How to Take Notes, Study, and Test Effectively

College Success Workshops
Noelle Lopez, DVC
Study Strategies
How to Study Effectively

• Create favorable conditions
• Generate a positive attitude
• Develop good techniques
Favorable Conditions

• Location – can you concentrate?
  • Are there distractions?
  • Music? TV? Street noise?

• Create a Schedule
  • Study at specific times each week
  • Arrange hard subjects when fresh, etc.
Positive Attitude

• Clarify goals – how does this fit?
• Find a way to make subject meaningful.
• Ask questions. Be an active learner.
• Reward yourself after each study period – breaks, food, walks, music, phone, etc.
Good Techniques

- SQR3
  - Survey (Skim) the section. Look for key words, figures and summaries.
  - Questions – for each major topic
  - Read – and answer questions
  - Recite the main points.
  - Review. Create 1 page summary sheet.
Additional techniques

• Use repetition to increase remembering. Flash cards.
• Review summary sheets and chapters weekly.
• Create associations, analogies, metaphors, and summaries.
Deal with Problem Areas

- **Procrastination**
  - Start quickly. Take the first step.

- **Concentration**
  - Remove distractions. Talk about the subject with yourself. Questions. Imagine talking with the author.

- **Boredom**
  - Switch subject matter. Be more active
Note-taking Strategies
Notetaking –
the Cornell Method

- Divide the paper into 2 columns
  - Right column for notes
  - Left column for “recall” (key phrases)
- Record – lecture content in right column
- Reduce – move key words/phrases to left column after lecture
The Cornell Method

• Recite the information using these key words
• Reflect – relate material to own experiences, add own thoughts
• Review – use left column throughout the term
Note-taking Tips

• Create your own abbreviations:
  • b/c (because), w/ (with), w/o (without), ex (example), diff (difference)

• Ask questions or to repeat something

• Prepare for class (familiar material)

• Stay till the end (catch summaries)
Note-taking Tips

- Photocopy notes; then exchange and compare with friend
- Leave empty space to fill in gaps later
- Ask instructor for details after class
- Tape record (with permission)
Note-taking Tips

• Use an outline format. Topic on one line and supporting details below.
• Sit near the front of the room
• Write legibly. Date your notes. Keep notes for one class together.
• Review each day and at end of week.
Testing Strategies
Learning about Forgetting

• We forget about 95% of what we are exposed to
• 53% of that forgetting happens within 20 minutes of first exposure
• Solution – multiple exposures
• Better than last minute “cramming” (see 7 Day study plan)
Seven Day Study Plan

• Day 1 – organize notes, materials, & text book
• Day 2 – Review lecture
• Day 3 – Review text
• Day 4 – Review lecture & text
• Day 5 – Review lecture
• Day 6 – Review text
• Day 7 – Review everything
Taking Tests

• Take care of yourself
  • Sleep, hygiene & healthy breakfast
  • Positive attitude & relaxation
  • Arrive a few minutes early
  • Sit away from doors, windows, or other distractions (& others’ stress)
• Think of a reward for yourself after the exam is over
Taking Tests

- Scan whole test – check point values and budget time accordingly
- Read the directions *twice*
- Think of exam as opportunity to show the professor what you know
Taking Tests

• Answer the easy questions first
• Then move to the more difficult
• Essays –
  • Write an outline, summary or notes in margin or on the back
  • State main idea forcefully
  • Back it up with supporting detail
Taking Tests

• Write as neatly as possible
• Check the clock to stay on track
• Relax – remember to breathe
• Test anxiety – an exaggerated sense of personal threat ("fight or flight")
• Poor performance on a task does not indicate personal worth
Taking Tests

• True - False questions
  • Look for qualifiers or negatives
  • Check each part of the statement
  • Think “true”, and guess when you must

• Matching questions
  • Start with item you are sure of, then move to items you are less certain of, then guess
Taking Tests

- Short answer
  - Answer only what is asked
  - Keep answer short & to the point
  - If you have difficulty retrieving some aspects of answer, show what you know
  - If you forget proper terminology, show what you know in your own words
Taking Tests

