

## **PREPARING FOR EXAMS**

Learn notes day by day, class by class. Attempt to learn today's lecture notes before tomorrow.

Review lecture notes and readings on a weekly basis. Using this approach, you may learn approximately 80% of the course material before you begin final exam preparation.

Utilize time management skills to maintain regular daily and weekly reviews. This reduces anxiety and maintains good motivation and concentration.

### **Getting Caught Up**

1. Make a list of all courses and write down exactly what has to be done to get caught up in each (e.g., chapters not read, classes missed, assignments not done).
  - Write down exam dates and due dates for up-coming assignments and papers.
  - Consider setting assignments aside that are not due until after your exams are finished.
  - Assignments due before exams have to be done quickly. Consider asking the professor if the assignment can be handed in late, after the exam.
2. Develop a time management schedule.
  - If possible, get caught up in all courses first (e.g., read necessary chapters and make a reduced record; ensure that lecture notes are complete).
  - Work on worst courses first.
  - Do not study any one course for too long. Better to switch courses after, at most, two hours.
  - Try to get as much done during the week (i.e., Sunday night through Thursday night). You may have to push yourself hard to study through the weekend.
  - Study in between classes during the day.
  - Free up your time (e.g., reduce commitments; ask for time off from a part-time job).
  - Schedule intense study preparation well before the exam, if possible.

## **Learning Notes**

1. Break notes into meaningful sections or "chunks". Identify and focus on what is most important to learn in each chunk of material; learn this information before proceeding to the next chunk.
2. Reduce notes by highlighting important sections.
3. Recite aloud and reflect on the notes.
4. Pick out key words/phrases which represent main points and place them in the left hand margin. Use these words as cues to assist you in recalling a section of notes.
5. Generate questions which summarize integrate or compare/contrast the important parts of the material. Develop an outline-answer for each of these questions. Write out a complete answer for one or two questions. Develop the skill/habit of making a brief outline to organize your answer.
6. Make a brief set of summary notes. This is a reduced record of the main organizational aspects including headings, subheadings and major important points contained in the notes. Use summary notes to refresh your memory after you have thoroughly learned your notes.

## **Focusing on What is Most Important**

1. Learn all of the material that is most important to know, and as much of the other material as possible.
2. Develop a way of identifying and keeping track of the relative importance of the material.
3. Go back through your notes and text actively assessing how important you feel different sections are. Ask fellow students what they feel is most important to learn.
4. Ensure class attendance as exams approach as professors often give clues regarding what is most important to study.
5. Encourage professors to engage in a dialogue about the exam. (e.g., What is the exam format?...Will the prof. review what is most important for the exam?... Will text or lecture notes be weighted more heavily?...What material will be covered on the exam?...Does the professor have old exams?)

## **Essay Exams**

- ❖ Based on recall memory, your ability to recall information you have learned.
  - ❖ Requires you to know broader meanings and implications of the course material (e.g., recall important concepts/ideas in order to explain, compare/contrast in your own words)
  - ❖ Your grade depends on your ability to: a) develop a clear, well-organized answer that addresses the main aspects of the question illustrating your understanding of the question and the importance of its implications; and b) include as much relevant, supporting detail as possible.
1. Learn/memorize the material and force yourself to recall that information.

2. Make a set of summary notes.
3. Understand the organization, main concepts and the interrelationships between the main concepts.
4. Generate broadly based questions, develop outline-answers and practice writing out a few long answers while you study.

### **Writing Essay Exams**

1. Read over all the questions.
2. Highlight, circle or underline important parts of the instructions and questions which are central to performing efficiently and accurately.
3. Pick out one that you know well, and start. Make a brief outline first.
4. Depending on the percentage each question is worth, allocate an appropriate amount of time for each question and stick to it.
5. If you are running out of time, switch to answering the remaining questions in point form. Write an organized point-form, outline-answer.

### **Multiple Choice Exams**

- ❖ Based on recognition memory, your ability to recognize information you have learned.
- ❖ Less emphasis on recall, more emphasis on recognizing and understanding relationships and fine distinctions between the material, as well as applying the material.
- ❖ Requires you to differentiate between the correct answer and very close alternatives.

### **Multiple Choice Exams - Study Preparation**

1. Determine if the professor expects you to: 1) know the most important material; or 2) to cover all of the material. You will need to know a wider range of material for a multiple choice exam than for an essay exam.
2. Start by memorizing all of the information being extra sensitive to correct relationships between the information. Be aware of the detail and "nitty gritty".
3. Know how related concepts are similar and different.. Learn lists and the order within lists, being able to differentiate between related lists.
4. Ask lots of questions which require you to: - understand concepts and the relationships between concepts. - know how different concepts are used differently and/or result in different consequences.

### **Writing Multiple Choice Exams**

1. If you are confident regarding the correct answer, go ahead and answer the question and move on.

2. If you can narrow the correct option down to two potentially correct options, cross out the options you know are false, make an educated guess between the two potentially correct options, and circle the number of that question.
3. If you know little about the questions and cannot narrow down the options or are only able to eliminate one of the four options, cross out the option you know is wrong and write an X through the number of that question.
4. After attempting to complete all of the questions, return to answer the questions with an X through the number and reconsider the questions you have circled and narrowed down to two potential options.

### **Specific Considerations:**

- Read all the options carefully before selecting the correct option.
- Look at longer, more detailed options carefully.
- Beware of qualifiers that alter the exact meaning of a statement (e.g., most, some, often, usually, seldom, never, none, always, all, worst, best).
- Look very closely at options that are very similar.
- When having difficulty selecting a correct option, try reading the statement with each option as a true/false question.

### **Problem Solving Exams**

1. Most important that you keep caught up and learn "class by class".
2. These are the hardest exams to successfully cram for. Get caught up and start studying early.
3. Know the problem examples presented in class well.
4. Do all of the assigned problems and as many of the recommended problems as possible.
5. Most of the exam will likely relate to these problems. Some of the exact problems may be included on the exam.
6. Ask the professor about specifics regarding the format of the exam. (e.g., Will it be all problems? Do you need to memorize definitions and/or examples or explanations?)
7. When you get stuck doing practice problems, ask for help quickly. If you can't get help right away, move on to another problem or different type of problem.
8. The more abstract and/or problem solving the course is, the more likely it will benefit you to get assistance from a classmate, the professor or a tutor.

Based on "Getting Started on the Right Foot" by Dr. James H. Pond (1991), Student Counselling Services, U of S.

Counselling Services, University of Regina 1998