

What To Do Before the Test

Manage Review Time

A key to successful test preparation is managing review time. The biggest benefit of early review is that facts have time to roam around in your head. A lot of learning takes place when you are not “studying.” Your brain has time to create relationships that can show up when you need them—like during a test. Use short daily review sessions to prepare the way for major review sessions. Reviewing with a group often generates new insights and questions.

Daily Reviews

Daily reviews include the short pre- and post-class reviews of lecture notes. Research indicates that this is an effective tool for moving ideas from short-term to long-term memory. You can also conduct brief daily reviews when you read. Before you begin a new reading assignment, scan your notes and the sections you underlined in the previous assignment. Use the time you spend waiting for the bus or doing the laundry to conduct short reviews.

Conduct short daily reviews several times throughout the day. To make sure you do, include them on your daily to-do list. Write down, “5 min. review of biology” or “10 min. review of economics,” and give yourself the satisfaction of crossing them off.

Begin to review the first day of class. The first day, in fact, is important for review. Most instructors outline the whole course at that time. You can start reviewing within seconds after learning. During a lull in class, go over the notes you just took. And immediately after class, review your notes again.

Weekly Reviews

Weekly reviews are longer—about an hour per subject. These review periods are also more structured than short daily reviews. When a subject is complex, the brain requires time to dig into the material. Avoid skipping from subject to subject too quickly. Review each subject at least once a week. These weekly sessions included reviews of assigned

reading and lecture notes. Look over any mind map summaries or flash cards you have created. You can also practice answering questions.

Major Reviews

Major reviews are usually conducted the week before finals or other major exams. They integrate concepts and deepen understanding of the material presented throughout the term. These are longer review periods, two to five hours at a stretch, punctuated by sufficient breaks. Remember that the effectiveness of your review begins to drop after an hour or so unless you give yourself a short rest.

After a certain point, short breaks every hour might not be enough to refresh you. That’s when it’s time to quit.

Learn what your limits are by being conscious of the quality of your concentration. During long sessions, study the most difficult subjects when you are the most alert: at the beginning of the session.

Your commitment to review is your most powerful ally. Create a system of rewards for time spent reviewing. Use the Intention Statements in this Study Skills Tip Sheet or invent your own to draw detailed plans for review time.

Create Review Tools

Checklists, mind map summaries, and flash cards take the guesswork and much of the worry out of studying. When you use these tools, you divide a big job into smaller parts. Your confidence could increase and you will probably sleep better at night.

Study Checklists

Study checklists are used the way a pilot uses a preflight checklist. Pilots go through a standard routine before they take off. They physically mark off each item: test flaps, check magnetos, check fuel tanks, adjust instruments, check rudder. They use a written list to be absolutely certain they don’t miss anything. Once they are in the air, it’s too late, and

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the consequences of failing to check the fuel tanks could be drastic.

Taking an exam is like flying a plane. Once the test begins, it's too late to memorize that one equation you forgot.

Make a list for each subject. List reading assignments by chapters or page numbers. List dates of lecture notes. Write down various types of problems you will need to solve. Write down other skills you must master. Include major ideas, definitions, theories, formulas, and equations. For math and science tests, choose some problems and do them over again as a way to review for the test.

A study checklist is not a review sheet; it is a kind of to-do list. Checklists contain the briefest possible description of each item to study. Begin keeping a study checklist the very first day of class. Add to it as the term progresses. When you conduct your final review sessions, check items off the list as you review them.

Mind Map Summary Sheets

There are several ways to make a mind map as you study for tests. You can start by creating a map totally from memory. When you use this technique, you might be surprised by how much you already know. Mind maps release floods of information from the brain because the mind works by association. Each idea is linked to many other ideas. When you think of one, other associations come to mind. An advantage of mind mapping is that you don't have to stifle any of these associations just because they don't come next in a sequential outline.

Everything fits in a mind map. Let the associations flow, and if one seems to go someplace else, simply start another branch on your map. After you have gone as far as you can using recall alone, go over your notes and text and fill in the rest of the map.

Another way to create a mind map summary is to go through your notes and pick out key words. Then, without looking at your notes, create a mind map of everything you can recall about each key word. Finally, go back to your notes and fill in material you left out. You can also start a mind map with underlined sections from your text.

Make mind maps for small, detailed subjects as well as for large ones. You can mind map a whole course or a single lecture or a single point from a lecture.

Flash Cards

Three-by-five flash cards are like portable test questions. You can take them with you anywhere and use them anytime. On one side of the cards, write the questions. On the other, write the answers. It's that simple.

Use flash cards for formulas, definitions, theories, key words from your notes, axioms, dates, foreign language phrases, hypotheses, and sample problems. Create flash cards regularly as the term progresses. You can buy an inexpensive card file to keep your flash cards arranged by subject.

Carry a pack of flash cards with you whenever you think you might have a spare minute to review them. Keep a few blank cards with you too. That way, you can make new flash cards whenever you recall new information to study.

Plan a strategy

Knowing what is going to be on your test does not require using highly sophisticated technology or breaking intricately coded messages. Before a test, some instructors hand out lists of questions to be used as study guides. Even if they don't, the following strategies can help you predict most of the test questions.

Do a dry run

One of the most effective ways to prepare for a test is to practice the tasks you'll actually do on the test. Write up your own exam questions and take this "test" several times before the actual test. Say that the test will include mainly true/false or short-answer questions. Brainstorm a list of such questions—a mock test—and do a dry run.

Also predict the level of questions. Some are likely to call for rote memorization; others might require application or analysis.

You might even type up this "test" so it looks like the real thing. You could write out your answers in the room where the test will actually take place. When

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you walk in for the real test, you'll be in familiar territory.

Ask the instructor what to expect

One great source of information about the test is the person who will create it—your instructor. Ask him what to expect. What topics will be emphasized? What kinds of questions will it contain? How can you best allocate your review time? The instructor may decline to give you any of this information. Even so, you've lost nothing by asking. More often, though, instructors will answer some or all of your questions about the test.

Get copies of old exams

Copies of previous exams for the class may be available from the instructor, other students, the instructor's department, the library, or the counselling office. Old tests can help you plan a review strategy.

One caution: If you rely on old tests exclusively, you may gloss over material the instructor has added since the last test. Also check your school's policy about making past tests available to students. Some may not allow it, or may allow it on only a limited basis.

As you begin

Prepare yourself for the test by arriving early. That often leaves time to do a relaxation exercise. (See Study Skills Tip Sheet: Let Go of Test Anxiety.)

While you're waiting for the test to begin and talking with classmates, avoid the question "How much did you study for this test?" This question may only fuel the anxiety that you didn't study enough.

Pay particular attention to verbal directions given as the test is distributed. Then scan the whole test immediately. Evaluate the importance of each section. Notice how many points each part of the test is worth and estimate how much time you will need for each section; use its point value as your guide. For example, don't budget 20 percent of your time for a section that is worth only 10 percent of the points.

Read the directions slowly. Then reread them.

Nothing is more agonizing than discovering that you lost points on a test only because you failed to follow the directions. If the directions call for short answers, give short answers. Sometimes you will be asked to answer two out of three questions. It's frustrating to find that out as you finish your third answer. When the directions are confusing, ask about them.

Jot down memory aids, formulas, equations, facts, or other material you know you'll need and might forget. Do this in the margins. If you use a separate sheet of paper, you may appear to be cheating.

Now you are ready to begin.

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.

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/.

With thanks to "Becoming a Master Student"
Canadian Second Edition

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**