

Rutgers Learning Centers Reading Strategies Study Guide

What follows are some reading and test preparation strategies for General Psychology, which are also useful in preparing for exams in other courses.

Your goal is to work smarter, not harder. These tips will help you identify what is important from class lectures and assigned readings, and test your understanding of the material.

Whatever you do, spend time working *actively* with the material. Simply reading and then re-reading the material is not an effective strategy. Nor is highlighting your textbook. Also, start sooner rather than later. More (shorter) sessions of *distributed* studying work better than a few (longer) sessions of *cramming*.

Identifying What Is Important

One way to identify important information is to look for the way it is organized. Anytime you come across a group of related terms, you must not only name and define each of them, but also describe how the terms are related to one another. For example:

What are the different types of operant conditioning and how are they characterized?

What are the types of common vision disorders and how do their symptoms compare?

What are the different types of reinforcement/schedules of reinforcement and how do they differ?

What are the different types of memory and how are they tested?

A related question on the exam might look like this:

I have learned to open my umbrella in order to stop the rain from soaking me.
What type of contingency led to this learning?

- a. positive reinforcement
- b. negative reinforcement
- c. punishment
- d. negative punishment

Drawing Out Differences and Similarities

After you have identified how the information is classified, you must also identify relevant similarities and differences between one concept or idea and other related concepts or ideas. For example:

How does classical conditioning differ from operant conditioning?

How does episodic memory differ from procedural memory?

Explain how negative and positive reinforcement differ?

Explain the difference between an algorithm and a heuristic?

A related exam question might look like this:

The concept of working memory is almost synonymous with

- a. long-term memory.
- b. episodic memory.
- c. procedural memory.
- d. one's current sphere of attention.

Posing Questions

Merely memorizing terms and definitions is not enough. You must be able to **apply** them. One way of doing this is to pose questions to yourself as you read your textbook or listen to a lecture. The more you are able to answer your own questions, the better you will comprehend the material. For example:

What occurs in the cones of people who are color-blind?

How do Gestalt principles apply to hearing?

How would you use the method of loci to remember a grocery list?

How would a social-learning theorist explain a child's learning to smoke a cigarette?

A related exam question might look like this:

Jake, a fly fisherman, finds that he gets an average of five bites per 50 casts. If getting bites is reinforcing, he is:

- a. on a fixed-ratio schedule of reinforcement.
- b. on a fixed-interval schedule of reinforcement.
- c. in a negative reinforcement situation.
- d. on a variable-ratio schedule of reinforcement.

Recognizing Examples

You must also be prepared to name examples of ideas, theories, or concepts. For

example:

What are some examples of omission training?

What are some examples of episodic memory?

What is an example of vicarious reinforcement?

What are some examples that a behaviorist would be least likely to study?

A related exam question might look like this:

Memorizing a list of locations and using them to help remember a list of names is an example of:

- a. serial learning.
- b. a mnemonic device.
- c. implicit memory.
- d. retroactive interference.

Recognizing the relationship between a theory, the phenomenon it explains, and how the researcher(s) carried out his or her experiments.

Like many survey courses, you must acquaint yourself with the seminal work of prominent researchers in the discipline. Accordingly, you'll have to know:

- The names of the researcher(s)
- The theories researchers are known for
- The experiments researchers conducted
- The significance of the researchers' findings
- How the researchers' work is related to other theories

A related exam question may look like this:

What did **Thorndike** mean by the **Law of Effect**?

- a. Changes in an animal's level of motivation can alter its speed of learning.
- b. Responses that are followed by reinforcement become more probable.
- c. The easiest way to train an animal to do a difficult trick is to start with easier tricks.
- d. The rate of responding depends on the schedule of reinforcement.

To sum up, the more you actively engage the material, the more you'll increase your comprehension and long-term memory for the exam. How do you know when you are prepared for the exam? You'll know when you're able to recite and elaborate upon the material from your textbook and lectures, using the techniques listed above.