THE STUDY CYCLE

The Path to Improving Study Techniques

FOCUSED STUDY SESSIONS

Focused Study Sessions (FSSs) are designed to work with the way your brain learns best: in short, focused increments. Schedule several focused study sessions per class each week.

START

PREVIEW
- Before class, skim new material
- Note big ideas
- 5-15 minutes

CHECK

THE STUDY CYCLE

ATTEND
- Go to class
- Take notes
- Ask questions
- 30-50 minutes

STUDY
- Step away from material to clear your head
- (Suggested time: 5 - 10 minutes)

BREAK
- 15 minutes

REVIEW
- Go back over, summarize, wrap-up and check what you studied
- (Suggested time: 5 minutes)

PLAN
- Decide what you will accomplish in your study session and get started
- (Suggested time: 1 - 2 minutes)

STUDY
- Interact with material: organize, concept map, summarize, process, read, work problems
- (Suggested time: 30 - 50 minutes)

BREAK
- 15 minutes

RECAP
- Should I continue studying?
- Should I take a break?
- Should I change tasks or subject?
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Test Anxiety Tips

1. Be prepared. Yes, this seems obvious, but it bears repeating. If you feel confident that you’ve prepped thoroughly, you’ll feel more confident walking into the test.

2. Get a good night’s sleep. Cramming is never the answer, and pulling an all-nighter can exacerbate your nerves. Having adequate rest (9–10 hours per night) is likely to be more beneficial than rereading a text until dawn.

3. Fuel up. Eat a nutritious breakfast before the test and pack smart snacks for ongoing energy. Look for foods that offer a steady stream of nutrients, rather than a sugar high followed by a crash.

4. Get to class—or the testing site—early. Feeling rushed will only amp up the anxiety. Pack everything you need for the exam the night before and set the alarm, so you can get out the door on time.

5. Have a positive mental attitude. Bring a picture of your happy place or come up with a morale-boosting mantra like “I can do this” or “I worked hard and deserve this.” Peek at your picture or recite your mantra, right before the test begins.

6. Read carefully. Read the directions thoroughly and read all answers before making a choice or starting the essay. There is nothing worse than putting time into a question and realizing you are not solving for x, or the essay is off target. Slowing down can help you stay focused.

7. Just start. The blank page can maximize your anxiety. After you’ve read the directions, dive right in by making an outline for an essay answer. Or, find some questions you can ace to build up your confidence and momentum. You can always go back and change things later if needed, but a few quick answers can get the ball rolling.

8. Don’t pay attention to what other people are doing. Everyone else is scribbling away? Ack! What do they know that you don’t? It doesn’t matter. Pay attention to your own test and pace, and forget about the other students in the room.

9. Watch the clock. Realizing that time is almost up and there are lots of test questions left can make it hard to do anything useful in those final minutes. Stay on pace by skimming out the whole test before getting started. Mentally allocate how much time you’ll spend on each section. If there’s time to recheck, even better.

10. Focus on calm breathing and positive thoughts. Deep breathing can slow down a beating heart or a racing mind, so practice these techniques at home. The very act of concentrating on breathing and thinking can biometrically alter those anxious feelings. Sometimes just remembering that some test-taking anxiety is a normal part of school can help make it easier to handle.
Before the Test Tips
1. Get a good night's sleep and eat a high protein breakfast. Drink plenty of water.

2. Practice guided imagery, visualizations of succeeding on the test, mentally “going where the information is stored in your brain”, or breathing techniques.

3. Don’t study right before the test. Concentrate on being calm and mentally accessing the information you have already studied.

4. Get to the test a little early.

5. Don’t engage in negative talk with other students before the test, such as “I’m so nervous — I don’t know if I studied enough.”

6. Eliminate negative thoughts or self-talk by replacing them with a positive affirmation, like “I am prepared for the test and I will do well” or “I am smart — I can do this.”

7. Ask your professor if you can use a blank piece of paper during the test (be sure to ask or it may look like you are cheating). Use the paper for “brain dumping” or “mind mapping” during the exam.

8. Make a decision to ignore students who finish the test before you. Research shows that students who leave early usually don’t score as well as those who take more time.

9. Sit as close as possible to the area where you learned the information in class.

Melting “Brain-freeze” Techniques
1. Recreate the testing scene. Get practice tests from your professor, or create your own, and take the test in the same time frame you are given in class with the same kind of distractions.

2. Focus your attention on breathing. Concentrate on the air going in and out of your lungs — long, deep breaths will calm you and send oxygen to your brain. Do this for two minutes.

3. Hear your negative thoughts and mentally yell: “Stop!” Then, mentally repeat an affirmation such as, “The answers will come” or “I am smart — I can do this”, several times.

4. Discover where the tension is in your body. Tense and release the muscles in this area and become aware when relaxation occurs during the release. Focus on the relaxation and recreate the sensation whenever you choose during the exam.

