

Student Success

“There is no secret ingredient!” --Po, Kung Fu Panda

Accountability: Put together a study team of 2-4 classmates, or at least have ONE “study buddy”. Plan at least one meeting with your team or study buddy at least a few days before every exam. **Plan** those meetings ahead of time so everyone is prepared to contribute when you meet: assign specific tasks/items to each team member, know who is supposed to bring which tools, and hold each other accountable.

Studying: **Effective Strategies:** Peer teaching, “chunking” --Research repeatedly confirms the value of these techniques.

Ineffective Strategies: Highlighting, repetitive reading --Research repeatedly shows that repetitive reading is not a very useful study tool. Highlighting CAN be useful but is often badly done. You really need to be able to restrain yourself and **highlight minimally**. It’s document-ably more effective to take good distilled notes (more on that below).

Additional materials: Complete any other assignments or activities related to the reading material. Also, take an active role in your own learning--look to Google and YouTube for outside resources related to the topics you’re studying. Find videos and articles that explain concepts or demonstrate skills. Your instructor can suggest authoritative websites that can serve as launch points for learning about EMS topics. (Share good finds with the whole class! Consider making a list of these kinds of resources for everyone’s benefit. In a hybrid class, consider asking your instructor to set up a links page in your online classroom for these resources.)

Notes: Do your assigned reading AHEAD of the class! **THIS IS IMPERATIVE.** If you can’t be bothered to read ahead, you are always going to be “chasing” the material from behind. So:

Have some blank index cards at hand. Read a section or paragraph of your assigned text. Then raise your head from the text and ask yourself, “what is this really trying to say to me?” Try to distill those 1 or 2 **main ideas** down to 2-3 sentences, and write those down in plain language, like you were telling a friend about what you read. Leave some white space after that (we’ll come back to this), and then read/interpret the next section or paragraph, the same way. While you’re reading, write any unfamiliar terms on one side of an index card. When you’re done reading and making your notes, go through your index cards and write the definitions of the terms on the back side of the index cards. USE PLAIN LANGUAGE for your definitions. These flash cards are going to help you keep this material in your head long after the lecture. The act of writing them helps, and then referring to them helps again.

“Chunk” your reading: When reading highly technical stuff like medical texts, it’s helpful to break down the task into smaller, more manageable “chunks” or pieces. For instance, if you have to read a 40-page chapter within the next week for class, you might plan to read & make notes/flash cards on 10 pages each day for the next 4 days. Then, take a break for a day and let things “marinate”. Then go back and read through your notes and go through your flash cards. **Do not re-read the chapter!** ...But use your text to look up your flashcard terms or to research other related questions that pop into your head.

Before the lecture, try to write down 2-5 questions that you’re still unsure about. Write those questions on index cards, one question per card.

The lecture: Bring your notes and your questions to class. Bring some extra index cards, too. During the lecture, in the white-space you left after your notes on each chapter/section, add any new information/tips that you learn about that particular topic. Also make a list of any additional new terms you hear or learn in the class—you’ll need to make flashcards for these after class to add to your collection.

After the lecture, take a break and let your reading & lecture “marinate” again for a few hours or a day! Then go back through your flash cards AND your notes. Again, **don’t** try to re-read the chapter—you’ve already read it. But use your book to look up anything in your notes that you’re still hazy about!

Last piece: Meet with your study team or partner before the exam. Again, have a plan as to what will happen during the meeting, and hold everyone accountable for doing their part. Review EVERYONE’S flash cards and notes, or use these to play a game (Jeopardy, Are You Smarter Than An EMT, Assessment Scrabble—whatever you all come up with!).

Get a good night’s sleep before the exam. Skimming notes & flashcards on the last evening or morning is ok, but relax! --You’ve already done the work.

General Test-taking strategies:

- Look over the whole test before you start. Don’t read it in detail or worry about the answer options, but **look through the questions**. This can show you recurring topics or themes, and one of the questions may “trigger” an answer for another one that you get stuck on. Your subconscious will continue to work on these more difficult questions while you are working on the easy ones first.
- “Memory dump”: if you’re allowed to make notes on the exam itself, or on scratch paper--as soon as you’re allowed to start the test, but before you begin answering questions, write down formulas, equations, or terms you’re worried about forgetting.
- Always try to answer the question in your head before you even look at the possible answers! THEN look, and see if one of the choices aligns with what you were thinking.
- Then look at the OTHER answer options, if there are any, and try to explain to yourself why each of those is NOT the correct answer.
- Go through the whole test, answering only the questions you are certain of.

- Start again at the beginning. This time, spend a little more time on these more difficult questions.
- Look for absolutes like “MUST” or “COMPLETELY” or “ALWAYS” or “NEVER”. These are often seen in True/False questions, and are almost always FALSE (because really, not much in life is absolute, right? 😊). Absolutes are also seen in multiple choice questions, and these will usually NOT be the correct answer, as there are many exceptions to most rules. When you see one of these qualifiers, test for truth by substituting its opposite. If your substitution makes a better statement, the question is FALSE; if not, the question is TRUE.
- Qualifiers that are not so absolute, like “generally” and “usually”, by contrast, are usually TRUE.
- In True/False statement questions, remember that if ANY small part of the answer is not true, it’s ALL FALSE.
- Look for negatives like “EXCEPT” or “Which of the following is NOT...”. Be clear on what the question is actually asking you! In multiple choice tests, these questions will have a pattern in the answers of “one of these things is not like the other”. Look for the “other”; that will be the answer.
- CIRCLE key words (like those above), especially if you know you are the type of test-taker who frequently misses questions “because I *thought* they were asking...”
- If two answers are very similar, neither is likely to be the answer.
- Trust yourself! Your first instincts are usually correct. Do NOT change an answer unless you are SURE that it is wrong!
- Answer ALL questions. Unless there’s a penalty for incorrect answers, you have nothing to lose by answering a question.
- Don’t agonize over any question for longer than 2 minutes. If you’re not sure by then, move on and come back to the question later.
- Consider the questions from the instructor’s point of view. Remember when you distilled your reading down to the main ideas for your notes? What were the main points that the instructor wanted you to retain about this topic?
- Try to rewrite difficult questions in your own words. This can help your subconscious access the answer.
- A “Hail Mary” trick: look for grammatical inconsistencies between the question and the answer choices on multiple-choice questions. A choice is almost always wrong if it doesn’t make a grammatically correct sentence when combined with the question stem.

EMS-Specific Test-taking Strategies:

- Sometimes ALL the answers to a multiple-choice question on an EMS exam can look reasonable. In those cases, try to determine what would come FIRST, or NEXT, or what would be MOST important.
- Answers that consider SCENE SAFETY or AIRWAY are often correct answers.
- In scenario questions, you will be given enough information to make your decision. Circle key words, pay attention to vital signs, and recognize the difference between pts breathing adequately (might need O₂) vs inadequate breathing (will definitely need a BVM). This can narrow down your answer options right away.
- Pay close attention to **units** of reference in drug dosages and other measurement questions. There's a big difference between "40 **mL**" or "40 **mg**"; on the other hand, there is NO difference between 500 **mcg** and 0.5 **G**.

References:

Bean, John C. **Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom, 1st Edition, 1996.**

McCallister, D., and Warren, W. **EMS Department Study Guide. Daytona State College, 2020.**

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