

-> Exams and exam questions. Since you are taking the course online, all of your exams are by default open book and open notes. For a traditional in-class exam, instructors can ask questions that test and evaluate how well a student has memorized basic facts and processes. For online (take-home) exams, however, students can simply look these answers up. As a consequence, take-home exams test how well the student can apply what they've learned to new questions and problems; where 'new' means questions that that students have to do a little more than just flip pages and look things up.

-> Here's an example of a typical exam question:

True or False: The sides of a cinder cone lie at the angle of repose.

If you've studied the topics for the exam, then you know what a cinder cone is, and you know what an angle of repose is, then the answer to the question should be straightforward. If, however, you are looking for a sentence in the book (or online), where it says that the sides of a cinder cone lie at the angle of repose – you aren't going to find it.

-> To help you focus on what you need to know, a Geology Study Guide is available for purchase through the LPC Bookstore. This study guide has almost all of the exam questions so that you can look up and/or figure out the answers before you take the exams.

-> If you try to take the exams before you've figured out the answers, you will probably not be able to figure them all out before the exam timelimit of 75 minutes.

-> Why are the exam timelimits 75 minutes? The online class is supposed to be equivalent to the traditional in-class course. In the traditional in-class course, we had 75 minutes class meetings and the geology exams were typically 100 questions. Some students would finish in 20-30 minutes, most students would finish in 30-45 minutes and a few students would take longer than 45 minutes. Now those were typical statistics for in-class exams, where students knew that they weren't going to be able to use their books or notes, so they studied and memorized and generally finished quickly.

For the online exams, most students are taking a bit longer, as they are not memorizing things that they know that they can look up. Looking things up during the exam, however, does slow you down. Therefore, I recommend memorizing some of the material, and/or organizing it onto easy-to-read note pages so that you can find the information quickly and with confidence - instead of stress.

-> What to memorize:

- For the Module 1 Exam, I recommend memorizing the basic names and dates of the geologic time periods as laid out in your Green Study Guide Geologic Time section. This amounts to a total of 7 words and accompanying dates. Read through the first few pages of this section in the Green Study Guide and then simply memorize this

basic time scale. If you do, this will reduce a tremendous amount of test stress during your Module 1 exam.

- Memorize the basic rock types of the three major rock groups (Igneous, Sedimentary and Metamorphic) when we get to each of those chapters. Again, if you simply memorize the 5-10 basic rock types in each category, then you'll find the exams much easier and simpler to complete.

-> To learn the course content and do well on the exams:

1. **Take notes** when working through the CD-ROM and textbook chapters. These notes will be your shortcuts during the exams.
2. **Work the exam questions in the Geology Study guide** before taking the online exams.
3. **Clearly tab or bookmark** important or useful pages in your textbook before you start the exam. Examples of pages to bookmark include the maps of the world that show the trenches or plate edges or worldwide volcanoes.
4. **Study the photos** in your textbook before taking the exam.  
**Run internet image searches** on the geologic features in the exam chapters and look at images from different locales and in different lighting.
5. **Make summary lists and charts** of some of the material before starting the exam. Examples would include a **quick-reference** summary Geologic Time scale with your own notes and info and comments on it. On one page for quick reference and ease of use during the exam. Another example would be to create a summary list of basic rock types separated into the three major rock groups. Summarizing that onto one side of one piece of paper will help relieve your stress tremendously during the exams.
6. **Take the exams early** – at least a week before the timeout dates. This will give you time to retake the exam if you discover that you really don't know the material as well as you had hoped. This will also give you time to deal with computer issues if they occur (and they will happen to some students). If you wait until just before a timeout deadline, that is your choice – and your risk. Remember, however, that the deadlines will not be extended if you wait and then something happens that prevents you from completing the exam.

-> **You have unlimited attempts** (until the timeout deadline) on the major Module Exams in this course. Your last attempt is what counts towards your term total. Always check your Blackboard gradebook and if your summary gradebook page shows a padlock symbol or exclamation symbol (instead of a numerical score), then click on the symbol and bring up a list of your attempts on that exam. Look at your last attempt, this is the

one that counts. If your last attempt shows a score, then those points should be in your term total at the bottom of your summary grade list. If your last attempt does not show a numerical score, then you have to retake the exam before the timeout deadline.

-> Your exams were created to be online (takehome) exams. Since the on-campus classes and the online courses are supposed to be equivalent, the on-campus classes take the same online exams that the online DE (distance ed) students do. That's only fair. Since the online students get open-book, open-notes exams, so should the on-campus students.

Therefore, the on-campus students are taking the online exams (the online DE students are not taking the on-campus exams). The reason I'm mentioning this is that while many students have succeeded very well in the online course, one student assumed that the reason that she was having difficulties was because the online and in-class exams were the same, which she *assumed* meant that the online students were being forced to take the in-class exams (which she thought was unfair).

So I want to be clear about this. The exams for this course were created for the online DE students. The exams were created with the knowledge that the students taking the exams would have their books and notes and the internet available to them, just as traditional take-home exams would. The exams were created so that they do not rely on information that can only be found in my on-campus lectures. Many, many students have taken this course and done exceptionally well in the online DE setting.

The on-campus classes are taking the online DE exams (not the other way around).

-> Of note, both the on-campus and online classes are following the same schedule and timeline and order of topics. This was done at the request of the students (both online and on-campus) who wanted to study together even if they weren't enrolled in the same sections.

-> Students who come to the campus and attend lectures do tend to have higher average scores. This is due to the fact that when a student attends class, my presentations focus their study time much more efficiently than most students do on their own. The material and information is very accessible in the textbook and on the internet and every semester many students prove that they can succeed in the course without attending the on-campus lectures. Every term there are students in the online DE course who have more than 1000 points by the end of the term (that's an A+).

For the average college freshman or sophomore, however, attending on-campus lectures is the simplest and most time-efficient way to learn the basics of the material. Most students procrastinate themselves right out of the course if they try to do it on their own. It's not that they aren't smart enough, and it's not that the course is too hard. The problem for most students (enrolled online or on-campus) has to do with time management and procrastination.

**My recommendations are:**

- If you enjoy studying alone, and you are good at making yourself study, and you do not procrastinate, then you can succeed in an online course where you have to be your own motivator and time-keeper.
- If you tend to procrastinate, especially with schoolwork, then you should look for ways to take classes on campus as often as possible.
- Take the Friday Geology 9 course. It's once a week and we cover topics for which there isn't time in the regular lectures (typically these are the homework topics). The Geology 9 course is typically a more relaxed setting where students have the opportunity to ask more questions that there is typically time for in the regular lectures. In the Friday class, students in the online DE class get to meet and talk with students who are taking the class in the more traditional on-campus setting.
- Always, always stay ahead of the deadlines. Finish everything at least a week ahead of the deadlines. This will reduce your stress and increase your confidence and enjoyment tremendously.