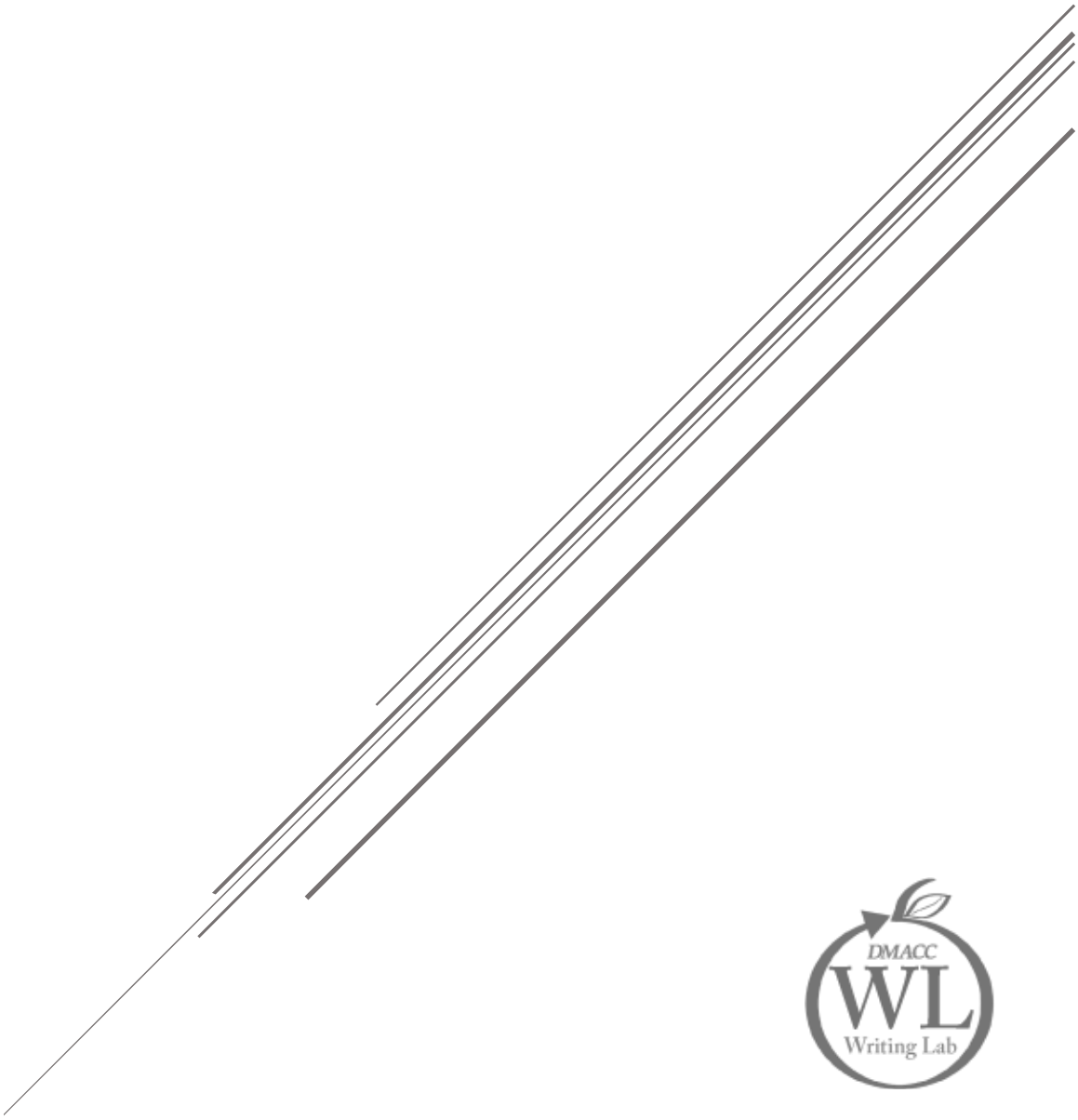
STUDY STRATEGIES

On-the-Fly



Des Moines Area Community College
Developed by Amanda Rodenborn, Dan Nelson, and Allison Pugh

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Welcome

Are you transitioning from high school to college and not sure what to expect? Have you spent some time away from school and need to get back into the swing of things? Did you have a semester, where, for one reason or another, you did not do your best and need to get back on track? Are you struggling to keep your head above water in the midst of the semester? Or, are you a proactive student who wants to add to your study toolkit? Whatever your situation, this packet is for you!

