Chapter 6: Test Preparation

This chapter has two resources:

* The 10 Day Study Plan
* Tips for Taking Exams

Ten Day Study Plan

Many students think studying for an exam is something to be done the day or two before the exam. Some students will clear their schedules the day before an exam and devote an entire day to studying-- but preparing for an exam is a bit like preparing for a game or a concert-- working on it over a period of time is more effective. The Ten-Day Study Plan is a customizable study plan-- turn it into a seven-day study plan for shorter tests, expand it to 14-day study plan for exams that cover multiple chapters. Skip steps you don't find useful or change them to fit your course better.

Days 1 and 2: Gather information about the exam

There is information about your exam you should know before you begin studying. Most instructors are happy to share information about their exams because they want students to be successful. Many post something on their D2L site or discuss the test in class. Classmates might also know the answers.

In any case, at least 10 days before the exam, find answers to the questions below:

Format and Value

What kind of questions will be on the exam? (i.e. will it be multiple choice? Short answer? Longer essays? A combination of question types?)

How many questions will be on it?     How many of each type? (i.e. 25 multiple choice questions and 3 short answer/ essay questions.)

How many points is it worth and/or what percentage of your grade is it?

Setting and Circumstances

* Is your test timed?  Y   N  If yes, how long do you have to take it?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What day/time is it due?             When can you start it?     Is it in person or take home?

* If it is over Zoom, do you need to have your camera on to prove you are not cheating?

* Can you use a study aid (cheat sheet, book, etc.) during the test?  Y   N   If yes, what are the details? (For example, are you allowed to bring only a 3 X 5 Notecard? Note only? The book only?

Content

* Which chapters will you be responsible for knowing on the exam?

* Is there anything else you need to read to be ready for the exam? (Articles you were assigned, other books, etc.?) List them below.

* Are there videos, movies, taped lectures, etc. you need to watch to be ready for the exam? List them below.

* What role will lectures play in the exam? For example, does your instructor lecture right out of the book, or do they use lecture to introduce new concepts? Will you be tested over what is said in lecture?

* What role will class activities play in the exam? (If you did class activities designed to help you understand an important concept, you are likely to be tested on it!)

NOTE: if you can’t find the answers to these questions on the D2L site or from classmates, make sure to ask your instructor.

Barriers

People are more successful when they name their concerns and come up with a plan to address them. What concerns you about studying for or taking this exam? Here are some options:

* Lack of time to study
* Having multiple tests the same week
* Test anxiety
* Fears you haven’t read the chapters carefully enough
* Concepts you still find confusing
* Poor performance on quizzes so far
* Other

Days 3-6: Figure Out What You Know

Flip to the ends of your textbook chapters, or wherever the authors have listed important concepts, learning objectives, etc. Determine which concepts, people, processes, etc. you remember and which ones you will need to review.

To keep yourself organized, try completing the concept chart below. **Information about how to complete it is below the chart.**

Chapter # \_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Section from the chapter  (Write the heading)   | Concept column  Make a college-level statement using the terms and concepts from your class.   | How would you rate your understanding of this concept?    | After review, how would you rate your understanding of this concept?   |
|      |    |    |    |
|      |    |    |    |
|      |    |    |    |

 How to Complete the Concept Chart

* Next to "Chapter #\_\_\_\_\_," Write down which chapter these concepts are coming from so you can keep yourself organized.
* In "Column 1: Section of the Chapter," write down chapter headings and/or subheadings so you know which part of the chapter these concepts came from. Also, write down page numbers so you can easily find information.
* In the "Concept Column" write **three-seven concepts** per chapter—but you can do more if you wish. When you complete the “Concept” part, don‘t just list terms. Instead read the college-level statements below. Notice that each statement asks you to do something with the terms and concepts in the chapter, and many of them ask you to think about how two or more terms or concepts relate.
* Summarize how \_\_\_\_\_ happens
* Explain how \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ works
* Explain the steps in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ process
* Name and explain the parts of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Define \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and list the reasons why \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is true/ false/ important
* List the reasons why \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ happens.
* Explain how \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ causes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Decide which one or ones “fit” most closely with the information in the textbook. For example, if your chapter section in Biology is describing how the process of photosynthesis happens, then select the “Explain the steps in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ process” and write something like, “Explain the steps in the process of photosynthesis” in the concept area.

TIP: Change the college level statements to better fit your material if you need to. The important thing to avoid is writing a bunch of “What is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?” questions since those emphasize memorizing vocabulary and definitions and you are not likely to have to do that on an exam.

* Look at the college-level statements you made in the chart and consider whether you can DO what the statement is asking you to do. For example, if you have to list the steps in the process of photosynthesis, can you? If you need to explain how one president’s foreign policy differs from another one, can you?

* After you Read each statement from the “concept” column rate it based on your ability to DO what it is asking you to do. See the ratings below:

0= I don’t remember these concepts. I cannot do what this statement is asking me to do.

1= I barely remember these concepts. I could do what the statement is asking me to do, but not at all well.

2= I remember these concepts pretty well. I could do what the statement is asking me to do, but I might miss a couple important ideas.

3= I remember these concepts very well. If I were given the exam right now, I could do what the statement is asking me to do.

NOTE: Don’t just read your statement and say, “Oh, yeah, I can explain how one president’s foreign policy is different from this other one.” ACTUALLY EXPLAIN IT! It is easy enough to THINK you can do what your college-level statement says. It is another to be able to DO IT. Think of it like this: Can you sing your National Anthem? You probably think you can. After all, you’ve likely heard it multiple times. But if you try it, you might find you don’t remember it as well as you thought.

