

# Lecture 8

## Exam skills

[greenwich.edu.vn](http://greenwich.edu.vn)

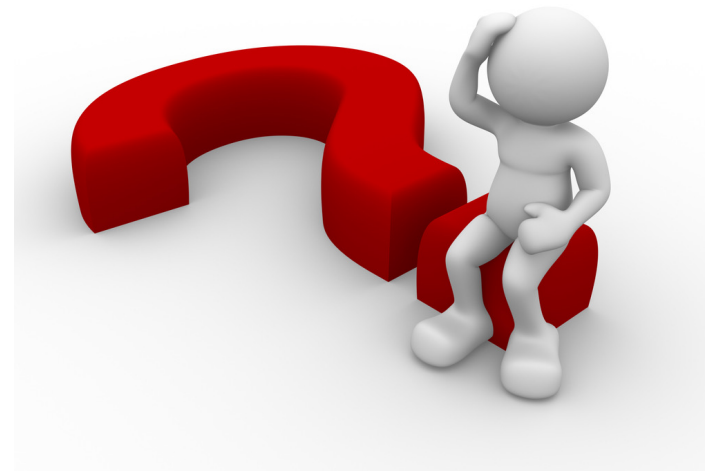


Alliance with  Education

- I. Preparing for exams
- II. Taking exams
- III. Memory and learning
- IV. Reduce test anxiety

## Complete the questionnaire 'Where are you now?'

- The questionnaire is taken from Course book (Blerkkom, 2008, p.290).
- Task:
  - 5 mins to do this quick quiz by yourself.
  - 5 mins to discuss the results with your peer(s) and the instructor.



# Activity 1 (cont.)

## Where Are You Now?

Take a few minutes to answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions.

	YES	NO
1. When preparing for exams, is your primary study method to read over the material?	_____	_____
2. Do you tend to miss class the day before the exam?	_____	_____
3. After an exam are you unsure of how well you did?	_____	_____
4. Do you make up self-tests as a way of studying for exams?	_____	_____
5. Do you study both by yourself and with a group before a very difficult exam?	_____	_____
6. Do you tend to study only the day or night before the exam?	_____	_____
7. Do you review your lecture notes and text material together according to the topic?	_____	_____
8. Do you often know the answers to multiple-choice questions even before you look at the alternatives?	_____	_____
9. Do you review by reciting out loud or by making up study sheets?	_____	_____
10. Do you space your study time over several days?	_____	_____
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>		_____

Give yourself 1 point for each *yes* answer to questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10, and 1 point for each *no* answer to questions 1, 2, 3, and 6. Now total up your points. A low score indicates that you need to learn how to study for college exams. A high score indicates that you are already using many good test preparation strategies.

# I. Preparing for exams

1. Gather information before you study
2. Use the seven-day study plan
3. Use active study strategies
4. Evaluate your preparation



# 1. Gather information before you study

- *Learn about the exam*
  - *Type of exam: objective, essay or both*
    - *Objective tests* include short-answer questions in which you choose one or more answers from several possibilities, or supply a word or phrase to complete a statement. E.g. Multiple-choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank questions appear on objective tests.
    - *Essay tests* require you to answer questions in your own words. You have to recall information, organize it, and present it in an acceptable written form.
  - Number of questions on the exam
  - Time limit

If your professor hasn't already discussed the exam, ask about it!

# 1. Gather information before you study (cont.)

- *Levels of questions*

- **Knowledge-level questions** require only rote memory they're the easiest type of question to answer. They include remembering terms, facts, dates, lists, etc.
- **Comprehension-level questions** require you to understand the material well enough to be able to identify concepts and issues even when they're phrased differently from the way you read them or heard them presented.
- **Application-level questions** require you to apply the information that you learned to a new situation.
- **Analysis-level questions** require you to break down a complex concept into its components or parts.
- **Synthesis-level questions** require you to bring information together into a single unit or whole.
- **Evaluation-level questions** require you to make judgments about the value or worth of an idea.

