

Tame the Finals Beast

Think! *One week can determine up to 40% of your final grade in every class. Finals week is where you will either SINK or SWIM.*

The question is, do you know how to guarantee that both you and your GPA will “float through” finals successfully?

Check out the following suggestions and put them to work for you.

1. **Start early.** Preparation for finals begins even BEFORE the week of final exams. You cannot cram an entire semester’s work of one or two nights of studying. Get started on Monday the week before final exams. Think of finals week as a week of finals.
2. **Sleep.** You need at least four hours of sleep a night to function. College finals are designed to make you think. If you are sleep deprived, you won’t be able to comprehend (or answer) the challenging questions you will face.
3. **Determine what type of final you will be taking.** A non-comprehensive final will cover all the information given/discussed after the last mid-term exam or test. A comprehensive final will cover all of the information covered from day one of the class. Determining which type of final you will be taking could make a huge difference in the time you’ll need to commit to studying for a particular final.
4. **Focus on your notes.** If you are 23 chapters behind in your reading for a class, don’t spend the night before the final trying to read the material for the first time. Unless the professor has clearly stated that the book covers different content than the lecture and that it will be covered on the test, you’re better off focusing on your notes (assuming you have been to class).
5. **Hide.** Study in an out-of-the-way place. As tempted as you are to study with your friends, your best bet is to find a place of your own where you can think. Avoid the mass hysteria at the student union and flee from people wanting to borrow your notes.
6. **Don’t chase an old test.** Don’t spend the entire night before trying to run down a copy of last year’s exam. Even if you do find one, you’ll most likely be very disappointed to find that it bears little resemblance to this year’s test.

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7. **Stop cramming five minutes before the test.** Use this time before the test to relax, catch your breath, and take a minute to get focused. By cramming until the last 30 seconds before you sit down to take the exam; you will more than likely just confuse yourself.
8. **Read all of the directions carefully.** Read through the entire test to see what you are up against. Determine if you will have any time pressure and if it is manageable. Determine where the easy points are. Answer those questions first if you think you may be short on time. This will leave the most time to focus on the harder portions of the exam. If different sections of the exam are weighted differently on the point scale, do not waste all of your time on the 2 point questions when there are heavier-weighted 10 point questions to tackle.
9. **Stay calm during the exam.** If at first glance, the test is overwhelming, remember to breathe! Do not panic! If you don't know the answer to a question, move on to the next question and come back later. Remind yourself that you are well prepared, and take the exam one question at a time. You will gain momentum by answering the easy questions first – and you will do better by keeping your head in the game.
10. **Ask questions if allowed.** If you do, you may find that you gain a great deal of clarity about what the professor is truly getting at with the question. You might even get a feel for the answer the professor is looking for if you listen closely.
11. **Stay for the entire session.** Reread the questions and your answers to them. Make sure you understand what the question is really asking and that you have answered the question completely and accurately.
12. **Remain calm after the exam.** Even if you think you did horribly, worrying about it afterwards will not change a thing; it may, however, effect how you do on your other finals. Keep your head up and move on to the next exam. Odds are that if you were well prepared for this exam and you did poorly that others also did poorly. If you received a 48% and the professor decided to curve the final, your score could still be a passing grade.
13. **Study your favorite subject last and the one you dread first.** Brenda Gantt, a junior majoring in political science, said she applied this strategy when preparing for finals last semester with dramatic results. “I had to take a math class to fulfill on of the requirements for graduation, and I hated math.”

By applying this strategy, Brenda said she was able to force herself to devote more time to a subject in which she was not strong and reduced time studying subjects she was really into and, by extension, better at. “By doing this I was able to neutralize the difference between love and hate for particular classes.” She credited the strategy for helping her to obtain all A's last semester, including the math class.