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Preparing for and Taking Tests

INTRODUCTION

Take a positive attitude toward tests—they help you learn.

1. Daily or weekly quizzes help you to keep up with daily assignments and to attend class regularly.
2. Studying helps you to tie together ideas and facts about the course.
3. Through reviewing and studying for tests information is learned, or stored in your memory

PREPARING FOR TESTS

When to study

1. Start a week in advance. Set aside specific times for review each day.
2. Spend time organizing your review so that you will have enough time to study everything that will be included on the test.
3. Reserve time the night before the test for a last, once-through review. Spend most of your time going over the most difficult material.

What to study

1. All textbook chapters assigned during the period covered by the test
2. All lectures notes that pertain to the test
3. Previous exams and quizzes
4. Teacher handouts: summary outlines, lists of terms, sample problems, charts, and graphs, or explanations of difficult concepts
5. Out-of-class assignments

How to study

In general

1. Find out whether the test will be objective, essay, or both.
2. Find out exactly what material the test will cover.
3. Find out how the instructor will evaluate the exam.

For objective tests (multiple choice, true/false, matching):

1. The goal is to be able to recognize the right answer.
2. Review textbook markings and lecture notes by asking yourself questions about headings and main points
3. Form questions you think you will be tested on. Write down each question on the front of a separate 3x5 index card; write the answer on the back. To study, read the questions and try to answer them without looking at the back of the cards. Sort the cards into two stacks—those you know and those you don't know. Go through the index cards 2 or 3 times a day for 3 or 4 days before the test. Shuffle the cards occasionally so that you don't learn the information in a fixed order. Carry the cards with you and review them when you have a few minutes.
4. To review more complex or interrelated information, use the study sheet system. First select the information to be learned. Then outline the information, using as few words as possible. Group together points or ideas which are related to each other. To learn the information on a study sheet, first read it over several times. Then write the first topic in your outline on a blank sheet of paper and try to fill it in from memory. Repeat this process for the other topics.

For essay tests

1. Essay Test demand complete recall. The task involves retrieving the information from your memory, organizing it, and expressing it in writing.
2. First, identify topics that may be included on the exam. Use major boldface headings in textbooks, end of chapter discussion questions, important points in your lecture notes, and the course outline distributed by your instructor at the beginning of the course as sources for possible essay questions.
3. Then identify what aspects of the topic you should review. This information will probably come from clues your instructor has been giving all semester—his/her approach, focus, and emphasis.
4. Then prepare a study sheet for each. (See #4 under objective tests.) Organize the information so that you could write a clearly-stated essay on every topic.
5. To remember the information on your study sheet, choose a key word or phrase for each idea. Memorize each key word or phrase in a particular order. When you are actually taking the exam, write the key words on the back of the exam paper before you start to write your answer. It serves as an outline for all the major points you want to include in your essay.

TAKING TESTS

In general

1. Take all necessary materials, including your own watch.
2. Get there on time—do not arrive too early or too late.
3. Sit in the front of the room—you may receive the test first and have a few extra minutes to work on it. You are also in a better position to hear instructions. It is also easier to concentrate and avoid distractions.
4. Pre-read the exam before you start answering questions. Make sure you understand the directions. Pre-reading gives an overview of the whole exam.
5. Answer the easiest questions first.
6. Plan your time. Estimate how much time you should spend on each part of the exam. The number of points each section is worth should be your guide. Allow 3 or 4 minutes at the end of the exam to read through your work, answer any questions you may have left blank, and make any corrections that are necessary.

Objective tests

1. Leave nothing blank. If you have no idea of the answer, guess—you might be right. Mark answers you aren't sure of, and then if you have time, go back and give them further thought. But put an answer in every blank.
2. In true-false questions, often there is just one word that makes a statement true or false. Therefore, read the questions very carefully.
3. With multiple choice questions read all the choices before deciding on the answer.
4. Even if you are unfamiliar with the information in a question, it is sometimes possible to use logic and common sense to reason out the correct answer.

Essay tests

1. Essay questions usually include valuable pieces of information:
 - a. The topic(s) you are to write about
 - b. A limiting word which restricts and directs your answer.
 - c. A key word or phrase which tells you how to organize and present answers

Examples:

Compare the causes of the Vietnam War with the causes of the Korean War.

Topics: Vietnam War and Korean War

Limiting word: causes

Key word: Compare

2. A well-written, organized answer will receive a higher grade than a jumble of information randomly written.
3. Write your answers in complete sentences and include only one major point in each paragraph. The remainder of each paragraph should explain or support the major point.
4. Use pen—it is easier to read and does not smear.
5. Number your pages and put your name on each sheet.
6. Draw a single line through sentences or words you want to leave out.
7. Proofread your answers
8. If you run out of time, jot down the major ideas which you would discuss fully if you had time. Often your instructor will give you partial credit for this type of response.