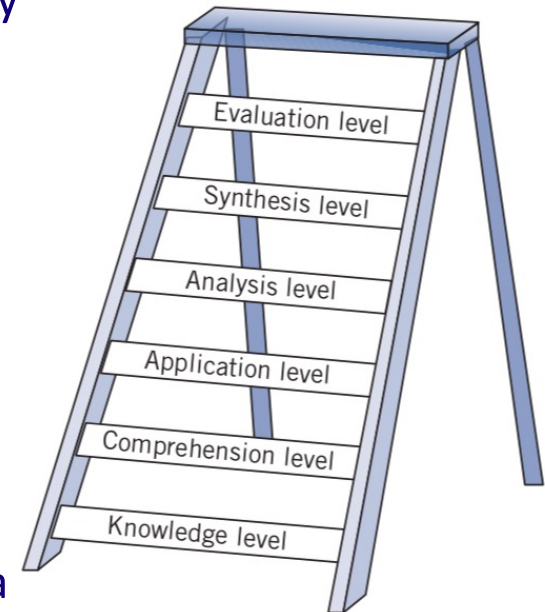


Figure 10.1: Levels of questions  
(Course book 1, p.291)

## 1. Gather information before you study (cont.)

- *Learn about yourself*
  - As you decide which strategies to use when preparing for an exam, you should also consider how you learn best. → Refer to the section on learning styles in Lecture 1.
  - Using your preferred learning style as you prepare for exams may help you stay more focused on the material and may make your study sessions more productive.
  - Don't forget, though, that using a combination of learning styles is often most effective when you're dealing with a new type of course, a professor who doesn't teach to your style, or a type of test that you've had difficulty with in the past.



## 2. Use seven-day study plan

- The **Seven-Day Study Plan** provides you with a mechanism to space your learning over a period of days, divide the material so that you can work on it in small chunks, use active learning strategies to study the material, and use self- testing strategies to monitor your learning.
- Watch the following video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oyKH5WVE3U>



Study Smart: Prepare for Exams Effectively!

## 3. Use active study strategies

STUDY TOOL	PREPARATION STRATEGY	REVIEW STRATEGY*
Highlighting	Re-mark text and *unknowns	Recite main points out loud
Text notes	Dig through text and write main points and supporting details; develop recall column	Recite information, identifying connections among ideas from headings and/or recall columns
Predicted questions in the margin	Predict questions and underline the answers	Recite the answers out loud
Concept maps	Design and draw maps	Sketch from memory or recite key points
Charts	Create charts	Recreate charts from memory on scrap paper
Geographic maps	Prepare copy of map without answers for self-test	Recite and/or write out answers; check original
Study sheets	Dig through text and lecture notes to select, condense, and organize material under main topics	Practice reciting out loud or in writing

## 3. Use active study strategies (cont.)

STUDY TOOL	PREPARATION STRATEGY	REVIEW STRATEGY*
End-of-chapter questions	Write out answers	Practice reciting answers
Word cards, question cards, formula cards, problem cards	Select information and write out cards	Recite out loud or in writing; shuffle cards and retest; test in reverse; retest missed items
Study groups	Prepare materials as agreed to by group	Explain your material to group and take notes on others' explanations; discuss
Self-tests	Select information and construct test	Take test in writing and/or recite out loud—retest
Predict essay questions	Predict specific essay questions; plan and prepare answers	Practice reciting main points and writing out answers
List of 20, 30, or 40+	Determine content and write out list	Recite out loud and write out troubling items

Different courses, different professors, and even different types of material require you to tailor your study plan and study strategies to each specific exam.

## 4. Evaluate your preparation

- Evaluate as your prepare

- Monitor your learning each day of your Seven-Day Study Plan. By quizzing yourself on the previously prepared and reviewed material the next day; by reciting, writing, or taking self-tests, you can find out what you do know and what you don't know—what you need to continue to review.

- Evaluate after you complete your plan

- Conducting a final review, taking a self-test, and even assessing how well pre- pared you feel are methods of evaluating your study plan.

- Evaluate after the exam

- After each exam, you should evaluate your entire study plan. Consider how much time you spent studying, the material you stressed or omitted, and the strategies that you used. Once your exam is graded and returned, you can make even better decisions about what worked and what didn't.



