

## SEMPER — A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR STANDARDIZED TEST PREPARATION

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Achieving your goal score on important standardized tests, e.g., LSAT, GRE, MCAT, and GMAT depends more on preparation and dedication rather than talent or learning some special tricks or methods. Examining and making improvements in your lifestyle as part of your preparation will help you earn the score you want on test day. Research the suggestions mentioned below for yourself before you decide to make any changes. Find sources you trust. We'll use the Latin word "SEMPER" as an acronym for Sleep, Exercise, Meditate, Practice, Eating, and Rest. Good luck!

**Sleep.** Don't skimp. Good deep sleep is when your brain incorporates all your study efforts. Research "sleep hygiene". This term sounds sort of funny, but it is the technical term MDs, DOs, PhDs, and other medical professionals use when they talk or write about healthy (and unhealthy) human sleep behavior. If you improve your sleep, your brain will work better.

**Exercise.** *Vigorous* exercise, e.g., some physical activity resulting in some muscle soreness, benefits not only your muscles, cardiovascular system, lungs, etc., but also your brain! That is, when your body repairs itself and grows stronger after *vigorous* exercise, all the hormones, growth factors, and general growing your body does afterwards also benefits your brain.

**Meditate.** Here, meditation is any mental activity we do to reduce stress. In particular, meditation is not necessarily a religious activity. Some formal meditation techniques are Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Mindfulness. There are many resources to learn about these and plenty of others forms of meditation. Developing some healthy technique of clearing your mind and reducing stress will only help you on test day. In fact, on test day when the test is physically in front of you, you will have several opportunities for a short meditation, e.g., right before you begin and during the short

breaks in between sections. Take advantage of these moments to effectively manage any test anxiety. “Test anxiety” is another good keyword. Research it too.

**Practice.** Get a lot of good example test problems. Go over each problem multiple times. Practice each day. Maybe take one day off per week. Consistently reviewing examples over 6 or 7 days per week is much more effective than cramming sporadically. Avoid memorizing the answer after you have reviewed the same problem several times. Emphasize the thought process. Approach problems like it is the first time you’ve seen them. The general problem solving strategies you develop while doing this will be what you apply to the specific fresh new problems on test day.

**Eating.** Your brain will work better if you improve your diet. Everyone of us can eat more healthy. Two things to consider are omega-3 fatty acids and caffeine. Research shows essential fatty acids are very important for our brains. ‘Essential’ in this context means that our bodies require these fatty acids but we do not synthesize them. In other words, we must ingest them; if we don’t, our bodies will not make them. If they are missing from your diet, your brain will work better after you include them in your diet. Research shows certain ratios of the different omega-3 fats such as eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) benefit different organs, i.e., one ratio may be better for your heart, while another is better for your brain. Another thing to consider is caffeine, which affects your sleep, concentration, memory, and anxiety levels. If you are a caffeine fan, make sure you’re not overindulging.

**Rest.** Don’t go bonkers. Make sure you take some time to enjoy doing the things you do for fun. Obsessing over your upcoming test will be counterproductive. Don’t let it consume you (too much)!

**SEMPER.** Sleep, Exercise, Meditate, Practice, Eat, Rest.