

PROBLEM SOLVERS

By Paul Bello | Contributor

10 tips to help cram for that exam

Let's say you need to study for — and pass — an upcoming exam for certification as an Associate Certified Entomologist (ACE) or Board Certified Entomologist (BCE), or your state license. But you work all day — and each night offers limited hours to eat dinner, spend time with your family, rest for tomorrow's full day and, oh yeah, study for your upcoming test.

No one wants to waste time on study methods that don't really work. Two common methods that may cost more time than you can afford to spend are:

- **Highlighting.** We have all spent time highlighting “important information” in books. We highlight this information so we can refer to it later. However, we may be cheating ourselves because realistically, we rarely take the time to revisit this information. While it's OK to highlight, don't depend on this method alone.
- **Repetitive reading.** Experts disagree on whether reading and re-reading information is a viable way to learn and remember it. Research indicates this method takes more time than students might think before it works.

WHAT DOES WORK

Here are 10 suggested methodologies that may help you attain your passing grade goals for the tests ahead:

- 1 **Begin with the end in mind.** For example, if the test is going to be 60 percent on insect physiology, it would be wise to devote a representative quantity of time on that subject area.
- 2 **Use annotative study.** This is merely a fancy way of saying you take notes while you study. What you're doing is actually *writing down information that's important to you* as you're reading and studying. Research shows taking notes helps you remember and learn in a time-efficient manner.
- 3 **Use page tabs.** Place tabs on the pages in your reference books where you find important information. It's wise to print a key word on the tab so it truly is a



quick reference — not just “the yellow one” or “the pink one.” Remember, you're doing this to save time as you study.

- 4 **Develop a study habit.** Habitual study means you keep to a schedule. Of course, keeping to a schedule may be difficult for the adult learner because schedules are so hectic each day. However, if you really want to attain your goals, you already know you're going to need to make a suitable time commitment to succeed. As such, set aside a reasonable amount of time each day or week and stick to your commitment.
- 5 **Create flash cards.** Using flash cards works when you're actively writing your own cards and using them numerous times to quiz yourself.
- 6 **Write your own test questions.** You're limited only by your imagination, although it is best to write test questions in the same format as the actual test — multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, open-ended essay, etc.
- 7 **Post study sheets.** Prepare single-sided, one-page, informational sheets on a certain topic — a list of insect orders and families, for example. Of course, these sheets need to be legible, so it is likely best to prepare them using your computer and printer. Post these sheets where you'll be able to see them often.
- 8 **Use the correct references.** Always check for a list of study references, subject matter, books and similar resources. The exam administrators may provide a comprehensive list of study resources from which the test subject matter is drawn.
- 9 **Get a study coach.** Enlist the assistance of someone you can ask questions of. Ideally, it should be someone you can learn from for those areas or subjects with which you may have difficulty.
- 10 **Fail to plan? Plan to fail.** Remember that anything worth having is worth the effort to attain it. Commit to your study plan, and good luck. PMP

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