Levels of Learning: Bloom's Taxonomy in Action

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Did your performance on a recent exam surprise you?
Did you feel like you "knew" the material, but you weren't able to answer the questions asked?

You may have done poorly on an exam because you didn't prepare at the level of the test. Even though you knew the information, or you grasped the concepts on a basic level, you weren't able to use the intellectual skills the exam required.

For example, let's suppose you learned the steps of the Scientific Method. If the test asked for a list of those steps, you would have been able to recall them easily. But what if the test asked you to apply the Scientific Method to a particular problem? In that case, you may not have been able to bridge the gap between knowledge and application.

Use this guide to help you prepare for exams by anticipating test questions on a variety of levels. You may also use it to analyze returned tests — determine the type of question, and figure out why you missed it.

NOTE: The sample test questions in the chart below are essay questions, but it's important to remember that questions on objective tests can also come from any of the six levels.

LEVEL OF LEARNING	SAMPLE TEST QUESTION
Knowledge: rote memory; recall of specific information.	Define schizophrenia.
	List the steps of the Scientific Method.
Comprehension: basic understanding; putting an idea into your own words.	Explain the process of cross-breeding.
	Describe the low and high peaks of business cycles.
Application: applying knowledge and concepts to a new situation.	Describe the contributions of computer technology to elementary education.
	Classify each of the following as a liability, asset, or owner's equity.
Analysis: breaking the information into parts so that the relationship between ideas is clear.	Interpret the following quote in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery:" "It isn't fair. It just isn't fair."
	How can there be inflation and unemployment at the same time?
Synthesis: putting parts together into a whole to create new meaning or structure.	Summarize the key Supreme Court cases relevant to the integration of public schools.
Evaluation: making a judgment about the value of ideas/actions; taking a position and providing justification.	Justify the American troop withdrawal from Vietnam.
	Evaluate the contributions of Jackson Pollock to 20th century art.

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Bloom's Taxonomy is a hierarchy that describes levels of learning. Many students learn information at the **knowledge level**; however, most college courses test at the **comprehension level or above**. These higher levels focus on the ability to understand fundamental concepts, to apply ideas to solve problems, and to think in terms of the discipline.

Evaluation
Make judgments
about value of ideas

Synthesis
Put parts together to form
new meaning or structure

Analysis
Identify component parts of concepts
so organizational structure may be
understood

Application
Use knowledge and understanding
to solve problems; transfer abstract or
theoretical ideas to practical situations

Comprehension
Understand concepts and be able
to describe them in your own words

Knowledge
Memorize and recall
information (but with no
evidence of understanding)

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