

Prepare for an Exam

Whether taken on the computer, with a blue book, or instructor prepared sheets, the final exam has a significant impact on your course grade. It provides the opportunity to demonstrate how much you have learned (or haven't learned) during the semester and how well prepared you are for the next class in this discipline. So, make no mistake, they are important!

While some finals are just one among a set of exams for the course, many finals are comprehensive. As such, these all-inclusive exams demand more study and understanding than any other course exam you will take this semester. In order to be prepared for these exams follow the suggested steps for each class and conduct your own finals countdown:



COUNTDOWN STEP 1: GETTING ORGANIZED

- ✦ For each course, check your syllabus and/or ask your faculty member about the content and format of your final in that class.
- ✦ If it is comprehensive, review earlier tests for those questions you didn't know the answers to. Go back to your books, notes, and other resources and develop your answers for those questions.
- ✦ Comprehensive or not, determine what you know and understand, and, more importantly, what you do not know or understand. As you begin Steps 2 and 3, don't waste a lot of time reviewing or studying what you already know. Focus, instead, on what you don't know!

COUNTDOWN STEP 2: NARROWING YOUR FOCUS

- ✦ Conduct a short review of your course material
- ✦ Review and organize your notes (both your textbook and in-class notes). Add explanatory notes, correct inaccurate or incomplete information, write exam questions in the margins. Make any adjustments necessary to ensure they are ready for your intensive study needs (Step 3).
- ✦ Develop summary sheets, word lists, mnemonic devices for memorizing vocabulary, mind-maps, fishbone diagrams (cause & effect), flashcards, etc. of important material you need to know.
- ✦ Create a study **to-do-list** of the material you need to know before the exam. Include textbook sections and chapters, classroom and textbook notes, study questions, practice problems, vocabulary lists, and formulas.
- ✦ Use your study to-do-list to develop a study schedule for the week before and the week of finals. First, estimate how much time you will need to

While Steps 1 & 2 might appear to be a waste of time, every activity reinforces your learning and makes your Step 3 activities more effective.



complete or learn each item on your study to-do-list. Second, using a monthly calendar, block out time in sequence (earliest finals first, latest finals last, information you are concerned about first, information you know very well last) for each activity for each class. Be sure to schedule time for your classes, work, breaks, sleep, eating, and exercise/relaxation. You now have your Plan of Attack!

COUNTDOWN STEP 3: STUDYING FOR SUCCESS

- ✚ Follow your study schedule!
- ✚ Focus on comprehension and understanding of material. Reach the point where you can summarize course concepts in your own words.
- ✚ Take breaks. Remember, a frustrated and tired learner is a poor learner.
- ✚ Use your mind-maps, mnemonics, study sheets, etc. to give visual organization to your course material. Look for similarities, differences, and relationships.
- ✚ Increase your retention by linking new information with information you already know.
- ✚ Apply concepts. Remember, if you can apply it you understand it. Ask yourself: What's an example of this? How does this differ from this? How and why would I use this? When does this formula apply?
- ✚ Outline the major concepts for potential essay questions.
- ✚ Work practice problems for mathematics and other math-based courses.

FINALS WEEK: REVIEWING & FINAL PREPARATION

For the last fifteen weeks you have been preparing for this last opportunity to demonstrate to your professor how much you have learned! So, last week was spent in intensive study, now how do you continue to prepare for your finals? Follow these simple steps and do well:

- Review summary sheets, mind maps, mnemonics, study sheets, etc.
- Continue to review your textbook headings and sub-headings, and introductory and summary statements.
- Take time to relax!
- Summarize information aloud.
- Give yourself mock tests and see how you do in specific areas of concern.
- Avoid last-minute cramming.
- Eat well, stay active, and get plenty of sleep.
- You have prepared and ready to show your professor how much you know! Get to the exam room early, take a few deep breaths and do your best!