

The Academic Resource Center
At Wheeling Jesuit University
(304) 243-4473

How to Prepare for and Take Exams

When you study for an exam, it's more than just opening your notes. By using a few simple strategies, you can become well prepared for any exam you are taking. You should attend any study groups or review sessions that are offered for the course. **Study groups** are a great way to clear up any questions you have from class. Formal study groups are created for most classes that students may have trouble in. Check the **Academic Resource Center** for a list of current study groups.

Multiple-Choice Exams

Multiple-choice exams are often the test of choice for college professors. You can be sure that you will experience this type of exam often throughout your college career. **Read the directions** to check if you should mark only one answer. **Answer each question in your head** before you look at the answers. If one matches your answer, it is probably correct. Mark questions you are unsure of and come back to them later. **Read all the answers** before selecting one. Sometimes two answers will be similar but only one will be correct.

True/False Exams

It is unlikely that you will come across an entire exam of T/F questions. However, you will have tests that include these types of questions. The following will help you approach these questions more confidently. Survey the entire test to determine the amount of time you have to spend on each question. If these questions are a small percentage of the whole test grade, answer the true/false questions quickly. **Read carefully!** Sometimes one word can make a statement inaccurate. If any part of the true/false statement is false, the entire statement is false. **Look for qualifying words** like *all, most, sometimes, rarely*. These are key words that determine the truth of the statement. Most questions that contain *always* or *never* are false. Answer the questions you know first then go back if time allows.

Open Book Tests

Many students believe this type of exam to be the easiest because the answers are right there. Unfortunately, this usually gives students a false sense of security and they become lax with exam preparation. If you have **specific formulae** you will need to know for the test, list these on a separate sheet. This will save time because you will not have to look up each formula separately. **Use sticky notes** to mark important pages in your book. If you are using your notes during the exam, **number the pages** and make a short table of contents.

Essay Questions

Read all the questions first to determine how much time to spend working on each question. Write on the questions you are sure of first. Identify *precisely* what the questions are asking. Know what specific words are asking for (see the following section). Write legibly. If the professor can't read your answers he won't be able to give you a good grade. Be brief with your answers. Get right to the point of answering your question. Use a pen. Pencil is difficult to read and is more likely to smudge. Write on one side of the paper only. Leave a large left-hand margin in case you need to add points later. When you are satisfied with your answers, recheck them for grammar, spelling errors, legibility and clarity of thought.

Words to Watch for in Essay Tests

Analyze – Break into separate parts and discuss, examine or interpret each part.

Compare – Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences.

Contrast – Show the differences between two things or ideas.

Criticize – Make judgments about a given statement. Evaluate the comparative worth of the information you are given.

Define – Give the meaning especially one that is specific to the course or subject. Determine the precise limits of the term to be defined. Explain the exact meaning of the word.

Evaluate – Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert regarding what is presented. Include evidence from the class to support your evaluation.

Interpret – Comment upon, give examples, and describe relationships regarding the information given. Describe the statement, then evaluate based on information from the text or lecture.

Prove – Support your argument with facts (especially facts presented during the lecture or in the text).

For Extra Help

The Academic Resource Center can help you to prepare for your upcoming tests. Study groups are available for History, Organic Chemistry, Accounting, and other traditionally difficult courses. Individual and group tutoring are also available for study skills and specific course areas. To take advantage of these services, stop by the Academic Resource Center on the ground floor of Ignatius Hall or call (304) 243-4473 for an appointment.

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