Studying for Problem-Based Tests

Before Each Class

Read the assigned chapter prior to class and take notes. Then, try to work out some of the practice problems in the book, even if the answers are given. If you’re having any difficulties, make a note of the issue and take it to class with you.

If the problem isn’t addressed in class, ask your professor during the lecture, or take the problem to office hours.

- Compare the notes you made in class with the notes you made during your reading. Is there any overlap? If there is, this you’ve likely identified an important concept that will appear in your homework or on the test. Be sure to know how to solve these types of problems.

- Work all of the assigned homework problems. If you’re having issues with a problem, mark it and consider looking to academic resources for help. Academic resources include tutoring services, your Supplemental Instruction leader if you have one, or your professor during her office hours.

- Finish the problems you’re comfortable with before looking for outside resources, so that you utilize your time efficiently.

- Once you finish your homework, go ahead and prepare for the next class session (see “Before Each Class”).

After Each Class

Before the Test

- Begin studying for a test when your professor assigns it. Remember that problem-based tests are usually cumulative, so it’s very important to make sure you understand the concepts the week they are addressed in your class. Otherwise, the foundation you’re building the rest of your knowledge on is shaky at best.

- Go through your homework problems, quizzes and previous tests if you have them. What questions did you get wrong? What did you lose points for? Rework each problem until you get it right. You may find it helpful to write out the steps next to each problem as a way of committing them to your memory.
Before the Test (continued)

- If possible, take at least 24 hours before studying for the next class period. Your brain needs time to relax.
- Create flashcards or a study sheet with all of the formulas you need to know. Commit these to memory.
- Based on what your professor says will be covered, create a practice test from your study materials. Include problems similar to, but not exactly the same as, the problems covered in class, your homework and on quizzes.
- To avoid “context clues” for these problems, write one problem apiece on flashcards, shuffle them, and complete the problems in random order. Your test will likely be a mix of problems, so you want your studying to mimic reality.
- For your practice test, aim to make it the same amount of questions and length of time as your real test. That way, you have a feel of your ability to complete the test in time. If you run out of time, consider making a plan that allots a certain amount of time to each question to keep you on track.

During the Test

- As soon as you get your paper, write down all of the formulas you might need at the top of the page. This way, you’ll have an accurate guide to reference if you are feeling overwhelmed during your test.
- Do the problems you’re confident with first. If a problem is taking too much time, mark it and move on.
- If you have a Scantron, fill it out as you go. That way, you won’t run out of time and make mistakes as you quickly fill in your answers at the end.
- Once you’ve gotten to the end of the test, revisit the questions you did not complete or are unsure about. Starting with the unfinished questions, work through what you have left.
- If you cannot find an answer to a question on a paper-based test, work through the steps until you’re confused. It’s possible your professor will assign partial credit. Do not leave anything blank.
- If you cannot find an answer to a multiple choice test, pick a random letter answer as a guess. If you guess on more than one question, be sure to answer with the same letter. It’s more likely that you’ll get one of them correct.

After the Test

- If you get your results back, go over the questions you missed. What went wrong? Try working the problem again. If you still get the wrong answer, consider getting help.
- Remember, tests are usually cumulative. If you do not make sure you understand what you did wrong, it’s very likely that you’ll do poorly on your next test too. Don’t let the semester get away from you by ignoring the results of one bad test!