

EXAMPREPARATION

Marianopolis Student Services

Exams are stressful and, in fact, they should be, in order for you to rise to the occasion. The trick is to be just stressed enough for optimal performance. Preparing for an exam is a lot of work, but the following general guidelines will help you.

- Attend the last few classes before an exam as the instructor often reviews the material on which you will be tested. Find out the exam format (i.e. essay, multiple choice, etc.) and the weighting with regard to your final grade. This information will help you determine what and how long to study.
- Prepare early by surveying and reading all the material to be covered: texts, class notes and assignments. If the format is objective, spend more time learning specific details, while essay exams focus more on general concepts and ideas with some specific relevant examples.
- Set specific objectives in each study session; e.g. study chapter 1 of psychology text; answer summary questions vs. study psychology. If possible, leave the night before the exam entirely for review. Past exams may be on reserve in the library, use them.
- Study for short periods, frequently. It is better to study for 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break over a number of days, than to plan for an-all day study marathon.
- Take good care of yourself, especially during exams. Eat well, ensure you are getting adequate sleep and try to exercise. The night before the test, go to bed at a reasonable time. You are rehearsing and storing information while you sleep and you will be able to retrieve the information for the test.
- Be certain of your exam time and place and that you have with you everything that you will need: ID card, pen, pencil, calculator, etc. Arrive early enough to find and arrange your workspace. Avoid arriving so early you get embroiled in last minute discussions with classmates. Exam anxiety can be contagious!
- Once you are allowed to begin the exam, immediately write down all of the information that you have had to memorize (formulae, definitions, etc...) so as not to forget it. Read the whole exam. Familiarize yourself with the breakdown and get a sense of where to start. Begin with the material you know best and can respond to quickly as well as those questions that are worth the most marks. Budget your time according to the value allotted to each question or section. For example, if a question is worth 25% and the exam lasts 1 hour [60 min x 25%=15], then 15 minutes can be devoted to that question. If the short answer or multiple-choice section, in the same exam, is valued 50%, but has 30 questions [60 min x 50%=30 min ÷ 30 questions = 1], you have one minute per question. This technique helps you avoid running out of time with important questions left unanswered. Be sure to leave yourself some review time for the end where possible.
- Remember the power of positive thinking. Try to feel good about what you know and use some positive self-talk; e.g. I am capable and competent vs. I do not know a thing.
- Breathe deeply - in through your nostrils and out through your mouth - it will help calm you. Focus on the task at hand and avoid looking around at what your classmates are doing. Keep things in perspective - this is not a life and death situation although it may very well feel that way. You have done what you could do to prepare for the exam.
- Hand in your exam and avoid performing a post-mortem with friends. No doubt you have other exams looming ahead - use your time and energy to prepare for them.

For more information, see a counsellor at Student Services.