**Test Taking: General Tips**

How do you typically prepare for tests?

A. Re-read the chapter

B. Study? Who studies?

C. Look over my notes

D. Combine information from text, notes & PowerPoints, design test questions and practice answering these questions.

Did you answer C? Most people do. Looking over notes is helpful, but you’re probably simply recognizing information, not “owning” it. Did you answer A? When re-reading a chapter, we think we’re studying hard, but the truth is most of us get to the bottom of a page and ask, “What did I just read?” (The strategy is to turn headings into questions and read to get the answers to these questions- study what *you* wrote in the text). Well, if you chose B it may have worked in high school, *but* … welcome to college! The answer to strive for? D! This test packet will show you how to “own” information so you can excel on your tests, but more importantly, truly learn!

**Tips to Apply Before the Test**

**1. Distribute your learning** into small manageable parts. (The opposite of this? Cramming!) Here is the basic rule of thumb:

Daily: 15 minutes: review what you learned during the last 24 hours

Weekly: 1 hour: review what you learned during the last week

Major: 2-5 hours: review the material for a major exam

**2. Review actively**. Integrate notes, text, and other info onto summary sheets by diagramming, charting, outlining, categorizing in tables or simply writing summaries. Here are a few types of visual organizers:

a**. Info chart**: Take a paragraph and analyze it..break it down: eg:

***Sigmund Freud was born in 1900 and died in 1955. He is best known for creating psychoanalysis, a method of psychotherapy which focused on unveiling unconscious thoughts, including the psychosexual,*** through ***free association. Psychoanalysis is a multidimensional therapy that can be time-consuming and expensive***. …Break it down like this…

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Who/When | What | Key ideas | Pros | Cons |
| Sigmund Freud  1900-1955 | Psycho-analysis | Unconscious, Psychosexual, Free Association | Multi-dimensional | Time consuming, expensive |

b. **Question Charts**: Another way to organize information. This works particularly well when comparing items in the same category. Here are the steps to create a question chart:

1. Write a summary question-the purpose of the topic (chart).

2. Put items to be compared across the top, questions down the left.

3. Use comparison items from the same category.

4. Write questions that apply to all comparison items.

**Eg: Summary/Topic question: Compare/contrast these world religions:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Hinduism | Buddhism | Taoism | Judaism | Christianity |
| Higher power? |  |  |  |  |  |
| Founder? |  |  |  |  |  |
| Rituals? |  |  |  |  |  |
| How is death addressed? |  |  |  |  |  |

c. **Pro/Con “T”**: Most Common chart. Start with a summary question; put pros on one side, cons on the other. Eg:

**Should urine testing be required to receive public assistance?**

Pros Cons\_\_\_\_\_

d. **Chain of Events**: Like a flow chart. Eg:

**What are the steps of the criminal justice system for those who ultimately plead guilty?**

Criminal act---criminal investigation---arrest---preliminary hearing or grand jury---arraignment---plea: guilty—sentencing---(probation)---prison or jail---release from incarceration

e. **Time Line**: Especially in history-shows chronological time of events

f. **Outlines**-It’s very helpful to outline the chapters in your text to see where all the details fit into place. It provides a big picture and aids in understanding. Even better? Use colors and symbols.

g. **Mind Map Summaries**: This is essentially an outline in picture form. Go from the general to the specific, starting with the topic in the center, and get more detailed as you move away from the center.

h. **Pictures**: Eg. Use a picture of a heart to remember its components.

**3.**  In an effort to refine your study plan, **ask the professor** the following:

\* How long will the exam be?

\* What topics/chapters will be on the exam?

\* Will the test be based on the notes, the text, or both?

\* Will it be multiple choice, essay, short answer…

\* If it is an essay exam, what critical skills will the students be asked to use? (define, explain, compare, contrast, apply, predict, create, evaluate…)

**4. Best study tool: Design a pretest**. Guess the questions and answer them. \*Far more effective than “looking over your notes.” How will you know what to ask?

\* end of chapter questions in your textbook

\* from your textbook: turn headings & subheadings into questions

\* Ask “mirror questions” from your notes. It’s like jeopardy: your notes provide the answers, now you flush out the questions. (Pay special attention to notes you’ve indicated are important-possibly with an \*)

\* Use visual organizers to predict test questions

\* previous quizzes

\* copies of old exams in the library

**5. Use memory techniques:**

1) Wear neural traces:

* + Write it down (kinesthetic sense of touch will help you remember)
  + Recite and repeat (say it out loud; you’ll remember it better)
  + Stand and pace (action is a great memory enhancer)

2) Get creative:

- Associations:

- Create pictures:

- Mnemonic devices:

Acronyms: 5 great lakes?

Acrostics: 9 planets from sun?

Rhymes & Songs: When did Columbus sail the ocean blue?

**6.** **Design flash cards**. Examples include the following: question on 1 side & answer on the other, formulas, simple problems, definitions, foreign language phrases. Keep 2 piles: 1 for mastered cards, 1 for cards you still need to work on. Review the diminishing 2nd pile until all cards are mastered.

**7.**  **Study groups**: Study with other well-prepared students and attend **review sessions.** NEVER miss a class before an exam…this is when you’ll be getting hints.

**8. Create a study check lists** for all you need to do for your test(s): Make to-do lists for each test (pages from text, notes, problems needed to master, make flashcards, make tutoring appointments, design visual organizers, and #1: design a pre-test)

**9.** **Be physically ready for the test:**

\* catch your ZZZZZZs the night before

\* eat high protein, low carbs, green veggies, but don’t pig out

\* minimize caffeine (gets in the way of concentration)

\* minimize sugar (crash!)

**10.** **True or False:** You should never **cram** under any circumstances. I bet you’d be surprised to find that the answer is false! Cramming is not optimal, but it is better than nothing. Focus on the key points and recite the information out loud.

