



# Three Stages of Test Prep: Before, During and After

*Before you take your next exam, consider the following: how you will prepare for the exam? What strategies will you use during the exam? And what can you do after the exam to improve your performance on the next test? The best practices below will help you navigate these three critical stages of test prep to increase your confidence on your next exam.*

## Before the Exam...

- **Determine what will be on the exam:** Review your syllabus, class announcements, and postings on Blackboard. Then speak with your professor in class, during office hours, or by [e-mail](#).
- **Determine the exam structure:** Will the questions be fact-based (multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and matching)? Short answer and/or essay questions? All of the above?
- **Begin your study sessions early:** To allow for [spaced repetition](#), a method that is shown to increase your ability to store and retrieve information, start this process two weeks before your exam.
- **Be mindful of your time:** Your exam prep will be in addition to the usual amount of time you reserve for homework completion. Begin with one to two hour test-prep blocks for each work day. Scale back when possible. An [hourly planner](#) will help strategically organize your class, homework, and test prep times.
  - If you find that you need more time to prepare for an exam, consider what you can do throughout the semester to reduce your test-prep time.
- **Divide and conquer:** Separate your course material into three categories by level of difficulty: high, medium, and low. Begin with the most difficult material first. This will, again, allow you to reap the benefits of spaced repetition.
- **Utilize your resources:** For time management, test prep, and [test-taking strategies](#), meet with an [academic coach](#).
  - For content-related questions, meet with the [Tutoring Lab](#), [Supplemental Instruction](#), or [Quantitative Academic Support](#).
  - For writing strategies, meet with the [Writing Center](#).
  - For learners with disability-related testing accommodations, utilize ASAC's ['Student Test Accommodation Request System.'](#)
- **Finally, confirm the details:** When and where will the test take place? How much time will be allowed? What materials can you bring?

## During the Exam...

- **Before you start writing, glance over the whole exam.** This gives you a "set" for the exam: what it covers, where the emphasis lies, what the main ideas seem to be.
- **When you begin your work, tackle the questions in the order that appeals to you most.** There is nothing sacred about the order in which the questions appear. Doing well on a question that you feel relatively sure of will be reassuring and will free your mind of tension.
- **Keep point value and time allowance in mind.** Determine a rough time allowance. If the total point value of the test is 100, then a 50-point question is worth about half your time, regardless of how many questions there are.
- **Work methodically.** If you tend to rush, slow down. If you tend to run out of time, pace yourself.
- **Underline all significant words in the directions,** such as "Complete 2 out of 3 essays."
- **When you are finished, check over your entire paper.** This will allow you to see if you have left out any questions and ensure that you have followed directions. Catch careless errors, but don't change your answers unless you are certain you have made a mistake.

## After the Exam...

- **Learn how to take exams by analyzing what you have done on a previous exam.** When you get your exam back, go over it, thinking about what it shows about the professor's expectations and style of testing. Did you prepare effectively for this kind of test? What might you do differently next time?
- **Detect where you tend to lose points:** Is there a pattern of why you missed points? Did you get the main idea but rush through the steps, proofs, or essay? Did you misinterpret questions or even test directions? Did you spend too much time on lesser-value items?
- **Note what you did right.** This may save you worry the next time. That question on the test that haunted you for the next several days may prove to be the one you did the best on. Why did it get such a good reception? Often, such analysis proves genuinely reassuring.