## II. Taking exams

1. General test-taking guidelines
2. Strategies to perform better on essay exam
3. Learning from exams

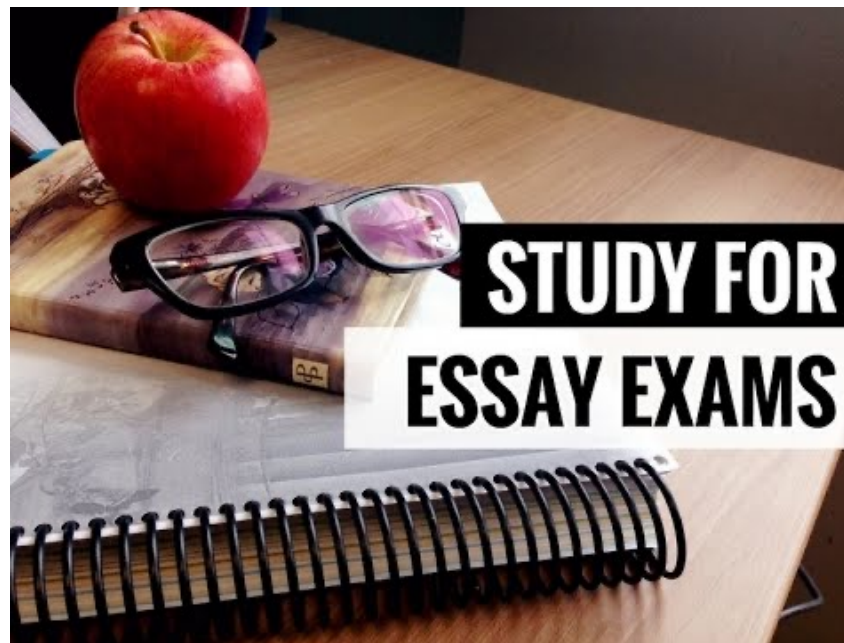
# 1. General test-taking guidelines

Approach exams in an organized, systematic way by:

- Bringing necessary materials.
- Getting there on time—or no more than 15 minutes early.
- Sitting in the front of the room.
- Previewing the exam.
- Planning your time—use the point distribution as a guide, and allow time for review at the end.
- Reading the questions carefully—don't assume hidden meanings or trick questions.

## 2. Strategies to perform better on essay exam

- a. Essay preparation strategies
- b. General test-taking strategies



## a. Essay preparation strategies

- Predicting, planning, and practicing your own questions and answers before the exam can help you improve your performance on essay exams.

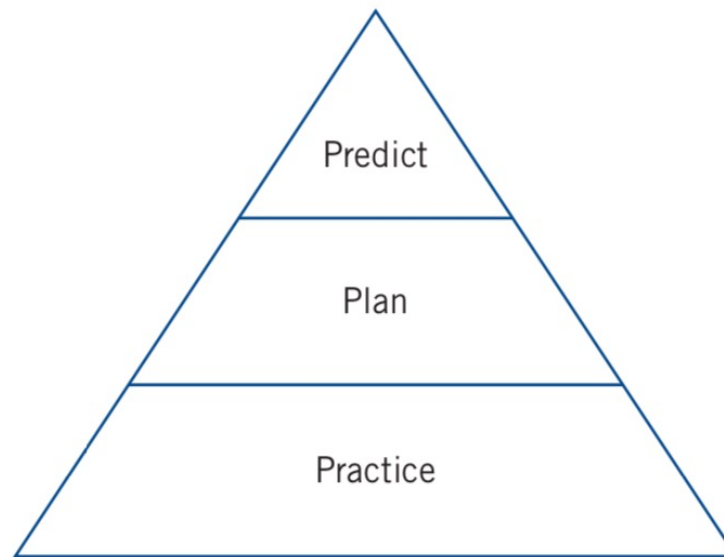


Figure 12.1: Three steps to preparing for an essay exam  
(Course book 1, p.307)



# a. Essay preparation strategies (cont.)

- **Predict questions**
  - A good rule of thumb is to predict at least four to five times the number of questions that will be on the exam.
  - The more questions you predict, the greater your chances of accurately predicting the questions on the exam.
  - Also, even if you don't predict the exact questions, you may find that you've predicted a question similar to the one on the exam.

Term	Definition
<b>compare</b>	Tell how two or more subjects are alike; provide similarities. Some professors also expect you to discuss differences—ask.
<b>contrast</b>	Tell how two or more subjects are different.
<b>define</b>	Give the meaning or definition.
<b>describe</b>	Provide details or characteristics about a subject.
<b>discuss or explain</b>	Give a detailed answer that may include definitions, main and supporting points, reasons, and examples.
<b>evaluate</b>	Discuss both positive and negative aspects of the topic and then make a judgment.
<b>illustrate</b>	Explain by giving examples.
<b>justify</b>	Prove by giving evidence that backs up or supports a point.
<b>list or enumerate</b>	Number and list the information rather than writing in paragraph form.
<b>summarize</b>	Provide a brief review of the main points.
<b>trace</b>	Describe the events or steps in order of occurrence.

## a. Essay preparation strategies (cont.)

- Plan the answers
  - Gather information:
    - Dig through your text and lecture notes and gather information that you use if you had to answer the question. Pretend that it's an open-book exam and you have the opportunity to look for the material that you're going to use.
    - As you locate important points and details that would be useful in answering the question, write them down on your sheet of paper. Don't copy the information; rather, write it in meaningful phrases.
  - Organize information:
    - By organizing the information for each question, you'll find it is easier to learn and remember the points you want to make for each question.
    - You can organize your gathered information by *labeling* each point.
  - Outline your answer:
    - The easiest way to outline your answer is simply to list the **main points** (the points that directly answer the question) next to the margin and then list the **supporting details** (the facts, details, or examples that support each main point) indented slightly underneath.
    - Try to limit your main points to seven or fewer so you can remember them. Three or four main points with good support for each should be sufficient for most answers.

