

Steps for Effective Exam Preparation Planning

Effective study planning begins with two basic questions:

1. What do I know about this?
2. What do I need to know about this?

If, for example, I know...

This is a problem-solving type of test.

It covers chapters 4 to 7.

The teacher has especially emphasized parts of chapter 6.

I haven't done any work in chapter 7.

The test is this Friday.

...then I need to know:

What concepts, theories, and formulas are covered in the required chapters?

Which of these do I know pretty well already?

Which of these are high priorities for the instructor, and not well understood by me?

Procedure

Based on the above information, I need to follow these steps:

1. List the concepts, theories, and formulas covered in the required chapters.
2. Test myself to see which ones I know. (Test for recall, not merely recognition. Write out or say the definition or formula; don't merely say, "Oh yeah, I know that one." Prove that you do.)
3. Find out the answers for the items I'm weak on.
4. Prioritize those weak items by degree of importance.
5. Assign myself problems that use those items.
6. Work those problems as many ways as I can. For instance, solve first for one unknown, and then for others; then change one number and check the resulting change in the others.
7. Re-test.
8. Continue this process (steps 2 through 7) until I feel confident.
9. Meet with friends to brainstorm possible questions and makes up a practice test.

Note: Essay tests and multiple-choice or short-answer tests work from similar principles, with the following alterations:

For essay exams:

Step 5. Think of possible questions.

Step 6. Build a timeline, or organize a map or chart information according to possible questions, which might be asked.

For multiple-choice exams:

Step 5. Make diagrams, rhymes, and mnemonics.

Step 6. Memorize using names, tapes, questioning, and discussion.

Remember: Studying actively (i.e., predicting questions, testing yourself using information over and over again) is much more effective than passive study (letting your eyes roam over the page while your brain roams elsewhere). If you have to cram, cram efficiently. Start with the highest-priority, least familiar material first and learn it thoroughly, rather than trying to review the entire course in a few hours.