

How to Survive Exam Weeks

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 should prove useful.

DEALING WITH TENSION.

Expect a certain amount of tension. It is normal during an exam period. Actually 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 your 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 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, a movie, a handball game, a visit with a friend periodically throughout finals. Plan a treat when they're all 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 out hour spans for getting down concepts and basic relationships.

3. ALLOW SHORT PERIODS FOR REVIEW.

Use the odd moments, in the shower or walking across campus, for recall and review. Run through the information frequently; this will ensure that you

remember it and it will broaden your understanding.

4. VARY WHAT YOU STUDY.

Don't study for two similar courses consecutively. It is better to break the pattern with a completely different study approach. For example, study chemistry and then French instead of chemistry and then physics.

5. SCHEDULE BREAKS.

Respect your concentration span. Especially if you haven't 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 you normally would, to continue studying. You will be able to understand and remember more when you are rested than you would if you postpone rest.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

As you approach the first exam, and the time between exams,

1. SPEND YOUR LAST HOURS CALMLY REVIEWING WHAT YOU'VE 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 for 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 have 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 life style during this and other times of stress.

1. MODERATE STIMULANTS.

Coffee, tea and Coca-Cola all contain caffeine and are relatively safe ways to help you stay awake. Pills, such as No-Doz, taken in recommended dosage, are concentrated caffeine equal to about one and a half 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.

This includes pills that were prescribed for other persons. Diet pills, for example, should be avoided, as it is possible to get an overdose of thyroid and a lethal dose of digitalis.

Amphetamine preparations such as speed, Benzedrine and Dexedrine increase mental processes, but they can cause other bad effects. A student under the influence of amphetamines can cram and scan more information, but retention may be reduced.

Adapted from the University of Texas at Austin Learning Center