This packet is full of quick, valuable tips to help you succeed in college. To fully understand the purpose of and how to implement each tool, you should meet one-on-one over a few mini-sessions with a Study Strategies professor (available in the Academic Achievement Center Writing Lab). During these sessions, you will discuss the skills and work to develop positive habits. For more detailed instruction, take SDV 115: Study Strategies, where you will learn more about the tips included here as well as others.

Top Tips for College

1) Use a **planner** (paper or electronic) to keep track of all tests and due dates, including midterms, finals, drop dates, and major projects. Look at it **every day**. Use your course syllabi to fill in important dates at the beginning of the semester. You also can use your planner to make **daily or weekly to-do lists**.
2) **Go to every class**. If you **miss** a class, find out what you missed. Ask a classmate for notes, and follow up with the instructor for clarification. **Contact the instructor** ahead of time, if possible, to make homework arrangements. Many instructors are more likely to work with you if you **communicate** with them in advance.
3) Always be ready to take **notes**, and keep them **organized** for later review. If possible, **type up** and/or **rewrite** your notes right after class. Organize them in a folder or binder. You can also create a Quizlet set (see quizlet.com) of key terms. Following these tips will help you **remember** what was discussed in class because you're reviewing it right away, and it will give you an excellent **resource** for studying for tests. Just ten minutes a week of reviewing these materials can help you avoid hours of trying to relearn forgotten information right before a test.
4) Ask **right away** if you don't understand something. Get help immediately from your **instructor**, the **Academic Achievement Center (AAC)**, or a **tutor**. Form a **study group** with other students in the class. No matter what, don't wait until the end of the semester to ask for help.
5) Be **organized** about assignments, notes, and handouts. Keep them all in the **same folder** organized by **date**. Hold on to **old** assignments and handouts so you can review them periodically.
6) Try not to study when you are **tired** or **distracted**. Find a time and place where you can concentrate and be alert. Choose several good study spots outside of your apartment or bedroom (consider the library or AAC), and spend most of your study time in these places. You'll begin to associate these spots with work and productivity, which will lead to efficient studying.
7) Do your homework **as soon as possible** after it is assigned. The longer you put it off, the more likely you will be to **procrastinate** and not get it done. Make it a habit to stay **on top of things**.
8) Read your textbooks **actively**, with a pen or highlighter in hand, taking notes as you go. Don't let your eyes skim over the words or try to read too much at once, just hoping that the information sticks. **Check for understanding** so you're not reading on **autopilot**.
9) Think about being a student as a **three-step process**: (1) **doing the basics** (showing up for class, reading the textbook, doing the homework), (2) **reviewing** (using repetition to go over the information often), and (3) **practicing** (explaining the information to someone else, using your own words). Remember, if you can't put the information into your own words, you probably aren't prepared for a test on it.
10) **Reward yourself** for getting your work done. Always use the system "**work first, play later**."
11) Hang out with other students who are **hardworking** and **motivated**. They will be a good influence on you.
12) Make **taking care of yourself** an important job. You will be more successful in school if you are well-rested and healthy—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Time Management

Managing the demands of college—not to mention work, chores, and family responsibilities—can be challenging. However, creating and following a consistent schedule can help you stay on track, avoid overbooking yourself, and achieve some life balance. Coordinating your months, weeks, and days will help you stay organized.

Monthly Schedule

Creating monthly schedules gives you a big picture view of your days and weeks, allowing you to plan ahead for major projects and appointments. If you have an electronic device, consider using its calendar feature or an app like Cozi Calendar to set alerts. Many of these tools also allow you to sync multiple calendars together.