## a. Essay preparation strategies (cont.)

- Practice the answers: Practicing the main points and details in your outline should help you learn the answers to your predicted questions.
  - Practice your outline:
    - Identify the main points in your outline and then learn them. The best way to learn the main points is to practice them over and over.
    - Cover everything except the question with your hand or another sheet of paper. Ask yourself, “What are the main points that I want to make about this question?” Even better, try to write your outline without looking back.
    - Practicing (reciting and writing) the information over a period of days will help you remember it during the exam.
  - Use Mnemonics to Aid Recall
    - If you have difficulty recalling certain points or remembering them in order, try using a **mnemonic device** (a memory cue) to improve your recall. Identify a key word in each of the main points that you made in your outline.
    - Underline the key words and then think of a way to remember them. Acrostics or catchphrases are useful for essay tests because they allow you to recall the information in order.

## a. Essay preparation strategies (cont.)

### Example of mnemonics

M <sub>y</sub>	M <sub>ER</sub> CURY
V <sub>ER</sub> y	V <sub>EN</sub> US
E <sub>D</sub> UCATED	E <sub>A</sub> RTH
M <sub>O</sub> THER	M <sub>A</sub> RS
J <sub>U</sub> ST	J <sub>U</sub> PITER
S <sub>E</sub> RVED	S <sub>A</sub> TURN
U <sub>S</sub>	U <sub>R</sub> ANUS
N <sub>O</sub> ODLES	N <sub>E</sub> PTUNE

## a. Essay preparation strategies (cont.)

- Practice the answers (cont.)
  - Write out some answers
    - Practice writing your answer by referring to your outline. Your goal here is not to test your memory of the information but to practice stringing together your ideas.
    - Turn each line from your outline (each meaningful phrase) into a sentence. Add additional sentences to provide more details, if you can.
    - After you've successfully constructed an answer with the outline, try to write the answer again without it.
    - If you've predicted a large number of questions, you may not have time to write out all the answers ahead of time. If this happens, write out only the ones that you think you would have the greatest difficulty explaining.
    - Choose more complex questions for written practice.

## b. General test-taking strategies

- **Read the directions carefully**
  - Find Out How Many Questions You Have to Answer
  - How Much Should You Write?
- **Plan before you write**
  - Jot Down Ideas in the Margin
  - Be Sure Your Notes Reflect All Parts of the Question
- **Organize Your Ideas Before Writing**
  - Add numbers to the notes that you made in the margin to organize them before you write.
  - Don't take the time to write another outline; a quick plan will do fine.
  - Check off each point as you use it in your essay. You won't get points for the information unless you actually use it in the essay.
- **Answer the easiest questions first**
  - As you preview the exam, look for questions that you predicted. Since you've already planned how to answer those questions, you should find them easy to do.
  - Completing one or two easy questions will help build up your confidence and help you maximize your score if time runs out.

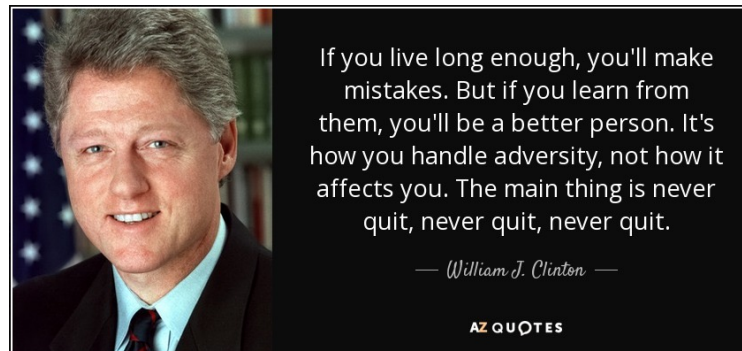
## b. General test-taking strategies

- **Be strategic when answering difficult questions**
  - Put the question in your own words and do a memory search.
  - Think about how some of the information that you learned when you prepared your predicted questions could be used to answer the exam questions.
- **Include all relevant information**
  - Some students leave out important information because they think it's obvious.
  - Pretend that you're writing the answer for a friend or family member who knows very little about the topic. Go into enough detail to explain each point you make.
- **Proofread your answer**
  - Be sure you take a few minutes to reread your answer before you turn in your exam.
  - Some students are so nervous at the beginning of an exam that they make careless errors and leave out words, make spelling or grammar errors, or even forget some of the information that they learned.
- **Learn from your mistakes.**
  - After the exam is over, monitor your preparation.
  - Go back and find out where the questions came from. Evaluate how well your predicted questions compared with the questions that were on the exam.

