



Concentration



Learning to concentrate requires practice and a plan. A few guidelines that may assist you :

1. Establish a place to study and use it for study only. Specific places may be a corner in the campus library, designated quiet rooms on campus, a vacant classroom or your bedroom at home (if you have a table or desk to sit).
2. Use this space for studying only so that when you enter this space your study hat goes on. Do not use the space to meet friends, take a nap or for any other activity other than to study.
3. Your Study area should be noise free and have good lighting, good ventilation, a chair and a desk large enough to hold your books and materials.
4. Your study area should not have distracters such as your favorite TV program, a loud stereo, view of activities you may want to participate in, visits from friends, etc.
5. Block time on your calendar for study and *stick to it*.

Study time!!

1. Determine if you are a lark or an owl. Study when you are fresh; you'll remember better.
2. Stop studying when fatigue sets in (daydreaming occurs or you lack attention).
3. Plan breaks in your study schedule to avoid fatigue; study for 40 minutes, break for 10 minutes.
4. Set realistic goals at the beginning of the study period; divide your time into short range goals (plan to read and take notes on ten (10) pages from the text, complete three math problems, or start the rough draft of your community paper).
5. Have your tools ready for study; books, pens, pencils, a notebook, note cards, highlighter, a dictionary/thesaurus, etc.
6. Build variety in your study, try not to study one subject for a long period of time.
7. Consider starting with short study periods, then progress to longer periods of time.
8. Base your study time on the amount of material you plan to cover and not by the clock. **Watching the clock may be a major distracter.**

NOTE TAKING SKILLS

Note taking is a three pronged process that requires you to listen effectively, record key points and comprehend what you have written. Remember that most forgetting occurs within 24 hours of learning, and in two weeks you will have forgotten up to 70% of your class materials.

Lecture Formats:

- The Cornell Method– Draw a vertical line from top to bottom on 8 ½ x 11 note paper. Use the right side of the line for your notes and the left column for key phrases, clues, questions, summary of need ideas.
- Outline form – use the standard Roman numeral outline, free form or indented outline to organize the major points, ideas or concepts.
- Paragraph form– If the outline method is hard to use for a particular class try writing short narratives.
- Developing maps, diagrams, graphs– This format is appropriate for pulling together complex concepts, especially in science classes. Drawing a picture is worth a thousand words.

Preparation:

Before class:

- Come to class ready to learn and to take notes. **Read the assigned text materials before class.** Set aside a section of your notebook for notes on the assigned readings. Take notes on the text materials using a format suited for the course.
- Review the course syllabus for the assignment for that day and be prepared to discuss the materials.

During the Lecture:

- Prepare to listen, using strategies that will help you focus on the lecturer.
- Decide on the method/format for note taking.
- Record the essential points; listen for the instructor’s signal words or points (“The five **major** points”, the “**key** points to consider”, the “**most important** points”).
- Don’t write on every line; leave a line for additional remarks. You do not need to write everything down–*listen* for the essential information in the lecture. **[If you are frantically writing, you fall into the trap of not listening.]**
- Write questions in the margins, make note of key words or reference to other materials.
- Develop a good abbreviation system that works for you; make a list to keep with all your notes for reference. Develop a list of new words with their definitions for quick reference.

- Use different colored pens for marking points emphasized by the instructor. Have a system– red is for ‘very important’, green is for ‘research important people,’ etc.

After Class:

- As soon as possible, review your notes. Fill in missing information.
- Develop in your own words a summary of the class lecture; develop possible exam questions and highlight information that may require more research.
- Review your notes on a daily basis. Remember to add more information as you have recall from the lecture. If you have classes back to back, schedule time to make your review.
- If you are in a study group, share your information and seek missing materials from your peers.

Additional note:

Tape recorders are a helpful tool for note taking; please get permission first from the instructor on the use of recorders in the class.

Improving Reading Skills

As an adult entering college for the first time or returning to college, you will be required to do a tremendous amount of reading for your courses, projects, and papers; and where reading, for some, can be a tedious boring job, for others it is a total enjoyment.

