

PREPARING FOR THE

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

To help you prepare for the Psychological Sciences Comprehensive (ETS) Exam, Loyola's psychology professors have compiled the following recommendations, suggestions, and advice. If you have questions about any aspect of the exam or require additional information, please speak with your advisor.

Resources on Blackboard (under Course Materials)

- Information about the content and format of the ETS comprehensive exam
 - Sample ETS questions
 - A full-length sample GRE Psychology Subject Test (useful study tool for ETS and Psych GRE exams)
 - Article by Boneau (1990) about field competency and a good read before taking a comprehensive exam
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Words of Wisdom

Dr. Mary Brazier

Obtain a GRE Subject Test Review (Psychology) and also study all of your notes from the courses you have taken. **See Blackboard for a Psych GRE sample test.**

Dr. Erin Dupuis

You should take this exam seriously. You will need to score at or above the 30th percentile compared to all students who take the exam nationally, in order to pass the course and graduate. The exam informs us about your knowledge in psychological sciences before you are sent off into the world possessing a Loyola degree. Do not try to cram three to four years' worth of knowledge into one night of studying. Break your studying up into segments, perhaps over a week or two. Review an Introductory Psychology text (you can usually borrow one from a faculty member), look over notes you have kept, and take any ETS practice exams you can find online. **See Blackboard for sample ETS exam questions.** If you are applying for graduate school, this exam may also be useful in helping you study for the subject exam in psychology (if the graduate schools to which you are applying require it).

Dr. Kim Ernst

Students are strongly encouraged to study all the major subfields of psychology, allowing enough time to avoid cramming the night before the exam. Borrow an Introduction to Psychology textbook to aid your exam preparation. Students also may find it useful to take practice tests provided in psychology textbook study guides. Also, the GRE Subject Test materials are usually available from most local bookstores and

on-line. You can also find sample exam questions from the Educational Testing Service, the administrators of the Psychology Comprehensive Exam at www.ets.org.

If you have not completed a course in a given area or subfield, this is probably not the time to try to learn everything about that area. Be aware, however, that preparing for the exam can easily complicate your semester because you have regular course demands competing for your time.

Psychology Professor Emeritus, Dr. Jerry Clack, always recommended that students use Boneau's article (1990) to help prepare for the exam. The citation for the Boneau article is as follows: Boneau, C.A. (1990). Psychological literacy: A first approximation. *American Psychologist*, 45(7), 891-900. **The article is posted on Blackboard** and can also be accessed via the following link: <http://people.auc.ca/brodbeck/4007/article12.pdf>. You can also obtain this article via PsycINFO accessible from the Monroe Library website. If you would like additional information about Dr. Clack's method of preparation, please let me know.

Please know that the department requires all psychology seniors to take the Comprehensive Exam two semesters before graduation. Thus, if students wait until their last semester to take the Comprehensive Exam and earn an unsatisfactory score, they may likely jeopardize their graduation plans.

Dr. Lawrence Lewis

The Comprehensive Exam is two hours long and consists of two sections with 70 multiple-choice questions each. Students are expected to bring several sharpened #2 pencils to the exam. According to the oral instructions provided to the examinees just prior to testing, there is no penalty for guessing. **See Blackboard for more details about the content and structure of the ETS exam.**

Dr. Kate Yurgil

Make a game plan! Build study time into your schedule and make it a habit to prevent last-minute cramming. Remember that distributed practice leads to better memory recall than massed practice! Choose a quiet study area to enhance focus and minimize distraction, and decide which topics you will review and in what order.

Use what you've learned! Use active encoding strategies over passive repetition or rehearsal. Some active encoding strategies include: using mnemonic devices, relating the material to real-world examples, using highlighters to draw your attention to key terms, and using multiple forms of input (e.g., text AND visual aid). Try teaching someone else to ensure you REALLY know the material. When you get tired of studying one topic, switch to a different topic – the switch releases old material that may be interfering with recall and makes it easier to remember new information. Resist the urge to skip material you *think* you know.

As exam day approaches... Get enough sleep! Sleep is essential for long-term memory consolidation. Avoid last-minute cramming as this practice leads to poor recall and is likely to cause anxiety. Instead, make time for relaxation and stress-reducing activities like running or yoga. On the day of the exam, set yourself up for success by giving yourself enough time to wake up, eat a good breakfast, and make it to campus with time to spare. Finally, take a deep breath and relax. You can do this!

Dr. Evan Zucker

Keep in mind that it is all multiple choice questions and covers the major areas of Psychology, reflective of a “typical” undergraduate curriculum. “Passing” is defined as achieving at the 30th percentile or better, meaning your total score is in the top 70% of all those taking this exam nationwide. It does not mean you need to get 70% of the questions correct.

I do recommend preparing for this exam. Minimally, review a current Introduction to Psychology textbook. There are some copies available in the Psychology office that you can borrow if you do not have one, and all faculty members have copies of books that they will probably be willing to lend to you. Be familiar with all the terms in the glossaries of these textbooks and know to which area of psychology they are relevant. Be familiar with the names of the major theorists and contributors and know to which area of psychology they are relevant. Do not forget about research design and statistics, particularly the basics of normal distributions, z-scores, and descriptive statistics (measures of central tendency and variability).

Relax! This test is important, but do not panic. Psychology is your major in college, and presumably, a major interest of yours, which is why you chose Psychology as a major. You know a lot – you are not trying to learn this material for the first time for this exam – you are reviewing and relearning. The material from courses you are currently taking should be fairly fresh in your mind – so start with older, less familiar material.