Collaborative Learning Center

H-LSAMP

STEM Tutoring in the CLC is provided
by students in the
H-LSAMP Scholars Program

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Top 10 Misguided Test Prep Techniques

1. Not looking at the last test

Who would want to re-visit a test that gave you a disappointing grade? Too depressing! But it's seriously the most valuable tool for learning (not just the course content, but better ways to prepare for and take tests).

When you look at that bummer-test, analyze what went wrong. Did you mis-read questions? Did you think you knew stuff that you really didn't? Were you so pumped or anxious that you didn't think clearly? Did you prepare effectively? Read on for effective preparation ideas.

2. Cramming

Cramming is about storing facts in short term memory. It might get you to through the test, but more likely your memory won't help you when you're asked to solve complex or novel problems.

3. "Reviewing"

Re-reading or reviewing notes tends to trigger your familiarity rather than test your deeper understanding of the material. If you're going to review, ask yourself these questions:

·   What does that mean?

·   How does it work?

·   Why is it important?

·   How is it connected to other things?

4. Studying Alone

One of the great advantages of a college education is working with the people around you. In fact, one thing that makes in-person learning more effective than online learning is the social interaction. Even if you're just sitting together not working on the same thing, the shared human experience is vital. And if you are actively thinking together and solving problems together, you are developing one of the most critical skills in life.

5. Memorizing

While there are times you will need to remember lists and terms, the core of learning is around understanding concepts and ideas. Consider using a concept map to help you organize the details you would otherwise try and memorize to identify hierarchical and functional relationships.

6. Not getting enough sleep

Not sleeping enough, especially the night before an exam, is physiologically counterproductive to learning and thinking clearly. You may think you're squeezing more time on task into your preparation, but the cost of creating sleep debt and going into an exam too tired negates anything you might get out of studying into the wee hours.

7. Always relying on resources when you get stuck

When you're doing homework, you should always do what you need to learn and answer questions that come up. But at some point, remember that those resources won't be available during the test and you'll need some practice at getting un-stuck before show time.

Getting stuck is a NORMAL PART OF PROBLEM-SOLVING, so don't panic. Return to the question and make sure you understand every aspect of it. Experiment with some approaches. When you find a dead end, analyze why your thinking got you there so you can learn from it.

8. Using "sound bite" flashcards without understanding the concepts

This is similar to #3, where you simply re-visit work you've done and sort of say hi but don't really drill down to make sure you understand things. Seeing someone on the street who looks familiar is not that same as knowing their life story.

9. Reviewing everything rather than just the stuff that needs your attention

Once you know something, spending time reviewing it is not time well spent. It might make you feel better about your level of preparation (it feels much nicer to review things you really get) but it won't broaden your understanding of things you're not as clear on. Focus on the things that you're less strong on, even though it might make you more anxious about the test.

10. Doing more of the same thing that didn't work last time

Whatever it is that you've been doing, if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. There are many ways to change up your approach, and we are here to suggest things and help you develop new strategies. May students just try to "work harder" (This Time I Really Mean It) but that doesn't usually get you there. Reflecting on and analyzing what you're doing and how well it's yielding results will help you make corrections.