

## Tips and Techniques

### Preparing for Tests



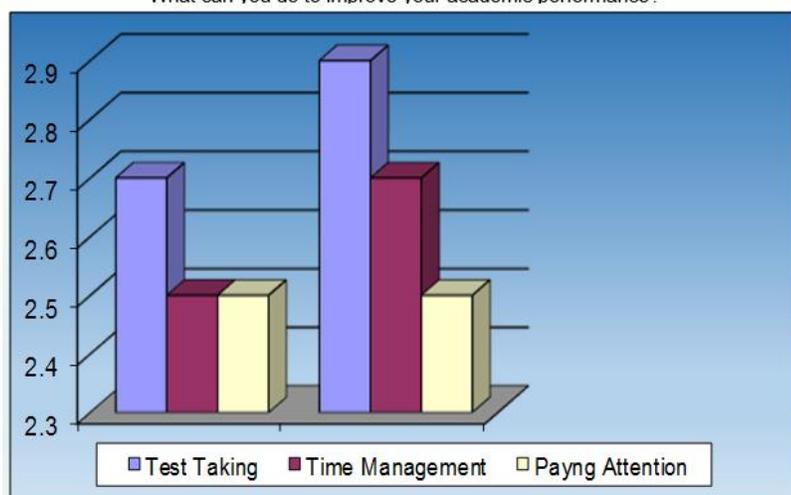
**Scripture Verse:** *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, be sober and set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13. WEB)*

#### Grades: 6-12

Several years ago we conducted a survey of 6-12th grade students and teachers. Students were asked, "What can you do to improve your academic performance. Learning how to do better on "taking tests" was the number one rated activity for both middle and high school students. When teachers were asked the same question, "What can students do to improve their academic performance," on a five-point scale teachers rated "managing their time"

#### 19. Improving Academic Performance

What can you do to improve your academic performance?



(3.9), "reducing absences in class" (3.9), and "paying attention in class" (3.8); whereas, students rated "paying attention in class" as the lowest activity related to improving academic performance. Most of the teachers were surprised of these response differences. Helping student learn how to prepare for taking tests became a major focus. We choose the "Study Power, Unit 5: Preparing for Tests" (The American College Testing Program, 1987). Using this and other resources, teachers designed four instructional units; the first two were "preparing for all tests," and

the last two were "preparing for specific kinds of tests." In addition, the teachers were provided in-service training on constructing quality and unbiased tests that measure what is being taught. (A sample of these guidelines for test construction is found in the CD, *Christian School Management Guide*, under the Products Menu Tab.)

Using the *Study Power: Preparing for Tests*, teachers provided a number of tips to help student prepare for weekly quizzes, mid-term and final exams. Last-minute cramming, late-night study sessions, and test-day panic were addressed. The following seven key techniques were presented to the students during these units and are included in the student workbook section of the *Study Power Series: Preparing for Tests*

## **Keep up with Assignments**

The best way to simplify the task of reviewing for tests is to keep up with the day-to-day assignments in your classes. Plan a schedule that allows you to study each assignment before it is due. A good goal is to complete all reading assignments and other homework several days before you're tested on the material. You should never postpone your first reading of an assignment until the night before a test. (Teachers required students to keep an assignment notebook which were purchased by the school and handed out at the beginning of the school year and checked by the teachers on Friday of each week. Students who lost their assignment notebook had to pay to have it replaced.)

As you study each textbook assignment, summarize important points in a notebook. Your reading notes will help you when you review later, because you may not have time to reread long sections of text.

Take class notes, too, and be organized about it. Date them and keep the notes for each class together. This way, you won't waste valuable study time looking for misplaced notes. Many students find that cross-referencing and regularly comparing their class notes with their reading notes helps them acquire in-depth understanding of their subjects.

When you have questions about material in a homework assignment or class discussion, be sure to ask a classmate or the teacher for help. Fully understanding today's work is essential for understanding tomorrow's.

## **Review Regularly**

Research has shown that students remember material better when they review it soon after their first exposure to it and regularly thereafter. Don't leave reviewing until the night before a test. Make reviewing a regular part of your day-to-day study schedule. The more times you go over material asking yourself questions and rehearsing your answers-the better you'll do on a test. In addition, regular review of old assignments usually makes new material on the topic easier to understand.

## **Plan Ahead**

When your teacher announces a test, write down the date and type of the test and the material to be covered. Keeping track of upcoming tests on a wall or desk calendar will help you to complete assignments on time and get an early start on test preparation.

