



## Getting Ready for the Test

Doing well on tests depends on good preparation. Too often, we leave things until the last minute. This mode of operation is fine if we're talking about getting ready for a picnic or packing up the car heading to the mountains for the weekend. However, as wonderful as this type of spontaneity may be in some areas of our lives, it's not recommended as a way to get ready for an upcoming test. In fact, when it comes to test preparation, the last thing we should do is leave things to chance and cramming.

### When is it soon enough to start getting ready for the test?

**Preparation for your test should begin the very first day of classes.** Stay on schedule with the assigned readings and homework, keep your notes organized, and review them a few times a week. This ongoing review allows you to learn the material over time. The key to mastery learning and retention is periodic review. Basically, you can categorize reviews into three types: daily, weekly and major. Later on in this handout, we'll focus on how to prepare for major reviews.

**Periodic review is far superior to cramming.** Note how professional athletes, artists, and good students perfect their skills. They are continually rehearsing, practicing, and mentally visualizing the outcomes they want to create. Overnight sensations are rare.

**Mastery entails knowing something "inside out".** Mastery takes time. You can't rush it. The major advantage of mastering the information you need to know for a test is that you have learned it so well, you won't forget it.

**Cramming does not result in mastery.** Cramming doesn't result in "learning" in its truest sense at all. If you know something, if you have truly learned it, you should be able to retain the information, retrieve it when necessary, and most importantly, apply the information at your discretion.

**Retention is minimal after cram sessions.** Students who complain about "forgetting" or those who experience an inordinate amount of test anxiety at test time are often victims of their own inadequate test preparation. Waiting until the last minute to learn enough information to pass the test is risky, and there's nothing more anxiety-producing than not having a good understanding of the material you're responsible for.

## What's the first thing I should do when preparing for the test?

**Get organized for a major review.** If you're not sure which lectures and what parts of the text are covered in the test, ask the instructor. Also find out what type of questions the instructor will ask: essay, multiple choice, short answer, or a combination.



**At least a week before the test,** make a list of the information you need to review. This study checklist should include readings in the text, lecture notes, reserve readings (those your instructor has "on reserve" in the library), course handouts, and any other material such as films or slideshows that have been used as part of class instruction. Making this list is just the first step. It's not a review. It contains only the briefest description of each item you need to study. The purpose of the checklist is to keep you on track as you study for the test.



**Focus on the specialized vocabulary of the course.** The vocabulary of any course is the key to understanding the most important concepts of the course. Get comfortable with the vocabulary. Study the definitions, learn to use the new words in sentences, and most importantly,

know how to discuss and apply the ideas or concepts represented by the vocabulary. Some students like to make up pocket sized flashcards for review. Other like to make lists; others study in small groups and quiz each other.

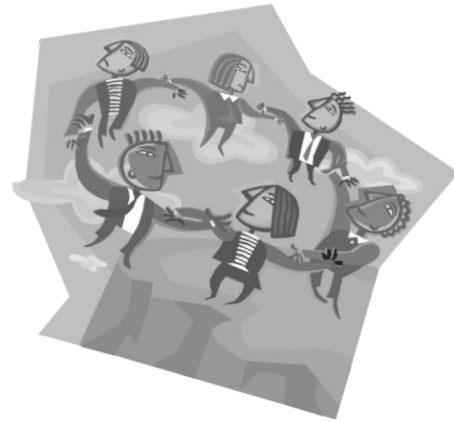
**Predict possible test questions.** After your general review, make up possible test questions like those you think your instructor will come up with. If you have not yet had a test with a particular instructor, this exercise may seem a little difficult since you may not be sure what sorts of questions the instructor will ask. However, you may be surprised how close you come to predicting a good portion of the questions that will appear on the test.

**Go through your lecture and reading notes carefully.** The number of test questions that you predict will depend on the amount of material you are expected to know for the test. Ask a variety of questions. Dig deeper than just definitions and identification questions. Most instructors want students to apply the information they have learned in the course. Imagine yourself as the instructor and make

up essay questions, word-problems, and questions that challenge the learner to prove what he or she knows. After you have constructed the questions, answer them.

**If working with a study group,** ask everyone in the group to make up at least ten questions and share them with group members. Predicting test questions has proven to be one of the most effective test preparation techniques. In a sense, it demystifies the test and you are more likely to feel in control.

**Form a study group.** It is true that two, three, four, possibly even five heads are better than one. When it comes to academic success, nothing is quite as powerful as collaborative learning. In a recent study conducted at the University of California at Berkeley, researchers found that one of the characteristics of successful students is that they tend to work with study groups.



**Study groups don't take the place** of individual studying; in fact, study groups are not very effective unless each group member has something to contribute. However, when each member of the group is prepared, a tremendous amount of information can be covered.

**Attend group study sessions or tutorials when they are offered in the classes in which you are enrolled.** Based on our data at Eastern, we have found that students who attend group tutorials and study sessions frequently (once a week) achieve higher grades than non-participants. The average difference is a whole letter grade in some classes. Think about the positive impact a higher grade would make on your GPA.

