

Prepping for Midterms: 3 Tips

Environment, Time Management, Approach

- **ENVIRONMENT:** Make your study space as **pleasant** as possible so that you want to spend time there. First, tidy up your space and make sure you have all your study materials ready. Think of creating a “spa-like environment”. You can have your favourite fragrance (diffuser, candles), drinks/snacks, soothing background music, etc. - whatever makes it as enjoyable as possible. Also, make sure there are no distractions (close window blinds, door, etc.).
- **TIME MANAGEMENT** is crucial for **efficient** studying. You’ll need enough time to study all the material that you’re being tested on, along with sufficient breaks in between study periods. A good way to start is by dividing the material into sections that you feel you can study in about 2 hours. Let’s say you end up with ten 2-hour sections. Then look at your weekly schedule and find ten 2-hour periods to enter into your schedule, going backwards from the exam date. Leave the day before the exam for final review of all the material. This should bring you to a start date by which you should start studying in order to have enough time to study everything thoroughly.
- Take sufficient **breaks** to rest your mind and improve your recall of the material. Research shows that taking breaks significantly improves study **effectiveness** by boosting recall ability. A good way to start is by following the Pomodoro technique: 25 minutes of study followed by a 5-minute break. If a distracting thought pops into your head during the 25-minute study time, jot it down on a piece of paper and return to your studies. During your 5-minute break, rest your mind completely. After four 30-minute sessions (2 hours), take a 30-minute break before starting another 2-hour session.
- **APPROACH:** How you study will depend on the **type of material** to be learned. For example, for math-based courses, it’s all about problem solving and doing as many **practice** questions as you can. If you want to be confident going into a math exam, don’t practise until you can get it right, practise until you CAN’T get it wrong. Learn which formulas and steps to use for the types of problems you will have to solve. For some courses, such as health sciences, you will have to memorize facts. **Repetition** is usually an effective way to memorize facts, either by reading or saying or writing the facts out over and over again. If your course content is mostly theoretical - in other words, if you need to be able to explain key concepts and use examples – the **teaching** technique may be helpful. Pretend that you have to teach the topic to someone who knows nothing about it. Practise explaining it in simple terms using your own words.