

Exam Preparation and Writing

- I. The Road to Exams
- II. Organizing Study Time
- III. Study Techniques
- IV. Writing the Exam
- V. Dealing with Exam Anxiety

The Road to Exams Begins on the First Day of Class

- I. Learning from Readings
- II. Learning from Lectures
- III. Learning from seminars

Pre-Reading

Before you begin to read a source, skim it.

- Read the title.
- **Skim the introduction and the preface (books) or the introductory paragraphs (article). What is the thesis?**
- Examine carefully the table of contents and the index of a book; read the section headings and sub-headings of an article..
- Skim through the work looking for the main ideas: read introductory and summary paragraphs of chapters (books) or topic sentences (articles)
- Skim the concluding chapter of a book or the final paragraph(s) of an article.

Active Reading

- Reading should be active, not passive. Stop and ask yourself questions as you read. Review the main ideas periodically.
- Active Reading Involves Critical analysis:
 - Evaluate controlling idea: What is the thesis? How is it supported?
 - Identify connections and applications
 - Identify arguments, biases, uses of evidence
 - Evaluate: do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Note-Taking

- Find a compromise between a system that is useful to you and one that is time effective:
 - 1) You can highlight main points and write comments in the margins
 - 2) Take notes in bullet form on one side of the page and make reactions on the other
 - 3) Highlight as you read and then write down a list of 5-10 key words and 1-3 central questions or ideas.
 - 4) For content heavy courses, create flashcards.
- Be selective of what you write down!

Learning from Lectures and Seminars

- Read the syllabus before each class to get a sense of what to expect. Do course readings before you come to class.
- Take notes on lectures in bullet or outline form. Review them after lecture and highlight key terms and themes.
- During seminar, keep your focus on participation. Jot down brief notes after class.



Study Strategies

- I. Setting Yourself Up for Success
- II. Seeing the Forest and the Trees
- III. Study Guides
- IV. Activities to Promote Synthesis
- V. Memorization Techniques

Setting Yourself Up for Success in Exams

- Get as much information as you can from your Professor or your TA about the format, length, and requirements of the exam.
- Attend the last day of classes and seminars!
- Organize all of your course materials. Use this as an opportunity to make an inventory of all of the materials that you need to look at while you study.

Create a Study Schedule

1. Break your days into sections and set goals for each section
2. Where do you study best?
3. Study BOTH alone and with others. Think about the most effective use of study groups.
4. Be realistic and honest with yourself
5. Remember to be well-rested and well-fed!

Seeing the Forest and the Trees

- Your goal in studying is to understand the larger goals and themes of the course (the forest) as well as the facts, events, and details of the topic (the trees).
- The first way to survey the forest is to **READ THE SYLLABUS**:
 - Look for themes and connections.
 - How is the course organized?

Creating a Study Guide

- Step I: Read through lecture notes, reading notes and list the main themes/divisions of the class. This is not a list of facts, dates, events, authors, but themes or ideals.**
 - For example, if you are making a study guide for English 1000, your list would NOT be a list of authors that you have read. Instead, it would be a list of themes that are common to them: literary techniques, self and society, etc.
 - Similarly, Hist 1500 would NOT be a list of events or dates. It would be themes: terror and the state, religion and terror, the "other"
 - BIO 105: consider connections: system – tissue – cells
- Step II: Now go back and read through notes again.**
 - This time, you are looking for details – key terms, definitions, events. Use the details to flesh out your study guide – to show how the details build your understanding of the themes..

Study Chart

- Make a table to organize themes, concepts or content

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Psychology | Concept/ Theory | Key Theorist | Historical Context | Main Idea | Application |
| English | Author | Title | Major Characters | Key Events | Important Themes |
| Business Admin | Concept/ Skills | Main Theorist | Historical Context | Main Ideas | Application for Workplace |
| History | Module | Time Period/Region | Major Events | Key Vocabulary | Connections to theme of course |

Activities that Promote Synthesis

- Try to guess the questions. What have been the most important themes? What topics could be combined into a question?
- Pretend that you are organizing a conference or a museum exhibit on the topic. What displays/panels would you have? What order would you put them in? What would be the title?

Activities The Promote Thorough Understanding

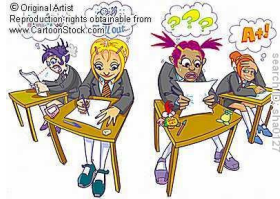
- Exams will often demand that you recognize a fact/event/idea when it is worded/presenting in a form other than the one in which you originally learned it. So, you need a very thorough understanding of the topic.
- Try pretending to explain a concept to your 10-year old brother.

Memorization Techniques

- Flashcards
- Re-copying text
- Timelines
- Charts
- Picture/Symbol associations
- Mnemonic devices

Managing Exam Anxiety

- Eat, sleep, and exercise
- Don't let yourself get drawn into a stress feeding frenzy.
- Explore relaxation techniques for anxiety such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.
- Develop positive rituals such as music or visualization.



