**Context**

Two undergraduate students learn that the next mid-term exam in their environmental studies course will be short answers and essays, primarily focusing on recent lectures and chapters in their textbook on the effects of environmental pollution on the ecosystem. Neither students have prior experience in this subject area.

* **Emilie** is slightly worried, not only because the test is scheduled for the morning after the basketball play off game, but also because she is aware that essay tests are difficult for her. Although she sees herself as a competent hard-working student, she acknowledges this weakness in herself and knows that she will have to be more selective about the way she prepares for this test. She realizes that she must set aside ample time and that she should probably not study in her dorm room as she is likely to be distracted by her roommates. A few days before the exam, Emilie takes her textbook and notes to her favorite corner at the campus coffee shop. She likes to study there because the chairs are comfortable, the lighting is good, and the background noise and coffee help keep her focused. Emilie recalls that when she studies for a multiple choice test she usually begins by writing definitions for all the bold-faced words. However, she knows that studying for an essay test requires different strategies. Although it will take her a little longer, Emilie decides to prepare for the test by outlining the information from lecture and her textbook, and reorganizing it so that it can be more readily recalled. This strategy has been helpful in the past and Emilie is willing to take the extra time needed. While skimming the chapters, Emilie notices that the authors have presented the information by linking causes and effects. She divides a piece of paper into two columns, 'causes' and 'effects', and proceeds to fill in the information and compares it with information from her lecture notes. As she works through her outline, Emilie stops periodically to assess the progress she is making. Is her plan working the way she had anticipated? Is she maintaining her concentration? Is she understanding the content? Emilie judges that her understanding has been enhanced by visually representing the relationships among the concepts being discussed. After completing the outline, Emilie self-tests by drawing diagrams of the concepts to illustrate the relationships between events and outcomes in the ecosystem. During the next few days, Emilie reviews her outline and diagrams, and discusses her understanding of the concepts with her classmates. When opposing viewpoints arise, Emilie checks back with the textbook and notes, as well as consults with the teaching assistant about her confusions. The evening before the test, Emilie completes a final self-check before heading to the big basketball game; she wouldn't pass up a chance to cheer for her university team!
* **Monica** is also anxious about the test format because she is aware that she usually does better on multiple-choice tests. She's not really sure why that is, but judges that if she just studies harder she will be successful. She thinks if she spends a little more time than usual reading and rereading her notes and the chapters, and memorizing the vocabulary words, she'll be prepared. Monica doesn't make a conscious decision about when or how to study; she assumes she just needs to spend more time studying. She realizes that spending more time studying means she should start at least a couple of days before the exam. She reviews her flashcards of vocabulary words and rereads the chapters whenever she can; she attends the professor's review session where she sits quietly and writes down more notes to remember. She does notice that the test is scheduled for the day after the big basketball game and thinks that is unfortunate, if not a little unfair. She decides to study for a few hours before the game at the coffee shop because her friends will be there, and then will study all night after the game to increase her chances of recalling the memorized information. She really can't think of any other alternatives; missing the big game is not an option. The idea of planning her study approach, or studying a different way, never crosses her mind.