Exam Techniques

1. Preparation Techniques

• Make 1-page (letter size!) notes (main points only) for each topic
  That is, make review notes. Do not just read through the book etc. - there is
too much information to assimilate.

• Use mnemonics where appropriate ("CUALOI"). Really helpful if your memory is
  not that good.

• Imaginary journeys are also good for memorizing (e.g., C cycle - imagine you
  are an atom of C and the different places you might go).

• Make simplified diagrams - they are easier to remember than reams of text in
  textbooks.

2. Exam Room Techniques

• If the exam asks for 4 questions, answer 4 at all costs: points are not
deducted for incorrect statements (may have a marginal impact). You would
probably get one point for at least attempting the question (out of a 6 point total,
one point is relatively important).

• Many exam questions are in multiple parts. Try to take "the question" to
  pieces and see what the different parts are. Then answer these in turn, if
  possible.

• Use brainstorming: on the back of the exam paper or exam book, write down the
  question topic (or part question topic) underlined and then jot down everything
  and anything you can think about that topic or sub-topic.

MindTools WebPages:

http://www.mindtools.com/page3.html

Scroll down to find the arrow button leading to the next two pages (Memory Techniques and
Creativity Tools, including Brainstorming)

Studying Techniques:

http://webusers.xula.edu/dhogue/studyhints.htm

Many students study for their exams by frantically reading their textbook and memorizing their notes
the night before the big exam. This is probably the most stressful and the least effective way to study.
Nonetheless, many generations of students have studied this way, even many of your teachers who now
tell you not to do it this way did it that way themselves!

Psychological research has shown that distributed practice is more effective for learning and memory
than massed practice (more commonly referred to as "cramming"). What does this mean?
Simple. Studying a little bit everyday for several days is more effective than trying to study everything all at once.

Perhaps the most necessary component to effective studying is having complete and organized notes. If you have not read the note-taking section above already, then go read it now. Not later, now.

Here are some hints for distributing your study time more effectively:

METHOD #1:

1. Calculate the minimum amount of time necessary to study. A good estimate is 20 minutes of studying time per hour of lecture, therefore one week of class would require at least one hour of study time. More complex, higher level, or courses outside your major may require more time. Lower level or simpler courses may need less time. Be flexible and willing to add more time if necessary.
2. Study only one unit or chapter at a time, then take a break. What works for many students is to study for 45 minutes then take a 10-15 minute break. Other students prefer to study for 20-25 minutes followed by a 5 minute break. These breaks are vital! Give your brain some time to process the information, and give your body a break from sitting still. Get up, walk around, drink some water, eat an apple or banana, then go back to studying.
3. Limit yourself to studying the material from a class to two hours at a time. It is better to study a few hours per day for several days than to study for several hours in one or two days. If you calculated that you need six hours of studying time, then start studying at least three days before the exam.

METHOD #2:

1. Take a few minutes before each lecture to review your notes from the previous lecture. This helps to remind you what has already been discussed in class as well as review the information for future studying.
2. Begin studying at least FOUR days before an exam. Small quizzes require less time. Large tests or final exams may require more time.
3. You should have been reading the textbook as class progressed, or at least scanning the textbook before each class. If not, then go read the section on note-taking again.
4. Day One (1-2 hours): Review the textbook and read any unread sections. Review your notes and check for consistency with the textbook.
5. Day Two (1 hour): Study your notes. Look up any incomplete or vague information in the textbook.
6. Day Three (1 hour): Study the text. Re-read sections which are more complex or difficult. By Day Three you should have some idea of what information you find difficult, so concentrate on that.
7. Day Four (1 hour): Study your notes. By Day Four, everything should be familiar to you. If anything looks or sounds new, then review that material again in both your notes and the textbook.
8. Exam Day. Review your notes prior to the exam, but you should not be trying to memorize information. The review before the exam should be to refresh your memory, not memorize for the first time!

There are many ways to study for exams and quizzes, and you need to learn which methods work best for you. Use these suggestions as a starting point and adapt your own methods to suit your needs.

Other factors which affect your ability to study effectively and efficiently include adequate rest and energy, a good place to study, and complete and well-organized notes.

Studying when you are exhausted and frustrated at 3:51 AM is not effective. Do not try to study when your body is telling you to sleep. Study when you are alert and awake.

Studying when you are hungry (or "starving") is not effective. Studying requires energy. Your brain
uses glucose (a blood sugar) for energy, and when you study your blood sugar levels decrease, because your brain is using more glucose. That is why we feel hungry (or get the "munchies") when studying. Have healthful snacks available, such as fresh fruit, trail mix (nuts and dried fruit), pizza, or yogurt. Yuck? Well, Doritos and Coca-Cola are not world-renowned as brain food...

Studying while watching television, listening to loud music, reclining in bed or on the floor, in a dimly lit room, or at a party is not effective. The more distractions there are around you, the more distracted you will be, and the less time you will spend studying. Ideally, the place in which you study should be quiet, well-lit, relatively distraction-free, and at a desk or table and chair. Students who study in inadequate or inappropriate environments take more time to study than they should. MUCH more time than they should. This is definitely not efficient.

Finally, well-organized information is important, because you need to be able to identify what information to study. By now you have already read the section on note-taking above, so here are some additional ideas for organizing yourself:

1. Use flashcards. Put names, vocabulary, theories, and concepts on the front and an explanation or definition on the back. Do NOT cheat when studying. Turn over the card and look at the answer only after reciting the information to yourself. Or, better yet, do not even write the answer on the back of the card. Set aside any card which you do not know and look up that information after you have gone through all of the cards.

2. Use the "Two Page Method." Take two blank pieces of paper. On one page write all the vocabulary words, on the second page write all the names, theories, and concepts. Make these lists using both your notes and your textbook to ensure that they are complete. Do NOT write definitions or explanations on these pages! Set your notes and textbook aside. Go through each list one item at a time and define or explain it to yourself. If you do NOT know it or you are unsure if you are correct or complete, then place a checkmark next to that item and proceed to the next item on the list. After completing a list, look up any information with a checkmark and review it in your notes and/or textbook. Then set aside your notes and textbook, and go through each list again, once again putting a checkmark beside any information which you are not certain you know. Repeat this procedure until there are no more checkmarks, then you are done!

3. Write outlines of the chapters. This may be tedious, but it often helps students better understand the concepts and their relationships to one another. It also helps identify any information which may have been accidentally missed when reading the textbook the first time.

There are many ways to organize information, so find what works best for you!

(from http://webusers.xula.edu/dhogue/studyhints.htm)

Some words of advice from down under:

http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/study/examination_techniques.htm

Univ. of St. Thomas notes:

http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/

...scroll down to Taking Tests. A lot of good stuff here.