Writing Exams

- I. Take Care of the Basics
- II. Thinking Strategically
- III. Deciphering and Writing Multiple Choice Questions
- IV. Deciphering and Writing Essay Questions

Take Care of the Basics

- Know where and when your exams are being held. Get there early!
- Come prepared with extra pens, pencils, and calculators. Do not bring notes and books as you will likely be required to leave them at the door of the exam room.
- Know the name of your tutorial leader so that your exam goes to him or her.

Don't Just Dive into an Exam – Strategize!

- Take time to read through all of the directions carefully. **How many questions do you need to answer?**
- Jot down key terms for the essays and short answer questions.
- Make a strategy: which questions will you answer?; how much time will be each get?
- Answer the easiest questions first and try to leave yourself time at the end to double check your work

Multiple Choice Questions

- Cover the answers and read the questions first. Try to answer the question without looking at the answers.
- Read each response one at a time. Mark answers that you know are wrong or think are right.
- Remember to choose the best possible answer.
- If you're really not sure, mark it and leave it until later . . . You can always guess

Structure & Strategy

- 3 parts of MCQ – 1. stem 2. statement to complete the stem 3. misleading statements that appear to complete the stem but do not.
- Approaches:
 - Turn the stem into a question
 - Try elimination
 - Watch for qualifiers
 - absolutes (never, only, always)
 - Watch for incomplete items
 - Of two opposites, one is probably correct
 - More words tend to be right

In what Canadian province would you find the country's capital city?

- a. Quebec
- b. Ottawa
- c. Ontario
- d. British Columbia

Conceptual M.C. Question

You lie awake all night trying to make sense of your schedule for the following day, planning things methodically. Your behaviour is an example of a(n):

- a) obsession
- b) delusion
- c) phobia
- d) compulsion

Be Careful of Absolute Terms

In determining whether a patient has a cold or a flu, nurses should keep in mind that:

- a) Colds always come on more gradually than does the flu.
- b) Colds never include a fever.
- c) The flu often involves high fever.
- d) The flu can lead to complications in the young and the elderly.

Essay and Short Answer Exam Steps

1. Understand and Underline key words in question
2. Do a mind dump
3. Plan your answer
4. Write your answer
5. Review your work

Understanding Short Answer and Essay Questions

1. **Identify questions:** Provide a detailed description of an event, process, or idea.
(Identify, Define, Describe, Enumerate, List, Summarize)
2. **Explain questions:** Analyze why, how, or in what order a set of events occur.
(Explain, Account for, Analyze, Discuss, Trace, or Outline)
3. **Compare questions:** Analyze the similarities and differences; answer with an investigation of a relationship
(Compare, Contrast, Distinguish, Relate)
4. **Argue questions:** answer with a defence of a position that considers potential detractors
(Argue, Agree, Disagree, Debate, Defend, Justify, Prove)
5. **Assess Questions:** answer with an evaluation
(Assess, Criticize, Evaluate, Interpret, Propose, Review)

Underline Key Words in Question

- Do women experience terror, both as victims and perpetrators, in the same way and to the same extent men do? Discuss with relation to at least two (2) modules.
- Do **women** experience terror, both as **victims** and **perpetrators**, in the **same way** and to the **same extent** men do? Discuss with relation to at least two (2) **modules**.

Do a MIND DUMP

- Scribble notes on the top of the page. Blorp it out ! You do not have to keep it in your head.
- **DIFFERENT**—Crimes against women: rape, "honour" etc. / different epochs = different roles & reactions
- **SAME**—transhistorical? Be careful... psychology of fear and terror, panic / violence
- **Victims**—Bosnia, witches (Salem / Europe)
- **Perpetrators**—Chechnyans, Ulrike Meinhof
Condy Rice, Elizabeth Bathory



Plan Your Answer

- Write a scratch outline or T-chart with main points and examples.
- This will help keep you focused and help to ensure that you don't forget points that you want to make.

In Your Response, Make Sure To:

- Answer all parts of the question directly and completely
- Don't lose marks because you left something out
- Focus on demonstrating your knowledge of the course – not lots of outside info. Content!!
– GIVE EXAMPLES!!!!
- Be as clear as possible given time constraints. Begin paragraphs with clear topic sentences.

Prof Pet Peeve...

Avoid generalizations. Be **specific**.

Not "people" but....*workers. Aristocrats.*

NAME political parties, factions.



Prof Pet Peeve...

- Know facts. *But AVOID facts if you are not sure.*

Being wrong is a big error



"Hitler came into power in 1903"
sinks it.

- **Best:** *"Hitler came to power in 1933, and he..."*
- **Bad:** *"Hitler came to power in 1903, and he..."*
- **Go around it if unsure:** *"When Hitler came to power..."*

"Facts" alone are of limited value...you need to interpret them and explain what concepts or themes they illustrate.



For An Essay Question

- Write a thesis first - this is where you declare your concise answer to the question.
- Write a brief outline or chart to keep you on track
- Use a clear structure and write topic sentences that keep your reader on track

A Good Exam Essay is NOT

a summary of events ☹

a bibliography ☹

A focus on “What happened” is only a summary / paraphrase, not an analysis.

A Good Exam Answer

is about a specific topic

argues a thesis about that topic

ANSWERS THE QUESTION

Good Luck! And Remember,

- Exams are opportunities to demonstrate what you have learned!
- Leave it all on the floor, your almost at half-time!