## 3. Learning from exams

You can learn a great deal from your essay answers **after the exam is returned to you**. Looking carefully and analytically at your returned exams can provide you with information on how to improve your answers on future exams.

- **What Can You Learn?**
  - How closely your answer matched what the professor wanted?
  - It's important to understand why you got the grade you did. You may want to evaluate your answer on the basis of the factors that influence grades and then discuss it with your professor. The key to improving your score on future exams is to find out what you need to do differently.





## 3. Learning from exams (cont.)

- **How to Evaluate Your Answer**
  - One method is to compare your answer with those of your peers. Sometimes just reading another student's essay can teach you a lot about what the professor expects.
  - Once you get a better idea of what the professor expected, set up an appointment to discuss your test with your professor. Don't go into the meeting with the expectation of getting extra points. Instead, focus on finding out how you should have answered the question in order to gain the maximum number of points.
- **Rewrite Your Answers for Comparison**
  - An excellent strategy for learning to write better essay answers is to rewrite your answers to the test questions after you get the exam back.
  - Use your text and your notes to put together the best answer that you can. Take time to organize the information and check your sentence structure, mechanics, and spelling.
  - Then go back to your professor and ask him or her to read your new answer. Ask what your grade would have been if you had written *that answer* for the exam. You need to find out whether you understand what your professor expects for an "A" answer.
  - If you still don't succeed in meeting your professor's expectations, you now have another opportunity to discuss why your answer was not a good one. You may want to rewrite the answer one more time and then meet with your professor to discuss it.

## III. Memory and learning

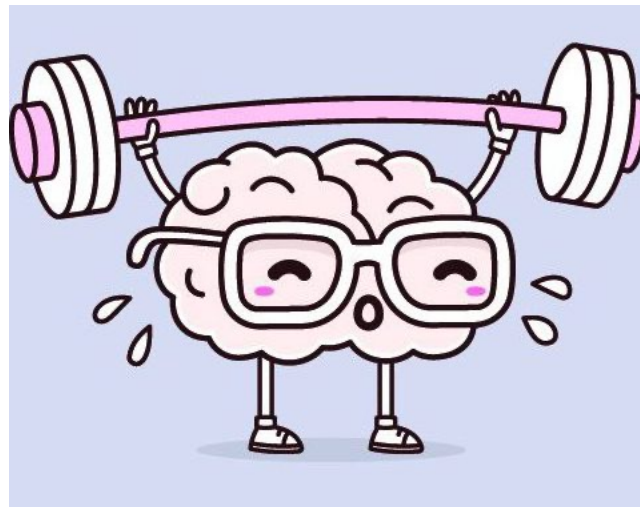
### Activity 2: Memory test games

- Visual memory test:

<https://humanbenchmark.com/tests/memory>

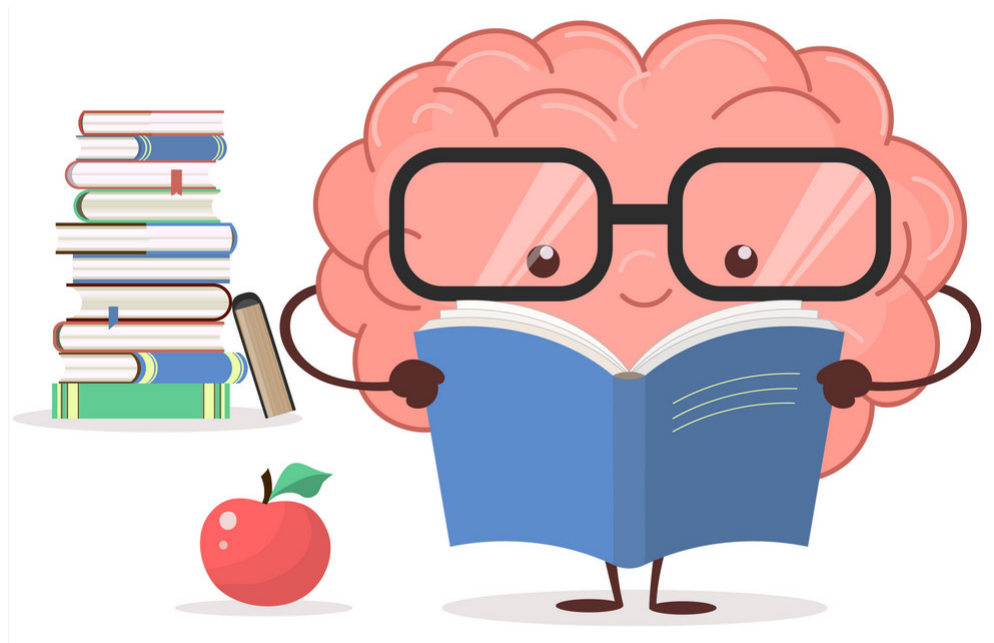
- Short-term memory test:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chmemory.html>



