

# Exams: Preparing to Study

Studying for an exam should be more than just a cramming session; successful studying is an ongoing process that begins with the first day of classes and involves managing your time and learning effectively from lectures, labs, and texts. It also involves developing a foundation from which to begin your pre-exam review.

## Assess Progress and Set Goals

The first step in preparing for a test or exam is to consider how much it is worth (i.e., what percentage of your final mark) and what marks you have earned in the course so far. This will help you to prioritize and allocate study time. You also need to consider your long-term goals (such as vet school or teacher's college) and how they're connected to this particular course. Is the course required for your program? What mark would you like to get? What results will you need on this particular test or exam to achieve that mark? What implications does this have for your approach to preparing for this test or exam?

## Review Material Regularly

Reviewing allows the brain to consolidate and integrate information, so that cramming should not be necessary! By taking these steps, you'll be able to use pre-exam study time to review rather than relearn (or learn) course content.

- *Daily review* Edit class notes as soon as possible after class to fill in gaps. Review notes quickly before class.
- *Weekly review* at the end of each week, take an hour to do a structured review for each course, integrating class and text notes. Make summary notes of important concepts and information. Look at the specific material covered that week, and also at how this information relates to the course as a whole.
- *Major review* Begin extensive review 1-3 weeks before the test or exam.

## Use the Instructor as a Resource

- During the semester and particularly as exams approach, see the instructor for assistance with any content you don't understand. If they have scheduled a review class, go prepared with questions to ask.
- Tactfully gather as much information about the test as you can. Although it is not appropriate to ask specifically what will be asked on an exam, there is nothing wrong with requesting information on, for example, approximately how much of the material will be coming from lectures vs. readings.
- Be sure to attend review sessions.

## Develop Awareness of What You Don't Understand

- Use a study tool such as a concept map or flashcards to pinpoint areas of weakness.
- Make a list of the concepts, terms, theories, or other knowledge that you don't understand well.
- Try to find the answers in the text, or ask classmates or the professor.

## Planning Your Time

A big part of studying effectively is knowing when to study and finding the time to do it. By setting specific goals for your study time, you can avoid procrastination and give yourself a feeling of accomplishment as your goals are met. Below are some suggestions for planning your study time; for more detailed information, see the Study Skills Tip Sheet series on Time Management.

## Set Study Goals

- Know the format and length of the test.
- Know what content the test will cover. Is the test cumulative?
- When you sit down to study, know what you want to complete in that specific study time.

## **Make a Study Plan**

- Divide your available time and your work load into manageable chunks. Study frequently in shorter periods of time.
- Pay attention to how much time you're spending on specific study tasks and stay on track with your study plan.
- Plan breaks (e.g., 10 minutes for every hour of studying). Build some free time into your schedule to allow for unforeseen things. Be flexible.
- Focus your energy on studying, not playing catch up. If you are already behind, try to prioritize, concentrating on the material most likely to appear on the exam.

## **What to Emphasize**

### **Consult the Course Outline**

- Both the course objectives and the lecture topics will tell you something about what to focus on when studying for an exam.

### **Review Old Tests**

- Try to obtain old exams used for the course in previous years. These may be available from the professor, the department or other students who have taken the course.
- Practise answering the questions - be sure to limit response time to the amount of time you will have in the exam. Afterwards, check your answers and make sure you understand the correct responses.

### **Analyze Previous Tests**

- Be sure to review any previous tests you've had in the course. These can help you to determine what kinds of questions your professor will ask on the midterm or final exam, as well as his or her particular "style."
- Analyze errors you've made in the past - recognizing where you lost marks will help you to avoid making the same mistakes again.

## **Use Effective Study Strategies**

The following are some general study strategies, which may or may not apply to your specific situation. It is important to recognize that your studying should be adapted to the type of exam you'll be doing (e.g., multiple choice vs. essay questions) and to the course's objectives and learning demands. These techniques are best used as a starting point from which to develop strategies that are relevant to your specific needs.

### **Use Active Study Strategies**

This means involving your senses and thinking consciously about your studying. Active studying increases your memory and understanding of the material.

