

“Taking the Anxiety Out of Taking Tests- A Step By Step Guide. Author Susan Johnson- New Harbinger Publications Inc.

Test Taking Tips

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Study Tips & Study Skills

Students with better study methods and strategies score higher on their exams.

- ✓ Everyone is different. Different methods work for different people; the following are only suggestions on improving upon your current studying techniques.
- ✓ It is best to review the material right after class when it's still fresh in your memory.
- ✓ Don't try to do all your studying the night before the test. Instead space out your studying, review class materials at least several times a week, focusing on one topic at a time.
- ✓ Have all of your study material in front of you: lecture notes, course textbooks, study guides and any other relevant material.
- ✓ Find a comfortable and quiet place to study with good lighting and little distractions (try avoiding your own bed; it is very tempting to just lie down and take a nap).
- ✓ Start out by studying the most important information.
- ✓ Learn the general concepts first, don't worry about learning the details until you have learned the main ideas.
- ✓ Take notes and write down a summary of the important ideas as you read through your study material.
- ✓ Take short breaks frequently. Your memory retains the information that you study at the beginning and the end better than what you study in the middle.
- ✓ Space out your studying, you'll learn more by studying a little every day instead of waiting to cram at the last minute. By studying every day, the material will stay in your long-term memory but if you try to study at the last moment, the material will only reside in your short-term memory that you'll easily forget.

- ✓ Make sure that you understand the material well, don't just read through the material and try to memorize everything.
- ✓ If you choose to study in a group, only study with others who are serious about the test.
- ✓ Test yourself or have someone test you on the material to find out what your weak and strong areas are. You can use the review questions at the end of each chapter, practice tests that the teacher may give out or other pertinent materials.
- ✓ Listening to relaxing music such as classical or jazz on a low volume can relieve some of the boredom of studying.
- ✓ Don't study later than the time you usually go to sleep, you may fall asleep or be tempted to go to sleep, instead try studying in the afternoon or early evening. If you are a morning person try studying in the morning.

Knowing how to study is crucial for maximizing test performance. While differences in material may require slight changes of strategy, a similar process can be applied to virtually any subject. Here is how to get the most out of your study time.

Reducing Test Taking Anxiety

Test anxiety is when a student excessively worries about doing well on a test. This can become a major hindrance on test performance and cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses among other symptoms. The following are tips on reducing test taking anxiety.

- ✓ Being well prepared for the test is the best way to reduce test taking anxiety.
- ✓ Space out your studying over a few days or weeks and continually review class material. Don't try to learn everything the night before.
- ✓ Try to maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the test and during the test.
- ✓ Exercising for a few days before the test will help reduce stress.
- ✓ Get a good night's sleep before the test.
- ✓ Show up to class early so you won't have to worry about being late.
- ✓ Chew gum (if allowed) during the test to help relieve test anxiety.

- ✓ Stay relaxed, if you begin to get nervous take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.
- ✓ Read the directions slowly and carefully.
- ✓ If you don't understand the directions on the test, ask the teacher to explain it to you.
- ✓ Skim through the test so that you have a good idea how to pace yourself.
- ✓ Write down important formulas, facts, definitions and/or keywords in the margin first so you won't worry about forgetting them.
- ✓ Do the simple questions first to help build up your confidence for the harder questions.
- ✓ Don't worry about how fast other people finish their test; just concentrate on your own test.
- ✓ If you don't know an answer to a question skip it for the time being (come back to it later if you have time), and remember that you don't have to always get every question right to do well on the test.
- ✓ Focus on the question at hand. Don't let your mind wander on other things.
- ✓ If you're still experiencing extreme test anxiety after following these tips, seek help from your school counselor.

1. Read the material once.

The first time you read through the material, whether it is a chapter or an entire book, you should avoid spending time re-reading sections or memorizing terms or concepts along the way. Instead, this step will familiarize you with the material and create a framework upon which you can build your knowledge until test time.

