

10 Test Preparation Hints

1. **Prepare for exams from the first day assignments are made.**
2. **Recite notes aloud from memory.** As the number of recitations increase, information is moved from short-term memory toward long-term memory where it must go to be stored and recalled when needed. One way to recite is to look at a main idea and recite the details aloud without looking. Then, check the details to see how much was recalled correctly. Read aloud any incorrectly recited material and go through this process repeatedly until it is recited correctly from memory, then move on to the next idea.
3. **Review notes on a regular basis,** for example, every other day. This improves memory, reduces text anxiety, and allows time between reviews for the information to consolidate in the mind. Spacing out reviews also results in better recall at test time. It is **normal** to forget on tests when notes are reviewed only once or twice.
4. **Re-write notes after each lecture.** Condense main ideas and clarifying details into a more organized format that promotes and speeds learning. For example, turn main ideas into questions and details into answers. Put one question on the front of the notecard and its answer on the back. Do the same as you take notes from textbooks.
5. **Self-test using a study system that includes a step to reveal how much has been learned and not yet learned before a test is taken, when something can still be done about it.**
6. **Use the instructor's clues to ideas that are likely to appear on exams.** Did the instructor narrow down potential testable material? What clues were given about what may appear on the test? Were sample test questions or review sheets provided? How much time was devoted to each topic? What questions did the instructor ask in class? What did the instructor repeat?
7. **Check to see if old tests from previous semesters are available for review.** This will provide a clue on how test questions may be constructed and the types of information instructors believe is important for you to learn.
8. **Utilize study groups.** If there are no study groups, start them. Study groups provide opportunities to check the completeness and accuracy of notes with others and to quiz each other. Research shows that study group members typically earn higher grades than non-study group students.
9. **Use all five types of studying** to increase chances of academic success.
 - a. **Studying to gather information.** Its purpose is to **formulate complete and accurate sets of lecture and textbook notes.** This type of studying requires a means for verifying if notes are complete and accurate. Some ways to do this are to clear up confusing material with instructors, comparing your notes with an "A" student's, comparing notes in a study group, and refining your ability to spot main ideas in textbooks and lectures.

- b. **Studying to learn.** Its purpose is to **move information from short-term memory toward long-term memory.** This requires repeated recitation of material to be learned. One way to do this is to read a main idea and recite aloud all the details you can recall, without looking. Then, check the details for accuracy. Do this as many times as it takes to recite all the details accurately from memory before moving on to the next main idea.
- c. **Studying to check for learning.** Its purpose is to **reveal what has and has not yet been learned** before a test is taken when something can still be done about it. This type of studying requires a system for self-testing to determine how well the material has been learned and what remains to be learned before a test is taken. One way to do this is to take the material you believe has been learned, read a main idea aloud and recite aloud all the details you can recall without looking, then check. The best time to discover that you haven't learned something is not during a test.
- d. **Studying to refresh.** Its purpose is to **prevent forgetting.** This type of studying requires regular review of material already learned. One way to do this is to have a calendar book and make time in your schedule to review the material you have learned.
- e. **Study to improve learning skills.** It has two purposes: **(1) identify which skills for learning worked, so they may be repeated,** and **(2) identify which skills did not work well, so they may be modified and not repeated.** This requires analyses of returned tests and quizzes. Unless this is done, grade-raising learning skills are more likely to remain a mystery and grade limiting learning skills are more likely to be repeated.

Three steps for studying to improve learning skills when exams are returned are:

1. **Identify answers that were correct** and determine how you studied to get these answers correct.
2. **Identify answers that were all or partially incorrect** and determine how you studied or didn't study that led to a loss of points.
3. **Modify or replace learning skills that resulted in lost points.** To do this, use the resources to improve and refine your learning skills such as do what "A" students do, do what is suggested in a learning skills book, take a learning skills class, attend learning skills workshops, meet with learning skills counselors, visit with instructors, or utilize resources in your campus learning center.

10. Cramming doesn't work for most students because it limits learning which in turn limits grades. Start studying to gather information early. Spend **most of your time** studying to learn and studying to check for learning. Study to refresh every two or three days.

Adapted with permission of Dennis Congo, Certified Supplemental Instruction Trainer, University Central Florida