

Advice for Various Types of Exams

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PROBLEM SOLVING EXAMS

- Write down tricky formulas, equations and rules as soon as you get to the exam.
- Read through the exam, noting point-values, easy problems, and problems you may have difficulty with. Start with easy, high-point questions and budget the rest of your time accordingly.
- Don't dwell on problems you can't work out – return to them if you have time.
- Show all steps clearly and label your answer so that it's easy to find.
- Check and double-check computations.
- When time is running out, jot down solution plans for questions you haven't finished for possible partial credit.
- Possible strategies if you get stuck:
 1. Using trial and error
 2. Brainstorming
 3. Breaking problems into parts
 4. Working backwards
 5. Asking for clarification

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAMS

- Practice with old exams, or work with a friend to make up your own exam questions, to get used to budgeting time.
- Answer questions in order, marking doubtful answers and rechecking them if time permits.
- Read all alternatives before deciding on the best answer.
- Read carefully for qualifying words such as NOT, SOMETIMES, BEST, SOME, MOST...
- Try to think of your own answer before reading the possible answers; choose the one that best matches yours.
- Watch for multiple ideas in true/false statements. All parts must be true or the entire statement is false.
- Convert information into a graph, diagram or equation if it's easier to understand before responding to the question.
- Note whether you're penalized for guessing, and guess (or don't) accordingly.

OPEN BOOK EXAMS

- Clarify whether you can bring books, notes, or both.
- Attend class so that you have the best idea possible what will be asked (based on what your prof thinks is most important).
- The key to open book exams is to be familiar with the format, layout, and structure of books and/or notes you bring with you, so that you can find the information you need quickly.
- Highlight sparingly, take notes in margins, or find other strategies that will help you locate information.
- Prepare around the themes of the course.
- Most open book exams are essays – see previous page for essay exam tips.
- Answer the question: resist temptation to just copy all the information on a given page of a textbook – be concise, synthesize, analyze rather than summarize, draw connections between texts.

TAKE HOME EXAMS

- Make sure that you know the exam pick up and return dates, times and locations.
- Scout out the best place to take the exam; if this is in your room, warn your roommates that you need an extra-quiet environment.
- Organize your notes ahead of time so you won't spend all of your time looking for the relevant materials.
- Work at the time when your concentration level is at its highest. Taking breaks will also make it easier to focus.
- Most take home exams are essays – see previous page for essay exam tips.
- Take care to cite sources – there's often a higher expectation to do this when you have the luxury of time.
- Work on your own. Do not ask for help from classmates or tutors – this is your exam, it's expected to be your work, and the consequences for academic dishonesty are significant at Grinnell.