## III. Memory and learning

1. Understanding memory process
2. General memory strategies

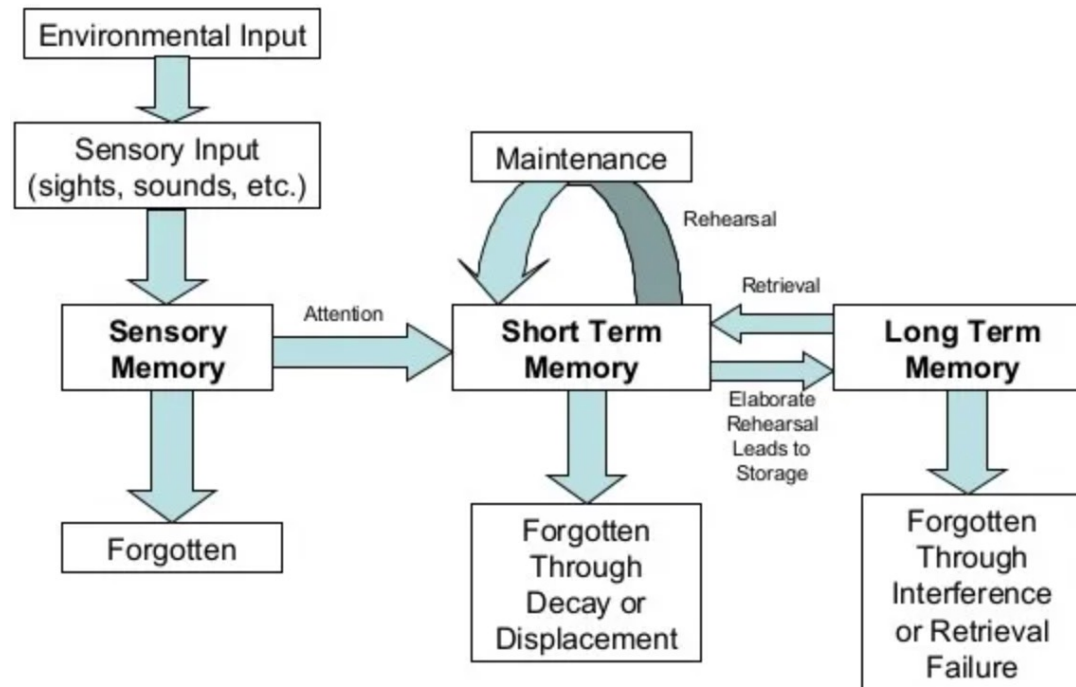


# 1. Understanding memory process

- Types of memory
  - *Sensory memory*
  - Short-term memory
  - Long-term memory
- Watch the following video: (from beginning to 1:55s)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tfh7vs0Mlc>

# 1. Understanding memory process (cont.)

- Atkinson and Shiffrin memory model



(From Atkinson, R. C. and Shiffrin, R. M. The Psychology of Learning and Motivation, 2, 89-195, 1968.)

## 2. General memory strategies

- **Don't assume that you'll remember.**
- **Review regularly.** Review your text and lecture information on a daily or weekly basis to keep the information fresh in your memory.
- **Organize the information logically.** Restructuring the information so that it's more meaningful to you aids your memory of it.
- **Write and recite to move information into long-term memory.** You won't even get information into long-term memory (or at least not very much of it) by just reading over your course material. You have to get actively involved with the material to make it meaningful so that you can learn and remember it.

## 2. General memory strategies

- **Form associations to increase memory cues.** Don't study information in isolation. By developing study sheets, explaining the material, or making maps, you form associations with and among the material that add a variety of cues that will help you remember it for an exam.
- **Organize the information in your study sheets.** The more organized the information is when you put it into long-term memory, the more easily you'll be able to find it when you're taking an exam. Creating titles, headings, and main points in your study sheets helps you organize the information and provides you with cues to aid retrieval.
- **Use your own expertise to aid memory.** When information is meaningful, it's easier to remember. Think of how what you're learning connects with your own life and work experiences. Create examples from your own experiences to help you remember the information you're learning in your college classes.

