

# Prepare for a Test: Make Your Own

Mr. Burke/Fall 2001

**Overview** What is on a big test is rarely a surprise if you take time to think about it. Sure the teacher might throw in a few curveballs, sneak in a few questions you had not expected, but most of the time what they ask will be no surprise if you are prepared. The following steps will prepare you for any a quiz or exam in any class. This exercise get you ready for your exam, but will also show you how to be an effective student. One last point: Though this seems like a long and complicated process, you soon begin to read and listen differently, identifying those events and ideas likely to be on the test as you read.

**Step One** **Gather Essential Information.** Ask the teacher what will be on the test and whether it is permissible to use notes, books, or other tools (e.g., calculator, dictionaries, computers) on the test. Here are some ways you might ask such questions if your teacher does not offer the information up front:

- “Could you please tell us what to expect on the test so we will know how to prepare?”
- “Will this test cover all that we have studied this whole semester, or just the units from this quarter?”
- “Would you be willing to allow us to prepare a page of notes or perhaps use our book when we take the exam?”
- “Could you tell us how the test breaks down: Are there multiple choice questions? If so, how many? Short answer? An essay question? Any matching?”
- “Will you be offering any study sessions or additional materials (e.g., study guides, old tests, outlines, suggestions) prior to the exam in order to help us prepare?”
- “When preparing for the exam, should we focus on anything in particular?”

**Step Two** **Assemble Available Resources.** Prepare to create your own exam. To do this you will need the following materials:

- all your notes, chapter study guides, and old tests and quizzes
- the textbook or other primary documents/texts on which the exam will be based
- study guides, word lists, or other preparation materials your teacher has given you to help you prepare for this specific exam
- your answers to the questions in step one: i.e., *will you be able to use notes in class? If so, that might determine what you should study and the format of your notes*

## Probability Continuum

When evaluating the likelihood of a question or information appearing on the exam, consider the following probability chart to help you decide:

0%                      25%                      50%                      75%                      100%  
Impossible   →   Unlikely   →   Possible   →   Probable   →   Certain

**Step Three Identify Likely Test Items.** Follow these steps to create a working draft of the exam which you can then use to prepare you for the real exam:

- Read through old tests and quizzes and, using the Probability Continuum above, ask “Will this question/subject appear on the exam?” If the answer is “probable” or “certain,” then write down the question or the fact.
- Go back through your notes and study guides and look to see what your teacher has emphasized. Look at each new topic and ask, “Will my teacher include a question or have me write about this?”
- Use your textbook (if you have one) to identify crucial information, events, or ideas likely to be on the exam. Look in the following places for such information, then ask: “Will my teacher include this on the exam?”
  - Chapter preview/overview at the beginning of each chapter
  - Section headings (e.g., “Greece: The Age of Democracy”) and subheadings (“Democracy: The Origins of the Idea”)
  - Bold words in the text (e.g. vocabulary words)
  - Chapter study questions and other guides, reviews, and resources listed at the back of the textbook. (Note: If the publisher maintains a web site for the book, check to see if they offer any practice questions or additional study guides).

**Step Four Create Your Own Exam.** At this point you should have a list or outline of probable questions that will appear on the exam. Time to make your own practice exam. I suggest you write the test in outline form. Leave an extra wide margin (1/3 of a page) so you can make notes or reminders as you study. Then write down the correct answer (or leave space for it). Here is an example:

- Which of the following is the proper definition of *democracy*?
  - **Answer:** Government by people who are elected by the population.
  - **Clue word:** *demos* = people.

**Step Five Create Your Own Essay Question.** If there is to be an essay portion to the test, develop some likely essay prompts. Keep in mind the following:

- Essay prompts ask students to explain, discuss, or reflect on the meaning or importance of a subject.
  - **Example:** Discuss how the main characters in the books we read this semester changed. Include in your discussion not only how they changed but why; moreover, provide specific examples of how they changed.
- Essay questions do not have simple answers. While they may ask you to agree or disagree, they always ask you to explain, discuss, or defend your idea.
  - **Example:** Democracy as we know it today is not the same as the democracy created by the Greeks. Agree or disagree. Be sure to support your thinking with examples from our studies.