

Learning Resource Center Study Skills Handout - #5

How To CRAM – *Even though you should not*

Know the limits of cramming. If you have not studied in any of your courses and have daydreamed through all the lectures, cramming will not help. It might help raise a grade if you have been reasonably attentive in class, taken fair notes, and have read or skimmed most of the material for the course. The purpose of cramming is only to make the best of a bad situation. Cram to get by in a course so that you can do better the next time – do not rely on cramming.

Please, recognize the following:

- Cramming is not really the same as learning.
- When you rely on cramming, you cheat yourself of true education because you won't remember what you crammed.
- Material learned in cramming sessions is generally unavailable to recall after one or two days.
- Cramming is more work. It takes longer to learn material when you do it under pressure. You cannot save time by cramming.

Having been warned of the limitations and costs of cramming, you still might use this four-step cramming process:

1. ***Make choices*** - Don't try to learn it all when you cram. You cannot. Instead, pick out a few of the most important elements of the course and learn those backwards, forwards and upside down. Resist the temptation to go over everything lightly. If you cover a lot of the material lightly, chances are you will recall none of it during the exam. Be courageous and choose a few important items. A good rule is to spend 25% of cramming time learning new material and 75% of cramming time drilling yourself on that material.
2. ***Use flashcards***. Jot down important facts you need to know on a flashcard. Later you can drill yourself using the flashcard.
3. ***Recite the material***. The key to cramming is recitation. Recitation will burn facts into your brain like no other study method. Go over your material again and again and again. Repeat aloud what you have chosen to study until you are confident that you will be able to recall it.
4. ***Relax***. Since material studied while cramming is not learned well, you are more likely to freeze or forget it under pressure. Use relaxation techniques to reduce test anxiety. During the test, do not beat yourself up about being unprepared. Give yourself permission to do the best you can.

Remember: knowing the limits of cramming can save you valuable time in the future.

Good Luck!

Ellis, David B. (1985). **Becoming a Master Student** (p. 163)