

Test Preparation

The number one goal of test preparation is to always aim for 100%. Never seek to merely pass a test or to get a 70% or 80%. Focusing on this goal can help you to avoid having a mental block during the test. If you aim for less than 100% you have to make the difficult decision of evaluating how much studying is sufficient for you to achieve your goal. If you aim for 100% you know that your goal is to master all possible topics. You will not have a weakness in any possible test topics. If you are weak on a topic, you are likely to worry during the test about that topic appearing. This can result in a loss of confidence in your ability to succeed on the test.

Benefits of Writing Tests

Consolidates Your Learning. Having to write tests encourages you to study the course material more intensely. Studying for tests may help you to retain the ideas longer.

Improves Your Thinking. Tests sharpen your critical thinking skills. Tests give you practice in careful observation, analysis, and judgment.

Provides Feedback. Test results tell you whether your study strategies have worked. Good results confirm that you are on the right track. A string of poor scores suggests that you have not learned enough.

Study Strategies

Pace Yourself. Do not count on cramming the night before the test. Set a schedule for yourself one to two weeks before the test and stick to it. Balance your time across the various courses for which you must study.

Commit to a Study Group. Being a part of a study group can:

- Motivate you to do your reading
- Compare perspectives
- Exchange ideas about what you think the professor will emphasize
- Share reading assignments
- Create practice questions
- Give you an opportunity to vocalize explanations and clarify material. If you teach something to someone else, you are more likely to remember it!

Protect Your Health. Make sure that you are getting the optimum amount of sleep each night; eat regular, balanced meals; and try to get some exercise several times a week. If you can stay healthy throughout the term, you will have fewer problems managing your study schedule and fewer distractions at test time.

Have a Positive Attitude. Examinations can be emotional events. Nearly everyone feels some apprehension in getting ready. Facing tests with confidence comes from good planning and systematic study and can help you to overcome negative attitudes.

Get Some Idea of What is Going to be on the Test. Most instructors describe the kinds of tests that they are planning during the class or in the syllabus. Many welcome questions on how to prepare for the test. The last class of the semester is often the one where instructors provide crucial exam information—don't skip it!

Match Your Study Strategies to the Test Format. You can practice making questions and answers appropriate to that format. Memorization works for some kinds of tests while others require more thinking and integration of ideas and concepts.

Test Yourself. Doing problems from old exams and/or assignments can be an effective way to test your knowledge. Have a classmate quiz you on test material. Flash cards (cue cards containing definitions, explanations, etc.) are also an effective and efficient way to test yourself.

Test Formats

There are many different types of test formats and you will want to study in different ways for different types of tests. These formats include:

- Multiple choice questions
- True and false items
- Fill-in-the-blank questions
- Short-answer or short-essay questions
- Essay questions
- Problem-solving questions

Some students find that they have particular difficulties with one of these types of exams while they may excel at writing another type. This may be more as a result of how you study than of how difficult the test format is. You may find that the way that you studied in the past for a particular type of test no longer works for the test formats that you are confronted with today. There are many books on preparing for, and writing, various types of tests. See the titles suggested below to help you to get started.

Self-Assessment Exercise

		Yes	No
1.	I am well prepared for tests.		
2.	I am flexible in my approach to studying for tests and use different systems depending on the format of the test.		
3.	Throughout the course, I conduct short review sessions for 5 to 10 minutes after class each day and every weekend for at least 30 minutes.		
4.	When studying for my exams, I study more than what is expected.		
5.	I begin studying 5 to 7 days before an exam so that I do not have to cram the night before.		
6.	I map out a schedule of when I need to begin studying for each exam so that I have time to focus on each course equally.		
7.	I set aside a significant amount of time to study on weekends as well as week days.		
8.	I use study aids such as old assignments, index cards, and study groups to help me to test my learning and remembering.		
9.	I have a quiet study area where I am able to concentrate on the task at hand.		
10.	I do not let outside problems or social activities interfere with my concentration and study schedule.		

Your strengths, in the area of test preparation, are indicated by those items to which your response was **yes**. If your answer to an item was **no** you may want to develop more effective strategies in that study area.

Resources Available at the Academic Advising & Career Centre

You will find more detailed information on test and examination preparation strategies in some of the study skills books in the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC). Some books to begin with include: *Survey of 300 A+ Students*, *Learning for Success, 3rd ed.*, *A Pocket Guide to Study Tips*, *Strategies for Studying*, *Study Secrets*, and *How to Study Mathematics*.