

PREPARING FOR EXAMS



AGENDA

- Starter
- Studying: Getting Ready
- Exam Day
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize the importance of preparing for tests.

Students will identify strategies for preparing for examinations.

Students will practice techniques for effective test taking.

Materials Needed

- One copy of the “Test-Taking Self-Assessment” activity sheet for each student (Starter and Part I)

Starter (6 minutes)

Tell students that you are going to give them an opportunity to reflect on something that they have been doing for years. In your usual manner, tell students that they are about to take an important pop quiz. Have them clear off their desks. Distribute the “Test-Taking Self-Assessment” activity sheet. Once students have had a chance to read it, tell them that this exercise will not be graded. Have students complete the activity sheet, keeping in mind how they felt when you announced the pop quiz.

Part I Studying: Getting Ready (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the importance of preparing in advance for a test.

1. Students discuss their views on taking exams.

Discuss student responses to question one on the activity sheet. Let students share their feelings about exams. Mention that people can improve their attitude toward taking exams if they think of an exam as an opportunity to demonstrate what they know.

2. Students recognize the impact that preparing for an exam has on their attitude.

Talk about question two. Ask students why some of them might have felt anxious about taking an exam. Ask, “Would your reactions have been different had you received advance notice?”

Point out to students that although the material on a pop quiz might be the same as on an announced exam, a pop quiz often causes more anxiety for some students as they have not had an opportunity to prepare. Elicit from students the awareness that preparing in advance for an exam helps to decrease anxiety.

3. Students recognize the impact that preparing for an exam has on their performance.

Discuss question three. Invite students to share how far in advance they usually prepare for an exam. Suggest to students that they could prepare for an exam as a runner prepares for a marathon: a marathon runner begins training well in advance of a race. Gradually, the runner builds endurance, running longer and longer distances. Finally, it is the day of the race. The runner is confident that they are ready and able to complete the race at peak performance.

Explain to students that just as with training for a marathon, people perform their best on exams when they allow themselves plenty of time to prepare.

4. Students identify effective study practices.

Talk about question four. Encourage students to share specific ways that they prepare for an exam. Write student responses on the board. (Students might respond: taking good notes in class, staying organized, making note cards or flashcards.)

Elicit from students that study sheets can be extremely useful when preparing for a major exam, especially the following two types of sheets:

- A “key terms” sheet, which contains dates, names, events, places, and other specific facts that need to be memorized
- A “general themes” sheet, which groups and outlines major ideas or recurring themes that must be reviewed

Discuss with students the usefulness of mnemonic devices for remembering key terms. Explain that mnemonic devices are tricks to enhance memory. For example, some people remember the order of the planets with a sentence like “My very entertaining mother just served us nachos” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune). Elicit from students examples of mnemonic devices that have been helpful to them in the past.

5. Students identify advantages and disadvantages of studying in groups.

Take a poll of students who get together with friends to study. Elicit from students the advantages and disadvantages of this method. Write their ideas on the board. (Advantages include: learning from one another, in-depth discussions, steady studying schedule, makes studying more fun. Disadvantages include: lost time if friends are not prepared, panicky students spread test anxiety to each other, groups may use time more inefficiently than one person alone, more distractions in groups.)

Conclude with students that choosing the right people to study with is important.

Part II Exam Day (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify effective strategies.

1. Students recognize that it is important to relax and sleep well the night before an exam.

Ask students to imagine that it is now the night before an exam. Have students suggest useful activities. Point out that they should have done most of their major studying already, and that, ideally, all they need is a brief review. Lead students to understand that the most important thing that they can do the night before an exam is to relax and get a good night's sleep.

2. Students brainstorm effective exam strategies.

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Give students the following instructions:

- Each group needs a sheet of writing paper.
- At my signal, one student in each group will write down one pretest strategy. This can be anything you do from the time you wake up until the minute before the exam begins.
- That student then passes the paper to the student on their right, who adds a different strategy to the list.
- Continue to pass the paper around the circle.

Give the groups two minutes to list as many exam strategies as they can. The paper can go around the circle more than once. (*Students might respond: eating a good breakfast, being on time, bringing all materials needed for the test [e.g., sharpened pencils, pens, scrap paper, calculators], bringing a watch, arriving a minute or two early to quickly review notes, avoiding talking to anxious students.*)

3. Students brainstorm effective exam strategies.

When two minutes have passed, instruct students to take two more minutes to write down as many strategies as they can. Groups should again pass the paper around the circle and include ideas from each member. (*Students might respond: looking over the entire test first, budgeting time, reading directions carefully, reading each question carefully, watching the time, circling difficult questions and coming back to them.*)

4. Students discuss the strategies identified by their groups.

When two minutes have passed, have the groups discuss the pretest strategies. Compile the groups' ideas on the board and add other ideas they might have missed.

On a separate list, compile students' test-taking strategies and add any that are missing. Students copy the strategies.

5. Students discuss strategies to reduce anxiety.

Ask students how many are anxious before or during an exam. Explain that exam anxiety is very common but that there are some simple things that they can do to combat it. Encourage students to offer suggestions. (*Students might respond: being well prepared, taking deep breaths, thinking calm thoughts.*)

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to identify three strategies that they use to prepare for and take tests. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Preparing in advance for an exam helps to decrease anxiety and increase the likelihood of success.
- Study sheets are useful when compiling notes in preparation for a major exam.
- Specific strategies can be applied during an exam to improve performance.

Student Assessment

1. What are your preparation strategies in the week preceding an exam? What can you do to make your preparation more effective?
2. List three mnemonic devices that you find effective.
3. List five preparation techniques that can help you get ready the day of an exam.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“No man ever became wise by chance.”

Discuss the meaning of this quote. Have students create their own sayings with similar meanings.

Addressing Multiple Learning Modes

Have students find recipes for healthy nutritious ‘brain food.’

Writing in Your Journal

Have students complete this sentence: “best way for me to prepare for exams is to....”

Using Technology

Have students use software to create outlines, flowcharts, and study guides to help them review for exams.

Have students create study guides, at least a week in advance, for an upcoming exam. After the exam, have them discuss which tools were most helpful.

Homework

Have students view study tips on YouTube.

Additional Activity

Have students create their study schedule for the term.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

1. How did you feel when the teacher said that you were going to take a quiz?
2. Why did you feel this way?
3. How far in advance do you usually begin studying for an exam?
4. Name three study tools that help you prepare for an exam.