

Preparing for Exams

There are several different types of exams, and the best person to talk to about what to expect is your professor. Talk to your prof early on about the exam, and plan to study in the way that you will be tested.

General tips

- Go through past term tests and homework assignments. Try to identify patterns of weakness – do you struggle with certain types of questions or concepts? Or with a lack of test-taking skills or test anxiety? Ask your professor to guide you as far as areas of potential improvement
- Study in the way that you will be tested - do the same types of problems/questions that will be on the exam. Time yourself!
- Study actively - test your knowledge and your ability to recall, don't just re-read your notes
- Create complex problems of your own and answer them – look at the course syllabi and learning outcomes to guide you
- Use past tests as a guide, however – remember that you can't expect the same types of questions, even if your professor wrote the past exam. When in doubt – ask your prof what to expect
- Create a flashcards to memorize terms, definitions, facts, diagrams
- Use concept-maps to show connections across course content
- Study with classmates – discuss course concepts and review each other's work

Problem-solving exams

- Don't rely on the text or solutions – study in a way that tests and extends your knowledge
- Study problems out of sequence
- Write problems and solutions out in full
- For any problems that you don't answer correctly, try to find similar problems and work through them
- Develop a problem-solving strategy, e.g., follow these steps for each problem:
 1. What background information do I need?
 2. Which theorems or rules apply?
 3. What are the steps to break down the problem?
 4. Have I seen something like this before? What problems are similar to this?
- The goal is to understand, interpret and apply information to new situations – not to rely on memorization

Short answer & essay exams

- Write thesis statements & essay outlines containing supporting points, evidence and a conclusion
- Make sure to provide concrete evidence for each supporting point
- Structure your points by including context, evidence and analysis
- Focus on clarity of writing, organization of ideas and flow
- Write as many answers/essays as possible and time yourself
- Review your work, paying attention to areas that could be improve

Multiple Choice & Objective Exams

- Memorization is not enough – study in a way that will allow you to see connections across course concepts, as well as memorizing facts, terms and definitions
- When reading the question, cover it up and try to answer it yourself first, then look at the options

During the exam

- Preview the exam – skim the questions, are all the pages and questions there?
- Do a memory dump – write down important theories, rules, facts, definitions to reference later
- Plan your time – look at how each section is weighted to gauge it's value and how much time to spend
- Read and interpret the question!
 - Underline key words, identify what is being asked, and what is testable, try to remember the lecture and readings where you learned this
 - Paraphrase and break the question down into steps if you are struggling to understand it
 - Check back to make sure you are, in fact, answering the question!
- Answer easy questions first, keep momentum, and come back to the difficult questions
- For multi-part questions, start where you can. Substitute a variable if you can't solve certain parts – and use it to solve others. Get part marks!
- If you are stuck – ask the professor for assistance
- Complete the whole exam – even if you feel discouraged
- Review your work if you have time

Managing anxiety

- Plan ahead – know what to expect as far as your exam type, location, date & time
- Start visualizing the exam day – picture the steps you will go through and how you will cope during the exam
- Create a study plan – start early and do a little bit each day. Prioritize more complex concepts
- Maximize the times of day that you are most alert, and take frequent breaks. Try not to cram!
- Sleep well, eat well, stay hydrated and exercise throughout the study period
- Clear your head – don't learn anything new on the day of, or study right up until the last minute
- On the day of the exam - workout, do yoga, go for a walk, breathe!
- Avoid talking to classmates about how anxious or underprepared you feel
- Use mindfulness strategies like meditation, breathing, muscle relaxation
- Identify and reframe unhelpful thinking habits such as "I'm going to fail", "If I can't study everything there's no point in studying anything", "Everyone else knows what they're doing except me". Ask yourself, are these thoughts realistic? Are they helpful?
- If not, what thoughts might be more helpful? For example: "I can't know everything", "I'm probably better prepared than I think", "I've survived exams before and I can do it again", "Everyone else is probably in the same situation as me", "I can only do my best", etc... Stay realistic and positive!
- Don't talk about your fears & anxieties with classmates, either before or after the exam
- Use rituals that help you feel confident & in control (favourite song, dress for success, good luck charms)
- Bring only what you need: T-Card and authorized aids. Pencil cases are not allowed at your desk.
- Bring a plastic bag to store your electronic devices and valuables under your chair. All electronics must be TURNED OFF.
- Celebrate your successes – you have worked hard! Plan a reward for after the exam. ☺