

Study Tips for Final Exams

Studying for finals can feel overwhelming and exasperating. But if you take time to breathe, plan, and then stick to the plan, you can do well on the finals.

Before the Final Exam

1. Plan

Make decisions about what to study and when and where you will study.

What to study

- Maximize your time and efficiency by focusing on the most important information/concepts and what you don't know or get stuck on.
- If you know the material, review if you have time.
Accept reality. No input = no output. You cannot learn a whole semester's material in a week or a few days. So, don't attempt to do so. Use your analytical skills to determine where you can best put your time and energy. Beating yourself up mentally and emotionally over the decisions of the past semester only serve to interfere with your ability to concentrate, absorb material, and analyze effectively. Forgive yourself and resolve to study more effectively the next semester.

When to study. Establish a study schedule based on your course load and your peak performance times. Put the most difficult material at your peak performance times (i.e., math, biology, or chemistry for morning (if you are a morning person). Designate the majority of study time for what you don't know or need to clarify.

Where to study. Have a place designated for studying. Throughout the semester, if you consistently use the same place (a desk in your dorm room or house, a place in the library) and only study at that place, you will condition your mind to focus whenever you are in that place. Save chatting with friends, text-messaging, reading a mystery novel and so forth for other spaces.

If possible, reduce your work schedule if you have a regular, part-time job.

2. Prioritize

- What is most important to your major?
- What is most difficult?
- What is most needed to bring up your GPA?
- What do you know the least? Test your memory. If you find there are things you know, review or skip and focus on the things you don't know.
- Of the 700+ things you need to know for a class, scan to see what you already know and spend less time on those. Of those, you don't remember, use any of the study methods below that work for you and the subject.

3. Study

Types of study methods. Method depends on the subject matter.

- Memory work: Create acronyms or other mnemonic techniques. Break long memory lists into smaller sections. Try following the 7 plus or minus 2 rule. The brain can more easily remember lists of 5, 7 or 9 items. Analysis: Practice cause and effect explanations or problem-solution. Use whichever technique fits the subject.
- *Become the professor.* Try thinking through the eyes and mind of the professor. Create your own test. What is most important? What did the professor mention or stress? If everything seemed important, what do you—as a rational, intelligent human being—think is most important? Why?
- Review class notes, handouts, and online tests. Review the headings and subheadings in chapters (if a textbook was used in the course).
- Try writing an explanation of a procedure, math problem and solution, etc.
- *Use your imagination!* Try visualizing the problem, solution, process. If you can't do the whole thing smoothly, focus study time only on where you get stuck.
- Find alternative sources for information if you don't understand something. For example, do an online search for another university website in which a professor has taught on the same subject using visuals, a PowerPoint slide, or even a video. Make sure the site is reputable.

Length of study periods:

- About 90 minutes at a time, if possible, then a short break.
- Review in your head while driving to work or home or walking from the dorm to a class. Note for extra review anything that you stumble over.
- Include breaks, but be reasonable about them. For short breaks, consider taking a brief walk or do 25 jumping jacks, which will get your blood flowing and wake up your senses.

