

How to Survive Exam Weeks

Do you find yourself panicking when you have several exams to take in a short period of time? Do you feel a lot more stress during mid-terms and finals?

If so, then the following suggestions should prove useful.

DEALING WITH TENSION. Expect a certain amount of tension. It is normal during an exam period. Actually a little anxiety helps to heighten your awareness and can enhance your performance.

1. **TAKE TIME TO RELAX.** Cope with your excess tension before and between exams through rest, exercise and deep muscle relaxation. For example, long walks or other physical exercise are excellent ways to release nervous energy and maintain your stamina for the duration of your exam period.
2. **ADOPT A POSITIVE APPROACH.** To avoid becoming too anxious, develop a “can-do” winning attitude.
3. **ANXIETY IS CONTAGIOUS.** Remember to keep away from people who are highly anxious before exams; their nervousness may tend to increase your own.
4. **PLAN REWARDS.** Schedule a meal, a movie, a game, a visit with a friend periodically throughout finals. Plan a treat when they're all done. These help keep your spirits up.

SCHEDULE FOR EXAMS. Prepare a general schedule. Write down the time of each exam and plan how much time you can allot to studying for each course; remember that your hardest course will require more time.

1. **START EARLY.** Schedule your study periods to avoid last-minute cramming.
2. **ALLOW LARGE BLOCKS OF TIME FOR STUDYING.** Block out hour spans for getting down concepts and basic relationships.
3. **ALLOW SHORT PERIODS FOR REVIEW.** Use the odd moments, in the shower or walking across campus, for recall and review. Run through the information frequently; this will ensure that you remember it and it will broaden your understanding.
4. **VARY WHAT YOU STUDY.** Don't study for two similar courses consecutively. It is better to break the pattern with a completely different study approach. For example, study chemistry and then French instead of chemistry and then physics.
5. **SCHEDULE BREAKS.** Respect your concentration span. Starting your exam period with impossibly long study periods is likely to leave you exhausted before it is all over.
6. **STAY WITH YOUR ROUTINE.** Stick to your normal daily routine as much as possible. If you do get off your routine and need extra time, avoid staying up all night; go to bed at your regular time and get up a couple of hours earlier than you normally would, to continue studying. You will be able to understand and remember more when you are rested than you would if you postpone rest.

THE NIGHT BEFORE. As you approach the first exam, and the time between exams,

1. **SPEND YOUR LAST HOURS CALMLY REVIEWING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED.** Try not to tackle new material then.
2. **AVOID STAYING UP ALL NIGHT.** The shorter you are on sleep the less clearly you will be able to think and write what you know on the exam.
3. **CRAM SELECTIVELY.** The night before an exam when you are more anxious than usual is one of the least effective times for study. Your ability to deal with concepts and synthesize material is greatly reduced, and even your ability to memorize is impaired by marked anxiety. Cramming only serves to make you more frantic about the exam and, hence, less prepared to do your best. If you do come up to exam time unprepared, use your last minute studying as a review of key concepts, instead of trying to learn it all. Be realistic about what you can accomplish: set priorities based on what you expect to be emphasized on the test. Stay calm.
4. **DON'T GO TO THE MOVIES.** Don't get involved in any activities that might either interfere with what you have been learning or make you feel so guilty that you come home to study far into the night to make up for lost time. **Review and relax.**

The Eight Step Study Plan

Step 1

- Find any old tests available
- Detect what material you will be responsible for on the test
- Divide the material into **FOUR EQUAL PARTS:** A, B, C, D
- Allow time to plan this to the best of your ability

Step 2

- Thoroughly review all material in Part A
- Write study sheets, in your own words, from your textbook and lecture notes
- Identify main points within this area and draw visual aids for clarity
- Develop questions about the material and quiz yourself

Step 3

- Repeat instructions in Step 2, this time reviewing Part B

Step 4

- Repeat for Part C

Step 5

- Repeat for Part D

Step 6

- Review Parts A & B

Step 7

- Review Parts C & D

Step 8

- Review all Parts A, B, C, D and pay special attention to problem areas

Test Day

- Use your very best test-taking strategies during the exam

Suggestions for Computational Exams

Some exams in courses such as chemistry, physics, accounting, statistics, and math require you to solve problems. The following suggestions have proven successful for test preparation in these subjects and in other subjects as well.

1. **PREDICT AND CREATE** your own practice test problems. Do this about 3-5 days before the exam by reviewing the problems done in class, the problems from the chapter (examples throughout and problems at the end of the chapter), the problems from old quizzes and tests, the problems from homework assignments, and the problems from worksheets. Then try to create and write your own problems—if you really understand a concept, you should be able to do this. If you have difficulty with this step, work with someone or ask the professor for sample problems.
2. **REVIEW AND STUDY** by summarizing in your own words the steps or processes for all the concepts or formulas which will be on the test. Do this several times without looking at your notes or the textbook.
3. **PREPARE YOUR PRACTICE EXAM** by typing it. Do this 2-4 days before the exam. If you are doing this with a partner, switch exams so you have two exams for practice.
4. **TAKE YOUR PRACTICE EXAM** without the use of any aids. Time yourself so you will be under the same time pressure situation as the test. Do this 1-3 days before the exam, or earlier if possible.
5. **CORRECT THE EXAM** to determine what you do know and what you still need to study. If you did poorly, plan to retake the practice exam one more time. Remember the importance of over-studying – the more you know the less you will forget, especially when studying a subject that is not a strength or is one you dislike.