2. Reread and take notes.

After you have read through the material once, you should go back and read the material again. This step might appear redundant at first glance, but you will more easily assimilate information and connect concepts this time because you have already formed a rough picture of the material in your mind. Reading complex sections aloud can enhance your absorption of the information by involving more areas of your brain. To stay engaged and increase your retention of the material, make notes of key points and diagrams along the way. You should also ask yourself questions about the material and write those down to explore later.

3. Test yourself for the first time.

It is time to assess your progress. If you are using a textbook, you are likely to find in-book reviews, chapter tests and cumulative reviews. These can be ideal for checking your knowledge of the material and identifying areas that need improvement. After you write down the sections of the material that correspond to the questions you answered incorrectly, focus on those sections as you prepare to test yourself again.

4. Make study aids.

The study aids you make can vary according to the type of material involved and the type of test you expect. For multiple choice tests, consider making flashcards with index cards. Write down questions and multiple answer choices on the front of the cards and the correct answers on the other side. Alternately, you can write phrases with blanks where words should be inserted and write the answers on the back. Flashcards are also excellent for memorizing math rules and formulas.

If you expect essay questions, you should practice tying related information together. One way to solidify your comprehension of the material is to write out concepts in your own words. In many cases, textbooks list questions at page margins or section endings that you can practice answering. Again, explaining concepts aloud uses some different parts of the brain compared to writing those concepts on paper, and you may find that your mastery of the material will increase if you practice both.

5. Test yourself again

This is your final pretest before the actual exam. After focusing on areas that were problematic for you during the first pretest, you should be able to answer questions on those topics successfully this time. For this second test, include more questions

covering those areas as well as new versions of questions regarding the rest of the material.

6. Review your text and notes before the test

As you prepare to sit for the exam, read through the text and your notes a final time. By this point, you should feel comfortable with the material and should only be cementing concepts that are already in your mental framework rather than learning anything for the first time. You have overlearned the material and tested yourself repeatedly, and the actual exam will simply give you the opportunity to prove your mastery to yourself and the instructor.

Use your time wisely

The time you have until your exam must be considered as you prepare for it. The longer you have to study and the more space between your own pretests, the better you will retain the material. Cramming just before the exam is unlikely to produce optimal results. Furthermore, you will be less likely to recall the information later if you learn it over a short period of time.

Take breaks regularly

Just like a muscle, the brain benefits from rest. This means that, if time allows, you should take breaks regularly during extended study sessions. Physical exercise, even a short walk, has also been shown to improve long-term retention of information that has just been learned. Naps can also be a powerful way to recharge your brain.

Besides boosting your ability to retain and recall the material you are learning, the right study approach can help you stay confident during your test. This confidence can help you keep a clear head as you work through the questions. Once you have practiced this strategy repeatedly, you are likely to find that your performance improves not only in school but in virtually any setting where extensive learning is necessary.

Successful Study Techniques

Here is how to prepare for any test or exam to get results you can be proud of:

Know What You Have to Study

This first step is easy and does not take much work. Before any exam, list what it is you have to know. This way, when it comes down to crunch time, you can concentrate on what is important and not waste time memorizing useless facts.

"The student has to begin by listening in class and jotting down what it is that has to be done," says Judy Macdonald. She counsels students at a learning center.

That means actually attending your classes regularly. Teachers usually base their tests on their lectures. So if you skip class, you will probably miss the answers to the test.

"I think a lot of kids sleep in class or spend their time talking and being distracted. They could save so much time by participating in class discussions or critically listening," explains Macdonald.

If you have attended all your classes but are still unsure about what you have to know, ask your teacher to specify which chapters, concepts or formulas you will be quizzed on.

Manage Your Time

Once you know what it is that has to be done, you then have to find the time to do it properly, says Macdonald. Don't wait until the night before the exam to crack open your book and read your notes.

"Cramming doesn't allow you to learn new information. It will only work to review material you have already studied before," says Joshua Halberstam. He is a university professor and author of a book on studying.

