

## How to Survive Finals Week

Do you find yourself panicking when you have several exams to take in a short period? Do you feel a lot more stress during mid-terms and finals? If so, then the following suggestions will prove useful.

**Dealing with tension.** Expect a certain amount of tension. It is normal during an exam period. 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 and bike rides are excellent ways to release nervous energy and maintain your stamina for the duration of the exam period.
2. **Adopt a positive approach.** To avoid becoming too anxious, look at the exam as the application step of your study efforts, instead of as a threatening new experience.
3. **Anxiety is contagious.** Keep away from people who are highly anxious before exams, because their nervousness may tend to increase your own.
4. **Plan rewards.** Schedule a meal, movie, game, visit with friends, periodically throughout finals. Plan a treat when finals are 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 hour spans for getting down concepts and basic relationships.
3. **Allow short periods for review.** Use odd moments such as, in the shower or walking across campus, for recall and review. Run through the information frequently, this will ensure that you remember it and will broaden your understanding.
4. **Vary what you study.** Do not study for two similar courses consecutively. It is better to break the pattern with a completely different study approach. For example, study chemistry and the French, instead of chemistry and then physics.
5. **Schedule breaks.** Respect your concentration span. Especially if you have not studied much all semester, it may be difficult to study for several hours at a time. 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 normal to continue studying. You will be able to understand and remember more when you are rested than if you postpone rest.

## How to Survive Finals Week, continued

**The night before**, and, as you approach your exam and the time between exams.

1. **Spend your last hours calmly** reviewing what you have 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 to 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've 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.

**Take care of yourself.** In addition to taking an organized and calm approach to studying, you need to make common sense and moderation a general lifestyle during this and other times of stress.

1. **Moderate stimulants.** Coffee, tea, and cokes all contain caffeine, and are relatively safe ways to help you stay awake. Pills such as No-Doz, taken in recommended dosage, are fairly safe to help stay awake. They are concentrated caffeine equal to about 1 ½ cups of coffee. An overdose may cause jitters and keep you from being able to sleep even if you want to.
2. **Beware of taking drugs.** Pills prescribed for others, including diet pills should be avoided. Amphetamine preparations such as speed, Benzedrine and Dexedrine increase mental processes, but cause bad effects. A student under the influence of amphetamines can cram and scan more information, but retention may be reduced.

Adapted from the Learning Skills Center, University of Texas, Austin.