



Study Technique: Layering

News & Announcements

Exam Prep Workshop

On November 27/28, 2004, we are running another 6-hour weekend workshop for high school students preparing for exams.

In this practical and informative workshop, students will learn how to:

- ▶ Overcome Exam Anxiety
- ▶ Organize for Studying
- ▶ Approach Different Question Types

Knowing how to study for exams is a skill that takes time to develop. When students are taught simple exam prep strategies and put them into practise, they can begin to take control of their learning, and become more engaged and creative with their approach to the course content.

Dates: Saturday, Nov 27 9am-12pm
Sunday, Nov 28 1pm-4pm

Location: Clearihue C115,
University of Victoria

Cost: \$120

Pre-registration is required.

For more information, check online, or contact us!

Feedback from June's Exam Prep Workshop

"My ability to prepare for and write exams has improved as a result of this workshop."

"I chose this workshop because I thought it would help me learn how to study for exams, and it sure did!"

by Ruth McGhee

"Memory feeds imagination."

Amy Tan (1952-)

There's a great scene in the original *Shrek* movie which occurs just after Shrek and Donkey depart on their mission to rescue Princess Fiona. As with all good journeys, this one is replete with conflict and tension as the hero and his sidekick get to know each other - a fiery chasm, a rescue and a dragon still looming before them. The exchange goes like this:

SHREK: For your information, there's a lot more to ogres than people think.

DONKEY: Example?

SHREK: Example? Okay, um, ogres are like onions.

DONKEY: They stink?

SHREK: Yes. No!

DONKEY: They make you cry?

SHREK: No!

DONKEY: You leave them out in the sun, they get all brown, start sprouting' little white hairs.

SHREK: No! Layers! Onions have layers! Ogres have layers! Onions have layers.

You get it? We both have layers.

DONKEY: Oh, you both have layers. Oh. You know, not everybody likes onions. Cake! Everybody loves cakes! Cakes have layers.

Shrek is trying to communicate the layers of his depth and complexity through his use of the onion simile. Well, good study habits are like ogres, onions and cakes: they have layers, too. But cultivating good study habits takes time, and sometimes the hard work stinks - like onions - and maybe the thought of it makes you cry. It takes work. In the end there is the prize that inevitably comes

from hard work: the cake - made of layers, of course.

The idea of layers is helpful to explain a method of studying which essentially builds knowledge and understanding. Each time you take in a specific body of information constitutes a layer; the layers build on one another, and with each layer comes a deeper level of understanding.

For any given concept - be it literary, scientific, mathematical, or in any subject - a goal of five or six layers is optimum. There is ample research on how the brain retains information to support the idea that successive layering of information increases likelihood of retention.

Most students give, at best, two layers to a concept: one when it is introduced in class, and the second during a study session a week (or less!) before an exam.

By adding more layers in between, students have much greater success recalling the concepts at crucial test time. The greater reward, of course, is the learning that takes place and the good study habits that are developed. So, here's a suggestion of what those layers might look like.

Students might think that the first 'layer' is laid down in class, when a new concept or idea is introduced. However, it would be better if there were already a foundational layer in place; **reading the assigned chapter in the text book, or the section dealing with the new concepts to be covered, should be your first layer.** Pre-reading gives you a base on which to build.

About Us

Our Mission Is:

▶ To provide top quality, flexible learning support and service to students and parents of students through:

Superior private tutoring matched specifically to each student's needs and stimulating workshops.

▶ To enhance students' skills and increase learning confidence through individualized support, recognizing each student's unique abilities.

▶ To improve the quality of life, in individuals and communities through education.

Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals. Each is carefully screened and selected to match individual students' needs.

We help students to achieve.

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While it may be challenging reading - some of the ideas might be completely over your head - you are putting the relevant terms, images and ideas into your head, ready to be elaborated upon in class by your teacher.

Logically, then, **the second layer is established when the concept is introduced in class.** If this had been the first time that you heard the information, you would have little or no prior knowledge from which to measure your understanding. However, with the information you have read beforehand floating around in your head, you will already have questions about what is what. When the teacher raises the idea in class, you can begin to put the pieces together.

Reading through your class notes at the end of the day constitutes the third layer. This needn't be any complicated analysis of ideas or terms; rather, it should be a straightforward 'once over' to see what you get and what you don't get. Put question marks or a star beside those things you don't understand, so when you are next in class you can ask to have them clarified or re-explained.

At week's end, **for the fourth layer, gather together your class notes to establish an 'overview' of the topics covered.** Read through your week's notes, and begin the process of highlighting, underlining and noting the important information included in your lessons. This kind of overview will help you to develop a bigger picture of what is being covered in the subject: you will begin to see the themes or broader topics that have been addressed in class.

Once you have completed the overview of the fourth layer, it is helpful to move right into **the fifth layer: make a condensed version of your notes - either on index cards or a separate**

sheet of paper, emphasizing key terms, definitions, ideas, dates, and events, formulae, etc. Highlighting or color coding can help: key terms in one color, definitions in another, examples in a third color, important events or dates in yet another, and so on. Read through the index cards or study notes as soon as you make them, to help secure this fifth layer in place.

If these layers constitute a layer cake, then **the sixth layer is definitely the icing.** By the time you get to preparing for exams, you have already exposed yourself to the information five times! In the weeks running up to the exam, you can **go over your index cards or study sheets regularly to fix those ideas in your head.** You will want to find ways to organize your study notes/cards into 'chapters' or 'themes' as they were introduced in class; exams often follow these themes in some way or another.

For some subjects, there is just no getting around straight memorization of facts, terms and definitions; for others, you need to be able to understand concepts in order to apply them to new situations. If you only give yourself one or two chances to secure a body of information in your mind, you can hardly expect to really learn it or be able to apply it.

The more times you return to an idea, the higher the likelihood of retention - even after the exam! Imagine that! The prize - the tasty layer cake you have made - is not passing the exam, it is the learning that has taken place.

"The stream of thought flows on; but most of its segments fall into the bottomless abyss of oblivion. Of some, no memory survives the instant of their passage. Of others, it is confined to a few moments, hours or days. Others, again, leave vestiges which are indestructible, and by means of which they may be recalled as long as life endures."

William James (1842 - 1910)