

Freshman Preparation for Final Exams

- Know the schedule, date, time.
- Find out about the test. Know format of the test. Meet with the teacher one week before the test. Ask about type of test, format of questions, ex. T/F, MC, essay, short answer, etc. Ask for suggestions on how/what to study. Look for clues as far as what the teacher stresses or highlights.
- Ask your teacher for suggestions on what and how to study.
- Look for clues, what does the teacher stress or highlight.
- Prepare. Read over notes from lectures, readings, etc. Quiz yourself over the material. Create a list of key terms.
- Short answer questions test factual knowledge. Identify key terms, memorize, use cue cards.
- Take breaks.
- Plan now which exams will be the hardest. Study a little bit every day.
- Work with a study partner or group.
- Study one subject at a time.
- Schedule a time and place to study.

The Night Before

- Review before you go to bed, then go to sleep with the material still fresh in your head. Your brain still works while you're asleep. Get a normal night's sleep if you can.
- Review casually in the morning. You're not going to do serious learning or quizzing at this point.
- Eat breakfast — protein.

General Test-Taking Tips

- **Whether or not you feel calm, approach the test calmly.** If you've crammed some last-minute information into your short-term memory, calmly write it down as you begin.
- **If you simply aren't calm, try to use your nerves.** Your adrenaline can keep you on edge and heighten your awareness. Don't spend time and energy worrying about being nervous. Tests are performances, and, as in any performance, your nervous energy can be your fuel. However, the goal is a controlled burn, not an explosion.
- **Scan the test before you attack the first question.** See what kinds of questions you have ahead of you. Ideally, you'll have time to give every question the attention it requires. Realistically, you may not. Some questions are worth many more points than others. An experienced test-taker will recognize this and factor it into the decisions he or she makes during the course of the test.

- **Read the general directions and the directions for each question.** So many mistakes occur when test-takers don't read the directions. For example, sometimes you're only required to answer some of the questions.
- **Don't spend too much time on questions you know the least about.** You need to budget your time intelligently. You want to be able to really nail the stuff you know, so don't leave it to the end. It's a shame (and bad test-taking) to struggle your way through the questions you don't know very well and then not have time to answer the questions you do know.
- **Check the time.** As you finish each question, quickly ask yourself how best to use the time you have left. You may have to revise your strategy, leave certain questions for last, spend more time on the questions worth more points. *The best move at any given moment is whatever makes the best use of the remaining time.*
- **Show your work!** If you make a small mistake on a math test (if you forget a negative sign, for example) and your answer is wrong, but you've applied the correct formula and taken the right steps, you may get very close to full credit. After all, you've demonstrated that you know how to answer the question; you've just made a small, careless mistake. If you don't show your work, your instructor has no idea how you came up with your answer and can't award partial credit.
- **For a math or science problem, make a logical estimation of what the answer will be before you start to work.** If your answer turns out to be nothing like your estimate (and you feel you know how to do the problem), suspect that you've made a careless mistake and check for it.

If You're Stuck

- **Rephrase a question in your own words.**
- **If it's acceptable, raise your hand and ask for clarification on the wording of a question.**
- **Get something down on paper.** Don't sit and struggle with every single thing you've ever learned—you'll only grow more and more frustrated. Getting something down on paper can help you think. Ultimately, only what's on paper counts when you turn the test in.
- **If you can't remember something precisely, give your best approximation.** Explain your logic and reasoning. Teachers may give partial credit, so be resourceful. Show how you would have solved the problem or answered the question had you remembered the formula or quotation or event.
- **If you're running out of time, note this in the test and outline as thoroughly as you can the remaining points you want to make.** You can't get away with doing this on every question, or even more than one, but show that you know the main points and can put them in a logical order.
- **If you're really running out of time, you'll have to leave some questions blank.** Don't wait until the very last minute to take this

step. If you have to leave questions blank, do so sensibly, by leaving blank the questions about which you feel least confident.

If You Have No Clue

- Guess if you don't know the answer.

TIPS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEST QUESTIONS

Essays

When you write an essay, you want to demonstrate that you understand the issue, take a stand, make an argument, consider the alternatives, and conclude.

- **Read the directions carefully**, paying special attention to the verbs. Does the question ask you to summarize, outline, refute, compare, state, trace, describe, criticize, or contrast? Keep these directives in mind as you write.
- **Take a moment to outline your essay**, even if only in the broadest strokes. An essay question is meant to evaluate not only what you know but also whether you can organize your knowledge compellingly—this takes a bit of structure.
- **Make distinct paragraphs.** Paragraphs should be visually separate from one another, and each should follow the standard rules of composition by dealing with one main point.
- **Begin strongly.** Deliver your verdict starkly, then back it up with subtleties. End strongly, if you can.
- **Write on one side of the page and in pen.** This will make the essay easier for the grader to read.

Short Answer and fill in the blank

Your ability to flesh out an issue isn't really on display here, nor are your full rhetorical powers. You want to keep your answers succinct and factual. State the answer clearly and, if appropriate, briefly give the reasons.

Multiple-Choice Questions

When you take a multiple-choice test, you have the benefit of knowing that the correct answer is in front of you. You need to recognize and recall it, but this is much easier than having to understand it or being able to explain it.

- **Read the question very carefully.** To make the exam more challenging, multiple-choice and true/false questions will distract you with answers that are familiar but do not quite fit the question at hand.
- **Try to answer the question on your own**, without looking at the multiple choices. This will help prevent your choosing the first familiar-looking answer.

- **Read all of the choices.** There might be an answer that *sort of* fits, and then one that fits better (this isn't good test-writing, but not all tests are written well).
- **If you don't know the answer, employ a process of elimination.** By eliminating the answers you know are wrong, you greatly increase your chances of guessing successfully.
- **If you have to eliminate some answers but have no idea how to do so, eliminate the extreme answers (the highest and lowest numbers, for example).** Often, these extremes are incorrect.
- **If there are two answers that look very similar (while the others do not), the correct answer often is one of them.**
- **Don't agonize if you can't figure out the answer.** Mark the question, move on, and then come back to it. Subsequent questions might give you a clue or jog your memory.
- **If the question is just too simple, you might be missing something.** Reread the question carefully.