- Verbalize information instead of reading silently: this increases sensory input to the brain.
- Re-organize the course material in a logical way - how do the concepts fit together? Try creating a 'concept map.'
- Teach the material to someone else. This is one of the best ways to learn it yourself.
- Use the 3R's: Read, Write, Recite the material.
- Involve physical movement or senses where appropriate.

### **Predict Questions**

Students generally spend too much study time taking in information and not enough time practising how to use this information in the exam format. Predicting questions and answering them will help you to consider what will be on the exam and give you practice in answering the types of question that you'll be facing.

- Use the course outline, previous tests, course notes, and any information given by the instructor to make up possible test questions, then practise answering these questions.
- Try this strategy with a study partner, trading questions to give you a new perspective.
- Set a time limit that reflects the amount of time you will have in the exam.
- Make sure to correct your answers, and then focus your studying on the areas in which you made the most mistakes.

## **Find a Study Partner or Form a Study Group**

Working with someone else can give you a different perspective on course materials, and a lot can be accomplished by sharing skills and resources with others. Some suggested activities for group studying:

- Practice teaching each other the material.
- Brainstorm possible test questions.
- Compare lecture notes.
- Conduct discussions or debates on selected course topics.
- Quiz each other on factual material.

## **Create Diagrams to Help Summarize Information**

Brainstorm ideas/concepts that are related to a chosen topic.

- Draw a diagram to provide a pictorial representation of the subject.
- Try a concept map with the most important idea in the centre, and then various branches showing the relationships between other ideas and their subcategories.

## **Use Strategies to Help Reduce Forgetting**

- Test yourself as you study.
- Over-learn the material so that you can't forget it.
- SOAR (Select, Organize, Associate, Rehearse).
- Use mnemonics.
- Use acronyms (HOMES).
- Use acrostics (Kings Play Chess On Fairly Good Soft Velvet).
- Use analogies (lungs = trees, pump = heart).
- Use key words linked to other information.

## **Try Flashcards**

Write the question on one side, the answer on the other.

- Use them to memorize definitions, vocabulary, facts, formulae, etc.
- Carry them with you to study in short, spare moments, such as while waiting in line or riding the bus.

## **Want more information?**

The Counselling Department and the Academic Success Centre are your best sources for advice and information on issues related to learning, studying, time management, and academic performance.

Workshops on learning, studying, etc., are offered regularly each semester by the Counselling Department. Please contact Student Services at Abbotsford - 604-854-4528 (B 214) or Chilliwack - 604-795-2808 (A 1318) to make an appointment.

Study Skills Tip Sheets providing information on many learning and time management topics, as well as writing and referencing, are available free to students. The complete range of Study Skills Tip Sheets is available on-line at [www.ufv.ca/counselling/study/](http://www.ufv.ca/counselling/study/).

## **Other Relevant Study Skills Tip Sheets:**

Essay Exams  
Multiple Choice Exams

With thanks to the University of Guelph  
Learning Services  
The Learning Commons

# The Counsellors at UFV can help you with...

## Career Planning

*Help! I'm undecided about my career.*

Most students come to university as a step towards a satisfying career, yet many are not sure what that career might be. Counsellors offer career counselling to help you explore your skills and interests, help you research educational programs and occupational areas that suit you, and help you decide how to choose a career goal.

## Success Skills

*I want to study more effectively,  
not just harder!*

If you are having trouble with your courses, or if you are "doing OK" but want to do better, then effective motivation skills, personal management strategies and study skills can help. Do you want to improve your memory, your note taking, your reading or other skills? Counsellors can work with you individually and in workshops to improve your effectiveness in studying and achieving success.

## Personal Counselling

*Ugh...! I do NOT need these  
problems right now!*

Coming to university is sometimes a big change, and when you have changes in your life, personal problems may appear, too. If you are having difficulties, Counsellors are here to help at no charge. The UFV Counsellors are trained professionals who can help you explore your options without telling you what to do. All our counselling is confidential within the limits of law. Just contact Student Services - you don't need to tell the folks at the front desk any details when you book a personal counselling appointment.

Emergencies happen. If you have an emergency, the Counsellors at UFV will see you as quickly as possible.

**The UFV Counsellors are in Student Services:  
On the Abbotsford Campus: Room B-214, phone 604 854 4528  
On the Chilliwack Campus: Room A-1318, phone 604 795 2808**