Final Exam Preparations
One Month Ahead

Does it feel like final exams are a long way off but also just around the corner? Depending on how well you prepare, the next few weeks will determine your level of success and stress on these important exams.

You might be wondering where and how to begin studying. Here is a list of steps that you should begin now, one month before your first exam.

PREPARATION (3-4 weeks before exams)

1. **Organization** – Gather all of your notes, homework, class work, tests, and quizzes for your classes. Make a pile for each class. You should have papers going back to August. For each class, put the papers in chronological order by the date they were given to you or were completed. If you get stuck, consult the class syllabus – it can help you determine what units or chapters you covered and in what order. Depending on the size of the pile for each class, find a way to keep them together in order. You could use a 3-ring binder, binder clip, file folder, or staple. Whatever you use, just be sure that you keep your classes separate (i.e. no mixing History with English, etc.).

2. **Old Tests & Quizzes** – now that you have an organized, chronological “stack” for each class, pull out all of the tests or quizzes you’ve gotten back from your teachers. Again, keep each class separate from your other classes. You’ll have a pile of math tests and quizzes, a pile of English tests and quizzes, a pile of science tests and quizzes, etc.

3. **Study Guides, Notecards, & Vocabulary Lists** – within each class, find your old study guides (the ones that some teachers give before a test). Also, if you have made notecards to study for tests, find those too and group them by class. Lastly, anytime a teacher gave you a list of key terms or vocabulary, you’ll want to find those.

4. **Schedule** – Look at your schedule for the month of December. The month page in your planner is perfect for this. Make sure that all of your existing deadlines, tests, and responsibilities are written down for the month. Include athletic events, due dates for papers and projects, and any remaining tests or quizzes you have for your classes. Don’t forget personal or family obligations too. Now, look and see where you can schedule in final exam study time. **Yes, you should actually schedule this time in.** Studying in advance can often be pushed to the bottom of priorities (**procrastination!!**). Putting final exam studying into your calendar will make it a priority and help you actually do it. **Spread your studying out over many days.** You will remember, retain, and understand much more if you spread you studying out rather than cramming at the last minute.
5. **Talk to Your Teachers** – ask them what will be covered on the final exam, what format it will be (multiple choice, fill-in, essay, etc.), and any recommendations they have to help you prepare. If they give you a study guide, great. If not, make yourself a Topic List.

6. **Topic List** – create a topic list for each class. What were the main topics covered this semester? Those topics will likely match chapters in the textbook and/or tests that you took. Your list will look like a table of contents or outline for what you covered since August. You are essentially making your own study guide. For each topic, as you read through your notes, retake the test (see #7), and review your flashcards and vocabulary lists, mark it off.

7. **Practice Tests** – for each topic, look at the graded test you took back then. Try taking the test again by asking yourself the questions while covering the answers. If you didn’t do well when you first took the test and you don’t do well again in this practice test, make a note that the topic is a priority to focus on.

8. **Memorization vs. Understanding** – both are important in preparing for an exam.

   a. **Memorization** – being able to recall facts and all details of a chapter or topic. It is the who, what, where, when, why, and how. For math classes, it is remembering equations and what steps to take to solve a certain type of problem. **Memorization takes time and practice.** The sooner you start, the better. Make mnemonics, acrostics (**M**y **V**ery **E**ager **M**other **J**ust **S**erved Us **N**achos – for the planets), acronyms (**HOMES** – for the Great Lakes), songs, rhymes, pictures, or any other technique that works for you. Practice throughout the weeks prior to the final exam.

   b. **Understanding** – being able to apply, critique, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the things you’ve memorized. This is the part most often overlooked by students when they study.

      i. Quiz yourself. Once you’ve memorized the facts, ask yourself questions like these: (depending on the class)

         1. Why is _____ important?
         2. How does this compare to ____?
         3. Discuss the pros and cons of _____.
         4. What ideas validate _____?
         5. What are some alternatives to ____?
         6. How would you compare _____ to _____?
         7. What can you infer from _____?
         8. How would you solve ____?
         9. What facts support _____?
        10. What would the result be if ____?
ii. Developing understanding is often facilitated by studying with a peer or in a group. Discussions build your ability to create and defend your answers. So, find a focused study buddy and quiz each other!

REVIEW (During the last week before the exam)

9. Practicing – When you review, you are no longer learning or re-learning information. You are practicing and strengthening your memory. You are re-reading your study guides and using flashcards. You are repeating your memory techniques. You are meeting with peers to quiz each other. You are posing and answering sample questions. You are isolating any remaining areas that need further study. You are meeting with teachers to get help with those last trouble spots.

10. Handling Stress – as the days get closer to exam day, stress and fatigue can grow. Be sure to take good care of yourself in the days leading up to exams.
   
   a. Get enough rest (at least 6-8 hours of sleep a night – whatever you normally need)
   b. Eat regularly (don’t skip meals in order to study)
   c. Eat healthy (don’t overload on junk food or caffeine while you’re studying)
   d. Take breaks (exercise, spend some down time with others)
   e. Visualize your success (imagine yourself writing a good essay, solving math problems, and feeling successful)
   f. Practice relaxation: deep breathing while imagining your “happy place”

GOOD LUCK ON THE FINAL

AND MAY THE ODDS BE EVER IN YOUR FAVOR