

# Preparing for Exams

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about how to perform your best by providing some strategies for success in studying for exams. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Preparing for Exams Throughout a Course

Some students believe that “studying for an exam” is something that happens the night before the exam is scheduled, in an intense and stressful burst of activity.

But if you can think of everything you do in the course—beginning with taking note of the date and grade value of your exams—as a kind of test preparation, you can put yourself in the best position to do your best work on exam day.

Ideally, you are collecting the knowledge and skills you need to succeed on exams throughout the course. This includes class participation, active listening and note-taking, asking questions, and completing assigned readings and homework—all of these things are ways of “studying for an exam” that happen well in advance of the night before the test.

---

## 2. Timely Review Vs. “Cramming”

The common student practice of working intensively in an attempt to master lots of material in a short amount of time is called “cramming.” Students who tend to procrastinate or who haven’t formulated a time management plan frequently end up cramming for their tests. In the popular imagination, cramming can seem like a venerable tradition of higher education or even be romanticized as part of a “work hard, play hard” routine.

However, studies increasingly show that cramming is an ineffective way to learn. Even if cramming produces positive results on the exam day—and it often does not—it is not conducive to long-term retention of the material.



### THINK ABOUT IT

The geology midterm is tomorrow and not only have you not studied, but you haven’t been keeping up with the reading—time to get some coffee and get ready to “pull an all-nighter”?

This is not a good plan. Another reason that it is preferable to begin preparing for your test well in advance instead of the night before is that researchers have concluded that lack of sleep can be one of the most significant factors that negatively impact a student's performance on tests. If you study during the time you would normally be sleeping, your efforts can be offset by the damage done to your brainpower. If you've been mindful of preparing for your exam well in advance, you can be rested and ready to go.

### 3. Best Practices for Exam Preparation

If procrastinating and cramming aren't the way to go, then what are some good methods and strategies for exam preparation?

- **Have a plan:** Think in advance about when and how you can prepare for the test and maybe even create a studying schedule.
- **Review any material from the instructor:** When it's time to study, first review any information your instructor has provided about the exam on the syllabus or elsewhere.
- **Consult your notes:** You've been taking notes all term, and now it's time to put them to use.
- **Create a study guide:** You might arrange your notes into a personal study guide.
- **Arrange a group study session:** You can compare notes with your classmates. Test preparation is a great opportunity to activate the community potential of your classroom experience—after all, when it comes to taking exams, you are truly all in it together.
- **Get plenty of rest, food, and water:** Lastly, optimize your performance on test day by taking care of your mind and body. Think about ways to minimize stress from other areas of your life on the days leading up to the test. Also, make sure you get enough sleep, eat right, and stay hydrated.

#### HOW TO PREPARE FOR EXAMS

KNOW WHEN YOUR EXAMS ARE SO YOU CAN SCHEDULE TIME TO STUDY.

TAKE USEFUL NOTES THROUGHOUT THE TERM.

REVIEW ANY MATERIAL YOUR INSTRUCTOR HAS PROVIDED ON THE EXAM.

ASSEMBLE YOUR NOTES INTO A STUDY GUIDE BEFORE THE EXAM.

ARRANGE A GROUP STUDY SESSION.

GET PLENTY OF REST, FOOD, AND WATER BEFORE THE EXAM.



#### SUMMARY

**Exam preparation for a course** should not be too difficult if you are doing well with assignments, engaging in class, and taking and reviewing your notes. Consider **timely review over cramming**, which is usually the approach students take when they have procrastinated in a course, and it is counterproductive. Planning your approach to studying for an exam well in advance, and then executing that plan is a **best practice for exam preparation**.