

Think of an exam as a “performance” and exam prep as rehearsal or a scrimmage—authentic practice.

## Come up with a game plan:

- Develop a **realistic study schedule** based upon clear and specific goals for each session. Write down where you’ll study, at what time, and exactly what you intend to do with that time. *Note:* don’t plan to cram—studies show that cramming leads to higher stress and lower scores. Think in terms of a five-day plan for each course.
- **Determine** available study time, blocks of time for specific tasks, and study with a sense of urgency. Schedule sleep, meals, and (some) down time. Sleep deprivation reduces efficiency.
- **Organize** your study area and materials, and make necessary plans (e.g., with study group members).

## Think like a professor:

- **Grasp** the big picture of the courses and your professor's objectives.
- Identify the underlying logic of the course design by focusing on **main principles, themes, and concepts first**, then look for evidence (details, examples) supporting and explaining them.
- Pay particular attention to concepts professors focused upon in class or in homework, quizzes, problem sets, and other assignments.

## Predict exam questions from your lecture notes, problem sets, precept discussions, and readings:

- **Formulate central questions** that link large chunks of course material. They will usually be derived from main principles and concepts—including how various concepts relate to each other. Practice answering them.
- **Identify and classify information** that might show up in an identification or short-answer section. Prepare yourself to show what you know succinctly.

## Consider where your weaknesses lie:

- What concepts remain unclear? Which problems do you routinely struggle to solve? Targeting your studying will help you make the most of the time you have for each course.
- Evaluate not merely whether you “know” the material, but whether you have mastered it and can apply your knowledge in ways your professor will ask of you.

## Create study aids such as:

- **Reading summaries** that capture main points of texts and relate them to course themes.
- **Charts** of theorems, mechanisms, or principles rewritten in your own words.
- A **course blueprint** that organizes main themes and concepts of the course.
- Problem packets in which you collate similar problems from the course and their solutions to study with.

### For quantitative courses, work through problems:

- Work through previous assignments, the ends of textbook chapters, or old exams.
- Don't think of each problem as unique; instead, look for similarities among them and common techniques for solving them.
- Don't consult the answer key until you've tried to solve the problem yourself--work under test-like conditions whenever possible.
- Review our tip-sheet on preparing for problem-solving exams.

### For essay exams, practice writing your response:

- Predict questions and **outline** your answers in preparation for the exam.
- Identify specific **examples/evidence** you will use to support your main points.
- If the exam is in class, **time your practice runs** to get a sense of the depth/quality of essays you'll be able to produce in the time allotted.
- **Evaluate** your practice efforts (outlines/drafts) and consider how to refine your response.
- **Practice** producing your answers or outlines, not merely reviewing material.

### Try to explain difficult material to someone else:

- You can do this with a study partner or in study groups. You can also work with others to generate questions.

### Take practice exams:

- **Take an old exam** and note what types of skills and techniques are tested--practice these.
- **Time yourself** and use only the materials you will have at the exam; don't refer to "solutions" or a study guide--you won't have them on the actual exam...
- **Review** your answers and **focus** on filling gaps in your skills and knowledge.

### Don't be afraid to ask your instructors and AIs for help:

- If after reviewing, you still don't understand something, **take advantage of office hours** or **review sessions** to ask questions about the material.
- Asking about the format of the exam is okay, but don't ask what's going to be on the test.

**Sharpen your study skills** for this exam and the next one with help from the McGraw Center. Our McGraw Learning Strategy Consultants can help you develop a strategic approach to learning and success in all of your courses. Sign up for a free appointment at

<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/undergraduates/learning-strategy-consultations>

Remember to eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. You'll study and perform better.