

# Studying for Exams

## Every Day



- For each of your classes, spend 10 minutes **going over the notes you took that day**. Fill in gaps, clarify, think about the major concepts.
- **Use the Cornell System** for taking notes, with headings or questions to the left and details on the right. When you're ready to study, cover the right side of the notes and quiz yourself.
- Constantly **paraphrase as you read**. In other words, talk to yourself: "Oh, I see, she's saying \_\_\_\_."
- Stop at the end of a paragraph or section to **highlight a phrase or to write a brief note in the margin**. (Most students find that using a combined approach provides the most flexibility.)
- **Focus on charts, diagrams, and outlines**, especially in the sciences.
- If the textbook is very difficult, **buy a review book** and use that to preview a given chapter in your text. Understanding the simplified version beforehand can really help, and it doesn't increase your study time (you will be able to read the textbook more quickly).

## Don't Just Memorize

- Most college courses require that you do more than simply stuff your head with isolated facts. Be sure to **paraphrase ideas and relate one idea to another**.  
For example, don't simply memorize each psychological theory in isolation; look for similarities and differences.
- **Study with another student or with a group.**  
Try to explain what you've learned to your study partners or even to your mother. Don't simply recite information, explain the *how* and *why*.
- **Focus on examples** because they can frequently help you understand complex ideas.
- Visualize the information if you can. (Half of your brain works in pictures, so use that half.)
- **Talk with your professors** after class and ask them to explain ideas you find confusing.



## Decide What to Learn

**Narrow your focus.** If you try to learn *everything* that might possibly be tested, you will simply spread yourself too thin and you won't be able to learn anything thoroughly.

- **Ask yourself** what you would test if you were the professor.
- **Pay close attention to the following:** study guides, review sessions, topics mentioned in the class before the exam, material written on the board or overhead.
- **Ask other students** what they think will be on the exam. Talk to the professor.

## Review Tools

- **Write summary sheets, charts, or diagrams.** Be brief. You don't want to simply recopy your notes; you are trying to condense and paraphrase.
- **Use flashcards sparingly.** Some students spend hours making cards but don't allow enough time to actually use them. Cards can be useful for memorizing isolated facts (such as drugs for a pharmacy class) but they aren't helpful for learning ideas. That said, quizzing yourself *can* be very helpful. One way to avoid the busy work of making cards is by using the Cornell System instead. As you take notes in class, you are creating a method for quizzing yourself later.

## Memorizing

- Don't simply stuff your head with facts; **think of a method for recalling each idea or fact.** Relate the new information to something you already know.
- **Write concepts on a blackboard** (the large size seems to help).
- **Walk around** while reciting your notes or quizzing yourself.
- Avoid marathon study sessions and instead, **review frequently and in small "doses"** with plenty of breaks.
- **Use mnemonic devices** for large lists or facts that are difficult to recall.

## Practice Exams

- Ask the professor for a copy of an old exam or at least a few sample questions. **Analyze how the professor words questions and look for patterns of thinking.** What does the professor think is important and how does he/she ask a question?

- Before problem solving exams (math, physics, chemistry, etc.), **give yourself 2 to 4 practice exams.** If the professor makes a practice exam available, use that as a model and write your own additional exams. Also use questions at the end of a chapter.
- **Do at least one timed practice exam.** Many math exams can be difficult to finish in time, so you need to practice working under time constraints. (The more practice problems you do, the faster you will get.)

