ECONOMICS: TEST PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE:
An Alternative to Cramming and Failing

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WARNING: Economics tests demand the ability to think clearly and quickly. A zombie regurgitating facts fails, so come to the test well rested.

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As economics differs from other disciplines, so economics tests differ from other tests. Strategies for improving your performance on economics tests will lead to success.

STEP 1: OVERVIEW

Purpose: To determine the scope of the content assigned for the test.

Method: Reread all the summaries in the study guide, syllabus or text.

STEP 2: ORGANIZATION

Purpose: To determine the central or crucial topics. (Generally, you will study 15-20 topics for each test, but only 5-8 are central topics which will enable you to organize, understand and master the entire range of material assigned for the test.)

Method:

1. Textbook: There will be at least one central topic per chapter, sometimes two.

2. Class:
   a. The professor will spend more time on a central topic than on a non-central topic, even if the central topic is not especially complex.
   b. The professor may directly state that a topic is important or may use key words such as "model" or "theory."

   NOTE: If the professor spends significant time on a topic as well as labeling it a theory or model, there is a 75-80% likelihood that it is a central topic.

Central topics are important because:

1. They can be applied to a wide assortment of situations.
2. They can be used for both application and analysis.
3. They subsume (incorporate) other topics.

Generally, central topics are presented in an abstract manner (i.e., stated as a general concept). The topic is then presented more concretely as part or all of a model; next, the model is applied to specific problems or is used for analytical purposes.

Example: Production possibilities

- incorporates the ideas of unlimited wants and limited resources.
- can be applied to the problems of unemployment, growth, and choice.

STEP 3: VERIFICATION AND PRACTICE

Purpose: To determine which material you already understand and to provide practice in answering test questions.

Method:

1. Beginning with the central topics, choose several questions of each type on each topic from the study guide. Rework the problems from notes and examples in class without assistance from your notes or the textbook. These problems usually appear on the tests. Then check your answers.

    a. If your answers are correct, do the same procedure for the secondary topics.
    b. If you missed more than 20% of the questions, go back to the text and your notes and study. Then try different questions. If you are still having difficulty, find help (i.e., tutor, teacher, etc.).

2. On topics with obvious applications (i.e., those topics which are repeatedly applied during lecture), create your own problems and solve. For example, create a production possibilities table and calculate opportunity costs.

3. Discussing the concepts with a study partner can help you master the concepts. Be sure that you are doing at least half the talking. Passive listening to someone else's discussion of concepts rarely helps.

4. Copies of tests used in previous semesters may provide useful supplementary practice questions, but they are not generally as useful as those in the study guide.

STEP 4: PERFORMANCE

Purpose: To perform to your level of mastery.

Method:

1. Skim the test and try to mentally allocate time.

2. Work the easiest questions first. These quickly reduce your anxiety.

3. Analyze each question. What kind of question is it (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis)? What is it asking you to do?

4. On the multiple choice items, read the question (stem), stop and think of the answer; then, read ALL the options and choose the correct one. If you do not find the answer you predicted, read the stem again to make sure you are reading the question correctly. Mark qualifying words like always, never, all, and some. Then look at the options again and choose the most appropriate one.

5. Problem-solving application questions sometimes contain more information than you need to arrive at the answer. First, read the instructions carefully and determine what the problem is asking you to do. Then determine what information you need to solve the problem. Underline needed information. Do not be concerned if there is data you are not using.