Develop an effective monthly schedule:

- Collect all of your course syllabi and plot important dates (exams, drop days, holidays) on your calendar.
- Break up projects, essays, etc. into smaller tasks with early deadlines.
    - Note: Early deadlines help to avoid procrastination and last minute cramming that lead to poor quality; use the extra days for polishing your work or submitting it early.
- Add appointments and other reminders.

Try it out on the next page!

Month:						
MON	**TUES**	**WED**	**THURS**	**FRI**	**SAT**	**SUN**

Weekly Schedule

Creating a weekly schedule gives you a consistent plan to follow each day so you have enough time set aside for each of your classes and life's other demands. Following a routine will help you prevent procrastination and be more productive.

Remember, study periods are not simply for completing assigned homework. In college, you must constantly review information to better retain it and avoid cramming. Generally, you will apply the 2:1 ratio, which means that you will study at least two hours a week for every credit hour. If the class is online, has a lab, or is particularly challenging, you should use the 3:1 ratio (study three hours for every credit hour). Try to incorporate other guidelines when applicable, such as having a study period each day for math classes or creating a study period right before a discussion-intense class to review notes. Try breaking up tasks visually by color-coding them. You can also create this schedule on your phone or with an Excel spreadsheet.

Develop an effective weekly schedule with the following:

- Face-to-face class meeting times (indicating class titles, e.g., SDV 115)
- Specific class study sessions using the 2:1 or 3:1 ratios as needed (E.g., Study SDV 115, not simply "study" or "homework"—you are creating *study periods* for *each class*, not just time to complete homework *if* you have any. In college, studying is *always* your homework.)
- Flexible study periods (2-3 hours per week) for when you have papers, projects, or exams and need a little extra time; if you don't need it, this time becomes leisure—bonus! ☺
- Work hours (if applicable)
- Meals, considering preparation time
- Commute time
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Time to care for children (if applicable)
- Chores (laundry, grocery shopping, etc.)
- Leisure

Give it a try on the next page!

SCHEDULE	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
6:00 a.m.							
6:30 a.m.							
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7:30 a.m.							
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12:30 a.m.							
1:00 a.m.							

Daily Schedule

Daily schedules are similar to to-do lists. They help you plan out the details of your day and prioritize tasks. It is a good idea to make the list the night before and organize it with the most pressing items first. You can use standard or digital sticky notes for writing down and remembering your list. You can also use a memo or reminder app. It is quite gratifying to check off items! Get started below!

To Do:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Goal Setting

Setting goals helps you plan your future and determine the steps necessary for getting there. You can set educational, financial, physical, social, family, and personal goals. To stay focused on your education and complete your degree, plan your academic goals and break down the steps for achieving them. It's also a good idea to remember your purpose in achieving the goal and plan a reward to stay motivated.

Some general goal-setting guidelines can be remembered by the SMART goals acronym: **S**pecific- clearly define your goal, **M**easurable- make sure you have a concrete way to know you have completed it, **A**ction-Oriented- focus on the steps to complete it, **R**ealistic- make sure it's within your reach but not overly easy, and **T**ime Bound- set a deadline. Get started planning your goals!

Goal:

- Purpose: _____
- Steps: _____
- Deadline: _____
- Reward: _____

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- Steps: _____
- Deadline: _____
- Reward: _____

Reading in College

Actively reading your textbooks and other assigned materials is one of the most valuable steps involved in getting the most out of your education and succeeding on exams.

General Reading Tips

1) Read the assignment soon after it is assigned so you don't procrastinate.
2) Glance through the reading assignment first to help you get focused and to get an idea of how much reading you can do at once.
3) If it is a longer assignment, break it into sections of 20-30 minutes.
4) Read the assignment *before* it is lectured on in class so you can use class time to ask questions or reinforce information.
5) Underline, highlight, and make notes in the margins to stay actively involved. This is called annotating.
6) Take notes on a separate sheet of paper while reading. That way you have a resource to use for review.
7) Place a sheet of paper or index card underneath each line to help you stay focused.
8) Read when you are the most alert (not when you are tired and not in bed).
9) Discuss the reading with another student in the class (or a friend or your dog ☺). If you can't put the information into your own words, then you don't really understand it.
10) Create a summary sheet, flash cards, or Quizlet set for the reading to review the information (again, use your own words).

