

Exam Studying

The following steps are strategies for effectively studying for exams. They involve selecting key course information, ensuring that you are aware of possible topics for the exam, that you are establishing an environment conducive to studying effectively, and that you are developing strategies to manage your time and energy.

1. Understand details about the exam.

Ensure that you know the format (essay, multiple choice, case study, etc.), location, date, time, focus, and weighting of each test to help you budget your time and focus on the most important material.

2. Set realistic and specific study goals and create a timeline.

Schedule a daily amount of time to study for each course. Write down the time allocation, as well as what topic you will focus on for each study session. In this step, ensure you balance time allotted to studying with regular coursework and time required to leave time to rest, relax, and recharge, whatever that looks like for you. This step will also help you decide how soon to begin studying.

3. Compile course material.

Gather and organize all relevant course material (i.e., lecture notes, tutorials, texts, past assignments, and tests, etc.)

4. Determine major sections, concepts, ideas and issues in the course.

From your lectures and notes, decide on what portions of the course are of greater emphasis. How has the professor approached thinking about the material? The manner in which the course has been organized and presented usually reveals what's important and how you will be tested on the material. Understanding how material from each lecture relates to the rest of the course will help you compartmentalize course topics.

5. Locate and use additional study aids.

These may include past exams, study guides, or reference material provided in class. Study aids can also include making a study group to discuss course material, assist each other with knowledge gaps, and quiz each other.

6. Get in touch with your professor or TA.

Office hours are an opportunity to discuss concepts, clarify ideas, and touch base with your professor. Similarly, your course might offer time to sit with your TA to go over previous assignments or questions related to the course. Ask your professor or TA about developing practice exam questions.

7. Prioritize effective studying over efficient studying.

Studying efficiently is less important than studying in a manner that effectively prepares you for your exam. Keep a separate document of sections or concepts you are finding difficult. Focus on them for a time, but don't exhaust or frustrate yourself. Seek help from classmates, TAs, or your professor. Go back to this document later to review these concepts again.

8. Be creative and follow your instincts.

How do you learn best? Create study aids and work in an environment that works best for you. For example:

- Re-writing notes in a consistent, organized format can be a good starting point.
- Creating a display that uses colour-coding or other symbolism to organize concepts and relationships might be a good approach if you learn kinesthetically or visually.

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- Write terms and vocabulary in a ‘glossary,’ or make flashcards to review repetitively.
- Approach and review the same material in a variety of ways. This can help you learn what works best for you while establishing connections and memories that will improve recall in an exam. Understanding connections between ideas often has a bigger impact on your success in exams than does rote memorization.

9. Create a study group.

Discussing and teaching course material to peers is one of the best ways to solidify your knowledge and to engage in meaningful discussion about the course. Form a group of people from the class that aren't your friends. This will help keep your group focused on the work, rather than socializing.

10. Anticipate possible questions.

For each theme or topic, anticipate a few questions that could be on the exam. You could also study with peers to share potential questions.

Try to start early and remember that you are learning how to direct your efforts strategically to produce a more effective set of skills. A word of warning: many students place efficiency above effectiveness when it comes to studying. They expect to learn effectively even though they cut out important steps in understanding and storing their course knowledge. There is little point in being efficient if you aren't getting the results you want; as you continue to use your newly developing strategies, you will find ways to streamline your approach and what works best for you.