According to the University of Waterloo's Study Skills Package, the ability to concentrate depends on sleep, healthy eating and regular exercise. Your grades will be higher the more you get of each. Halberstam says that by cramming, you miss out on a good night's sleep, making it harder for you to think the next day.

"There is evidence that your IQ won't go down, but your reflexes do go down and you won't be as sharp," he says. Consequently, even if you have the information stored in your brain, it will be harder to get it out.

You can avoid these problems if you make a plan to study in advance. Start by reviewing your class notes and readings every day. Research shows that if you don't practice what you've learned within a day, you can forget almost half of it within 24 hours.

As the exam nears, Macdonald suggests creating a more detailed study plan. She tells students to block off study periods in their agendas or on their calendars two weeks before the test. You can organize your time by hour, by day or by task -- whatever works best for you.

For instance, you can set aside Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. to study. Another option is to block off Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights to learn five new physics problems no matter how long it takes you. It's all about dividing large study assignments into smaller, more manageable tasks, says Dave Berry, an independent college advisor.

"For example, if you have to learn 50 new vocabulary or spelling words, learn five groups of 10 spaced out over the time available rather than trying to learn all 50 at one sitting," he says.

The important thing is that you have a schedule, so you will not be overwhelmed trying to learn everything the day before the test. Macdonald says you will also feel freer with a plan.

"You can go off and enjoy yourself without worrying because things are under control."

Select the Best Study Environment

"After you find the time, you actually have to sit down and follow your plan," says Macdonald. But where do you sit?

"The desk is the place to be," says Macdonald. She says you are more alert and motivated when sitting up than when lying on a comfortable bed.

She also suggests eliminating distractions -- like television, music and telephone calls -- that can break your concentration.

"When you're going to study, study. When you want to listen to music and hang out, hang out. Don't mix the two," warns Halberstam. "Students have a terrible habit of fooling themselves that they're actually studying while listening to hip hop."

Yet Macdonald admits some students need music. "A lot of kids, unfortunately, live in really noisy homes. They use music to block out sisters and brothers," she says. "I tell those students to go out to a library."

Study Actively, Not Passively

Whether you are at the library or in your room at a desk, learning does not happen by osmosis. You will not absorb much information by sitting back and staring blankly at your textbook for hours.

The trick is to study actively. Become involved with what you are studying. One way is to reduce your textbook to notes.

"I tell people to not just underline the books. Make summaries in your own words. It's easier to remember your own words," says Macdonald.

You can also draw diagrams or create mental images to help you understand complex concepts. Berry gives an example of how to do this. "If you're trying to wrap your mind around what happens in a nuclear chain reaction, imagine a basketball court covered wall-to-wall with cocked mousetraps. Imagine a ping-pong ball resting on top of each mousetrap. Now, imagine tossing a ping-pong ball into the middle of that. What happens next is a chain reaction."

Mnemonic devices are other memory enhancing tricks you can use. A mnemonic device can be a word, phrase or even a rhyme. For instance, you can use the word HOMES to remember the Great Lakes: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior.

Another example is the sentence "every good boy does fine," in which the first letter of each word stands for a note on the musical scale.

Repeating things aloud or to a friend also improves memory. So forming study groups to quiz one another is another good idea. Halberstam suggests making practice tests together.

"If you are having a multiple-choice test, the best thing you can do to study is make your own multiple-choice test," says Halberstam.

If you can't find a few friends, repeat what you have learned to a parent, cousin or anyone who will listen.

Active studying means your body has to be active, too. The average attention span for one task is approximately 20 minutes, according to the Sam Houston State University Counseling Center website. Go for a walk or have a snack whenever you feel your head is too full, says Macdonald. Halberstam agrees. "Pick a chunk-sized material to study, then reward yourself after studying each one."

The greatest reward comes after the test. When combined with the three other components of successful studying, active studying makes getting high test scores a reality. Of course, better grades mean higher self-esteem.