## 2. General memory strategies

- **Use mnemonics to aid memory.** Mnemonics can be used very effectively to aid retrieval. However, unless you learn the information to begin with, mnemonics won't work. You also need to practice the connection between the mnemonic device you create and the actual material you want to remember.
- **Use rhymes, stories, or songs to help you remember.** If you're good at writing or remembering songs, rhymes, or stories, use those methods to help improve your memory. Words that rhyme, the details of a story, or even the melody of a song add additional cues that may help you remember information for your exam.
- **Monitor your memory.** Many students are frustrated when they can't remember information during an exam. If this has happened to you, you may not have *learned* the information (at least not at the recall level). Check your memory of the information before the exam by self-testing on paper or by reciting. If you can't say the answer out loud without peeking, you don't really know it.



## IV. Reduce test anxiety

All students experience a certain level of test anxiety at one time or another, but some students experience high levels of anxiety, fear, and frustration before, during, and after taking exams. Understanding the real causes of test anxiety and developing coping techniques can help you reduce the amount of test anxiety you experience.

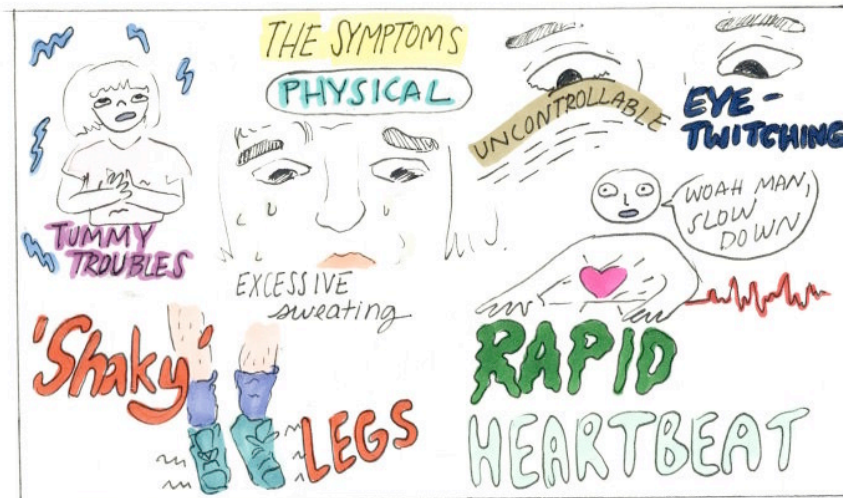


1. What is test anxiety?
2. What causes test anxiety?
3. Is test anxiety normal?
4. Coping with test anxiety

# 1. What is test anxiety?

- **Test anxiety** involves both physical responses, such as headache, nausea, rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, and emotional responses, such as worry and negative thoughts.
- **Common symptoms of test anxiety:**

Work with your friend to list out all common symptoms of test anxiety that you have experienced or can think about about.



# 1. What is test anxiety? (cont.)

## Common symptoms of test anxiety:

nausea	trouble concentrating
light-headedness	diarrhea
sweaty palms	throwing up
butterflies	shaking
heart pounding	headaches
fainting	feeling tense
going blank	crying
worrying about failing	

## 2. What causes test anxiety?

Although there's no real answer to this question, several possible explanations may help us understand the problem.

- For some students, **past experiences during exams** lead to anxious feelings about subsequent exams. Failure accompanied by embarrassment and frustration in one testing situation can lead to anxiety in the next.
- **Failure** doesn't mean the same thing for every student.
  - When most people talk about failing an exam, they mean getting a grade that is below passing.
  - For some students, however, getting a C or even a B is like failing; they fail to get the grade they wanted or needed. Excellent students often exhibit high levels of test anxiety because of the pressure they (or others) put on themselves to be the best.
- **Your self- efficacy** (your belief in your ability to successfully complete a task) may be a factor in causing some test anxiety. E.g.:
  - If you have high self-efficacy about taking math exams, you probably won't experience much anxiety. On the other hand, if you have low self-efficacy about taking math exams, you will probably experience more test anxiety.