Bonus tip: Don't let the information you read get cold. Review it on a weekly basis so that you don't forget everything and end up cramming right before a test.

SQ4R

SQ4R is a reading system to keep you active and asking critical questions before, while, and after you read. Being an active reader helps with understanding and remembering the information. Below are the steps in SQ4R. Try it out on the next page!

- **S- Survey** (before): Preview the reading to prepare your mind.
- **Q- Question** (before): Predict what you expect to learn by creating questions.
- **R_1- Read** (during): Read carefully, searching for answers to your questions.
- **R_2- Record** & Reflect (during): Highlight main ideas, and annotate the text by responding to it and asking more questions. (Record these notes in the margins, on sticky notes placed into the text, or in a designated notebook.)
- **R_3- Recite** (after): Verbalize what you learned, and respond to your questions.
- **R_4- Review** (after): Check your understanding of the text. (Answer end-of-chapter questions or your own study questions, recall main ideas, think about the organization, or write a summary and reflection.)

SQ4R for Active Reading: Survey, Question, Read, Record, Recite, Review[1]

Your Name:

Article/Chapter Title:

Author(s):

1) **Survey**: Look at the title, headings, subheadings, visuals, questions, and other standout information. Fill in the answers to the questions below.

What do I know about the topic?	*What do I expect to learn?*

2) **Question**: When applicable, turn headings and subheadings into questions. If not applicable, create questions based on your survey of the text.

A)
B)
C)

3) **Read** and **Record** (Annotate): Read the selection thoroughly, highlight, and make note of important points, associations, and unfamiliar terms. Relate what you are learning to yourself and your experiences. Take notes in another format too.

4) **Recite**: Answer your questions from step two and recite the information *aloud*.

a)
b)
c)

5) **Review and Reflect**: Check your memory by repeatedly verbalizing the above information. Below, write a summary **in your own words** of what you read and a brief reflection. This reflection is a personal response, so you should use "I" statements and make associations to your own experiences and consider anything you were reminded of or visualized while reading. Review this worksheet periodically to retain the information.

Summary:

Reflection:

[1] Adapted from Florida Online Reading Professional Development. (n.d.). *SQ4R*. Retrieved from the Marco Island Charter Middle School website at http://micms.org/SQ4R.pdf

Taking Notes

Like reading, taking notes in college is of utmost importance. Even if you think you already know the information, you should still write it down to understand the context of the material and remain engaged so you don't miss anything.

To take notes efficiently, develop a system of symbols and abbreviations. Also, remember to listen or read first, then write. That way, you can paraphrase and condense the information in a way that makes sense when you review it later, but you won't waste time writing *everything*. Never write a sentence when a phrase will do, and never write a phrase when a word or abbreviation will do.

Cornell Notes

Cornell Notes can help you read and listen actively. This strategy is also a useful study tool, as you can use it for self-quizzing and review later.

For Cornell Notes, you should take notes as usual in the **right column**. Use dashes, indentation, underlining, and color-coding to differentiate headings, subheadings, main ideas, and supporting details. Leave spaces to break up ideas; you do not need to fill the page. Chunking information helps with visualization as you study. If you're in a lecture class and miss something your professor says, leave a space and keep writing. You can always ask your professor after class and fill in missing information later.

After class or when you're done with a chapter, create study questions in the **left column** that line up with and correspond to the information on the right. Do your best to think like your professor and anticipate possible exam questions. If you used SQ4R while reading, then add the questions you formed. Additionally, if necessary, you can expand your notes with examples and extra support. See the Bloom's Taxonomy section in this packet to help you develop deeper thinking questions.

