Tips for Maximizing Your Potential in Summer Orgo

Every year, we are asked a million variations on this question: “How can I improve my test scores?” While there is no “magic bullet” that can instantly make you ace the exams, below is a collection of strategies that we find help students get the most out of their efforts in the course. Not all strategies will work for each individual, but hopefully some combination of them will work for you.

1. **Plan your time wisely.**
   - One day of this class is roughly equivalent to one week of a typical class, so **DON’T TAKE ANY DAYS OFF!**
   - Expect to spend 60-80 hours/week working on this course.
   - Set up a schedule that allows you to study **every day** but still have some “mental health time” built in.

2. **Focus your studying on the purple book problems.**
   - You will do some purple book problems in section every day. After section each day:
     - Do all the problems that you didn’t have time to get to in section.
     - Print (or view online) a clean copy of the problems that were done in section and redo them.
     - Check the answer key only AFTER your work through the problems yourself.
   - Make sure that by the end of the week, you can complete **every problem from scratch.** This is not the same as looking over the answers and saying to yourself, “That makes sense.”

3. **Make the practice exams approximate the real exam as closely as possible.**
   - Sit in a quiet place and time yourself. Stop writing immediately at the end of 70 minutes.
   - If you don’t know the answer to a question, **do not give up!** Write something down in an attempt to get partial credit, just as you would on the real exam.
   - **DO NOT HAVE THE ANSWER KEY NEARBY WHILE TAKING THE PRACTICE EXAM!!!!** Do not use any test aids other than your model kit.

4. **Analyze and learn from your practice exam results.**
   - Once you have finished, take out your notes, purple book, etc., and make a second pass through the exam.
   - In a different color, make any changes/corrections that you can based on your notes.
   - Only refer to the answers on your THIRD pass through the exam. At this point, take out a third color and make any corrections that you need to based on the answer key.
   - You now have a guide to what you know and what you need to work on.
     - Everything you got right in the original color is stuff you are ready to be tested on.
     - Everything you got right in the second color is stuff you understand but need to study more in order to internalize.
     - The third color represents material that you need to work on/ask questions about.
5. **Make the reaction chart! We mean it!**
   - We’ll describe what we mean in the first week of class.
   - Make the chart twice. First, order it by starting material. Then, order it by product.

6. **Make use of the Help Room.**
   - Come to room 110 Tuesday-Thursday, 3-5 and Sunday, 2-6.
   - Get answers to questions that came up for you during lecture *that morning*. Do this on a daily basis to make sure you don’t fall behind.
   - Work through purple book problems there and ask questions as they come up.
   - Bring your annotated practice exams on Sunday afternoon and ask questions about the problems you missed.

7. **Take advantage of Melissa’s and Logan’s office hours.**
   - The course instructors love this material, and we’ve been teaching it a long time.
   - We really enjoy talking about orgo, and we’re really invested in helping you master it.

8. **Try out the Friday review questions BEFORE the review.**
   - Use the gap between lecture and section or between section and review to at least take a look and think about the problems.
   - Show up to review with potential solutions and questions in mind.

9. **Don’t spend a ton of time studying from the textbook.**
   - The textbook is a helpful reference. You should not attempt to read all of it.
   - Read or skim the textbook chapters *before* a topic is lectured on.
   - Only work through textbook problems if you’ve already *mastered every* purple book problem.
   - DO NOT worry about material that is discussed in the text but was not covered in lecture or the purple book. You are only responsible for the material we cover in class.

10. **Get a good night’s sleep before exams.**
    - The exams won’t just ask you to recall information. You will need to think and synthesize that information in new ways.
    - If you stay up all night cramming, you might know more info, but your ability to think will suffer.