Getting the most out of your reading requires you to:

1. be an active, not passive, reader As you read, try to state the main ideas in your own words
2. identify the main ideas and think about what the author has written. What is it you need to know about the subject?
3. concentrate on what is being read. Occasionally stop and tell yourself what you have just read; try to recall the main ideas or points presented.
4. comprehend what you have read. Take notes on important points; use your 3X5 cards, or highlight; develop a list of new words.
5. stay focused by asking yourself questions. Start with a basic question and move to more in-depth questions.
6. enhance your vocabulary. For each new or unfamiliar word you come across in your readings, define the word; try to use the word in your speech and develop a new word list for future reference.

Preparing to *Pass* A Test

Preparing for a major test can be emotionally, physically and mentally draining. Preparation for taking a test begins the first day of class; listening for course expectations and assigned dates of quizzes and major tests. You know the old saying “practice makes perfect”; well, practicing the following techniques may help to reduce your test anxiety as well as improve your test results.

Review: A key to successful test preparation is the thorough review of course materials. But don’t wait until the night before a test to begin reviewing. Consider practicing these different types of review.

– **Daily Reviews.**

Research indicates that a daily review of your notes is an effective way to moving ideas from short-term to long-term memory. Use your daily reviews for two kinds of material: concepts you have just learned (either in class or in your reading) and material that involves simple memorization such as equations, formulas, dates and definitions. Begin on the first day of class (when professors often outline the entire course), and keep in mind that several short reviews are generally more effective than a single lengthy review session.

– **Weekly Reviews.**

Weekly reviews should be longer: allow about an hour of additional study time per subject. Review each subject at least once a week, and include reviews of assigned reading and lecture notes.

– **Major Reviews.**

Major reviews are usually conducted the week before midterms or finals. They help you to integrate concepts and deepen your understanding of the material presented throughout the term. These review sessions should last from two to five hours, and be punctuated by a number of short breaks. During long sessions, study the most difficult subject when you are most alert – at the beginning of the session.

Create Review Tools

Study aids such as checklists, mind-map summaries, and flash cards can help take the guesswork and much of the worry out of studying.

– **Study Checklists**

A study checklist is a kind of to-do list. Checklists contain the briefest possible description of each item to study. For each subject on the list, include reading assignments, dates of the lecture notes, and any skills that must be mastered. Make a note of major ideas, definitions, theories, formulas, and equations. Begin your study checklist the very first day of class, and add to it as the term progresses.

– **Mind Map Summary Sheets**

There are several ways to make a mind map as you study for tests. One way is to go through your notes and pick out key words; then without looking at your notes, create a map of everything you can recall about each key word. Afterwards, return to your notes and review the material that was left out. You can also start a mind map with underlined sections from your text.

– **Flash Cards**

Who says you're too old for flash cards? Try using three by five (3x5) index cards to make possible test questions: on one side of the card, write the question; on the other side, write the answer. It is that simple. Through-out the term, use flash cards for definitions, theories, historical dates, sample problems and key points heard during lectures. Carry the flash cards with you whenever you think you might have a spare minute to read them, especially places where you have to wait, i.e. beauty parlors, doctor's office, car pooling and drive in lanes.

Plan a Strategy

Different strategies can be employed to help you know what kind of questions to expect on your test. Some professors may even hand out a list of questions to be used as a study guide. Some text books have questions at the end of each chapter that will guide you to the type of questions to expect. Depending on the professor, some will develop each question taking information from their

lectures only, others will use questions from a test book, and some will advise you as to the type of questions to expect on the test. Today, with all the new technology, some professors provide computerized tests. The following suggestions can also help you to predict the types of test questions you will most likely encounter.

_ Do a Practice Test

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" at home. When you walk into the classroom for the real test, you'll be in familiar territory. If the professor is using computerized tests, ask if sample practice questions are available.

_ Ask Your Instructor For Advice

One good source of information about the test is the person who creates it—your professor. Ask him/her what topics will be emphasized, what kinds of questions the test will contain (true-false, completions, essay), and how you can best allocate your review time.

