

How to Review

There are two main pieces of advice:

- 1- First, and foremost, do not study just to pass the exam; study to learn and grow intellectually. Try to develop curiosity about and interest in the material for itself, even beyond the exam. Try to love what you are studying. You can do that if you think about the **RELEVANCE** of the material to your life, of how it is related to you and how you can use it in real life. If you do that, you will learn and pass the exam. If you study just to pass, you will not learn and you might not even pass.
- 2- Start by identifying the **big ideas**. One mistake students make is to get immersed in details and lose sight of the big picture. Start with the big ideas first and then move to the details. If these big ideas are not stated clearly in your notes or in the lectures, you have to figure them out. (You can use **mind maps** to connect the big ideas to the details that emerge from them.)
- 3- Try to put these ideas into some meaningful structure. One such structure is that of (**Question – Evidence – Conclusion**). When you start a new topic, try to express it in questions. Then try to pile up evidence for each question in order to arrive at a certain conclusion. In lectures, professors do not usually state the questions and conclusions directly. So, you have to figure them out.
- 4- There are several ways to avoid forgetting the material that you learn. One way is to put that knowledge in context: to connect the new information that you are learning now to the older, larger body of information that you already know about society or human nature, etc. Another way is to read as if the topics really matters to you. Try to connect what you know to your personal or social experience. For example, when you are reading about race or gender, try to reflect that on issues of race and gender in your life and society. That will make it more relevant to you and make it stick in your mind.
- 5- We said in class that stories are cognitive means that help us make sense of our life experience. So maybe if you mould your knowledge in the form of a story or narrative, it will help you understand it better and remember it longer.
- 6- Avoid **massed practice**: studying one topic at a time and not moving to a new topic until you have finished the first one. Instead, use

interleaving: studying many topics at the same time. Research has shown it makes information stick longer.

- 7- Avoid rereading and mere repetition of the material. Rereading is time-consuming and gives you an illusion of mastery over the text. Long exposure time to the text is no measure for mastery. Repetition is not useful to master the material.
- 8- Instead, use regular **self-quizzing** and **retrieval**. Test yourself after you finish a topic. Rather than rereading the material 10 times, read it once and quiz yourself. That is more productive for learning. Quizzes bring out the areas of your weakness. And when you answer your quizzes, do not just say them in your head. It is more effective to speak them out loud or write them on paper.
- 9- Retrieval interrupts the process of forgetting. Retrieval must be practiced repeatedly in **spaced-out** sessions. Like you quiz yourself now, and then after 6 hrs and then the next day or many days later, and so forth. This is more cognitively difficult, but it makes the material stick in your mind. Spacing-out allows some forgetting to take place, and then you interrupt it by retrieval.
- 10- When the learning is hard, it is more productive. Making mistakes and correcting them gives better results. The more you have forgotten, the better effect retrieval will have.
- 11- Use **elaboration**: giving the material new meaning by expressing it in your own words and connecting it to what you already know. Do not use the professor's words, but your own words.
- 12- Use **varied practice**: for example, you use the information you learned in the novel and apply them to drama; or use the grammar skills you have acquired in your writing exam, etc. This is a very effective method of learning.

Time management

- Do not study for more than one hour nonstop. As humans, our attention span is limited. We can only get focused on one thing for a limited amount of time.
- One way to solve the focus issue is to use the **Pomodoro technique**: you set a timer for sprint, focused and uninterrupted study for 30 mns and then take a 10 mns break. And repeat that over again. After each 3 sessions, you can take a 45 mns break. And so on. Fortunately, there are many mobile apps that can help with that. (My favourite is TIDE, available on Play Store.). Of course, you can customise the duration of the sessions and breaks. Remember, the 30 mns study session should be distraction-free. Better you set your phone on airplane mode during that.

How to Manage in the Exam

Before the exam

- Remember that the days before the exam are for reviewing, not studying the material. So, if you are studying at this time, this means there is something wrong.
- Reading right before the exam has a negative influence. Try to avoid that and instead try to get seated in the exam room 5 or 10 mns before the exam starts in order to relax and ease your anxiety.

In the exam

- Build a **time budget**: try to decide on how much time you will devote to each question (e.g. 45 mns for Q1, and 30 mns for Q2)
- Answer the questions in the order of difficulty. Start with the easiest, move to the easy, then to the hard, and lastly to the hardest.
- Allocate time to check your answer at the end of the exam (e.g. the last 5 mns after each question). You will discover many errors. Better you discover them now than the examiner will later!

When answering essay questions:

- Outline your answers before you rush to writing;
- Pay attention to the question words in the essay question (describe, compare, elaborate, discuss, define, etc.)
- Write in legible handwriting. It is very effective, and leaves a good impression on the examiner.

When answering multiple-choice questions:

- Try to solve the question in your mind first before writing on the paper.
- Read all the answers (do not rush into picking one choice from first sight). Your first intuition might be wrong.
- Maybe a better tactic than looking for the correct choice is to start by eliminating the incorrect choices.