5. Use guided imagery. This works best if you practice before the test. Close your eyes and see yourself in your favorite, most relaxing place — a beach or forest are good examples. Feel everything about this place, including sights, sounds, and smells. Once you are proficient, you can take this quick fantasy trip right during the test. When you are there, mentally tell yourself “Go to the place where the answers are.” Take a deep breath, open your eyes and begin writing.
Math Test Taking Tips

✓ Repetition is important in math. You learn how to solve problems by doing them so keep on practice problems but don't do it blindly. Make sure you learn how to recognize when/why you should use a specific method to solve a problem.

✓ Work on practice problems for each topic ranging in levels of difficulty.

✓ When practicing, try to solve the problem on your own first then look at the answer or seek help if you are having trouble.

✓ Mix up the order of the questions from various topics when you are reviewing so you'll learn when to use a specific method/formula.

✓ Make up a sheet with all the formulas you need to know and memorize all the formulas on the sheet.

✓ When you get your exam, write down all the key formulas on the margin of your paper so if you forget them when you're in the middle of the test you can look back at the formula.

✓ Read the directions carefully and don't forget to answer all parts of the question.

✓ Make estimates for your answers... e.g. if you are asked to answer $48 \times 12 = ?$, you could expect a number around 500 but if you end up with an answer around 5000, you'll know you did something wrong.

✓ Show all your work (especially when partial credit is awarded) and write as legibly as possible.

✓ Even if you know the final answer is wrong, don't erase your entire work because you may get partial credit for using the correct procedure.

✓ Check over your test after you are done with it. If you have time, redo the problems on a separate piece of paper and see if you come up with the same answers the second time around. Look for careless mistakes such as making sure the decimal is in the right place, that you read the directions correctly, that you copied the numbers correctly, that you put a negative sign if it is needed, that your arithmetic is correct and so on.

Visit TestTakingTips.com for more test taking help.
Questions to Ask Yourself To Create a Custom Study Routine!
*Take some time to answer these questions to reflect on: your current grades, how much you want to improve, and studying methods to make the dead-finals week successful. Work through these questions in order to prepare the perfect, customized study plan for yourself.

1. **What classes am I struggling in?**
   a. Identify the classes and the grades you currently have (refer to blackboard)
   b. Why are you struggling in this class?
      i. Class A- reason I am struggling:
      ii. Class B- reason I am struggling:
      iii. Class C- reason I am struggling:
      iv. Class D- reason I am struggling:
      v. Class E- reason I am struggling:
2. What are your goals for finals week?
   a. What overall grades do you want in each course?
      i. Class A grade I want ________________
      ii. Class B grade I want ________________
      iii. Class C grade I want ________________
      iv. Class D grade I want ________________
      v. Class E grade I want ________________
   b. How well do you need to do on your finals to achieve the goal grade you want in the course?
      i. Class A- estimate grade you need on final: ____________
      ii. Class B- estimate grade you need on final: ____________
      iii. Class C- estimate grade you need on final: ____________
      iv. Class D- estimate grade you need on final: ____________
      v. Class E- estimate grade you need on final: ____________
   c. Are some classes easier to attain your goal grades than others?
3. **Major concepts to cover/things you don’t understand**
   a. It is important to know what you do and do not understand in the course. The things that are less clear you will have to study more.

   i. Class A- important parts to cover:

   ii. Class B- important parts to cover:

   iii. Class C- important parts to cover:

   iv. Class D- important parts to cover:

   v. Class E- important parts to cover:
4. **HOW are you going to study?**
   a. What methods work best for you? Think about your strengths and weaknesses and figure out what YOU need to do to study effectively. Remember to cover the concepts you do not understand as well from part 3.

   b. Some examples of studying include: look over lectures, read the textbook, review practice problems, look at old exams, retake notes, practice drawing pathways/equations, go over important concepts, go over old homework assignments, make flashcards, review study guides, make mnemonics etc. Below, write whatever you’re going to do and the **HOURS** it will take.

   c. If you are unsure HOW to study for a course, ask the Instructor, TA, or a Professional Staff member. We will help guide you in the right direction based on your strengths/weaknesses. **Remember, some classes may take more time than others.**
i. Class A Study plan(s) and hours each will take:

ii. Class B Study plan(s) hours each will take:

iii. Class C Study plan(s) hours each will take:

iv. Class D Study plan(s) hours each will take:

v. Class E Study plan(s) hours each will take:

d. Do you work well in groups or by yourself?
e. Are there any review sessions being offered?
   i. List any other important review session dates
      1. Class A-________________________________
      2. Class B-________________________________
      3. Class C-________________________________
      4. Class D-________________________________
      5. Class E-________________________________

f. What has the professor identified as important information? Look through your SYLLABUS and STUDY GUIDES for this information!