_ Get Copies of Old Exams

Copies of previous exams for the class may be available from the professor, other students, or the library. Old tests can help you plan a review strategy. However, use them with caution, because new materials may have been added to the course that was not covered at the time that test was constructed. Make sure the professor has no problem with your use of old test papers.

_ Physical Preparation

Get a good night's sleep the night before the test. If you have used effective study techniques, you won't need to stay up all night cramming for the test. Avoid foods and drinks that will keep you awake; try an exercise activity like walking or jogging before bed time. In the morning, eat a light breakfast containing foods that will keep your energy level up.

_ Emotional Preparation

A prepared student is always ready to take the test. A student who is confident about course materials enters the test ready to pass. If you have test anxiety, choose a relaxation technique that works for you. Draw strength and confidence from the Scriptures: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"; "I have the mind of Christ".

The Essay Exam

Essay questions are problematic for some students because they fail to answer the questions correctly, completely, and/or with enough information. One or two sentences are insufficient answers for essay questions (short or long). Short essay questions require at least a minimum of four (4) well thought out and to the point answers. A long or lengthy essay requires an organized discussion starting with an introduction, a body and conclusion.

Strategies:

- Read the instructions and clarify what is expected; how many questions are to be answered? Are some of the questions weighted?
- Determine the amount of time allowed for the exam and divide your time equally; however, you should schedule some time to review your answers before submitting your exam.
- Review all the questions and prioritize those that you feel you know more about than others.

- Jot down key words or key ideas while fresh in your mind. This will reduce the ‘fear factor’ when you begin to answer that question. Develop a brief outline of each question with main ideas to be discussed.
- Determine the theme of the questions. Does it ask you to discuss fully a concept, compare and contrast, evaluate, interpret or analyze?
- If the question has several points, remember that each part must be completely answered.
- Do not try to bluff your way through the essay. Your instructor would rather see you write a small amount of clear, organized information, than to write a poorly written a voluminous amount of information.
- Starting the essay answers:
 1. Begin with a strong first sentence which introduces the main idea or point.
 2. Develop each idea you plan to discuss.
 3. Write in complete, concise, organized sentences.
 4. If using a composition book (blue books), write on every other line and write on right side of the page; leave the left side to make additions or corrections.
 5. Use key words that are part of the question.
 6. Be careful with definite statements; qualify answers when in doubt.
 7. Summarize your ideas in the last paragraph.
 8. Review, proof, edit and make necessary additions and/or corrections in spelling and grammar.
 9. Watch your time for each question to avoid being rushed to finish other questions.



Conquering Test Anxiety

Text anxiety can occur before a simple quiz, a final exam, the GRE, or any number of other stressful situations. Test anxiety is a distressing problem—but it can be managed. Using some of the tips that follow, you can meet the challenge.

How To Be Better Prepared...

- **Ask questions in class.** When you’re puzzled by something presented in class, ask about it right then. Your questions may be exactly what the student next to you is wondering about. If you can be clear about the course material as you go through the term, you won’t struggle with the concepts just before the exam.

- **Take good class notes.** These can be a lifesaver when facing a difficult quiz. You can ask to borrow notes from someone if you miss a class, but try to make arrangements ahead of time. You may be able to ask someone to tape the class lecture for you. Also, don't just take notes, study them! Take the time to read your notes.

- **Complete all of the assignments.** Doing your homework can be a drudge, but it certainly helps you learn the material. Be sure to turn your homework in **on time**. Late assignments may be graded down. Pressure to perform well on the final exam can be greater if you're trying to make up for lower grades resulting from missed homework assignments.

- **Don't put off studying.** If you already know you suffer from test anxiety on a regular basis, don't put off studying until the night before the test. Review the course material at least three or four days before the exam. This way, you will find if there is any material that needs extra study time, and you'll have the time to do it. Otherwise, you'll be pressured to stay up all night before the test and cram.

- **Join a study group.** Work with a student (or students) to go over class notes. Different people retain different facts and information from each class. Compare lecture notes and quiz each other. (*highly recommended*)

TEST TIME...

Let's assume that you have already attended every lecture, taken copious notes, read the material and completed all of the assignments. You are thoroughly prepared. The knowledge is there in your brain, but it begins an unexpected game of hide-and-seek when test anxiety strikes. If this happens, there's no need to panic. The key to recalling information is relaxation.

