

Don't Cram for that Exam!

Maximize your studying success

Your short-term-memory does not have enough space for all you need to know. Cramming overwhelms your long-term-memory (where well-learned material is stored), and it can set you up for panic and "blanking" on your test.

Organize a Long-Term Study Plan

- Use a monthly calendar to record all of your upcoming tests, quizzes, and other assignments. Transfer all of your due dates from your syllabus at the start of the semester; update as needed.
- Decide how far in advance you should start preparing for each exam. Mark the "start date" on your calendar. As you get closer to the exam date, schedule specific tasks, such as "create study guide for chapter 2;" "create self-test on chapter 3;" "bring questions to a tutor;" etc.
- Read textbooks effectively throughout the semester, and take notes on your readings. Don't plow through reading; survey and record chapter headings or key ideas and terms first. Then read to understand them.
- Review your class notes on a regular basis throughout the semester. Schedule a time before or after each class to do so.
 - During your regular review, update an outline of main topics and sub-topics to build a study guide, which helps you to avoid procrastination as you prepare for your exams.
 - You can also create concept maps as you review your notes, to highlight key ideas and organize the material. See the reverse of this handout for examples.
 - At the beginning of each review period, do a brief recap of the previous period's material. You can also use this strategy as you begin your shorter-term study plan leading up to a test.

Create a Short-Term Study Strategy

- **Create Connections:** Exams require you to demonstrate that you have accumulated a large amount of knowledge over time. Therefore, in order to build and maintain a solid information network in your long-term memory, focus on how the ideas you are learning relate to each other or concepts you already know.
- **Make your Memory Muscular:** Exams require you to retrieve and **use** information from your memory. Therefore, study actively: answer questions, solve problems, write essay answers, define, explain and apply terms, and work through past exams. Exercise your brain!
- **Master Material Multi-Modally:** To store information in your long-term memory, challenge different parts of your brain to use it through different senses: sight, sound, touch! Try converting material from one form to another: take notes as you read, convert text to a concept map, read highlighted text aloud, use color-coded flashcards, write a paragraph about a diagram, and explain the steps to a practice problem aloud as you solve it.
- **Practice with a Partner/Group:** Practice solving problems and explaining concepts to each other. Challenge one another and ask questions just as your professor will on the exam.
- **Simulate Exam Conditions:** Generate a practice test similar in the number and type of questions that might be on your exam. Budget your time for each question, problem or section as you would on an exam. This will show you what areas you might need to study more closely and will ultimately help you feel more comfortable during the exam.

 **Ballotti Learning Center**
Suffolk University · Donahue 208
617.573.8235 · learningcenter@suffolk.edu

Research shows:

- The amount of **time** you spend **effectively** studying determines how well you learn the material. **Plan ahead** to allot enough time!
- It is easiest for your brain to **understand**, **retain** and **retrieve** material that is well-organized.
- Your brain contains networks of related ideas. Generating **clear connections** not only keeps the ideas organized, but also stores them in the long-term memory.

References:

Mooney, J. & Cole, D. *Learning Outside the Lines*. New York, NY: Fireside. 2000.

Proctor, B.E. et al. (2006) Study Skills Profiles of Normal-Achieving and Academically-Struggling College Students. *Journal of College Student Development*. 47(1) 37-51.

Don't Cram for that Exam!

Maximize your studying success



Short- and Long-Term Strategy: Concept Mapping

Creating concept maps is a great way to organize and demonstrate relationships between pieces of information. See the examples below for ideas on how to create your own maps.

Figure 1 Demonstrates how sub ideas relate to a main idea.

Figure 2 Demonstrates the stages of a cycle.

Figure 3 Demonstrates the phases in a process, ie: the Birth of a Star.

Figure 4 Demonstrates a comparison.

Figure 1

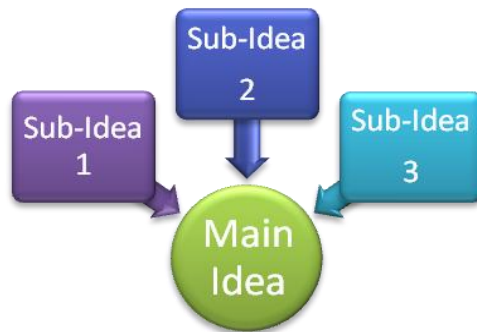


Figure 2

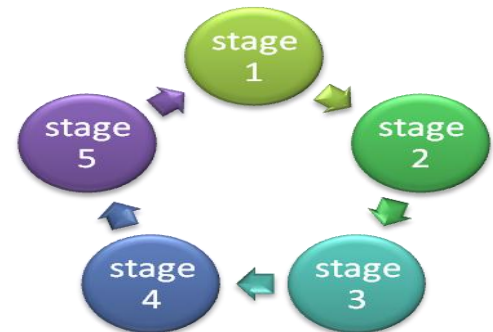


Figure 3 – The Birth of Star

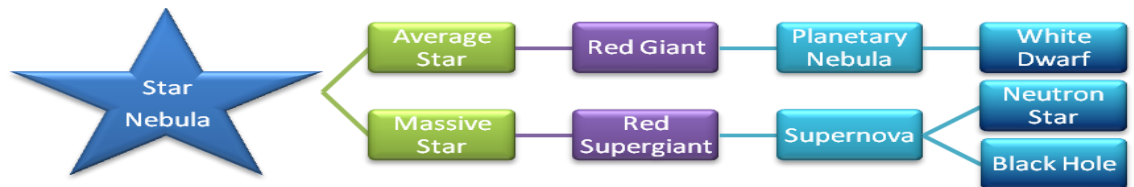
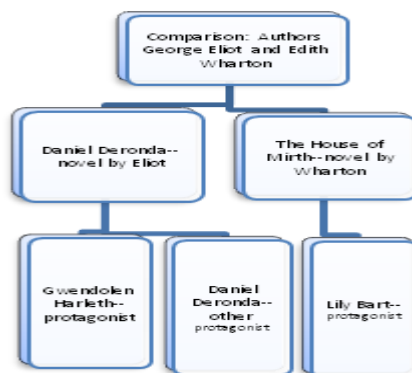


Figure 4 – Comparison of Two Novels



Keys to Effective Mapping

- **Take Your Time:** The act of generating a well-organized map is just one part of the process. Giving yourself time to actually study your map will make it a useful tool.
- **Multi-Modal Methodology:** Most of your course content will require more complex versions of the maps above. Taking a multi-modal approach to studying your maps by explaining the connections aloud by yourself or with a partner and writing about them will help you learn the material and store it in your long-term memory.

These maps and many more are easily created in Microsoft Word using SmartArt or at www.bubbl.us and can be modified to reflect a variety of connections. You can also draw your own maps in any way you choose!

To Create an Effective Map:

- Organize your information by asking yourself these questions:
- What type of relationship do I need to demonstrate?
- How many levels of information will I need? (Label clearly and leave room for your map to grow as you learn.)
- Could I use color help distinguish or unite ideas?
- Could I use shapes or symbols to distinguish or unite ideas?