5. How many hours do you need to study for each final/class?
   a. By adding up the hours from part 4, find the total the time you need to study/work in groups/attend review sessions/go over practice problems and tests to get your goal grade in the class. Make sure you OVER estimate because it is very easy to get distracted during finals week.
      i. Class A- (over)estimate hours you need to study ____________
      ii. Class B- (over)estimate hours you need to study ____________
      iii. Class C- (over)estimate hours you need to study ____________
      iv. Class D- (over)estimate hours you need to study ____________
      v. Class E- (over)estimate hours you need to study ____________

   b. Can you find time to study enough for all your classes? How are you going to prioritize? Make your schedule to fit in these hours. Remember, it's finals week- classes COME FIRST. If you need to start earlier than finals week to get in all your studying, that's okay.

6. Where are you going to study?
   a. Do you need a quiet study place? Where is it going to be? Do you need to change location every few hours for more effective studying? (Answer these questions below)

   b. What hours is the space open, remember most libraries are 24/7 during finals week.

   c. Will you have access to computers or other people in case you need to look something up?
7. What else do you need to succeed?
   a. Do you understand all the course material? If not, how are you going to learn the topics? For example, you can ask your professor, TA or even a friend in the class who understand the material.

   b. What other tools are out there to help you succeed?

   c. Write down anything else you may need to succeed:
MAKING USE OF THE RETURNED EXAM

I. Use the score as a standard of comparison.
   A. Check the letter grade.
   B. Consider the average score of the class. [even if your score is low, it may still be good compared to others in the class]
   C. Consider the range of scores.

II. Use the test items to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses in the subject.
   A. Study the items missed.
      1. Check for different items repeated in other words.
      2. Ascertain the need for further study on points.
      3. Analyze what is wrong with your answers.
      4. Ask the instructor for clarification and suggestion for improvement.
   B. Study the answers guessed.
   C. Survey the correct answers.

III. Analyze your errors.
   A. Most common errors in Essay Exams.
      1. Students don’t follow directions or answer the question.
      2. Essays are not well-organized.
      3. Essays are too general; students give few examples of specific persons, groups or places.
      4. Facts are incorrect or mixed up.
      5. Students don’t give a viewpoint or thesis. They mention facts, but don’t tell why those facts are important, or what the facts prove.
      6. Students fail to give a time frame.
      7. Students write illegibly and don’t proofread.
   B. Most common errors in objective (multiple choice) exams.
      1. Students misinterpret question.
      2. Students answer first correct choice instead of reading all.
      3. Students don’t study differences or exact definitions of terms.
      4. Students misread directions.
      5. Students don’t use clues to help them choose.

IV. How did you produce that error?
   A. Studying: Not enough
      Not the important/relevant material
      Not correctly; no outlines, etc.
   B. Read questions wrong or partially.
   C. Didn’t think before writing.
   D. Wrote incoherently or poorly.
   E. Not enough time.
V. How do you plan to improve?

A. Instructor expectations.
   1. Kinds of questions asked? [Did you study the wrong kind of information/problems?]
   2. Source of content? [Did content come more from book or lecture? Will this change your emphasis?]

B. Studying
   1. Amount: Spaced vs. crammed?
                  Stressed in lecture [Consider more effective notetaking strategies?]
                  Syllabus [Are there clues you missed in the syllabus?]
                  Old tests, repetition [Did old tests contain clues or actual test items? Can you find a copy for the next exam?]

   3. Techniques: Organize?
                  Think?
                  Memorize? [Consider new strategies?]

   4. Tutors [Look at this as seeking assistance from a professional "consultant"]

C. Writing
   1. Aid [Do you need greater assistance for the next exam — e.g., from the writing center; take the exam with you to discuss ways you can improve]
   2. Sample answers [Can you obtain examples of answers that were expected for the exam?]

D. Time
   1. Improve organization strategies before exam
   2. Write-out or do formulas (… more)
   3. Budget time differently and/or more effectively (new tools, strategies?)

VI. Use the test as a pattern for the next test - note the instructor's style of writing a test.

A. Note the kind and/or type of questions asked.

B. Analyze the content of questions:
   1. From text or lecture [To what extent did the questions reflect notes or text material?]
   2. Expected or unexpected material [How well did the exam match expectations stated by your instructor (or not)?]
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<td>Studied the information but couldn't remember it.</td>
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<td>Knew the main ideas, but needed details.</td>
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<td>Knew the information, but couldn't apply it.</td>
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<td>Studied the wrong information.</td>
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<td>Didn't anticipate this question.</td>
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<td>Was daydreaming (distracted).</td>
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<td>Was distracted by sounds, other students, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misread the question or directions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn't manage time well (rushed; ran out of time).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too much time on one question (should've moved on).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carelessly marked a wrong choice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn't notice limiting words (qualifiers).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thrown off by a double negative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changed a correct answer to a wrong one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrote incomplete responses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responses weren't well organized.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced a mental block.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was so tired or hungry I couldn't concentrate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I panicked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative thoughts / Got down on myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gave up -- lost confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item from Lecture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Item from Text / Course Materials</td>
<td></td>
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</table>