How to Prepare Students for Exams
The Review Process

Research has shown that many students have not been taught formal study techniques. They pick up advice about studying, here and there, as they progress through various levels of schooling. The truth is that most students do not have an effective, efficient, study method. Students who know that they are not doing as well as they could in assessed course work, test and examinations, are likely to benefit most from straightforward advice, because they know they need help. Students who are satisfied with their progress can also be helped to do even better work, just as talented athletes can improve their performance when well coached. Learning to work effectively (improving their ability to think, understand, select, organize, explain, and remember) would help them not only as students but also in any career.

Strategies and Techniques for Preparing Students for Exams and Enhancing Classroom Learning

1. Stress the importance of working steadily throughout the year, not just in the last few weeks before examinations.

2. Suggest to students to prepare a calendar at the beginning of each semester. They should record assignments with due dates and scheduled tests/exams. Also record planned school activities as well as out-of-school commitments. A weekly schedule as well as a daily organizer will also help students to make the best use of their time.

3. During class time, before the exam, instruct your students to highlight important details, circle answers they missed or left blank, ask questions to clarify any confusing information, anticipate exam questions and look for answers, and discard any useless paperwork that has collected in their binders or notebooks.

4. Suggest the use of flashcards for group or paired study. Flashcards are great for reviewing vocabulary, grammar rules, historical facts and dates, geographical statistics, mathematical formulas and foreign language phrases. Warn students however, of the danger of spending too much time making them and not enough time reviewing them.

5. The use of in-class collaborative group discussion for the exam review can promote critical and analytical thinking skills as well as independent thinking. Teachers can:
   - Assign different roles within a group: writer, speaker, researcher and “devil’s advocate”.
   - Thoughtfully pre-arrange student groups in mixed ability and interest levels.
   - Assign a group goal, such as preparing a presentation or designing a review poster.
   - Provide students with specific written questions requiring higher-order thinking.
   - Give students a final exam review study guide.
6. Go over with your students the following suggestions to improve study concentration:

- Study in a quiet place that is free from distractions and interruptions.
- Make a study schedule that shows what tasks need to be accomplished and when you plan to accomplish each task.
- Study when you work best. Some students choose early in the morning, others late at night.
- Make sure that you are not tired or hungry when you study.
- Don’t try to do two tasks at the same time.
- Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks that you can complete at one time.
- Relax. It is hard to concentrate when you are tense.
- Develop an interest in what you are studying. Try to relate what you are studying to your own life to make it as meaningful as possible.
- Take two or three minute breaks whenever you feel fatigued. At the end of a two hour study session, take a 10 minute break. Move away from your work and do something different.
- Make sure you have enough space for notes and other necessary books or papers, and that your working surface is sufficiently and evenly illuminated.

7. When studying for a specific exam, students should:

- Set questions of different kinds, which could be on the exam: analyse, define, explain etc., and write point form answers.
- Solve any problems from the text that have not been tackled previously.
- Organize your knowledge of a subject.
- Make notes of any gaps in your knowledge and then try to fill in the gaps.
- Prepare simple diagrams from memory, and then compare these with similar diagrams prepared previously.
- Recall and write down in concept map form all the main points on one aspect of a subject. Do the same thing until all the important topics for the subject have been covered. Review your study notes repeatedly, especially in the last weeks preceding an examination.
- Write definitions from memory, and then check in the text or in your own notes for accuracy.
8. Review with your students the basic rules for answering multiple choice exams:

- Read the question and try to answer it BEFORE looking at the answers, but make sure you look at all the answers before choosing.
- Do not spend too much time on any one question. Circle the questions and come back to it if you have time at the end.
- If the question asks something you do not know, cross out any wrong answers before you guess.
- Do not keep changing your answer. Research shows that your first choice was probably the right one.
- After you have finished the test, go back to those questions you circled. If you have to **guess**, see if one answer fits better grammatically than the others. Look to see if any of the answers repeats key words from the question. Look to see if any of the answers is much longer than the others as it takes more words to form a correct answer. See if one of the answers sticks out as the “odd one out”. If you spot a typing error in one of the answers, choose one of the other answers.