

COPING WITH INFORMATION-HEAVY COURSES

An effective strategy for coping with courses that have a lot of factual material to learn (like introductory Psych or Soc, or many science courses) is to integrate a weekly review session for those subjects into your regular time plan for the week.

Begin by reviewing and editing the week's lecture notes. Be sure you understand everything that you've written down, and that your notes are complete and legible. Highlight important points and keep a list of possible exam questions. Do the same for the notes you've taken from your textbook, or the sections you've highlighted. Then, integrating the information from the lecture and text notes for that week, write a one page summary of the main points. Imagine that you're preparing for an exam and this is the "crib note" or "cheat sheet" that you'll use to study from.



The next week, begin by reviewing the one-page summary from the week before. If there are some points you can't remember, go back to your textbook or lecture notes and review them. Then edit and integrate your lecture and text notes for the current week as described above, and write the summary for that week.

The third week, begin by reviewing your summary sheets from BOTH the first and second week, and then edit, integrate and summarize the week's material as described above, and so on through the semester, always beginning by reviewing the summaries right from week one.

The key to making this strategy work well is to keep up with the review sessions - they must be done faithfully each week - and to review the weekly summaries, starting with week one, every time. By the time you get to the fifth or sixth week of classes, you'll probably be spending over an hour doing the weekly review. But, when you begin preparing for the midterm, you'll have significantly reduced the amount of time needed to relearn material that would have been forgotten, because the weekly review has kept the material fresh in your mind. In effect, you've been preparing for the midterm since week one, but doing so in relatively painless, small, distributed amounts instead of one marathon pre-exam cramming session. The result is less stress and better retention and understanding of the material in courses that are information-heavy.