Once your notes are fleshed out, you're ready to study! Quiz yourself by covering up the right column and answering the questions *out loud*. Verbalizing the information keeps you accountable and helps you remember it better. Then simply check your answers by uncovering the right column.

Try out Cornell Notes on the next page!

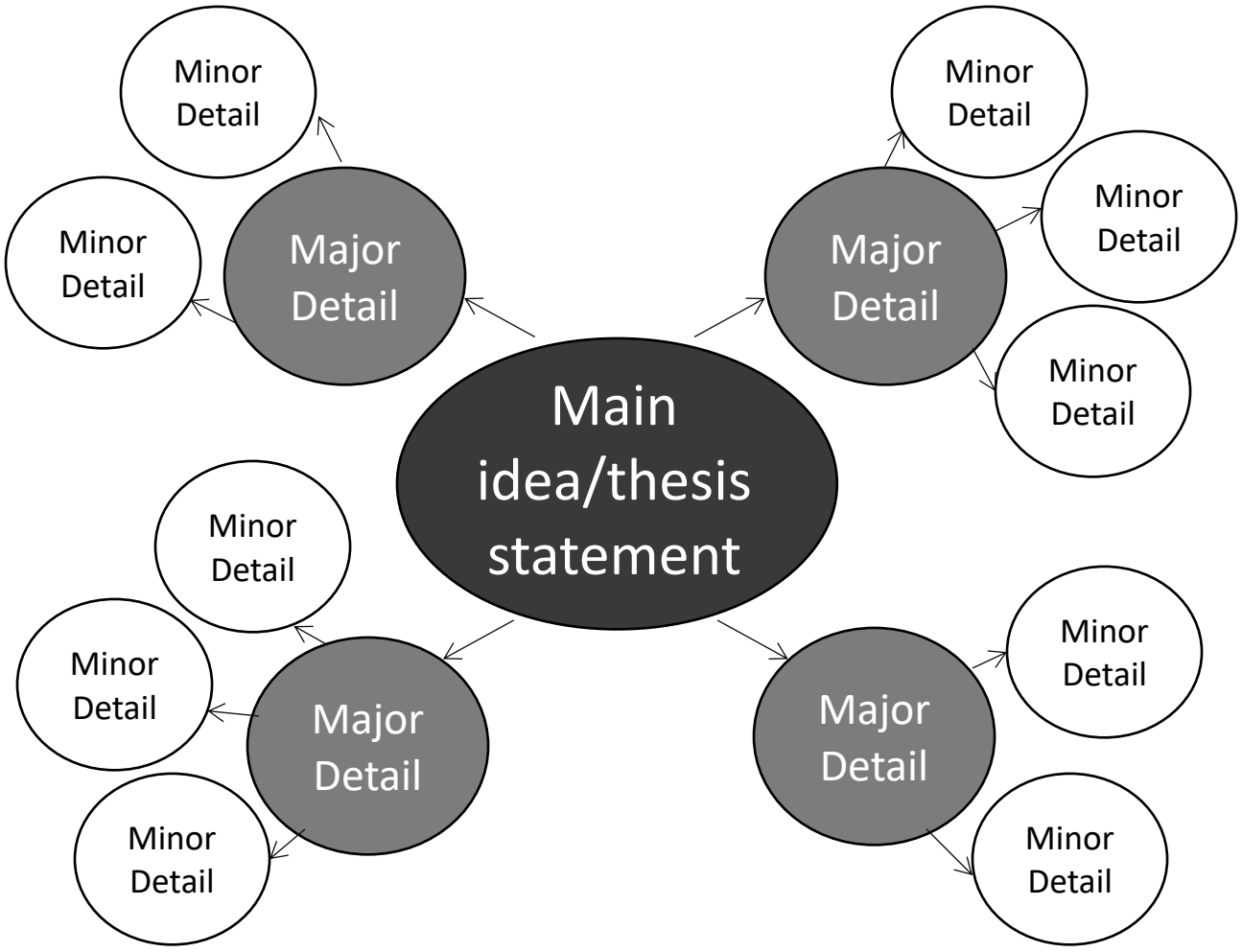
Name:	Date:	Class:	Title:
Questions/Headings/Key Words (Cues) Column	**Record (Notes) Column**		
Summary			

