

Stages to Successful Test Taking

Three separate places along the test-taking journey can impact your success on a test: **intake**, **review**, and **test recall**.

Intake

Test preparation doesn't start the night before the test when you pull out your book—and not even the week before the test when you start creating outlines and note cards. Test preparation begins the moment you walk into class, take your first set of notes, or read the first section in your textbook. At your first encounter with new material, you are engaging in activities that will shape your exam preparation. This involves:

- Listening to lectures
- Reading textbooks
- Note-taking in lectures and from books
- Asking questions to clarify
- Summarizing lab results
- Obtaining PowerPoint slides
- Creating questions from class/book materials

It's only possible to have a clear understanding of material for a test if you get a clear understanding of the material when you first hear it, read it, and write your notes.

Active Review

Active study strategies move information from short-term memory to long-term memory. Re-reading your text and notes isn't enough; you've got to actively engage with the information to process it thoroughly and deeply.

Active means putting ideas into your own words and organizational structure. For example: Talk your notes and textbook out loud. Build a question bank of possible questions as you read your notes over. Create a study guide. Make your own practice tests. Construct a graphic organizer to help you visually understand and remember material. Teach the material to a friend.

Active review is what successful learners and test-takers do. Review material for short periods of time repeatedly to get the most out of your study time. Don't forget to reread the notes you took that day before going to sleep and benefit from off-line processing that occurs while you sleep.

Review: What's on the test?

What chapters or topics do you need to study, and how do you determine the most important information? These questions will guide you as you review material and predict test questions.

- What is emphasized on the syllabus? (ie: what topics do your other assignments cover?)
- What are the goals and objectives for the class?
- What does the professor emphasize in class?
- What does the book or the professor devote the most time to?
- What's on the study guide? If there is no study guide, can you create your own from the ideas emphasized in class?
- What material does the professor write on the board, repeat, or point your attention to in the textbook?
- What are the questions your professor spends the most class time answering?

Test Recall

Some tips to help you stay calm and focused:

- Get a good night sleep and be sure to eat (think protein) before the test.
- Settle yourself by taking deep, cleansing breaths (try 4) and use positive self-talk: "I know the material well." "I can do this." And "I am going to take my time and think carefully."
- Take something familiar with you into the exam—a favorite pen, a comfortable sweater—as well as water and an energy bar.
- Look over the whole test. Notice the number of points assigned to each section and decide how to best spend your time. Pencil in times to begin each section. For example, if the essay is worth 50% of the test grade, plan on spending 50% of your time working on the essay.
- Read the directions carefully for each section.
- Read each question carefully. Underline key words.
- Let the test help you. As you work through the test, skip answers you can't recall and keep working. You may find a word you're looking for later in the test, or another test questions may help you.
- If you have time, review the questions and your answers. Be careful about second thoughts; more mistakes are made when answers are changed after first responses so be sure before you change an answer.