

Getting Organized

Now you find yourself surrounded by information. You have at least one textbook, supplemental readings, lecture notes, and possibly even a study guide! You could work through the mess, but what a waste of time. Organizing the information may seem to take a little time and seem tedious, but you will end up saving time and stress in the end. Trust me on this one.

Fact Sheets

One of the most basic ways of organizing your thoughts is by getting it all on paper. This is similar to an outline for a chapter in a textbook, or notes taken during a lecture. In fact, this is the next step in that process. Once you have all your lecture and text notes, you may wish to further consolidate your notes to make the information more manageable. Writing the information in the form of phrases or sentences on a sheet of paper does this.

Another form of this is a word list. Oftentimes a way to test your knowledge about a particular topic is to put a key word in front of you, and the page numbers or dates of lecture that the word refers to. For example the word may be:

Psychoanalysis (pp 478-479)

This tells you that if you cannot come up with enough information regarding that subject, refer to those pages of the text.

Retroactive viruses (09/20)

If you are not sure what "retroactive viruses" mean or you cannot give examples of such viruses, the parenthetical note refers you to a certain lecture during which the professor discussed retroactive viruses.

Fact sheets and word lists work well when you wish to summarize information for a test. They offer quick references, and it is easy to track your progress. Unfortunately, they can often be cumbersome and easy to lose.

Note cards

The easiest way to set up information in a uniform manner is to put individual statements on note cards. They are relatively inexpensive, and you can take them anywhere. By putting one part of the concept on either side of the note card, you can create a study guide that facilitates self-testing also. Here are a few examples

Vocabulary (*this is an easy one and you can use it to memorize any terms, meanings, or translations*)

Front side: To Study (Spanish)

Back side: Estudiar

Concepts (*this can work if the idea takes more than a phrase to explain*)

Front side: Latchkey Adolescents

Back side: Description

Mathematical formulas and equations (*works similarly to a definition*)

Front side: $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$

Back side: Theorem Description

Be creative, remember this is **your** system. Make sure though that nothing on one side gives away the other side. That way, you can reverse some of the cards and work both ways.

Once you have this system, you can flip through cards while going to class, talking on the phone, or doing almost anything. Feel free to mark your progress by highlighting harder ones or discarding easy ones, although you want to be careful that the markings do not give away what is on the card!

Getting Refreshed

Despite the benefits of study guides, nothing beats hitting the books when you just want to become reacquainted with the main concepts and be sure you haven't forgotten anything. Rereading through the material can often bring to the surface ideas you thought you had forgotten. Unfortunately, no one has time to reread everything, so here are a few ways to efficiently work through the textbook.

- Focus on all headings and subheadings. They can help you organize your thoughts.
- Be sure you know all **bold faced** or *italicized* words. Often, these terms are vital doorways to the information.
- Review all summary sections and review questions. This can help to be sure you have successfully hit on all the points the textbook editors feel important.
- Review highlighted material. You obviously marked the book for a reason, so try to figure out why. Be wary of using highlighted lines from other semesters though, you don't know for sure that the previous owner of the book got an "A" in the course.
- Check all marginal notes. They may help you relate the text to your notes. It is always good to review your thoughts to recapture the moment.
- Review aloud the key concepts. Being your own lecturer can prove to your benefit, and you get to hear yourself talk!

There are three styles of reading you can use when studying. At this stage in the game, it is important to remember that you have already drawn out the important facts on note cards. Therefore, pick a style that won't be time consuming and won't make you feel overwhelmed.

- **Comprehensive reading:** This style is what you used when developing note cards, and is obviously very tedious at this point. If you feel like you are reading the same thing over, that's probably because you are. Avoid this style at this point, because you will just grind yourself and lower your enthusiasm.
- **Skimming:** This is the opposite extreme, and is not ideal either. Of course it is better than nothing, and if you are short on time, do at least try to get the main ideas and points through a quick read-through. Obviously, if this is all you do, that is not conducive to a passed test.
- **Newspaper reading:** Also referred to as magazine style, this method is ideal for the final read through. Because you have already taken great lengths to search out the important points and catalog the facts, you should feel comfortable just reading through the pages as if you would without a pending exam. This will help to make you feel comfortable with the text you have presumably mastered, as well as notice anything foreign to you. Of course if you do not have a general understanding of the material, or a portion of the material, this step serves as a safety net.