Making an Effective Study Plan

Do you have many exams in a short period of time? Are you not sure how to effectively study your course material to correctly prepare for the test? Use this guide as an example of how to effectively study for all of your classes.

Start Early – studying should simply be a “Review” of the material, not a “relearning” of the material. You cannot accomplish all parts of studying in only 2 days. It is something you should do every week, or after every lecture, starting at the beginning of the semester. Your academic brain will recall information much better if you have short, frequent study sessions over a long period of time. For example, you will remember more if you study 2 hours a day for 10 days than you will remember 10 hours a day for 2 days.

The Five Day Study Plan is an example of how to chunk up your pre-exam studying, and can be done for just one class, or for three or four. Obviously, your study days will be longer if you have multiple tests, but the process is the same. The five day study plan works best if you have taken the time throughout the entire semester to do readings, lecture reviews, etc. You shouldn’t be looking at the course information for the first time when you start studying! To do well on any exam, you should actively study at least 8-10 hours, but this may be more or less depending on your knowledge of the material and the style of the exam.

What does the Five Day Study Plan do?
1. Allows you to space out your studying into manageable chunks over 5 days.
2. Allows you to prepare one chunk of new material from that class, and then review previous days’ chunks, until on day 5 you are only “reviewing”.
3. Allows you to actively study through reading, writing and reciting.
4. Allows you to use various self-testing techniques to review the material.
5. Allows you to effectively and actively study each subject each day.

How do you make a Five Day Study Plan?
1. Break your course material into chunks, based on how your class is designed (i.e. by textbook chapter readings, by lecture order, by topics, by theories…).
2. For each class, study at least two hours per day. If you have three exams to study for, this means you should be spending at least 6 hours a day studying.
3. How you chunk your material for each class, and how you study each day, involves two things: preparing the material, and reviewing the material.

When you have multiple exams, you can be flexible in your five-day study plan. Some days you will have overlap in the courses you are studying for, and the day or day of the test, you may want to only focus on that exam. Do what works best for you!
Example of how to make a Five Day Study Plan

Remember, this is for one course - you would repeat as many times a day as you have an exam to study for.

Day 1: Prepare 1st chunk 2 hours
Day 2: Prepare 2nd chunk 2 hours
Review 1st chunk 30 minutes
Day 3: Prepare 3rd chunk 1.5 hours
Review 2nd chunk 30 minutes
Review 1st chunk 15 minutes
Day 4: Prepare 4th chunk 1 hour
Review 3rd chunk 30 minutes
Review 2nd chunk 15 minutes
Review 1st chunk 15 minutes
Day 5: Review 4th chunk 30 minutes
Review 3rd chunk 20 minutes
Review 2nd chunk 15 minutes
Review 1st chunk 15 minutes
Self-Test

Examples of Preparation and Review Activities (From Learning Strategies Center)

Preparation: Develop study sheets, Develop concept maps, Make word cards, Make question cards, Make formula cards, Make problem cards, Make self-tests, Do study guides, Re-mark test material, Make a list of 20 topics that would be on the exam, Define the list of 20, Do problems, Outline, Summarize material, Chart related material, List steps in the process, Predict essay questions, Plan essay answers, Write essay answers, Answer questions at the end of the chapter, Prepare material for study group.

Review: Recite study sheets, Replicate concept maps, Recite word cards, Recite question cards, Practice writing formulas, Work problems, Take self-tests, Practice study guide info out loud, Take notes on re-marked text, Recite list of 20, Do “missed” problems, Recite main points from outline, Recite notes from recall cues, Recite out loud, Re-create chart from memory, Recite steps from memory, Answer essay questions, Practice reciting main points, Write essay answers from memory, Recite answers, Explain material to group members or study partners.

Information Adapted from:
Cornell University, Learning Strategies Center, www.lsc.cornell.edu