**11. Avoid the** “**escape syndrome**.” If you find yourself fretting or talking about your work rather than studying, relax for a few minutes and rethink what you are doing…ask: Would I pay myself for what I’m doing right now?

1**2. Arrive at the test room early,** but not too early. You should have enough time to arrange your working conditions and establish a calm, alert mode. Select a seat where the lighting is best, **usually in the front**, and where your view of other students is minimal. If you arrive too early, you may catch anxiety from your fellow students….anxiety is very contagious!

**Visit Tutoring Services in the Butler Library. Academic Commons!**

**Tips to Apply During the Test**

**1. 1st and foremost…relax**. In an anxious state, brain waves speed up, and concentration becomes difficult, if not impossible. This is how stress sabotages. It is actually easy to slow down brain waves, but it takes focus and intention. Here’s what to do: ask:

**A.**  **“What can I do with my body?”**

\* With feet flat on the floor, sit up straight and breathe deeply from the abdomen. A few deep breaths will slow down brain waves immediately.

**B. “What can I do with my mind?”**

\* Get into a **fighting attitude before** the test. Focus on what you know rather than what you don’t know. There is nothing you can do about it now anyway. Visualize a big red A on your test.

\* Does the following sound familiar to you: “Oh no, I don’t know the answer to the 1st question…oh, no, I don’t know the answer to the 2nd question…I’m going to fail this test…I’m going to fail this course…I’m going to get kicked out of school…I’ll never get a job…I’m going to end up eating cat food in a ditch..”

This is called the “**whirlpool of despair**,” and there is nothing rational about it.

\* Notice when you’re entering the whirlpool and, in your head, **yell “Stop!”**

\* Stay out of the whirlpool by practicing the mantra, **“It’s no big deal!”**

**2.** When you receive your test **jot down all of the information you might forget** in the margin or on the back**.** (As long as it’s o.k.) Get the info out of your head and onto the paper.

**3. Preview the whole test** prior to answering any questions. Make sure your copy has no missing or duplicate pages. Note the format…are there essays? Read the directions….are you to pick only 1 or 2 of the essays?

**4. Read and re-read each question**. Circle and underline the important words in the question; pay special attention to words like **except**, as it changes the entire question. How annoying it is to study hard and know the information but get it wrong simply because the question was read incorrectly!

**5. Plan your time**. Allow the most time for the questions which offer the most points, and leave time for review. P.S. Wear your own watch…don’t trust the one on the wall!

**6.**  **Start with the easy questions 1st**; this’ll get you into the “flow” and build confidence for the harder questions.

**7. As soon as your anxiety increases, move on** Make a slash next to the question and visit it later.

**8. True or False: Your 1st answer is usually correct**. TRUE! Put down that eraser unless you’re certain!

**9. Use the test to take the test**. This means that some questions actually answer other questions. Pay attention to this.

**10.** Do not panic if you see a question you did not anticipate. Use everything you know to **analyze the questions and create a logical answer**. Go for partial credit; if you studied, you’re bound to know something.

**11. Read the question as is**. Avoid overanalyzing or oversimplifying.

**12. Pay attention to the test, not to yourself or others**. True or False: The 1st person to finish the test usually gets the best score…..FALSE! Don’t worry about what you should have done; pay attention to what you can do now.

**13.** Don’t hesitate to **ask for clarification** from the professor.

**Tips for Specific Types of Exams**

**Multiple Choice, True or False, Open Book, Essay**

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. Answer in your head before looking at the choices.

2. Mark questions you can’t answer immediately with a slash…but remember to go back!!

3. Read all choices before selecting your answer (you want the **best** answer, not just a good answer).

4.Circle words such as ***not*** and ***except.*** (These words change the entire meaning of the question.)

5. Deduce by crossing off wrong choices.

**True or False Questions**

1. Answer these questions quickly, as they are not worth many points.

2. Read the questions carefully; 1 word can make it inaccurate.

3. The ***entire*** statement must be true to accurately mark it true.

4. All inclusive words (**always, never**) indicate a false statement.

5. Qualifier words (**sometimes, rarely**) are often true as they are meant to “cover the butt” of the teacher.

6. Unusual technical terms that are not familiar to you, (and you’ve studied) are usually false. Don’t let them trip you up.

7. If you have no clue and are not penalized for guessing, the answer more often than not is TRUE.

**Open Book Questions**

1. True or False: Open book tests are the easiest kind of test….false! Don’t be fooled-prepare!

2. Write formulas and key terms on a separate sheet.

3. The key to taking an open book test: organize your text and notes:

a. Flag important pages with paper clips or post-it notes:

\*table of contents \*index \*charts/graphs \*other important pages

**Essay Questions**

**1st step:** **Determine precisely what is being asked:**

a. underline key words

b. circle verbs and know exactly what they mean:

\*compare \*explain \*create \*contrast

\*analyze \*apply \*critique \*classify

**2nd step:** **Brainstorm ideas in the margins**

**3rd step:** **Outline in the margin:**

Intro: Tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em. (Thesis)

Body: Tell ‘em

* Be organized here
* List points in order (start with strongest points)
* Supporting details
* Make sure you answer the question!

Conclusion: Tell ‘em what you told ‘em Summarize major points

**4th step**: **Write directly from the outline**

a. Get to the point. Less is more, so avoid filler.

b. 1st sentence: Restate the question with your direction (use the professor’s words)

c. Logistics: Use pen, 1 side only, leave space between lines and in margins, review grammar and spelling.

d. End with strong conclusion. Restate thesis and summarize clearly.

**Note**: While test taking skills are important, **nothing** can replace attending class, taking notes, doing homework, & studying effectively.