## 2. What causes test anxiety? (cont.)

- Sometimes the **type of test** being given can lead to test anxiety. Some students become anxious during exams that require them to demonstrate their knowledge in ways in which they do not feel comfortable. E.g.:
  - Some students panic when they find that they have to take essay tests.
  - Others become anxious over oral exams.
- The added pressure of having to **complete an exam within a limited time period** also creates feelings of anxiety for many students.
- Some **professors** make students anxious because of **things that they do** during the exam.
  - Telling the class that the test is the hardest they've ever made up or that no one in the other class got above a D can lead to feelings of anxiety.
  - Some instructors think that they are helping the students pace themselves by announcing the time every five minutes, but that behavior makes the already anxious students feel even more pressured.

hey,  
it's OK



## 3. Is test anxiety normal? (cont.)

- It's **perfectly normal to be anxious about an exam**. If you weren't a little anxious about your performance, you probably wouldn't study at all.
- A small amount of test anxiety is good. We can describe this state of anxiety as **facilitating test anxiety**— anxiety that facilitates or helps motivate us to prepare before and work hard during the exam.
- On the other hand, a high level of test anxiety can interfere with your performance on an exam. We call this type of anxiety **debilitating test anxiety**. Like a debilitating illness, it prevents us from functioning in a normal way. High levels of test anxiety may interfere with your ability to concentrate on the exam, take the exam, or even to prepare for it (see figure 11.1.).

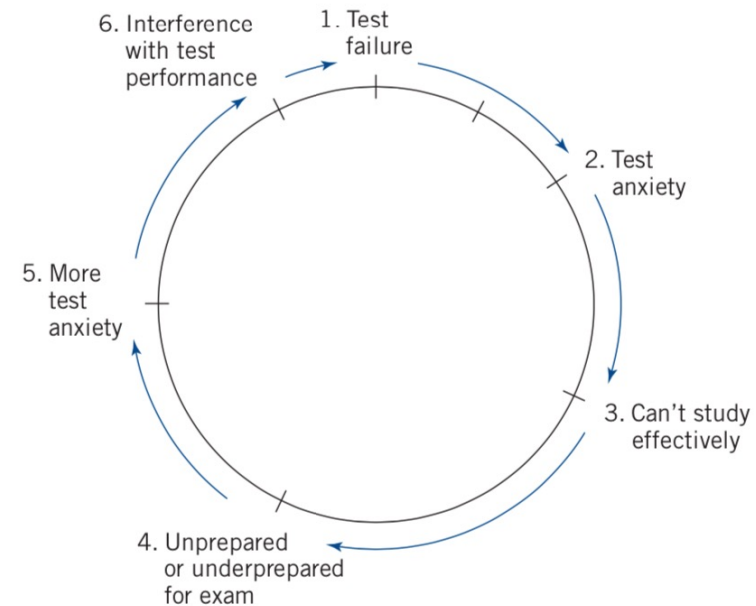


Figure 11.1: Test anxiety cycle  
(Course book 1, p.279)

## 4. Coping with test anxiety

- **Prepare well.** The best way to lower your level of anxiety is to be well prepared for the exam and to know that you are well prepared.
- **Monitor your learning.** If you quiz yourself each day, you'll also find out what you do know and what you don't know. Then you can review that material until you do know it, and by test time you'll be well prepared and confident about your preparation.
- **Use relaxation strategies.**
  - Breathing technique:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-YQxUb\\_Puo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-YQxUb_Puo)
  - Jaconson muscle-relaxing techniques:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3uK039WdaM>
- **Avoid negative thought.** Negative thoughts compete with and distract you from concentrating on the exam, so you need to avoid them.
- **Recite a positive mental script.**



I'LL TRY TO DO IT ! I CAN DO IT



## 4. Coping with test anxiety (cont.)

- **Use visualization.** Several days before the exam, put yourself in the exam situation. You can actually go to the classroom or testing room and pretend that you're there to take the exam, or you can just pretend you're there and visualize the room.
- **Don't arrive too early.** Arriving too early can actually increase your anxiety level. Enter the classroom about five minutes before the exam is to start. You'll have time to settle in and do a quick review, but not enough time to allow yourself or others to make you nervous.
- **Identify your triggers.** Identifying what triggers your feelings of anxiety can help you cope with them. Answer the questions you know first.
- **Don't let test anxiety become an excuse.** They blame their test failure on their anxiety rather than on their lack of preparation, poor class attendance, or poor preparation in high school. After all, that's easier than having to work hard and face the results of their efforts. Be sure you don't fall into that trap.





- Chapter 4: 'Memory and Learning'
- Chapter 10: 'Preparing for Exams'
- Chapter 12: 'Taking Essay Exams'

Coursebook: Blerkom, D. (2009), *College Study Skills: Becoming a Strategic Learner*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

- Homework:
  - Apply the ‘Ten Tips for Improving Your Memory’ in Coursebook (p.103) to learn by heart those ten tips for a quick review in class at the beginning of next session. Explain how you could memorize the information. Which tips/methods you used?
  - Practice two relaxation techniques twice a day.