“I NEED HELP STUDYING!”
Sound Familiar? Here are some ideas to get you thinking about preparing for 1st semester exams starting January 13, 2009.

Part One: Manage Your Time

School is a full-time job. And managing your time is important.
How much time should you devote to studying? A recent survey in the Chronicle of Higher Education suggested that students are not studying enough. So, how much is enough? High school students should assume that their education is a full-time job, then they should spend about 25 hours/week on it outside of class.

You should spread that out over the week. Suppose you decide to study Sunday through Thursday evenings, taking Fridays and Saturdays off (from studying, that is). Dividing that 25 hours by those 5 days gives you 5 hours of studying per night. If you think that's too much, then plan on studying in the afternoons, too, or some of Saturday.

Part Two: Taking & Rewriting Notes

Good studying at home begins with good notes taken in class. Just as everyone has a different learning style, different teachers have different teaching styles: Some teachers lecture, some lead discussions, some “facilitate” individual work (as in a lab), etc. Consequently, different classroom settings will require different note-taking techniques. But the suggestions here are general enough to work in most situations.

The key idea of taking good notes in class is to write down as much as possible. There are several reasons to take notes that are as complete as possible:

It will force you to pay attention to what's going on in class.
It will keep you awake (!)
There will be less that you'll have to remember.

Should you concentrate on taking notes or should you concentrate on understanding what you are learning? Paradoxically, I'd err on the side of taking notes, not understanding! Understanding can come later, when you review your notes. But if you have incomplete notes, it will be hard for you to learn what you didn't take notes on.

Taking complete notes will require you to write fairly quickly and, as a consequence, to use abbreviations. If you send text messages on your cell phone, then you know the sort of abbreviations that you understand. Use them when you take notes in class! The key idea in abbreviating is to use abbreviations that will make sense to you. You can put an abbreviation key in the margin of your notebook for any abbreviations that you make up on the spot.

Yet another key idea of note-taking is that you don't have to be neat; your notes only have to be legible enough to be able to read your notes a few hours (or, at most, a few days) later.

If you have a question or something comes to mind as you're taking notes, you have two choices: You can contribute to the class discussion by asking your question, Or you can jot your question down and wait for the lesson to end to see if it's answered. One reason that you should always put your question or comment in your notes is so that you won't forget it; you can then always bring it up later, either in class or one-on-one with the teacher or a fellow student in a study group. One technique that is suggested to use to be able to distinguish my own questions or comments from the rest of the notes is to put them in the
By the way, if you have a question, especially if you need clarification of something that the teacher said or wrote, ask it! Do not be embarrassed about asking it! You can guarantee you that there will be at least one other student in the class (and often many more) who will be extremely grateful to you for having asked the very same question that they were too embarrassed to ask, and they will come to view you as wise and brave for having asked it.

DON'T JUST STUDY YOUR NOTES...REWITE THEM! Of course you should study your class notes at home; but just (re-)reading them is too passive. Studying must be active. It is all too easy when just reading passively to have your mind wander or even to fall asleep. Moreover, notes are often incomplete or sketchy; just reading such notes won't help. If you wait too long after you take them, they may very well be illegible or incomprehensible. Finally, if you don't do something active with your notes, you run the risks of having unorganized notes or of misplacing them.

The main idea behind re-writing your "raw" class notes (besides making them more legible and organized) is that the very act of copying them is one of the best ways of studying them! Further study of your class notes can then be done from these "cooked" ones that are neater, more legible, more organized, and more complete.

Use this opportunity to fill in gaps from your memory while they are still fresh in mind. You may find that you have questions, perhaps something you missed or don't understand, or even a "substantive" question. If so, good! Make a note of your question and ask it in class next time! Use this opportunity to (re-)organize your notes in a more logical or coherent fashion. You could write your permanent notes in an outline form that is suitable for you.

PART 3: ORDER TO STUDY & LOCATION

Study hard subjects first. Each night (or day) when studying or doing your homework, do those subjects first for which you need to be alert and energetic. Leave the easier, or more fun, subjects to later.

Study in a quiet place, with as few distractions as possible. Do not listen to music or TV: It is virtually impossible to do two things at once if one of them is studying.

PART 4: READ TEXTS ACTIVELY & SLOWLY Before & After Class!!

Read Actively, not passively. Don't just read the text straight through without thinking about what you're reading. If you read without thinking, I guarantee that your mind will eventually wander off, your eyes will eventually glaze over, and you will fall asleep—it's a form of self-hypnosis. So you must read actively.

Read Slowly. The first step in reading actively is to read s-l-o-w-l-y. If you still don't understand it, then re-read it slowly again.

Make notes in the margin. If you find that this is especially helpful, copy the pages you are reading and use the margin for any notes or hints that will help you when you review. It may seem a bit costly, but money well spent for those who cannot remember everything they read.

The best technique for active reading is to keep a notebook. In addition to (taking notes on a passage, copy it—verbatim—into your notebook. Be sure to write down the page numbers of each passage that you copy. Then, write down—at length and in detail—your comments on the passage. (use a pen for the text and a pencil for your personal commentary.) These notes can then be used later if you write a term paper or research paper that discusses the material in the text. etc.)

Read BEFORE and AFTER class. Read it (perhaps quickly) before the class in which it will be discussed, so that you are familiar with its contents. Then (re-)read it after class using the slow and active method. If time permits, you can cut corners by only reading it—slowly and actively—after class. NOW GET TO WORK! :-