Studying as Applied Cognitive Psychology

I. Basic Principles from Memory Research

A) Organizing (actively dealing with) material increases retention.

B) Repetition increases retention.

C) Distribute practice – For better retention, do not cram all of studying, including repetition, into one time interval.

D) Periodically test yourself on material – and check correct answer. This helps recall as well as recognition memory.

For a web-video tutorial on applying these principles, go to:
http://www.samford.edu/how-to-study/

II. Applying these Principles

A) Go through course materials

1. Read text materials on topic
2. **Take notes** -or- elaborate on instructor's notes

B) Organize the course material. For example, construct your own outline of each topic in your own words. Check outline against course notes, text. Differences (omissions, mistakes) highlight points that you need to work on.

C) Do A) and B) at different times to distribute "encoding". For example, do A) before the topic is covered in class, then later read text again and do B) as you read it.

D) Test your comprehension regularly. Do the sample exam questions. Check your answers and make sure that if you get an answer wrong, you understand why (re-study what you miss). Work with a study partner and construct questions for each other.

III. Doing Multiple Choice Exams

A) With each question, eliminate alternatives that you know *can not be correct*.

B) Check what is left.

1. In 4 alternative such as examples below, if 2 of first 3 alternatives are still viable, check d) to see if it works with those two alternative.
2. If all of first 3 alternatives are still viable, check d) for all of the above.
3. If none of first 3 alternatives are viable, check d) for none of the above.
4. If only one of first three alternatives is viable, it is the answer.
5. If steps 1-4 fail, then you have eliminated an alternative that you should not have or you have failed to eliminate an incorrect alternative.

C) If stuck on an item, go on to the next question and come back later. Sometimes later items will help you remember information about the items that you were stuck on.

D) If, at the end, you still can not figure out an item, guess. (Only in situations where there is no penalty for guessing.)

Samples to illustrate strategy:

Reviewing previous research is useful for determining: a) what variables must be controlled and methods of control b) what theories have already been proposed c) how previous studies have been done d) all of the above

Which of the following should be included in the "introduction" section of a journal article? a) the hypothesis b) the apparatus c) the obtained results d) b & c above

Note that the correct answer for the first example is d and the second is a.