

TIPS FOR STUDYING FOR EXAMS

I. Be aware of the difference between cramming and reviewing. “Cramming is a frantic attempt to stuff one’s mind as full as possible of facts and ideas in, and for a short period of time. Review is a re-examination of familiar material to clarify one’s understanding and pick up any material which has been overlooked.” If you use a systematic method of study, reviewing should not be a problem.

II. Before the Test: A Checklist

1. If your instructor gives objective tests (multiple choice, true-false, completion), try to think of questions he might ask. Skim and review your notes, either in the book or in your notebook, and frame possible questions in your mind.
2. Try writing a brief summary or commentary for each chapter you have studied. This will force you to put into your own words the knowledge you have gained.
3. Recite to yourself the important names, theories, dates, terms –any relevant information connected with what you have been studying in class.
4. Take the time to define the key words in each chapter. Words such as mitosis, ecology, chromosomes may be familiar to you, but could you explain them in your own words for a test?
5. Put together what you’ve learned for lectures, class readings, and outside reading.
6. Look over the last test you took to figure out the type of questions you can expect and to recall the instructor’s comments on that test.

Tips for a Good Performance on Exams

Physical and emotional readiness is as important as being intellectually prepared in taking exams. It is also important to know the best ways to answer different kinds of test questions.

1. Get Plenty of Sleep

You lose sleep when you leave yourself an impossible amount of work to do. This leaves your body and mind in poor shape. Get a good night’s sleep.

2. Avoid Panic

Go to bed on time, take brisk walks, and eat leisurely. This will avoid the vicious circle of panic from getting started.

3. Adopt a Good Attitude

Have a positive attitude. This will influence your success.

4. Finish Your study Sessions with an Overall View of the Topic

Look at all of your summary sheets and see how the individual topics and categories fit together to make a complete picture.

5. Don't Rush the Morning of the Exam

Get up early. Don't rush. Shower, do a few simple exercises. Take one last look at the summary sheets. Have a breakfast of good food; you will need your protein.

6. Find a Good Spot in the Exam Room

Arrive early. Get a good seat. Sit where the light is good and no one will bother you (either the exam proctor or your friends).

7. Avoid Tenseness During the Exam

Some anxiety is good, but not too much.

Here are some techniques to forestall excessive tension:

1. Take several slow, deep breaths; drop your shoulders.
2. Place your hands limply on your lap.
3. Think briefly about a "reward" after the exam.
4. Recall some key words on your summary sheets.

How to Take Objective Tests

When taking objective (multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, completion) tests:

1. Read the directions carefully.
2. Skim the exam to determine the types of questions asked.
3. Develop a time plan.
4. Read an item through quickly with high concentration, and answer on the basis of your first impression.
5. Re-read the item asking yourself what it really means, expressing the thought in your own words striving for comprehension.
6. Ask yourself if your original answer still appears correct in light of your close analysis of the item, but do not change your answer because of a mere doubt; change it only if you find clear indication that is wrong and another right.
7. Do all the questions you know the answer to first. Then go back and complete the ones you are not sure of.
8. If there is no penalty for guessing, leave no question unanswered.
9. Don't read too much into the exam and waste time overanalyzing and looking for trick questions unless previous experience with a teacher tells you to be very cautious about the phrasing of questions on an exam.

True-False Tests Beware of statements containing modifiers such as always, never, all, entirely, etc. These statements are usually false. Statements containing modifiers such as some, sometimes, usually, most, are generally not true. Make no assumptions about the answer pattern. It is possible to have all the answers false or to have an extraordinary imbalance. Here's a word of caution however. Instructors are aware of the power of these words, too. The one real way to be certain that the words are being used correctly is to know the answer to the questions.

Multiple or Single Choice Read the directions carefully. DO not choose the correct or incorrect answer. Can you choose more than one answer? First see if you can answer the questions or pick out the correct answer without looking at the choices. If so, mark it. If not, see if you can identify the correct answer. Often a correct, but not necessarily the best choice, is at the top of the list. If you are unable to decide immediately on an answer, skip it for now. Usually questions or statements are interrelated and one question will give a clue to the answer to the other questions.

How to Take Subjective or Essay Tests

Some questions may require very long answers, some shorter ones. Short-answer questions can be tricky, especially those so worded that you are left in doubt of the kind of answer expected. For example, take the following question from a Biology 1 test:

1. What is the process called mitosis?

Before you answer a question like this, you need to know whether the instructor wants an answer like this:

Mitosis is a term given to a common method of cell divisions (sometimes called equational division) in which the nuclear chromatin is formed into a long thread which in turn breaks into chromosomes that are split lengthwise. The halves then come together in two sets, each forming the nucleus for a new cell.

