

Strategies for Acing Your Midterms

Mr. Samir Al Baghdadi

This is it. Do or die. Midterms are right around the corner and you can't stop wondering if you'll pass or fail. You don't want to let your parents down, and you don't want to look like a moron in front of your professor. Most of all, you don't want to disappoint yourself. Stop and take breath. There are several strategies you can use before and during your midterms to improve your chances of acing them.

Before the Midterms

Don't cram it in. If you are one of those students who waits until the last minute to put your nose in the books, you're asking for a failing grade. A more sane strategy is to start studying at least seven days before the midterm. This will give you plenty of time to process the information in your mind. It will also allow you time to grasp concepts you don't understand.

Pick up on hints. Professors have a lot on their plates, so they often recycle information from earlier tests and study guides. They also drop hints in class about what's going to be covered on the midterm. During lectures, when you hear the professor use phrases like, "You might see this again," or "This is very important." Jot the information down. More often than not, it will pop up on either your midterm or your final.

Flashcards are worth it. Write out questions on one side of the flashcards and write the answers on the opposite side. You can use them to quickly go over key concepts no matter where you are. You can even grab a study partner and have him drill you with the flashcards.

Do a mock up. Create a mock test to take a couple of days before the exam. If you have a noisy roommate, go to the library and use one of the study rooms so you'll have some quiet time. If you miss any questions, put in a little extra study time to figure out where you went wrong.

Google it. When a subject is difficult, the industry jargon in a textbook only makes it more complicated. You'll often find that when you search online for answers, you'll get simplified explanations of concepts you can't grasp from reading the textbook.

The Day of the Test

Eat up. You won't be able to concentrate on the test if your stomach is growling. Eat a well-balanced meal before you sit for your exam. Keep the portion sizes sensible. You don't want to stuff yourself to the point where you can't breathe in the exam room.

Dive right in. You may only get an hour to get your midterm done. If you spend the first 10 or 15 minutes fiddling with your paper or shuffling in your chair, you'll lose valuable test-taking time. When you look at the clock and notice your time is running out, you'll panic. This is a recipe for disaster. When you panic, instead of thinking the questions through, you'll lose focus and rush to fill in answers.

Read what's there. Don't skim over the questions. Instead, read each and every word. If you miss one word, you could misunderstand the question. For instance, you might have a question that says, "Which is *not* true about the GDP?" If you skim the question, you might miss the keyword "not" and mark the wrong answer.

Eliminate answers. If your midterm is multiple choice (A-D) you have a 1 in 4 chance of getting the right answer. There is always an answer that is absolutely wrong. If you can figure out which answer is not correct and eliminate it, you improve your chances of marking the right one.

If the thought of midterms make you buckle at the knees, you're not alone. Many college students feel anxious and jittery during this time. If you use the above strategies, you'll prepare well in advance and be ready on test day. When you ace your exams, you'll go into the last half of the semester feeling very satisfied.