Begin reviewing for tests several days in advance. This gives you plenty of time to check with classmates or teachers if you have questions about any of the material. Schedule extra time for studying and reviewing topics that are difficult for you.

## **Identify What to Study**

Use clues that can help you identify what material your teacher is likely to cover on a test. Look over earlier tests in the course and, if they are available, tests from last year. This will help you see what the teacher thinks is important. Review any handouts that have been distributed in class.

## **Study Efficiently**

For greatest efficiency, arrange to study when you're feeling your most alert and energetic. Studying in blocks-an hour or so of study, followed by a ten-minute break-works well for many people. You'll remember the material better this way than if you try to cram everything into a single marathon study session. Minimize distractions and interruptions; a quiet, undisturbed environment allows you to concentrate better.

Start reviewing by going over your class and textbook notes. Check the textbook when you have questions. Reread chapter summaries, or skim through the headings and subheadings. This will give you a good overview of the material to be covered.

As you begin your final review, focus on topics most likely to appear on the test. Make up questions that you would ask if you were the teacher. Then try to answer them, in your own words.

After you feel that you know the material, get together with some classmates and ask each other questions. You may find that you've overlooked one or more important topics. Make sure that this is really a study session, not a social get-together.

## **Stay Calm**

Sweaty palms? Nervousness? Irritability? Sleeplessness? These are all symptoms of test anxiety which, if severe, can reduce your performance on a test-even when you know the material. It's not surprising that many students suffer from test anxiety. Our society puts a lot of emphasis on doing well. For most people, part of doing well involves getting good test scores and grades. This isn't all bad; a little anxiety can make you want to do your best and encourage you to study. However, if you're too anxious, you may panic and start forgetting what you've learned as soon as your test paper is in your hands. The following tips can help you stay calm.

- The best way to deal with test anxiety is to prepare well for each test. When you feel confident that you know the material, it's much easier to stay calm under pressure.
- Practice your test-taking skills. Make up questions of the type that will be on the test and try answering them so that you have a feeling for how much time to give each question, and how much material you can expect to cover during a test session.
- Avoid last-minute review. If you're still studying some topics five minutes before the test, you're likely to panic-and forget all the other material that you do know. Just before a test, it's better to sit quietly and practice a relaxation technique such as deep breathing.
- Plan to review the material in depth over a period of several days before the test. Then, on the night before the test, do a light final review-and go to bed on time. Try to be so well prepared that you could go to a movie the night before a test.
- Don't upset your regular routine by staying up late (or all night) or getting up too early. Keeping to your regular schedule for sleep and meals will help you relax.
- If you try all of these suggestions and still feel overly anxious about tests, talk to your teachers or counselors.

## **Review After the Test**

Always review tests as soon as they are returned to you. Look for the kinds of questions that gave you trouble, as well as facts that you might have missed. Find out the correct answers for anything you missed, and go back over your study notes to see what went wrong. (Teachers require students to keep a folder for each subject and place all returned assignments in these folders.)

Was one particular type of question especially hard for you? If you made most of your errors on essay questions, perhaps you need practice in getting your ideas down quickly and logically. If you missed a lot of factual items, perhaps you need to devote more study time to learning specifics.

If there's a topic or procedure that you don't understand, get help. Don't assume that, because the test is over, it's no longer important. The material could be the basis for everything else you'll be expected to learn during the rest of the course. Keep your old tests if your teacher allows you to do so. They can help you develop strategies for the next exam.

## **Summary: Preparing for All Tests**

1. Keep up with day-to-day assignments so as to simplify later test review.
2. Review your assignments regularly to improve your understanding and recall of the material on tests.
3. Plan ahead and begin your final review several days before the test.
4. Identify what to study by using such clues as earlier tests and class handouts.
5. Study efficiently by focusing on the topics most likely to be on the test and answering questions about them in your own words.
6. Stay calm before and during tests by preparing carefully in advance and avoiding last-minute cramming.
7. Review returned tests to learn from any mistakes you may have made.

## **Preparing for Specific Kinds of Tests**

- For objective tests learn important dates, facts, and other details and practice recalling them with lists or flash cards.
- For problem tests learn key theorems, formulas, and equations and practice using them on a variety of problems.
- For essay tests learn broad topics and practice answering questions about them in your own words.
- Practice making logical outlines of topics and then go over them.

The *Power Study* presents several Power Building Exercises for the students that allow practice on the seven steps presented above. The exercises can be completed at home or in the classroom. A Test Preparation Worksheet allows students to keep track of test information, design a study completion schedule and a review schedule.

The last section of the student Power Study Workbook helps students sharpen their skills in identifying and preparing for possible essay questions.