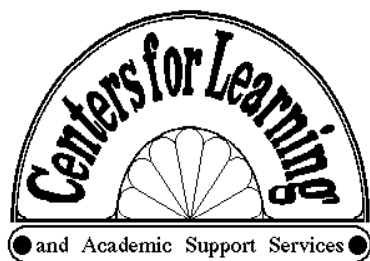


Preparing for and Taking Exams



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PREPARING FOR AN ESSAY EXAM

As you prepare for an essay exam, *you will* want to concentrate mainly on key ideas, the evidence supporting these ideas, and their relationship to other key ideas. Essay questions generally focus on broad questions rather than on details.

Two techniques used when studying for an essay exam:

1. Select several pages of notes covering a body of information that you regard as a likely essay topic. Lay pages of notes on the desk in front of you with each page covering two-thirds of the one before so that only recall columns show. (*see Listening & Notetaking Workshop) Recall columns prompt paraphrased recitation of the material at hand. When you get stuck, consult the supporting details and then continue to recite. Work through the text chapters in similar fashion by using your markings to prompt recitation.
2. Compose questions based on the material you are studying. Solid understanding is necessary in order to formulate questions, so creating questions increases concentration. It is also a good idea to practice writing out answers to your questions.

Three Principles for Taking Essay Exams

Here are three principles for taking essay exams and ways to implement them.

A). Use Exam Time Well.

Quickly survey the entire exam and note the questions that are easiest for you. Answer these questions first. Knowing certain material very well may tempt you to write brilliantly for 30 minutes on a question worth only 10 points, leaving little time for a harder question worth 30 points. Govern yourself during the exam according to a plan for choosing questions and allocating the right amount of time for each.

Organized Answers.

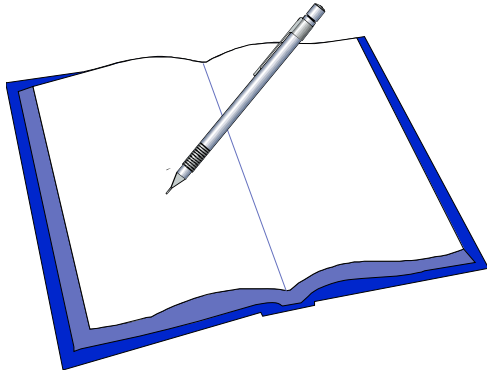
Students write fine answers to questions that have not been asked. This strategy will help you stay focused and organized:

1. Read the question carefully.

- Take the time to read it again and underline key words. This forces you to read the question accurately. The underlined words will stimulate recall of relevant information.
- Brainstorm. Write down all the ideas you can think of in response to what the question asks. Then read over your notes, underline the most important points, and use them in your answer.
- Use the underlined words in the question and in your written brainstorming to construct a brief outline. This ensures good organization.
- Begin your answer by rewriting the question or problem. This reinforces your focus.
- Write the rest of the answer according to your outline. If new ideas come to mind as you write, add them at the end.
- Make sure each answer begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusion.

PREPARING FOR A MULTIPLE-CHOICE EXAM

Studying for multiple-choice exams is different from studying for essay exams. Preparing for multiple-choice exams still requires purposeful notes, well-reviewed texts, and active daily learning. The multiple-choice exam requires a light review of nearly everything covered.



- Plan to review the material several times before the exam.
- Use your notes and text markings, aided by regular recitation to quickly reread large amounts of material.
- Take advantage of the many cues that multiple-choice questions contain. With careful reading you will find that the right answer is frequently apparent.

Taking the Exam

Three helpful suggestions:

- #1:** Question those choices that use absolute words such as *all*, *always*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *never*, *no one*, *none*, and *only*. These choices are often incorrect.
- #2:** Answers with qualifiers, such as *generally*, *probably*, *most*, *often*, *some*, *sometimes*, and *usually*, are frequently correct.
- #3:** Read carefully for terms like **not**, **except**, and **but**, which maybe contained in the question.

Look at the following sample multiple-choice question:

In multiple-choice questions, the most complete and inclusive answer is

- a. never correct
- b. often correct
- c. always correct
- d. all of the above
- e. none of the above



The correct answer is *b*, the choice with the qualifying word *often*; all the other choices use absolute words and are incorrect.

What to do when you just don't know:

- Skip over the puzzling questions but mark them so that you can find them easily later.
- When you have finished answering all of the obvious questions, return to the puzzlers.
- For the puzzlers that remain, try eliminating those choices that are clearly wrong.
- Eliminate as many choices as you can so as to increase the odds in your favor, and then make the best guess possible.

A word of caution: Make sure you know the scoring system for the exam. If, for example, there is a built-in factor to penalize you for guessing (number right minus a percentage of number wrong), it is not wise to guess.

12 Ways to Reduce Test Anxiety

- 1) **Take Care of Yourself** - Eat right, get enough sleep, and exercise
- 2) **Try Relaxation Techniques** - Take deep breaths, try meditating
- 3) **Detach Yourself** - Let go of ideas which you hold tightly such as “I must get an A.” Phrases like this will only get you into trouble.



- 4) **Recognize and Accept Your Anxiety** - Recognize that your sweaty palms and the knot in your stomach are messages your body is giving you about stress and anxiety.
- 5) **Yell “Stop”** - If you can’t yell it out loud, say it in your head. This will temporarily break the cycle of worry.
- 6) **Focus** - Focus your attention on a specific object. Study it, concentrate on that one thing.
- 7) **Talk to Yourself** - Reassure yourself, use positive words and phrases.
- 8) **Consider the Worst** - Try to find the source of your anxiety. Why do you have to get an A on this exam? What will happen if you don’t? Keep things in perspective!
- 9) **Talk to Your Professor** - If you do poorly on an exam, maybe you can do something for extra credit or take a make up exam. Ask to review an exam with the professor to see what went wrong.
- 10) **Talk to Your Classmates** - Study in groups. Other students may understand points that you missed. Talk about your anxiety, maybe your classmates are anxious about the exam too.
- 11) **Don’t Cram** - Cramming is the worst thing you can do if you are anxious about exams. First of all, you will not retain the information you are studying; second, it will be harder to recall on the exam; and third, if you deprive yourself of sleep, you will be tired and your brain will work slower making it difficult to think through anything.
- 12) **Be Prepared** - Make sure you know what will be on the exam. Ask your professor about specific material covered and about the test format.