

## **Study skills: Guide to taking Examinations**

Taking mid-term and final exams can be the downfall of many otherwise capable students. Some students become so rattled that they blow a big test by forgetting material that they could previously recall without much trouble. Why? For most, the basic cause is test anxiety due to a lack of self-confidence. They either feel that they are inadequately prepared, or they lack confidence in their test taking techniques. Thus, the two keys to conquering such anxiety are to study the subject matter thoroughly and to develop effective test-taking skills.

When your tutor first announces an exam, make certain that you know what materials will be covered and what type of test it will be. For an objective test, you will need to concentrate on memorizing factual details such as names, dates and formulas; for problem-solving tests, you will need to work through examples of each type of problem that might appear on the exam. In reviewing, spend most of your time on the material that is least familiar, but also briefly review the material most familiar. For an essay exam, you will want to concentrate on understanding general concepts, principles and theories.

On the night before a big test, (or for two or three evenings before), rethink the materials by making a comprehensive final review—either out loud, or quietly, and then go to bed early so as to be mentally and physically alert when time comes to take the exam. Remember, your mind and body will not be fully alert if you have spent most of the previous night drinking sodas in a desperate attempt to stay awake while you frantically scramble for last-minute facts.

### **Special suggestions for Objective tests:**

Answer all questions in order without skipping or jumping around. Identify doubtful answers by marks in the margin and recheck these as time permits after all questions have been answered.

For the T-F questions, note the qualifying words such as “all – most – some – none” or “always – usually – seldom – never” or “highest – lowest” – you may test for the truth by substituting the other members of the series. If your substitution makes a better statement, the question is false; if your substitution does not make a better statement, the question is true.

Watch for modifying or limiting phrases inserted into T-F questions. Tutors often use inserted names, dates, places or other details to make a statement false or inaccurate.

Be cautious about changing your answer to a true-false or multiple-choice question without a good reason. Your first “guess” is more likely to be correct than the subsequent “guesses.”

On matching exercises, limit your work to only one column at a time. Match each item in that column against all items in the second column until you find a proper match, marking though matches about which you are certain so that it will be easier to match out the rest about which are unsure.

### **Special suggestions for Problem Tests:**

Write down hard-to-remember formulas, equations and rules before you actually begin working on the test problems.

If you are unable to work a problem, go on to the next one and come back to it later if time permits.

Even if you know that your answer is wrong, turn in your work because you may get partial credit for using the right process.

Show all the steps in your work and clearly identify or label your answer so that it can be quickly found.

Whenever possible, recheck all answers in a different way from that employed when you did the work.

### **Special suggestions for Essay Exams**

Carefully budget your time, saving time at the end for editing (we use different parts of the brain for creativity, recall, etc. than we do for editing – so get the facts down first, and go back later to check spelling, punctuation, etc.)

Read all the essay questions before beginning to write on any of them. Occasionally questions are related to each other. As you read the questions, jot down alongside each question words that come to mind for answering the question. This will alleviate any fears you may have about forgetting important points.

Develop a brief outline for our answer before beginning to write. This will help you be concise and yet not leave out important information. Write legibly, and write those answers that you know best first.

Write concisely to the question. Answer the question directly, then give support for your answer. Avoid bringing in information that is only remotely related to the question. Unless other specified, answer in complete sentences, in paragraph form.

If you run out of time, outline your answers to remaining questions rather than leave blank.

Time permitting, read through your answer, correcting obvious spelling errors and punctuation, and make sure the answer says what you intended to say.

### **Open book and/or note exams**

Many tutors recognize that real life situations often require a person to use available resources when attempting to resolve a problem or answer a question. Some tutors give open note exams; some in class, others at home with parental oversight. Like an essay exam, an open note exam measures the student's ability to organize and present ideas. Here are some tips for this sort of exam.

Locate the materials: books(i.e. Bible, if specified), assignments, articles and notes that you anticipate will be useful for the exam. Do not procrastinate in your preparation, thinking (which is a false security) that you will have plenty of time to find the right answers. You will not have time to do the necessary reading while you are answering the exam, so this reading must be done ahead of time. Preparing for an open note or book exam is thus no different from preparing for an essay or an objective exam. You must review your lecture notes and your reading notes before the exam. And you must do considerable thinking about the meaning of what you have been studying, and about how the pieces all fit together. In many cases, this is the most difficult of all types of testing, but you will be learning a lot in the process!

\*the above notes have been adapted from William F. Brown's *Effective Study Material*, San Marcos, Texas