

Test Taking: Cramming

Academic Success Center
Iowa State University



Although you've been told to avoid cramming (studying the night before), there are times when you are left with no other choice. For these unavoidable situations here is information on how to cram.

For students who have worked hard all term but now have three exams in five days so only an evening to review already learned material:

TRY	Writing out a course summary.
<i>WHY?</i>	Because reviewing the structure of the course will help you remember, comprehend, and retain the material.
TRY	To work through notes and assignments but just skim the text.
<i>WHY?</i>	Because this is the best way to set priorities for the time that you have.
TRY	To stay calm and confident!
<i>WHY?</i>	By taking breaks in your studying, by getting at least 6- and preferably 8-hrs sleep, and by reminding yourself that working hard all term really will pay off!

For students who've slacked off and are now in justifiable panic:

TRY	Gathering information about what's likely to be on the exam.
<i>HOW?</i>	Find out which chapters in the text were covered; get a set of course notes, copy and return them; ask the TA what topics were emphasized.
TRY	Finding the following from information gathered: principal themes, sub-topics, and major illustrations. Now memorize them!
<i>WHY?</i>	Repetition is the key to memorization; so is using ever trick you can -- word association, rhymes, enumeration, sentences from acronyms.
TRY	Being selective. After memorizing major themes, decide what supporting material to concentrate on. You're more likely to remember a narrow range of material covered in depth.
<i>HOW?</i>	Skim the text if there is only one, or skim only chapters that seem emphasized from your information gathering. If there are many texts, pick two to concentrate on. Take time to review what you've covered.
TRY	To be kind to yourself.
<i>HOW?</i>	Get at least 6 hours of sleep. If you have an exercise program, stay with it, and don't forget to eat well! Finally, record the pain of this experience (in a letter or a tape to be addressed next term) so you won't repeat it!

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Academic Consulting ❖ Disability Resources ❖ Psych 131 ❖ Supplemental Instruction ❖ Tutoring Services
1076 Student Services Building ❖ 294-6624