• Multiple Choice
  • Be sure it is “best” answer, not “all correct” answers (or “answer that doesn’t belong”)
  • Read all the choices
  • Cross out those that don’t fit (decoys)
  • Stick to the subject of the course
  • Watch for negatives and extreme words, such as “only”, “always” or “most”.
Taking Tests

• “All of the above” questions
  - Look for two or more correct choices
• Numbers – if you don’t know, cross out highest and lowest and guess in middle
• Choose between two look alike choices, crossing out other options
• Longer choices are often correct
Sample Questions

- The almost perfect walls of granite boulders surrounding some lakes in Iowa were formed by:
  - American Indians
  - Prehistoric men
  - Huge meteors
  - Thick ice
Sample Questions

• Because of its lack of lumber, Syria has many “beehive” homes built of:
  • Metal
  • Concrete
  • Marble
  • Mud brick
Sample Questions

• Which materials are NOT used in making saddles?
  • Linen, canvas, serge
  • Rubber and cork
  • Wood and leather
  • Iron and steel
Sample Questions

• The author suggests that the desert:
  • Climate is unpredictable
  • Heat is always unbearable
  • Is totally empty of rain
  • Earthquakes pose constant danger
Sample Questions

- Which of the following cities are European capitals?
  - Paris
  - Stockholm
  - London
  - All of the above
Sample Questions

• The “Great Pyramid” originally stood how many feet high?
  • 281 feet
  • 381 feet
  • 481 feet
  • 981 feet
Sample Questions

• The author considers himself an authority on:
  • Touring the Middle East
  • Middle East rug dealers
  • Middle East rug bargains
  • Behavior patterns of tourists
Sample Questions

• Why are the climates of Europe generally warmer than North America’s, when they are both about the same latitude?
  • There are fewer mountains in Europe
  • The waters surrounding Europe moderate the climate, helping to keep the winters warmer and the summers cooler
  • There are fewer trees in Europe
Test Anxiety

• Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam.
• A small amount can actually sharpen mental alertness and enhance performance.
• Too much anxiety can interfere with exam performance.
Test Anxiety

• What causes test anxiety?
  • Lack of preparation
    • Cramming the night before the exam
    • Poor time management
    • Failure to organize text information
    • Poor study habits
Test Anxiety

• What causes test anxiety?
  • Worrying about the following:
    • Past performance on exams
    • How friends and other students are doing
    • The negative consequences of failure (often exaggerated)
    • “All-or-nothing” thinking
  • Losing perspective
    • It’s only a test – there will be others
Physical Signs of Test Anxiety

• Any or all of the following:
  • Perspiration
  • Sweaty palms
  • Headache
  • Upset stomach
  • Rapid heartbeat
  • Tense muscles
Effects of Test Anxiety

- Nervousness:
  - Difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam
  - Difficulty organizing your thoughts
  - Difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions
  - Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material
Effects of Test Anxiety

- Mental blocking:
  - Going blank on questions
  - Remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over
How to Reduce Test Anxiety

• Study and know the material well enough that you can recall it even under stress
• Practice good time management and avoid laziness, procrastination and day dreaming
• Avoid cramming the night before exams
• Build confidence during the semester
How to Reduce Test Anxiety

• Learn to concentrate on the material by:
  • Generating key questions from your textbook and your notes
  • Focus on key words, concepts & examples
  • Make charts & outlines to organize information in notes & textbooks
Relaxation Techniques

- Take a couple of long deep breaths (not quick shallow ones) to relax the body and reduce stress
  - Count to five as you breath in and out
- Focus your mind on your breath or some object
- Tense and then relax muscles throughout the body
Relaxation Techniques

• If allowed, go get a drink or go to the bathroom
• If allowed, eat something
• Break your pencil lead – then go sharpen it
• Notice any negative or panicky self-statements; offer reassurance (it’s OK)
After the Test

• During the exam, think of the post-exam reward you have promised yourself
• Whether you did well or not, follow through on the post-exam reward
• Try not to dwell on any mistakes you might have made
• Just relax for a little while