Visual Notes: Concept Maps

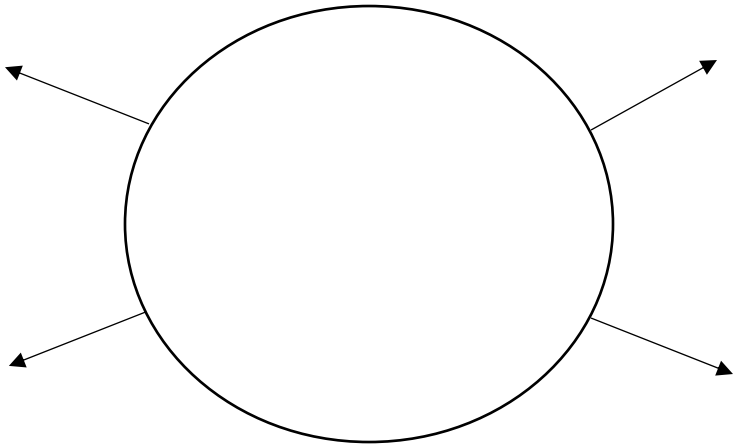
Concept maps are valuable because they can help with brainstorming; drafting notes, essays, and speeches; and organizing information. They also effectively show the relationships of ideas. The following visual shows the basic structure of a concept map. Color, size, and arrows are often used to differentiate levels and relationships of ideas.

If you are drawn to visuals, incorporating this or other visual note-taking strategies—diagrams, hierarchies, drawings, graphs, or photographs—to your notes aids in retention.

Give it a try as you brainstorm or take notes! A blank map is provided on the next page.



Concept Map



Bloom's Taxonomy for Studying and Critical Thinking

Bloom's Taxonomy helps build comprehension, deepen understanding, and increase retention. Therefore, it is a great tool for generating your own quiz questions and pushing yourself to achieve more complicated levels of thinking. You can do that by moving down the list of Bloom's Taxonomy, as pictured below. Try it out by creating a question or action statement about your own course material based on each level of Bloom's Taxonomy.

1. Remembering: (Name, describe, identify)

Example: Define photosynthesis.

2. Understanding: (Interpret, explain, classify, infer, summarize)

Example: Explain the photosynthesis process.

3. Applying: (Use, apply, connect)

Example: How does photosynthesis connect to raising a summer garden?

4. Analyzing: (Compare, contrast, organize, deconstruct, structure)

Example: What are the important steps in photosynthesis and how are they connected?

5. Evaluating: (Judge, test, critique, hypothesize, monitor)

What conditions allow photosynthesis to work most efficiently for a plant? Why?

6. Creating: (Design, construct, plan, devise, produce)

Example: Create a picture that presents the process of photosynthesis.

Tests

You are guaranteed to take many quizzes and tests in college. Tests can cause some stress, but remember, the more prepared you are and the more studying and self-quizzing you've done, the better off you'll be. Some more tips follow for how to prepare and also keep stress levels to a minimum around test-taking times.

If you are actively attending class, reading your course materials, and taking and reviewing notes, you are already on a path to exam success. Other helpful tips include preparing a study resource and developing a study plan.

Prepare a Study Resource

1) **Gather together** all of the information that you have learned, from class notes to past assignments, handouts, and tests.
2) **Organize** the material into main categories.
3) From those main categories, **highlight** the most important terms and ideas, and practice putting this information into **your own words**. Don't just use the "stare method," expecting to soak up information passively. Instead, have someone else quiz you, or "teach" the information to someone else. You need to **interact** with the material in several different ways in order to retain it. In other words, **do something** with the information; don't just look at it.