- **Get enough rest.** Don't stay up all night before the exam trying to learn everything at once. Review the material before you go to sleep, but then go to bed early enough to get plenty of rest.

- **Arrive early.** Settle into a comfortable seat several minutes before the exam begins. Rushing in at the last minute might make you nervous.

- **Relax!** Take those few extra minutes to calm yourself and clear your head. Take a few deep breaths, then try flexing and relaxing your muscles several times.

- **Listen.** As the instructor begins handing out the exam, listen carefully to the instructions. You might learn which questions are most important, or how the exam will be graded. If extra credit is given for a specific question, you'll hear about it before the test begins.

- **Scribble.** As soon as you receive the test, scribble down any facts, formulas, memory aids, or essay ideas that you know you'll need.

- **Read and evaluate the test.** Get a feel for the range of questions and establish priorities. You may want to start with the easiest questions, but if there is an essay question that's worth a big percentage of the grade, you may want to start there. Set a time limit for the essay to give yourself sufficient time to answer any remaining questions.

- **Don't panic.** When you reach those tough questions, don't despair. On a piece of scratch paper, jot down whatever information comes to mind. Seeing these thoughts on paper might help you to

recall more information. Don't leave an answer blank; a partial answer might be worth partial points.

- **Read over your answers.** Don't cheat yourself out of a good grade with silly mistakes. Check over spelling, punctuation, and calculations. Resist the temptation to change a lot of answers, though. Usually your first response is the best.

- **Learn from any mistakes.** When you do receive your tests results, take time to analyze your performance. Did you mis-read or mis-understand a question? Did you divide your time effectively? Think about how you might be able to help yourself next time around. It might take time to get used to a professor or a specific test format. Be sure to learn from each experience.



Managing Your Time

Adult students, like first year students, have some of the same problems with **TIME**. Often the first year student mismanages time participating in many non academic type activities. Adults, on the other hand, have too many activities that require their time, such as full time jobs, family, children, and home responsibilities.

Planning your time is key to your success as a student. The general rule is that you need to devote at least two (2) hours of study for each credit hour of class time.

Guidelines to Planning

1. Develop a personal time log– track all the time you use in a given day for at least a week. Use this information to help you design a weekly calendar which will guide your class and non class activities.
2. Purchase or make your own calendar with day planner and space to designate each hour(6 a.m. to 9 p.m.).
3. Enter all the dates you have acquired from your syllabi, including class time, test dates, and report/paper dates.

4. Enter time you plan to study, including library time, academic support time.
5. Establish priorities with realistic goals for the term, as well as for each day.
6. Develop a list of the ways in which you procrastinate and why you procrastinate. Use the list to help you develop strategies to avoid procrastination and to recognize when it is occurring.
7. Establish your 'to-do list' daily, starting with top of the day to sleep time.
8. Guard your time; break those minutes you have available into small blocks of time for review of a specific area (ex. review your history dates, proof your essay).
9. If you tend to be a perfectionist, learn to accept your best. Trying to get everything perfect may cost you valuable time.
10. Develop some balance in your schedule; time for work, study, play and family.
11. Obtain reliable child care and a good support system for emergency situations. Stress related to child care will absorb your planned time and wreck your schedule.
12. Solicit help from family members and friends to handle some of the major household chores. Stocking the freezer with family favorite casseroles for future meals, bulk purchasing, and using the laundry mat for the family laundry will save you more time in the long haul.



Balancing College Commitment and Family Needs

These days, more and more parents and spouses are returning to the classroom. For the adult student, college life can be a rich, rewarding experience. But it can be an overwhelming one, too. Juggling school, relationships, family needs and a job can be a bit much for even the most organized and energetic person. You don't have to lose your family when you earn a degree! Just remember, it's important both to receive and to give family support when you return to school.

"How do I handle all of this?" you might ask. "How can I care for the people in my life and keep them happy while I'm busy with college?" The best way to succeed academically, and stay sane, is by considering three important tools: **consideration, cooperation and communication.**