

# Scientifically, The Best Ways To Prepare For Final Exams

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## Campus Life

By Shaniese Alston

Finals week can be a stressful time for all students—I know it is for me. So, knowing how to properly prepare for finals is the key to avoiding stress and acing every single one of your exams. Of course, all students would love to relax by receiving massages or by the healing power of dogs before finals (I sure would!).

But, we all know this isn't really possible. There needs to be a uniform way to assess our performance as students and it has to happen at some point (hence, "finals"). So how else can we lower stress and know that we're on the right track to excel in each course? Well, here are some *proven* methods that will have you focused and better prepared for final exams.

1. Say NO to cramming: Study in intervals! Studying in 20-50 minute increments and giving yourself 5-10 minutes in between is more beneficial than cramming. Distributing learning over time typically benefits long-term retention more than a short period.
2. Say YES to cardio: Science says that just 20 minutes of cardio can improve your memory. Whether you're dancing, jogging or busting a sweat by walking, exercise will increase your energy level and reduce the effects of stress. Very important!
3. Eat superfoods/antioxidants: Everybody knows you should eat breakfast the day of a big test. Research suggests that high-carb, high-fiber, slow-digesting foods like oatmeal are best (oatmeal is more fulfilling than cereal). But what you eat a week in advance matters, too. When 16 college students were tested on attention and thinking speed, then fed a five-day high-fat, low-carb diet heavy on meat, eggs, cheese and cream and tested again, their performance declined. The students who ate a balanced diet that included fruit and vegetables, however, held steady, says Cameron Holloway, a senior clinical researcher at the University of Oxford. When you study, your brain consumes glucose, so take a five-minute break every hour to let your body produce more fuel for your studying. Eating a healthy snack is very beneficial and can make a significant difference (almonds, fruit, and yogurt are good choices).

5 Reasons to Spend an Extra Hour at the Library Tonight: <http://t.co/hJZWuFgD26>  
[pic.twitter.com/O9qC9GvP7O](http://pic.twitter.com/O9qC9GvP7O)

— SUNY (@SUNY) April 4, 2014

4. Alternate study spots: Shake up your finals routine! Spending all night in the library can be draining. According to the New York Times, simply alternating the room where a person studies improves retention. In an experiment, psychologists found that college students who studied a list of 40 vocabulary words in two different rooms — one windowless and cluttered, the other

modern, with a view on a courtyard — did far better on a test than students who studied the words twice, in the same room. Why? Supposedly, the brain makes subtle associations between what it is studying and the background sensations it has at the time. Try alternating your study spots between the library, a study room, and a quiet coffee house.

5. Time management: Cramming causes anxiety, which lowers your ability to retain information. By creating a balanced study plan and schedule, you will be able to study each subject in its entirety and ultimately boost your test performance.

6. Avoid the all-nighter: Almost every college student pulls an all-nighter, but it is a bad idea. Based on a 2008 study by Pamela Thacher, Associate Professor of Psychology at St. Lawrence University, all-nighters impair reasoning and memory for as long as four days. As a result, you will receive lower grades. But that's not all; you would then be forced to wake up earlier than expected—and that's bad too. According to Dan Taylor, director of a sleep-and-health-research lab at the University of North Texas, this will interfere with rapid-eye movement (REM), which aids memory. So, get a good night's sleep and expect to perform better on tests. (Quick tip: Review the toughest material right before going to bed the night before the test. It makes it easier to recall the material later, adds Taylor!)

7. MINIMIZE distractions: Research shows that while many teens prefer to study while listening to music, texting friends, or watching television, they are less likely to retain information that way. If you must listen to music, stick to instrumental music and consider downloading these study tools to keep you focused!

8. MAXIMIZE practice-testing: You may have thought highlighting, re-reading and summation would be effective ways to study. Think again! A 2013 study, Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques, found that these techniques do not consistently boost students' performance. Practice testing through the use of flashcards, or taking practice exams was observed to be a highly effective studying technique.

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