Develop a Study Plan

1) Start as **early as possible**, and write down *when* you are going to study and for *how long* (not more than 30-60 minutes at a time; think "short and sweet" with your study times). Making a **specific appointment** with yourself makes it harder to procrastinate. Use a planner or weekly schedule to do this.
2) **Keep track** of what you have studied, particularly as you feel you have mastered certain terms and concepts. Make a list of things you still feel shaky about, and attack that list one item at a time.
3) Work with **other people** if possible, as long as you stay on task. Talking about information and hearing it explained by someone else are better ways to study than just looking at it passively by yourself. Best case scenario—have someone else **quiz you.**
4) Go over the material **repeatedly**. The best strategy is to practice **over-learning**, which is learning something so thoroughly that there is no chance you will forget it even if you get anxious.
5) Use **practice tests** if they are available. Look up the answers to the questions you don't know, and write down this information in a separate notebook. (Basically, this is a list of "trouble spots" that need more attention.)

General Test-Taking Tips

Below are some tips for different types of questions and prompts.

- **Always read instructions carefully**
- **True/False:** only true if the *entire* statement is accurate
- **Multiple choice:** read **ALL** options before answering, and then look for the "best" answer by using the process of elimination
- **Matching:** start with those you are certain about first and note whether or not terms can be reused
- **Fill-in-the-blank:** think of vocabulary terms and spell them correctly
- **Listing:** visualize lists in your notes, and if necessary, make sure you write them in order
- **Definitions:** define and *expand* on the term; (1) identify the category, (2) define the term, and (3) give extra details or examples
- **Short answer:** pull information from your memory; explain why/how/when; give specific examples
- **Problem-solving:** show the steps you took to get to your answer
- **Essay:** include an introduction with a thesis statement, organized body paragraphs that directly support the thesis, and a conclusion; sketch out a concept map or outline beforehand to help you organize the information

The exam is coming. What should I be doing?

- Go to class, bring necessary materials, and pay attention.
- Take notes and study them.
- In the days leading up to the test, spread out your studying. Make a plan and stick to it; study a little each day.
- Do your homework.
- Talk to your instructor; ask questions. Ask your instructor for advice about how he or she would study for the test.
- Quiz yourself—exam day should never be your first time you've been tested over the material.

It's the day of the exam. Now what?

- Psych yourself up and get in the zone.
- Bring necessary materials and extra pens and pencils.
- Mentally rehearse information from your notes.
- Listen carefully to the instructions.

You have the test. Now what?

- Get started immediately.
- Focus on you. Avoid comparing yourself to how others are working through the exam, which can lead to anxiety.
- If it is possible to use scratch paper, use it.
- Jot down important information (mnemonics, lists, facts) or a quick list of ten things you know to serve as a memory kick-start if you get stuck.
- Read directions and questions carefully.

- Survey the test and budget your time.
- Decide where to start.
- Do the easiest problems first.
- Visually isolate questions by covering up with your hand or scratch paper.
- Answer all questions (even if you're running out of time).
- If you are unsure of something, ask.
- Eliminate answers that are obviously wrong.
- Don't worry if others finish before you; focus on you and remind yourself, others may not have studied as well as you.
- Watch for modifiers, words like ALWAYS, SOMETIMES, NEVER, NOT, ALL, EXCEPT, OFTEN, RARELY.
- Search your memory to retrieve information; use association, visualization, mnemonics, and auditory cues.
    - Ask, *"When did we discuss this? In what chapter? What other things fit with this? Is it vocab? Can I see it in my notes, instructor's notes, or the text? Can I hear my instructor or peers talking about this?"*
- Rely on other test questions for clues.
- Make an educated guess (usually you can eliminate two answers).

Your instructor handed back the exam. Now what?

- Don't just look at your grade and dismiss it.
- Go over correct answers.
    - How were you able to get them correct? What strategies did you use? How did you remember? Can you trace patterns?
- Go over feedback and incorrect answers.
    - Can you trace any patterns here?
- Try to correct incorrect responses.
- If you don't understand something, ask your instructor.
- Adjust your study habits for next time.

Reducing Test Anxiety

Many people suffer from some degree of test anxiety. However, there are different coping mechanisms you can practice to ease this anxiety, the most obvious being preparation. See more strategies below.