4. **Maintain** the study schedule, with a little flexibility. Learn to say "No, not now" to friends and family who ask you to get off your study schedule.
5. **Reduce stress** through dance, exercise, laughter, meditation, music, relaxation, and/or yoga. See the ULM Counseling Center website for information on affirmations, breathing, and relaxation techniques (www.ulm.edu/counselingcenter/schedule.htm).
 - Positive thinking through affirmations can help calm, energize, and empower you—if practiced before final exams.
 - Deep breathing before and during study and tests, helps the body relax and the brain to focus. Again, it's better to practice these before final exam week so they kick in faster.
 - Various relaxation exercises, like autogenic muscle relaxation, can help relax you both during study and final exams.
6. **Have balance** in all things: work, study, exercise, eat healthy, and plenty of rest! Our brains function better when we have a balance of all these.
 - a. Be flexible. Accept that occasionally some things will come up that will interfere with your study plans (dentist appointment, illness, events beyond your control).
 - b. Assert your boundaries with those who try to interfere with your study schedule, for example a boss who agreed that you would not work on Tuesdays and who then calls you on Tuesdays to work. Respectfully remind them of your agreement and explain about the test.
 - c. Know what works best with your body, mind, and spirit. We have internal messengers through our body that let us know when we need to study or rest. As you honor your body, mind, and spirit, you will tend to approach tasks with a calm attitude.
 - d. Eat healthy meals (whole fruits and vegetables, reduce sugar and excessive caffeine).
 - e. When you take a short break, get into your senses. Doing so will relax the mind and body and give you a mental break. If you take a walk, spend a few minutes looking at the sky, listening to the birds, smelling the air. You will feel more rejuvenated. If you are studying late and can't go outside, focus on a favorite object that has pleasant memories.
 - f. Get a good night's rest before the final exam.
 - g. Eat a healthy, nutritious breakfast before the exam.

During the Final Exam: Do's and Don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Be at the testing room with several minutes to spare.	Talk to your classmates or try to review. Doing so could just increase anxiety if a question you hadn't thought of is mentioned.
Take a few relaxing deep breaths, counting slowly while breathing in and just as slowly while breathing out (do only about 2-3 to prevent hyperventilating).	Allow your tension, if you have any, to remain. Do the breathing, muscle relaxation, and sensory techniques listed in the Do column to help calm yourself.
Do a few neck and shoulder relaxation exercises, very slowly without causing any pain, to reduce tension.	Scan the test when you get it to see what it on it, the value of each question.
Focus on pleasant sensory images or objects. Doing so will further relax you.	Plan briefly which questions you are going to answer.
Get your test-taking material out ahead of time, but don't focus on it.	If allowed to write on the test or a scratch sheet of paper, jot down one or two words for each essay question or question in which you immediately know something about it. You can then refer back to it when you get to that question.
State positive affirmations to yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am prepared for this test. • More and more I am learning how to take tests. • I love this class (even if you don't). • I am able to reason well. • I am calm. • I am peaceful. • I am reading each question carefully and understanding it. 	If you get tired or anxious, put your pen or pencil down (or stop typing) and close your eyes. Do the counting and breathing exercise, then breathe naturally for 2-3 breaths. Come back to the question. If still stressed, look at what parts of the question you know. If it's a total blank, skip it and go on to the next question. Look for clues within the test that might help answer that question. Also, put the test question into perspective. If it's one question worth 2 points, go to more heavily weighted questions. If it's an essay question, answer what you do know, even if it is only a little. If still stuck, close your eyes again, and think for just a minute or two about something pleasant (a favorite pet or object, a favorite place). Use all your senses. After a couple of minutes, come back to the test. Answer another question and then return to this one.
Stretch your neck and shoulders throughout the test when you notice your shoulders, back, or neck are tense.	Give up if the test is very confusing. Keep trying until the end of the class.
Accept what you know on the test and what you don't know. Make positive statements, "I don't know what that question is about, but after the test I will look it up so that I do know it. I can always learn."	Call yourself a failure if you didn't do well. When we label ourselves negatively, we hurt ourselves.
Review briefly to see if you have all the essential parts written on the test: name, ID, Course, Section #, etc. Make sure you have answered all the questions you can answer. Make sure you have not skipped a line on a scantron sheet.	Ruminate over questions you didn't get. Forgive yourself if you did not study properly and decide to study more efficiently. Seek help from the Student Success Center or other resources to help you learn how to study better.
After turning in the test, relax, reward yourself in a healthy way for doing a good job.	Allow one test to determine how you perform on all other tests. There may have been circumstances beyond your control affecting your study time. If not, resolve to do better the next time.

Do's	Don'ts
When you are rested, look up any questions you remember that you missed.	

If you would like additional help in reducing stress or improving your study methods, call us for an appointment:

The ULM Counseling Center
 Student Health Center Building
 318-342-5220