

PowerPoint Exam Preparation and Execution

For many students, exams not of traditional paper and pencil format create un-necessary stress and anxiety. These emotions are not helpful and are not really necessary. The purpose of this short monologue is to provide students with approaches to preparing for this sort of exam so as to remove the anxiety and free up the student's brain for optimal success.

On typical paper and pencil exams, students often receive 60 multiple choice questions to be completed within 60 minutes: a minute a question is the general rule for exams across higher education. On Powerpoint exams, each slide is timed for automatic advancement to the next slide. The time provided per slide is written at the top of the slides. Those slides without a time are defaulted to 1:00 minute for that slide. PowerPoint exams are different from pencil and paper exams only insofar as the reading of the question is concerned: the work and scribing remains the same.

Different kinds of questions receive different amounts of timing: "matching" kinds of questions don't take as long as "fill-in-the-blank" kinds of questions; questions that require extensive calculations require longer slide times, as well. How are the slide times determined, then?

This is a three part question as it depends on your professor and on students and their peers. Your professor takes the exam before it ever gets to the classroom and times how long it took him to complete each question. When that time has been recorded, the slides are then timed at three times the amount of time your professor needed to answer the question, e.g., if a question required 1:30 for a calculation, then the slide is timed for students for a minimum of 4:30.

Your professor also walks around and/or visually scans the classroom periodically during the exam. He is looking for question completion behavior, e.g., pencil laid down, doodling on scratch paper, head on arms, while watching slide times. If all students have completed the question well before the time is "up" for that slide, then he knows to reduce the time for that question for the future.

The third part is once the times have been determined empirically (data based), the professor totals the time for the total exam to see if it fits the allotted exam time slot. Slide times are not reduced to fit the slot – questions may be adjusted for time reduction to fit the exam time slot; slide times, though, *may* be increased to fit the exam slot at the professor's discretion.

So, what can you, the student do to prepare for this type of exam? First of all, get a good night's sleep before the day of the exam; eat and exercise properly and regularly. Refrain from any mind-altering chemical utilization during the course of the semester and, specifically, for at least a week before the exam. Do not cram just before the exam – stick to your 3 hours a day, every day outside of class, study schedule that you've established. If others are cramming around you just before the exam, find a quiet place so you don't get confused, frustrated, irritated, ad nauseum, by the chaos circulating around you. Bring some 80% minimum dark chocolate with you to the exam and munch on it ahead of time: research is clear that it helps you relax. For others, l-theanine may be of help to reduce your anxiety, or green tea.

Make sure that you've completed EVERY problem in the assigned problem sets and know how to work them in your sleep, as well as any variation thereof. These kinds of questions and variations are clearly gone over in lecture and are in the prepared lecture downloads for you to easily access and apply to homework.

Make sure you know the terminology from the field of study: each field has its own unique language and not knowing that language will catch a student who has not taken the time to learn the language.

Make sure that you've thoroughly been over the lecture downloads and have also completed and read thoroughly the lab experiments as they are also testable. Thoroughly, BTW, means "read to study", not "read like a novel for fun".

When taking a PowerPoint exam, also pay attention to "road map" questions. These are questions that are designed to assess your problem solving, inductive reasoning, information recall and critical thinking skills and are marked as individual questions within a cluster or group of questions that all depend on the previous question or questions. When you see that there will be a cluster of questions, use your scratch paper wisely: be systematic in your problem set-up and result markings – those who turn the scratch paper every question without some sort of labeling will get lost in their work and lose their structure/sequence and be unsuccessful in those endeavors. Learn to write small and neatly so that you don't get lost in your hand writing – it's very easy to do when balancing equations, e.g., your professor commonly "loses" his "S's" and "5's" in reaction balancing and pays extra attention to those kinds of details. Use both sides of the scratch paper – and fold it in half for ease of use and difficulty in another's ability to look at and copy your work.

Make sure that as you go along that you scribe your answer on your Scantron card – there is no additional time at the end of the exam for that – once the exam is over, it's over and is to be turned in on demand. Make sure you bring your Scantron card with you: no Scantron, no exam. If you bring extra Scantron cards, make sure you are compensated for it if you choose to provide a Scantron card to a classmate (during final exam week at UNR, Scantron cards go for as much as \$20 apiece between students!), and make sure you don't short yourself. As you may have surmised, there is no "going back" to change an answer on a PowerPoint exam. This actually helps student grades: 75% of the time, when students change answers, s/he changes it to another incorrect answer – by not "going back" you don't increase your risk for an incorrect answer. Go with your first instinct if you are not 100% certain and commit to it. This exam format also helps prepare students for "Board exams" down the line, e.g., R-NCLEX, USMBLE, MCAT, where responses are not returned to on the computer screen.

Lastly: wear a watch with either a second hand or a stopwatch so that you can also keep track of time for each question: it's easy to get stuck on one part of a question that is for 3 minutes only to look up and see another question on the screen at the front of the room.

PowerPoint exams are very doable: keep your wits about you and think calmly. Be prepared by studying properly in advance and you won't have any difficulties with this exam format: the converse is equally as true. Be on time, as you will not be admitted once the exam has begun. Remember Pat Parelli's 7-P's for success.