Or like this:

Mitosis is the process by which a cell divides to form another cell. Mitosis includes several stages of division going from interphase, and back to interphase, metaphase, anaphase, telophase, and back to interphase, where one cell would then be two.

Ways of Determining What the Instructor Wants

- A. Look at the amount of space given.
- B. Number of points the question is worth
- C. Experience with previous tests
- D. Ask the instructor how detailed of an answer he wants

Answering long essay questions that are worth many points requires more sophisticated skills. IN a long answer, you will include a great information. You will need to be precise and make sure that everything you say is relevant to the question. For this you need two main abilities: to be able to detect the key words in the question, and to know how to organize your ideas.

Here are some key direction-words used in essay exams. See if you can write a definition for each word. Then compare you answers with the definitions that follow.

- 1. Compare
- 2. Contrast
- 3. Define
- 4. Describe
- 5. Discuss
- 6. Enumerate
- 7. Evaluate

8. Explain
9. Interpret
10. Prove or Show

Here are answers to compare with yours:

1. COMPARE: show the similarities between the two events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like. (Some people use compare to mean showing differences as well as similarity so be careful.)
2. CONTRAST: show the differences between two or more events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like.
3. DEFINE: state the meaning of a word or phrase. Example: Define science.
4. DESCRIBE: give the characteristics of something. Example: The functions of the ATP/ADP systems.
5. DISCUSS: give the pros and cons of an issue, event, process, theory, or technique. Example: Discuss how DNA replicates itself.
6. ENUMERATE: list a number of reasons or attributes of something. Example: Enumerate the stages of mitosis.
7. EVALUATE: make a judgment or give an opinion, or supply reasons why something is as it is. Example: Explain what is meant by the “scientific method.”
8. EXPLAIN: support or qualify a given generalization with specific facts and ideas. Example: Show with diagrams how the eye is like a camera.

General Rules for Taking Subjective Tests

1. Read through all test questions before beginning any one question if the number of questions isn't too great. You will now have an idea of length and difficulty.
2. Make a mental note of how much time you should devote to each question. Try to stick to your time plan.
3. Start by answering the easiest questions first and progressing to the most difficult.
4. Outline your answers right on your exam sheet, including as much factual information as possible.
5. Stick to the facts. Don't try to pad the answer to make it sound more impressive.
6. If you do not know the answer, write something. If you have been to class and read the text, you should know something about the question.
7. Proof read your answers checking for spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. How do you spell words correctly without access to a dictionary? By noting the spelling of specialized and technical vocabulary that occur in the subject matter while reading and making an effort to spell them correctly in note taking, you prepare for the test taking.

IMPORTANT WORDS FOUND ON TESTS

Here are answers to compare with yours:

1. COMPARE: show the similarities between the two events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like. (Some people use compare to mean showing differences as well similarity so be careful.)

2. **CONTRAST:** show the differences between two or more events, periods, ideas, theories, or the like.
3. **DEFINE:** state the meaning of a word or phrase. Example: Define science.
4. **DESCRIBE:** give the characteristics of something. Example: The functions of the ATP/ADP systems.
5. **DISCUSS:** gives the pros and cons of an event, process, theory, or technique. Example: Discuss how DNA replicates itself.
6. **ENUMERATE:** list a number of reasons or attributes of something. Example: Enumerate the stages of mitosis.
7. **EVALUATE:** make a judgment or give an opinion, or supply reasons why something is as it is. Example: Evaluate the results of Jernner’s experiments with cowpox.
8. **EXPLAIN:** support or qualify a given generalization with specific facts and ideas. Example: Explain what is meant by the “scientific method.”
9. **INTERPRET:** analyze critically or explain something not clear. Example: Interpret table 12.2 in the article on obesity (page 143).
10. **PROVE OR SHOW:** demonstrate the truth of a statement, explain the reasons for events turning out as they did, or speculate on what might be the effects on certain causes. Example: Show with examples how the eye is like a camera.

An understanding of these words will permit you to control what you say. To write an effective essay you must apply your knowledge to the question and stick to the point. It isn’t enough just to write down everything you know.

Test Takers Tips

1. Place the marks on the answer sheet in the correct spaces, erase carefully.
2. Make sure you read and understand the directions.
3. Answer all the easy questions first.
4. Check your answers if you have time.
5. You may make educated guesses- eliminate incorrect items, then choose carefully.
6. If two choices look equally good- guess and go on, don’t become frustrated.
7. Be wary of the too obvious clue- it may trap you if you’re going too fast.
8. Try working backwards from E through A. Test makers sometimes out correct answers in D or E to see if a student can eliminate the correct choices.
9. Relax occasionally- close your eyes, stretch, shift you position.
10. Don’t worry if others finish before you.