

Learning Resource Center Study Skills Handout - #4



Tips to consider when preparing for and taking an exam

On the surface, tests do not look dangerous, but we treat them like they are land mines. Grades are not a measure of intelligence. Grades do not measure creativity. They are not an indication of your ability to contribute to society. Grades are simply a measure of how well you did on one test on one particular day. A key to successful test preparation is managing review time. Use short daily review sessions to prepare the way for major review sessions. Also, be specific about your intention to review from the beginning of the semester.

DAILY REVIEWS

Daily reviews include the short pre-and post-class reviews of lecture notes. You can also conduct brief daily reviews when you read. Before you begin a new reading assignment, scan your notes and the sections you underlined in the previous assignment.

It is important to focus daily reviews on two kinds of material: material you have just learned either in class or in your reading, and material that involves simple memorization (equations, formulas, dates, definitions). Regular daily reviews will pay off during exam week. Begin to review the first day of class. The first day, in fact, is important for review. Most instructors outline the whole course at that time.

WEEKLY REVIEWS

Weekly reviews are longer – about an hour per subject. These review periods are also more structured than short daily reviews. When a subject is complex, the brain requires time to dig into the material; do not skip from subject to subject too quickly. Review each subject at least once a week. The content of these weekly review sessions includes review of assigned reading, review of lecture notes, and practice answering questions from your notes. Also, it is a good idea to look over any flashcards you have created.

MAJOR REVIEWS

Major reviews are usually conducted the week before finals or other major exams. They integrate concepts and deepen understanding of the material presented through the term. These are longer review periods, two to five hours at a stretch, punctuated by sufficient breaks. Remember that the effectiveness of your review begins to drop after an hour or

so unless you give yourself a short rest. After a certain point, short breaks every hour will not be enough to refresh you. That's when it is time to quit.

During long sessions, study the most difficult subjects when you are the most alert, that is, at the beginning of the session. It is important to remember that when preparing for exams, in addition to adhering to your daily, weekly and major review, you should note the following:

1. Learn what your limits are by being conscious of the quality of your concentration.
2. During long sessions, study the most difficult subjects when you are the most alert: at the beginning of the session.
3. To combat procrastination, set aside time in the future to plan how you will quit putting your study time off. Do this within three days or at least within a week or two.
4. Create a system of rewards for time spent reviewing.
5. Clarify your intentions about reviewing. Use the intention statements in this chapter, or invent your own, to draw a detailed picture of your plans for review time.

Remember, your commitment to review is your most powerful ally.

Ellis, David B. (1985). Becoming a Master Student (p.148-149)