

Common Exam Errors

Error 1 Answering with the wrong list or the wrong concept.

Cause: Memorizing material as separate lists and ideas rather than getting an overall view of the material by organizing it on study sheets and learning it as an organized mass of material.

Error 2 Writing a sketchy answer.

Cause: Skimpy lecture notes and skimpy study sheets.

Avoid by taking complete lecture notes and making complete study sheets.

Error 3 Answering a question in the wrong way.

Cause: Careless, hasty reading of the question and the desire to write about what you have studied, whether or not the professor asks about it.

Avoid by reading the question well, marking and numbering its parts, and referring back to it from time to time as you write. Ask the professor to clarify difficult questions if this can be done without giving away the answer.

Error 4 Not knowing the key terms either as they appear in the question or as they are needed in the answer.

Cause: Neglecting to isolate and learn key terms throughout the semester.

Avoid by writing key terminology on lists or cards and learning what these terms mean before the exam.

Error 5 Not knowing how to apply the material from the course to new situations (occurs in math and science as well as in liberal arts classes).

Cause: Not thinking enough about the material being learned during the semester.

Avoid by inventing original examples, applying what you have learned to new situations, looking for fresh relationships, and writing your insights and ideas in brackets in lecture notes, textbooks, and on study sheets.

Error 6 Leaving out important material such as parts of the question, supporting details, or ramifications and implications.

Cause: Not reading the question well enough and not knowing how much information to include in the answer.

Avoid by writing all you can that is relevant to the question. Use plenty of detail and examples. Reread questions when you have finished writing your answer to check whether you have answered all parts.