

Quizzes, Tests, and Exams

In your home country, college professors may test students at the end of the course. However, here in the US, most professors offer multiple ways for students to earn grades. Your syllabi will describe how you will be graded in each course, including quizzes, tests, exams, and mid-term and final exams.

Having just one test at the end of the year prompts a different style of time management and studying. Mastery is expected after all of the content has been reviewed over a number of months. On the other hand, if you are expected to turn in weekly homework and take frequent quizzes, tests, and exams, your management of the course material is quite different. You are working towards mastery incrementally. The terms quiz, unannounced (pop) quiz, exam, mid-term, final and comprehensive final may be new to you. While expectations may vary slightly among your professors, generally these terms mean the following:

Quiz: a short test over a small amount of material, such as a chapter.

Unannounced (pop) quiz: a test that will not be announced by the professor beforehand.

Exams: a longer test, covering a number of chapters or readings and class discussions and lectures.

Midterm Exam: a longer test that may cover the first half of the course content or that may just be scheduled at the mid-point of the semester.

Final: a longer test that may cover several chapters at the end of the course or the second half of the semester.

Comprehensive Final: a longer test that covers the content from the entire course.

Finals may be given the last day of class or during finals week. Quizzes, exams, midterms, and finals will usually test you on different levels of understanding. You may be asked to memorize definitions, formulas, and concepts. However, most professors also expect that you can apply this memorized information to new situations and problems. Therefore, you need to spend time working on the homework at first with the aid of your textbook and classmates. But as you work to prepare for exams, practice solving problems in the same manner as you will on the exam. In other words, if you are expected to memorize formulas for the exam, complete practice tests without the aid of your textbook and notes. International students often express surprise about their first round of quizzes and exams. That's a natural reaction to college testing whether you are a native speaker or non-native speaker. However, to prepare more effectively for testing, consider these strategies:

- Attend review sessions held by the professor, TAs, and SI leaders, you may see some sample test questions.
- Ask your professors for their policies about bringing an electronic translator to the exam. Some professors may just prefer that you ask questions about any word or phrase that is not content-related.
- Practice taking any sample tests provided by the professor, TA, or SI leader.
- Confer with the professor, and SI leader, and/or tutor about the best way to prepare for the exam.
- Review graded quizzes and exams with your professor to determine the best way to prepare for the next graded experience.