

## INFORMATION MATRICES

An information matrix is a technique for organizing information that will enable you to predict objective and essay questions on exams. It helps you generate questions from lecture notes and textbook reading that you can use in preparing for an exam.

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Consider this example: A student is enrolled in an introductory class dealing with several theories of psychology. An information matrix for this class might look like this:

	Rogerian	Psychoanalytic	Behavioral	Adlerian
What are the causes of mental illness?				
What are the characteristics of mental illness?				
What are treatments for mental illness?				

The student might find one of the following questions on the exam:

- "Discuss the causes of mental illness according to the Rogerian, Psychoanalytic, Behavioral, and Adlerian school of psychology."
- "According to Adler, mental illness might be described as... " (choose the best of four alternatives given)

In class, the professor may have lectured about the "causes of mental illness" according to the Rogerian, Behavioral, and Adlerian schools, but not the Psychoanalytic school of thought. The average student might object to the exam questions which included the Psychoanalytic school since it wasn't mentioned in class. The "A" student would have seen that there was a missing piece of information in the matrix and found it before the exam.

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Let's look at another example. The following matrix addresses characteristics of different kinds of grocery stores. The student originally prepared the matrix below:

	Location	Variety	Price
What are the characteristics of surplus food outlets?			
What are the characteristics of large chain retail food stores?			
What are the characteristics of single-family owned corner grocery stores?			

However, a better matrix could have been made... (*over*)

	Surplus Food Outlets	Chain Food Stores	Corner Grocery Stores
Where is the store located?			
How much variety does the store have?			
How expensive is the store?			

In the second matrix, the items being compared—types of stores—are across the top, and the questions about them are on the side. This matrix is better than the first one because a student can continue to add compare/contrast questions as he/she learns more about the subject. For example, the instructor might talk about *profit margin*. A student might generate this question for the matrix: "What profit margin does the store have?"

### Some Additional Suggestions for Information Matrices

1. Keep your matrices in the notebooks or folders in which you keep other course materials so that you can continue to add items to a given matrix during class or when studying for that class.
2. To help you see new relationships, do your matrices with a friend taking the same course.
3. Use the questions from your matrices to ask questions during class.
4. Practice reducing your matrices to smaller, key-word matrices or diagrams that you would be able to quickly reproduce for your exams. When taking an exam, more concise matrices will help you:
  - a. organize your writing under time pressure
  - b. remember what you want to say
  - c. earn credit for points about which you don't have time to write fully
5. Remember to avoid questions that can be answered by "Yes" or "No." A question that can be answered by Yes or No can usually be changed to one that requires a more complex answer.

For example: "Is it safe?" could be changed to "What kinds of safety factors are involved?"

An information matrix should have more complex questions, since you want to be sure to answer it as fully as you would be required to answer it on an exam.

