

Common mistakes made on exams (and some solutions to them)

1. Misread the question or overlooked key facts given in the question

Don't get flustered during the exam. Slow down; focus on each word of every question. Identify the question and given information. Underline or write down key facts in an ordered way that helps you understand what information you are given and what answer is being requested.

2. Could not recall factual subject matter or key term(s)

Study regularly between exams. The following measures will help:

- a. Before each lecture: Look at key figures in the text or in articles. Reading the book chapters before lecture can help make the lectures easier to understand because lecture will not be the first time you are exposed to the information.
- b. Within 24 hours after each lecture: Re-read your notes and compare them with the PowerPoint slides from that lecture. If anything seems confusing, clarify by reading the textbook, article, or checking with the T.A. or professor.
- c. Each week: **Actively** review your notes and PowerPoint slides. Active reading means that you locate the key concepts and list them in order. Create clusters of ideas and organize them spatially based on their relationships into *concept maps*. Fill in your knowledge by reading the textbook. Look at the PowerPoint slides for each topic and make sure you understand each key topic covered in lecture.
- d. Before each exam: Test your knowledge by taking the discussion quizzes and old exams without looking at the answer key. Design and answer questions from classmates. Treat this as a trial run for the real exam. Find your trouble spots and review those topics again.

3. Incorrect or unclear reasoning or lack of organization, needed to see the big picture (for questions regarding processes or sequences, forgot some steps or confused the relationships between steps / elements)

a. Draw concept maps or flowcharts. Application questions often require more time to answer. You will proceed more rapidly if you already have concepts linked in your mind. Sometimes multiple answers seem true. In this case it may help to determine which answer **MUST** be true versus which answer is only sometimes true.

4. Did not understand the language or precise meaning of the question.

Reading comprehension may be hurting you in these cases. Improve by reading the textbook and other reading material as often as possible. Look for key ideas in each question and focus on the information related to those areas. Do not get distracted by extraneous information.

5. Unable to apply information from class.

The best way to do well on application problems is to solve as many practice problems as you can in every possible variation before the exam. One way to practice is to meet with a classmate(s), each person should bring some questions, and then practice answering each other's questions.