What coping strategies can I practice before the exam?

- Get plenty of sleep the night before.
- Know your triggers and change how you react; use positive self-talk and visualize yourself reacting differently.
- Predict, write, and practice test questions to improve your response in situations where you may not know the answer.
- Prepare, prepare, prepare!

What should I do on exam day?

- Get up early that morning so you're not rushed.
- Arrive to class early, and be prepared with extra writing utensils and other permitted items, such as a water bottle or notes.
- Dress in layers. (You can always peel off, but you don't want to freeze.)
- Avoid overdoing caffeine. (You'll get the jitters, increasing anxiety.)
- Take deep breaths or practice breathing by threes (in for a count of three, hold for a count of three, out for a count of three).
- Use positive self-talk: "You got this!" "You studied this!" "You know this!" "It's time to ace this exam!"

What can I do if I feel anxious while taking the exam?

Here are some common situations with specific coping strategies.

- **Going "blank?"** Use relaxation techniques, positive self-talk, reread questions in a whisper, search your brain for better retrieval, or mark the question and move on, coming back to it later.
- **Eyes jumping around?** Restrict your vision to one area; use your pencil to go over words and follow the text.
- **Making mistakes in marking?** Slow down; mouth/whisper words; highlight key terms in the question; ask, "Does this make sense?"
- **Mind shifting?** Interact with the test (underline, circle), use positive self-talk, and keep your eyes on the test.

Above all, remember that you *can* succeed at college, and all of these tools will help! We wish you the best of luck, and we're always available to offer extra tips if you need additional support!

Appendix A: Blank Study Tools

Monthly Schedule

Month:						
MON	**TUES**	**WED**	**THURS**	**FRI**	**SAT**	**SUN**

Weekly Schedule

SCHEDULE	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
6:00 a.m.							
6:30 a.m.							
7:00 a.m.							
7:30 a.m.							
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1:00 a.m.							

Daily Schedule/To-Do List

To Do:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Setting Goals

Goal:

- Purpose: _____
- Steps: _____
- Deadline: _____
- Reward: _____

Goal:

- Purpose: _____
- Steps: _____
- Deadline: _____
- Reward: _____

Goal:

- Purpose: _____
- Steps: _____
- Deadline: _____
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SQ4R for Active Reading: Survey, Question, Read, Record, Recite, Review[2]

Your Name:

Article/Chapter Title:

Author(s):

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What do I know about the topic?	*What do I expect to learn?*

2) **Question**: When applicable, turn headings and subheadings into questions. If not applicable, create questions based on your survey of the text.

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4) **Recite**: Answer your questions from step two and recite the information *aloud*.

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Summary:

Reflection:

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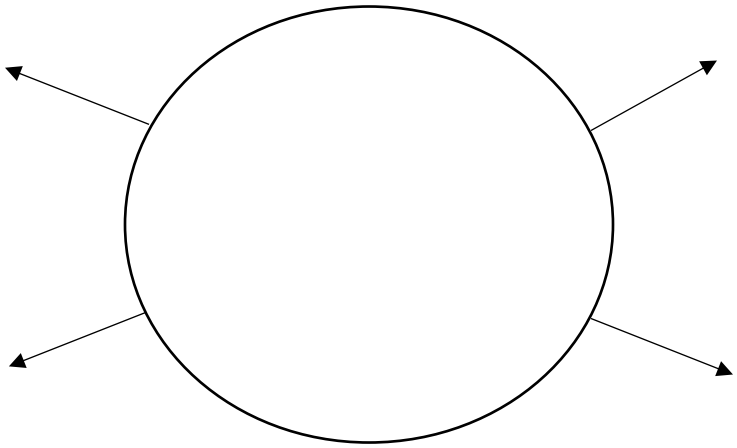
Cornell Notes

Name:	**Date:**	**Class:**	**Title:**
Questions/Headings/Key Words (Cues) Column	**Record (Notes) Column**		
Summary			

Concept Mapping



Bloom's Taxonomy