How to Review

When you review, start with the concepts with the lowest scores and use your notes, book and whatever tools are available to you to learn them. If necessary, check in with your instructor, or talk to a study buddy. After studying, reevaluate. Can you give yourself a higher score? Repeat this process until the majority of your numbers are 2 or 3. You can go chapter by chapter, or you can do this for each chapter and then review all at once.

Here is a review technique: pretend someone comes up to you at a party and makes a college level statement to you. (i.e. They ask you how the atmosphere on Earth is similar to or different from the atmospheres of Mars, Venus and Mercury.) If you can’t respond to the college level statement without looking at your books or notes or asking a friend, you likely don’t know it well enough to take an exam over it.

NOTE: Avoid googling people, concepts etc. since google definitions are often not detailed enough for your class, and/ or the terms you need to know might have other meanings.

*Sample Completed Concept Chart*

Here is a sample from Chapter 1 of a Psychology textbook. The headings in the chapter are “Why Psychological Science Matters” and “The Scientific Method.”

Chapter 1

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Section   | Concept column  Make a college-level statement using the terms and concepts from your class.   | Rating 1   | Rating 2   |
| Why Psychological Science Matters   | Define hindsight bias, overconfidence and perceiving order in random events and explain how they prevent people from thinking critically.    | 2   | 3   |
| The Scientific Method   | Describe the steps to using the scientific method  Theory, hypothesis, operational definition, Replicate       | 1   | 3   |

Days 7-10: Brainstorm Study Questions

To get ready for your test, you need to practice at home what you will have to do on the exam. To do this, go back to the college-level statements you made in Days 2-7.

Below is that list of college level statements in case it is helpful to have it again.

* List the steps in a process (i.e. how a neuron fires)
* Compare/ contrast (i.e. how is the peripheral nervous system similar or different from the Central Nervous System?)
* Explain why something is important (i.e. why is thinking critically important?)
* Summarize (i.e. the ways the brain can respond to damage)
* Define \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and list the reasons why \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is true, false or important

Your exam can’t cover EVERY concept—particularly if you are taking a comprehensive test. Now, you need to narrow down the college-level statements to those you think are more likely to be on the test.

Sort through the college-level statements you have written to decide which ones are the most likely to show up on an exam. Here are tips about how to do that:

Focus your energies on concepts, people and processes that:

* Your instructor told you are important
* That are both in your lecture notes AND in the book
* That you were tested on in previous exams
* Were emphasized in assignments or discussions

Note: Some of this work may have been done for you already by your textbook. Does it have review questions? Chapter objective questions? Look them over for college-level test questions.

Reminder: Avoid writing test questions that begin with “What is . . .” Those questions lead you to memorize vocabulary works and definitions, which is not usually what you are tested on. Try, as much as you can, to stick to the college level statements.

Complete the chart below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Question  Number   | Chapter   | College-Level Statements   |
| 1   |    |    |
| 2   |    |    |
| 3   |    |    |
| 4   |    |    |
| 5   |    |    |
| 6   |    |    |
| 7   |    |    |
| 8   |    |    |
| 9   |    |    |
| 10   |    |    |
| 12   |    |    |
| 13   |    |    |
| 14   |    |    |
| 15   |    |    |
| 16   (If you want)   |    |    |

Make this chart as long or as short as you would like to be. If you have a 50 point exam, it isn’t necessary to come up with 50 questions! Maybe 20 is plenty! Studying does require a certain amount of experimenting.

Next, go through your college level statements and actually DO what they ask. Even if you already did this in days 3-6, do it again to make sure you still can.

If you follow these steps, you are more likely to be prepared to take and perform well on a college exam. Good luck!

Tips for Taking Exams

You’ve done all your studying, and you think you are ready. The big day has come, and you are walking into the test. Now what? Below are tips to help you take the best test possible.

## Multiple Choice Tests

**Cover up your options**. Stop just after you read the question, pretend it is a short answer question and see if you can answer it on your own. If you can, check to see if the answer you thought up is there. If so, it likely is the answer. Read the remaining options and see if any other options make sense before selecting your answer.

**Write notes**. Sometimes you are allowed to have blank paper to write, or if your test is given on paper, you can write on the exam. First, ask if you are able to write notes during the exam. If you are, you can jot down formulas, steps in processes etc. Those little notes, even though they are from your memory, can jog your memory and even reduce nerves.

**Pay attention to terms and words**. Don’t confuse words like “hypoglycemia” and “hypothermia.” When you are nervous and pressed for time, you might read so fast you misread words and make assumptions.

## Short Answer or Essay Tests

**Don’t try to come up with witty introductions to your essays** (In other words, forget the attention getter.) Your instructor knows you are pressed for time and won’t mind if you simply plunge in with what you have to say.

**Use the “I” voice**. You might want to ask ahead of time if you can write in the first person. (i.e. “I think . . . ” or “When I read  . . . .” or “I will compare X and Y.”) But, again, your instructor isn’t expecting polished prose and likely will not mind if you write less formally than you would otherwise.

**Forget grammar and spelling (to a point).** You want your answers to be legible, and you don’t want to make so many errors your instructor won’t be able to understand your point, but don’t waste time worrying about grammar and spelling. (If your essay test is on a computer, auto-correct will likely help you out anyway.)

**Add information if you need to**. If your test is taken on a computer, it is easy to go back and add something you forgot. But if your test is taken the old-fashioned way with pen and paper, and you are just wrapping up your second paragraph when you realize you want to add something to your first one, do this: go back to the place in your essay where you want to add something. Draw an arrow out to the margins of your paper and carefully print what you forgot to add.

**Write your answers as though someone who has some knowledge about the topic is going to read them**. (Unless you are told otherwise. For example, if you are writing an essay about how impressionism relates to other styles in your Art History class, you probably don’t need to define impressionism.