



## How to Maximize a Cheat Sheet

At UBC, some professors allow students to use a cheat sheet during exams! This video will explore what cheat sheets are, why you should prepare one for your course, and how students can maximize them to succeed in courses!

The term “cheat sheet” can be used to refer to a page or pages of information that students are allowed to take into exams. Professors may use other terms, such as “pages of notes” or “study sheet”. Before starting your cheat sheet for an exam, clear any doubts with your professor and make sure you are following all the required and established rules. If the cheat sheet violates instructions, there is a high chance you will not be allowed to use it, and this can put you at a disadvantage during the test.

### What is a Cheat Sheet?

As mentioned, each professor has their own policies when it comes to the definition of a cheat sheet. Here are some considerations when starting one.

- Size of the paper
  - Ensure you are not using poster paper when your professor only allows letter size!
- Number of pages
  - In some courses, a cheat sheet can mean a notebook of up to 10 pages, or it could be a single piece of paper. Sometimes less is better, being able to use fewer pages to summarize information shows that you can connect ideas and explain a complex topic in a concise way. Less pages also reduce time searching for information during timed exams.
- Double-sided vs single-sided
  - There is a tremendous difference in the amount of information that can be put on a double versus single-sided sheet. Avoid planning for two sides when only one is allowed!
- Handwritten vs printed
  - Handwriting a cheat sheet can have great benefits. Content can be abbreviated, and the layout personalized. Studies have shown that handwriting can help with memory retention too.
  - On the other hand, printed versions make it easier to erase, delete, and change the content. As well as moving the information from one place to another.
  - Both are great methods, just make sure to follow along with the professor’s instruction.

## Why prepare a cheat sheet?

There are many reasons why a cheat sheet is helpful even if it's only used to study and not during an exam.

### 1. Reduces Stress

- a. A cheat sheet is a great tool to help feel more confident in tests. In exams, it is a companion in case you have any doubt on certain topics. In closed-book assessments that don't allow cheat sheets, the process of creating one can help structure your studies and reduce stress.

### 2. More Prepared

- a. Creating a cheat sheet can also push students to review course material thoroughly and learn the concepts to express them concisely. This is especially important for timed exams with open question types like short answers or essays.

### 3. Useful for Future Exams or Courses

- a. Lastly, cheat sheets can be useful after an exam. For instance, the cheat sheet for Midterm 1 will come in handy when studying for Midterm 2 or the Final because it contains foundational or previous key ideas. Moreover, future courses could be based on content from previous classes so having a cheat sheet can help prepare for new courses.

## When should you start preparing your cheat sheet?

There is no specific timeframe on when to start cheat sheets. However, they require preparation and planning, especially if it's handwritten because it takes longer to edit. For exams, we recommend starting one week before; this way all the content is covered and there is time to plan, execute, and finish the cheat sheet! If the cheat sheet is used as a learning strategy, summarizing weekly from the beginning of the course could also be helpful.

Pause the video here to check out these helpful writing tips based on course characteristics!

Course Characteristic	Common Cheat Sheet Characteristic
Quantitative exams	Includes more formulas, graphs, and visual content
Essay-based courses	Tree diagrams; dividing novels per topic
Memory-based courses	Terminology, definitions, and examples; might include glossary in alphabetical order
History	Timeline and chronological order

Writing a cheat sheet for a university course can be daunting. Starting is the most difficult step. Plan with enough time and students might be surprised how much it helped with their studying!