

# What To Do Before A Test

## Manage Review Time

*A key to successful test preparation is managing review time.*

The biggest benefit of early review is that facts will have time to roam around in your head. A lot of learning takes place when you are not “studying.” Your brain will have 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. Also, be specific about your intention to review from the beginning of the term.

### Daily reviews

Daily reviews include the short pre-and post-class reviews of lecture notes. 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 the laundry to conduct short reviews.

Concentrate daily reviews on two kinds of material: material you have just learned, either in class or in your reading, and material that involves simple memorization (equations, formulas, dates, definitions).

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. Regular daily reviews will pay off during exam week.

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.

### 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; don’t skip from subject to subject too quickly. Review each subject at least once a week.

The content of these weekly review sessions includes review of assigned reading, review of lecture notes and practice answering questions in the questions section of your notes. Look over any mind map summaries or flashcards you have created.

### 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 will not be enough to refresh you. That’s when it’s time to quit. Each of us has our own limit. In a marathon 10-hour review session, a student might typically accomplish only a half hour’s worth of review in the last two or three hours of that session. In other words, he might as well be at the movies. 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.

Of course, it’s easy to write (or read) about reviewing regularly from the very first day of class. Actually doing it is something else. Reviewing is easy to postpone.

To combat procrastination, set aside time in the future to plan how you will quit putting things off. Do this for sure within three days or at least within a week or two.

Create a system of rewards for time spent reviewing.

Clarify your intentions about reviewing. Use the intention statements in this chapter, or invent your own, to draw a detailed picture of your plans for review time.

Your commitment to review is your most powerful ally.

## **Create Review Tools**

Study checklists, mind map summaries, and flash cards take the guesswork, and just as important, much of the worry out of studying. When you use these tools on a daily and weekly basis, you are dividing a big job into small, manageable parts. Your confidence will increase and you will probably sleep at night.

### **Study checklists**

Study checklists are used the way a pilot uses a pre-flight checklist. Pilots go through a standard routine before they take off. They physically mark off each item: test flaps, check magneto, 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 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. And the consequences could be unpleasant.

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 be able to solve. Write down other skills you must master. Include major ideas, definitions, theories, formulas, equations, and other information you might need.

A study checklist is not a review sheet. It contains the briefest possible description of each item.

Keep a study checklist beginning the very first day of class. Add to it as the term progresses. Then, when you conduct your final major review sessions, check items off the list as you review them.

### **Mind map summary sheets**

Mind mapping is an effective system for note-taking and it's also a great way to make summary sheets for tests. Mind maps let you work with your brain rather than against it.

Traditional, Roman numeral/capital letter outlines contain main topics which are followed by minor topics which in turn, are subdivided further. They organize a subject in a sequential, linear way. This kind of organization however, doesn't reflect some very natural aspects of brain function, specifically "right brain" activities.

Right brain function refers to creative, pattern-making, visual, intuitive brain activity. Left brain function refers to the orderly, logical, step-by-step characteristics or thought. Left brain is words. Right brain is pictures. (The reverse is sometimes true for left-handed people). A mind map used both kinds of brain functions. Mind maps contain lists and sequences and show causes (left brain functions), but they also provide a framework for recall. They work on both verbal and nonverbal levels.

Further, the mind mapping process directs you toward thinking from the general to the specific. By choosing a main topic, you focus on the big picture, then zero in on the subordinate ideas.

By using key words, you can condense a large subject into a small area on a mind map. You review more quickly by looking at the key words on a mind map than by reading notes word for word.

Making a mind map is simple. Write the main subject in the center of a sheet of paper. Write related subjects on lines branching out from the main subject.

Indicate relationships between elements of a subject by drawing arrows between them, enclosing related ideas in circles, boxes, or other shapes, or by color coding them. Use symbols, graphic signals, and pictures for emphasis.

There are several ways to begin 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 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 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.

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.

As you build a mind map on paper, you are also constructing a map in your mind. When you are finished, the picture of the map will be firmly implanted in your memory. You could throw away your paper mind map and still retain most of the benefit of making it.

### **Flashcards**

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

Use flashcards for equations, formulas, definitions, theories, key words from your notes, axioms, dates, foreign language phrases, hypotheses, sample problems, and more.

Create flashcards regularly as the term progresses. You can buy an inexpensive card file to keep your flashcards arranged by subject.

Carry a pack of flashcards 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 flashcards whenever the need arises.

