

Open-ended exams are a challenging way to test your knowledge of a particular subject, but they are not impossible! Open-ended exams include fill-in-the-blank questions and short answers for which there is no word bank. Use the tips below to help you prepare for and excel on open-ended exams.

Chances are your professor has outlined the format of their exams on the syllabus or on the first day of class, so if you know you're going to have all open-ended assessments, you need to prepare early!

Before Class

1. Actively read the chapters assigned before class. Active reading includes:
 - a. Highlighting important concepts or information you don't understand.
 - b. Keeping post-its in your book with notes and questions.
 - c. Writing notes in a notebook or binder on lined paper.
 - d. Outlining the chapter.
 - e. Printing out the lecture slides (if they are posted prior to class) and reviewing them makes it much easier to take notes during class.
2. Confer with classmates over the material. Sharing questions with each other can lead to clarification of topics.

During Class

1. Engage in active learning. Active learning requires your full attention in class.
 - a. Have your notes/book open on your desk or the lecture slides open. Follow along while the professor goes through the material.
 - b. Don't forget to ask questions! If you put a note next to a topic, make sure you remember to ask your question during that part of the lecture.
 - c. If you find yourself getting bored or distracted, refocus by taking a deep breath and looking up at the professor.
2. Don't spend all your time writing. The point of reading and taking notes prior to class is so you can focus on additional information that your professor mentions (that may not have been in the reading). Write down the extra information given, especially if it is written on the board.
3. Pay attention to terminology and definitions; your professor will most likely provide a more colloquial version of a definition which will help you understand better.
4. Record the lecture if you have trouble multi-tasking (listening and taking notes), but be sure to get permission from your professor first.

After Class

1. Review the notes you took during the lecture, or listen to the lecture if you recorded it.
2. If you have questions once you're looking over your notes, send the professor an email right away, or ask a classmate. If you wait too long you might forget your question!

Preparing & Studying for the Exam

1. If your professor offers an extra study session, ***go!*** You might gain valuable sample questions or other tips.
2. Compile your notes into a cohesive unit, making sure to only include the topics that will be on the exam (because you don't want to study extra material if you don't have to).
3. Associate terms with concepts. Grouping can help you compartmentalize the material so it makes sense.
4. Make practice questions with ~~fill-in-the-blanks~~. After studying for a little while, see if you can answer the questions without looking at your notes. Task your classmates with creating questions that you can swap and answer.
5. Create flashcards and carry them around with you. Whenever you get a free moment, take them out and study.
6. Regularly review the test material in short sessions throughout the unit you'll be tested on.
7. As you get closer to the exam, schedule study sessions and stick to them. Avoid cramming. Overlearning material will be extremely beneficial for open-ended tests.
8. Remember, this is not strictly about memorization; it's about *learning* the material and being able to connect the dots.

Taking the Exam

1. Put your name on the test and read the directions carefully. Take a deep breath and relax!
2. Read each question carefully, and look in the question for key words and hints that will help you answer.
3. Fill in the answers that you definitely know first.
4. If the question is short answer, make sure you put enough information to fully answer the question.
5. Go with your instinct. The first thought that comes to mind is most likely the right one.
6. When you finish, check over the answers for things like spelling, capitalization, and that you put the answer on the correct line.
7. Make sure you don't leave anything blank—guessing (especially if there are choices) can earn you extra points.

Parts of the above information compiled from "Becoming a Master Student" by Dave Ellis.