

Best Practices in Student Test Prep

Effective Learning Approaches

Orient your studying and review with these ideas:

- a. **Elaboration**: How does this concept relate to other concepts?
- b. **Distinctiveness**: How is this concept different from other concepts?
- c. Appropriate to Retrieval & **Application**: How am I expected to use or apply this concept?

Generate meaningful questions to model the upcoming test; Qs based on –

- a. facts (ok but not great)
- b. **connections** between ideas or facts
- c. **compare/contrast** problems or processes
- d. think about **implications** and significance
- e. analyze
- f. generate **examples that tie ideas**/material together

Draw a concept map showing nodes and links that connect and distinguish material in the course

Practice retrieving and using the information in the way the teacher expects

- a. practice recall without referring to notes (out loud helps!)
 - b. practice **using** the information
- Remember, recognizing a solution is not the same as solving a problem.
Recognition is usually **not enough**.*

Test Prep w/ SQ3R Method

- The **Survey** step helps to let you see the scope your work and its important parts. Go through your notes and book, looking for the most important topics. Re-read introductions, conclusions, & diagrams.
- The **Questioning** step engages your brain in actively approaching the material and thinking about assessment and significance; writing out a list of questions in an outline form as you go. This creates a study guide for later and allows you to quiz yourself and think about the upcoming test as you review. Add Qs as you go and expand them to include effective learning approaches.
- The **Reading** step can be very directed then, focusing on what is what is missing as you go through your list of questions without notes. If you can answer them accurately and completely put a check mark next to them; if not, re-read and review the relevant material, then put it away again and try to answer the question. Don't check it off until you can answer it completely and fluently without checking notes.
- The fourth step is **Recite**, which again engages your brain in two different ways; using your own words and speaking aloud, and also listening to yourself. You can do this step with any study buddy, or by yourself. This forces you to use whole language and put ideas together coherently, which your brain doesn't always do when "thinking" internally.
- The last step, **Review**, encourages you to go back over your material in a focused way, thinking about the questions and which answers you know well and which you don't. Remember that because of the "question" stage, at any point after that, you can identify areas where you need help and ask directed questions to get specific support from a TA, classmate, or your professor on a topic or concept.

Pacing Work & Getting Help

Each of these steps is short and sweet, and appointments with professors, TA's or study buddies in step 3 can create mini-deadlines that will help you stay on track to pace yourself for more effective studying and review.

1. **Assess & Evaluate** -- skim to figure out what you have to do, and what looks easier or harder, put check marks or question marks next to each problem in an assignment.
2. **Attempt** -- try all the easy stuff first, then try the harder stuff with question marks
 - Use resources -- use your book and/or notes to try and figure out the harder stuff, but don't bang your head against a wall here
 - Identify the problem -- when you get "stuck" and stay "stuck", write down **WHY** you are confused or **WHAT** you don't know or understand before moving on... use a "sticky" note that can later be moved to a study guide page for review.
3. **Strategic Intervention** -- with a classmate, peer tutor, or professor; explain (RECITE from SQ3R) what you do know and show WHY or WHAT you don't; get help based on specific problems you identified
 - This allows you (and/with your support resources) to identify patterns of problems, and target specific help for concepts or applications that are troublesome
4. **Reflect, Re-Attempt, Review** -- use what you've learned to try again on your own; are you doing it? did you find new stumbling blocks? can you use notes/book resources more efficiently now? Keep practicing the same problems until you get them right, and look for other challenging problems to attempt to help you get ready for exams. Figure out, write, and solve your own questions. Watching someone else shoot a great jump shot, even lots of times, doesn't mean you can do one yourself. Practice your own jump shot now that you've had more coaching.

Chunking Time

An hour spent multi-tasking usually amounts to about 15 minutes of useful work. You can't text, check facebook, email, and expect to also be able to learn and retain complex academic information at the same time. Use your time wisely, and use neuroscience research to figure out how:

Spend 20-40 minutes focused ONLY on work.

- Put away your phone, but set an alarm.
- Minimize distractions and noise if possible.
- Choose a task that will approximately take this much time.
- NOTE: if you are "in the zone" keep going!

Take a 5-10 minute break.

- Stand up or stretch.
- Drink water and have a snack.
- Check in socially.

Repeat.

This helps you keep your brain actively engaged over longer periods of time. It allows you to feel better about your break time, and about getting back to work (I can do 20 minutes, that's not that long!) It also allows you to use even small chunks of time effectively rather than waiting until you have long blocks to get to work. Finally, coming back to your material after a break helps you remember what you were doing and make connections going forward, which is practicing good study habits!