decision to focus.

Cramming: If you want to remember a large volume of very detailed information (such as all the bones in the body), it can help to review intensely the night before to keep the information in your memory long enough to take the test. It will not, however, remain in long-term memory well. If you are studying for an exam that requires more conceptual understanding and not just sheer memory of facts, continuous preparation rather than cramming will be more effective.

Left Brain/Right Brain: Each side of the brain processes info differently. The left brain processes in a more logical, step-by-step way with emphasis on details and information organized in words. The right brain focuses more on the “big picture.” It is more visual and intuitive. Most of us favor one side versus another, but you can maximize your learning by using tools from both sides.

Left Brain Tools: Outline, lecture notes, lists, flash cards

Right Brain Tools: Charts, maps, time lines, concept maps, visuals

Mastering Material

Learning should be a continuous process; the test is just the final phase in the process.

1. **Preview before class:** Read or preview material to be covered in class before class. Create chapter maps or outlines. Note questions you’d like answered in class.
2. **Attend class:** Listen actively during class, takes notes, participate in discussions.
3. **Review after class:** Review and process notes within 24 hours. Annotate or organize notes (outlines, notecards, concept maps, binders, etc.), fill in gaps, and note any questions.
4. **Study:** Repetition is key. Shoot for 3-5 short intense study sessions per day (see below). On weekends, review notes and material from the week to make connections.
5. **Assess your learning:** Periodically assess how well your study strategies are preparing you for LO presentations, exams, etc.

Intense Study Session

1. **Set a goal** (2-3 min). Decide what you want to accomplish in the study session.
2. **Study with focus** (20 -40 minutes). Read text carefully. Interact with information--make notes in margins, outline text, summarize and/or make concept maps.
3. **Review** (5 minutes). Review what you have just studied.
4. **Take a break** (10 minutes): Get a snack, play a quick game, contact a friend.
5. **Repeat** (with same or new material).

Notes Review

At least once a week get out your notes and look at them as a continuum (lay them out on a big table or on the floor if necessary). Look at them in their entirety. How do they fit together? How do Monday's notes connect to Wednesday's? How do Tuesday's connect to Friday's? How do this week's notes connect to last week's? Look for patterns and connections. Create a concept map to visualize the "big picture" of concepts and connections. Look for holes in the connections that you need to fill in. Write main concepts from the week(s) on note cards. Shuffle them and pull 2 or 3 cards at random. Explain how these concepts connect, or explain how the concepts are similar and how they are different.

After the Test

Use the exam and your performance on it as a learning tool for preparing for your next exam. First, evaluate your preparation. Did your study plan prepare you properly? What worked well for this test and why? What didn't work?

Next, review all the questions you missed. Why did you miss them? Did you not understand the concept? Did you not understand the question?

Reflect on the test-taking experience as a whole. How were you feeling? Relaxed, stressed, confident, worried? Did you have enough time or did you feel rushed? Did you need to skip many questions and return to them later? Did you leave any blank? Did you second-guess your answers or feel confident with your first choice?

The last step, after considering the above, is to create a plan to improve on your preparation for and performance in the next test.

Some of the information in this handout was adapted from *Test Preparation and Test Taking Skills*, The Center for Academic Success, Louisiana State University.