"Your whole experience with school will change as a result," says Macdonald.

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Top 40 Study Strategies
University of Guelph Learning Services

Time Management

1. Start using a calendar, planner, or task list at the start of the semester.
2. Write down important dates for exams, assignments and other projects on a calendar.
3. Make a weekly or monthly schedule to get an overall picture of when you'll be busiest and when you have free time.
4. Make a task list to keep track of things you need to do on a daily basis.
5. Although some people like to use lots of tools to manage their time, it's not always necessary. Decide on one or two that will help you the most.
6. Use short breaks in your daily schedule (such as an hour between classes) wisely. Schedule appointments, check email, or review your class notes.
7. Break large tasks into smaller pieces that can be completed within a few hours (or even a few minutes).
8. Procrastination happens, but don't let it take over your life. Pay attention to what makes you procrastinate and try to avoid these triggers, especially during high stress times.
9. No one can - or wants to - study all the time! Plan your time to include doing things that you enjoy.
10. Be patient and flexible. If certain time management strategies don't work for you, try a different strategy.

Listening and Notetaking

1. Find out how you'll be evaluated on the material from lectures. For example, are the lectures based on material from the textbook, or is the content entirely different?
2. Do assigned readings before the lecture in order to participate in class discussion, better follow the lecture, and ask meaningful questions.
3. Listen actively by comparing what you hear in the lecture to what you learned in the last lecture, what you read in the textbook, or what you see on the slides.
7. Concentrate to get the most out of the lectures. Sit where you can hear and see everything you need to.
8. Organize your notes after the lecture by identifying main topics and key terms, underlining or using different colors for important points, and making diagrams or concept maps to illustrate relationships.
9. Compare your notes with a study partner's notes on a regular basis in order to fill in missing information and identify what you know and what's unclear.
10. Review your notes on a weekly basis to prepare in advance for exams.

Textbook Reading

1. Find out how you'll be evaluated on your knowledge of the readings. For example, do you need to know the textbook inside out? Or is the text a supplement to the lectures?
2. Think carefully about reading strategies and techniques that will help you the most in each course. Skimming, scanning, and in-depth methods can all be good reading strategies, depending on the course.
3. Break long readings up into shorter, smaller chunks, depending on how long you can concentrate in that subject area. No one can read for hours at a time and remember details well.
4. Find a quiet, comfortable place to read. Your body associates your bed with sleeping, so it's probably not the best place!
5. Preview the reading by noting the subtitles and headings, looking at diagrams, and skimming through the introduction and summary.
6. Reflect on the content as you read and take notes. How is the reading connected to the course lectures? In what way does it connect to the main ideas in the course?
7. Pay attention to your attention span. Take a quick break if you can't remember what you just read.
8. Summarize and take notes in your own words to help you understand and retain information. Don't rely on highlighting as your main method of note-taking.
9. If you tend to read the textbook after a lecture, review your lecture notes before you read, and don't take additional notes on the material already well explained in your lecture notes.
10. Review the notes from your readings on a regular basis to keep them fresh in your memory.

Exam Preparation

1. Locate one or two good study places with few distractions or interruptions.
2. Review the course outline for information about what your professor expects you to learn in the course.
3. Review previous quizzes, assignments, papers, labs, etc. to pinpoint where you've had difficulty in the course. Make sure you understand that material since you may see it again in the next exam.
4. Learn by doing. Do practice questions based on old exams, or create and answer your own test questions.
5. Write practice exams under exam-like conditions (timed and with your books closed).
6. Study in small chunks of time when possible. Two-hour blocks with a 15-minute break work well for many people.
7. Study with a group if that works for you, but choose study partners who have the same general level of knowledge of course material and commitment to the course.

8. Keep a regular schedule. Be sure to eat right, get enough sleep, and take time to exercise.
9. During the exam, focus on what you do know rather than what you wish you had spent more time studying. Don't forget to breathe! After the exam is over, follow up. See the instructor to find out how you can improve for next time.