

STUDY TIPS FOR ECONOMICS COURSES

(a condensed summary)

TAKING NOTES IN CLASS

Before class: At least pre-skim related readings and review lecture notes from previous class; look at problems in the study guide; make note of new terms, concepts, measures, models, graphs, and theories; formulate questions. During class: Have questions in mind as the lecture begins; adapt a format which allows a wide left-hand margin for summarizing and editing your notes plus a narrow right-hand margin for recording your own insights, questions, etc.; be alert to assumptions underlying hypotheses and note how hypotheses are tested against observational data. After class: Review and edit your notes; use the left-hand margin to summarize material and list key terms; "test" yourself as soon as possible to recall lecture highlights.

READING THE TEXT

Preview the material: Look at sub-headings, graphs, questions at the end of chapter; note new terms.

Read actively: Formulate questions before you read (from lecture notes and preview) and then read to answer those questions; translate abstract concepts to specific instances; know what every term and symbol means. Analyze graphs thoroughly: What "economic story" is being told?; what are the assumptions?; note units of measurement on each axis; note direction (positive or negative) of the relationship. Recall: Test yourself immediately and cumulatively at the end of each section; then use a combination of marginal notations and underlining to summarize. Reflect: Set aside time to question and criticize what you've read--then make notes of those thoughts.

PREPARING FOR EXAMS

Integrate and review lecture and text notes; make a list of key topics, concepts, problems, theories, models, and terms. Review via ACTIVE RECALL rather than just passive re-reading. Re-work homework questions and workbook problems. Practice using the information in the form that will be required by the test format; predict test questions and problems and practice answering them. Realize that various test questions will ask you to know, comprehend, apply, and analyze what you've studied.

TAKING EXAMS

Glance over the whole exam quickly, assessing questions as to their level of difficulty and point value; set time goals for each section accordingly. Begin to work the questions which are easiest for you; the others will be easier when you've "warmed up." Maximize partial credit possibilities by attempting all questions. Save time at end of exam for re-reading and editing. Analyze returned tests to prepare for future ones.

OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is a habit, not a fatal flaw. It takes persistence to change, but you can do it. Here's how:

CLARIFY YOUR PERSONAL GOALS

- Articulate and write down your personal goals. Post them on your door, mirror, notebook -- so you'll see them frequently.
- Be sure the task you think you "should" do is one that is really important to you, that leads to your goal. If your actions aren't in line with your intentions, perhaps you should change your intentions: "I said I'd study history now, but it's more important to rest after my test today. I'll plan to do it tomorrow morning."

MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

- If you don't know how to manage your time, learn. Consult an UTLC counselor, attend a time management workshop, or work with an independent study program in the Reading/Writing/Study Skills Lab.
- Break your goal up into little parts. Write out and list the steps you must take to accomplish your goal.
- Write out a plan for yourself. Make a schedule.
- Establish a regular time each day to work toward your goal. Get out of a disorganized lifestyle and make working toward your goal part of your routine.
- Organize your environment, complete with the tools you'll need, so it's conducive to working. Or...move yourself to an environment which is conducive to working.
- If you aren't sure how to reach your goal, learn. For example, if you aren't clear about an assignment, plan to consult with your professor. Build this appointment into your schedule.
- Start early. Build procrastination time into your schedule. Call it "creative leisure."
- Start small and easily. Build gradually.

CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE

- Do you feel that the world is too difficult? That you are inadequate to meet its challenges? That you cannot function without a lot of approval? Are you frustrated with the limitations of others? Expect nothing less of yourself and others than perfection? Convinced that disaster hinges on your actions? ... These are immobilizing, self-defeating, avoidance-producing attitudes and beliefs. Recognize them as such, and use them only to the extent that they are helpful.
- Don't indulge them and don't believe them! Replace them with self-enhancing beliefs and attitudes.
- Remind yourself of the emotional and physical consequences of procrastination. Then remind yourself of the consequences of not procrastinating.

- Concentrate on little bits and pieces of your project; don't think "all or nothing."
- For a day, pretend that you are a well-organized non-procrastinator. Imagine how you would think and behave. Then behave and think that way ... even if only for a few minutes at a time.
- Value your mistakes; don't judge them. What is curious, useful, interesting about them? What is worthwhile? Anything worth doing is worth doing badly.
- Know your escapes and avoidances: self-indulgence? socializing? reading? doing it yourself? over-doing it? Running away? day dreaming? Call yourself on them.
- Rage, complain, and vent: don't hold it in ... or, hold it in, if that works for you!

CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR

- Use your friends. Set up a contract with someone to get something done. Make an appointment to study with a friend who has no difficulty studying. Make an appointment to consult with someone who can help you with your task. Arrange to meet with a friend for support, someone who'll listen and who'll share your highs and lows.
- Make something you normally do and enjoy contingent upon doing the avoided task: "I'll work on my term paper in the library half an hour before going to play racquetball."
- Keep your tasks visible in front of you: set up reminders, signs, slogans, notes, lists.
- Use your impulsiveness. When you get going, keep going. Do something when you think of it -- don't think about it. Do instant, tiny things.
- Do something daily. Agree to start a project and stay with it for 5 minutes. Consider another 5 minutes at the end of the first.
- Establish priorities among tasks according to the degree of unpleasantness. Start with the most unpleasant task and work down until you get to the easier ones.
- If you've got something hard to do, rehearse it in your imagination or with someone. Work the bugs out; don't terrify yourself.
- Be sure the rest of your life is in good shape ... so your awful task is less awful within the context of a good general quality of life.

ACCEPT YOURSELF

- Give yourself time to change.
- Expect and forgive backsliding.
- Give yourself credit for anything you do.
- Forgive yourself a lot.

How To Keep Calm During Tests

1. **PREPARE WELL IN ADVANCE.** Keep up day to day, if you can; but don't judge yourself harshly if you don't. Avoid last-minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before (though 4 or 5 hours may be enough). Stop studying an hour or so before the test and relax and compose yourself.

2. **KNOW TIME AND PLACE** of the test and what you need to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late, with blue books or supplies. Don't rush.

3. **DON'T TALK ABOUT THE TEST** with classmates immediately beforehand, if you know it raises your anxiety level. To do so may nourish group paranoia.

4. Read over the test and **PLAN YOUR APPROACH.** Ascertain point values per part, time limits for each section, which question you'll start with, etc.

5. Don't hesitate to **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION** from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you have questions about directions, procedure, etc., rather than letting anxiety build up because you aren't sure about what you are expected to do.

6. **DEVELOP AN AGGRESSIVE, YET REALISTIC ATTITUDE.** Approach the test vigorously determined that you will do your best; but also accept the limits of what you know at the moment. Use everything you know to do well; but don't blame yourself for what you don't know.

7. **ACTIVITY REDUCES ANXIETY.** If you go blank and can't think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the test. On an essay, jot down anything you can recall on scratch paper to stimulate your memory and get your mind working.

8. **RELAX YOURSELF PHYSICALLY** during the test, if you notice that you are not thinking well or are tight. Pause, lay your test aside, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Do this if you notice that you are worrying excessively about one problem, not reading carefully, forgetting information you know.

9. **PAY ATTENTION TO THE TEST,** not to yourself or others. Don't waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, blaming yourself, etc. Don't worry about what you should have done; pay attention to what you can do now.