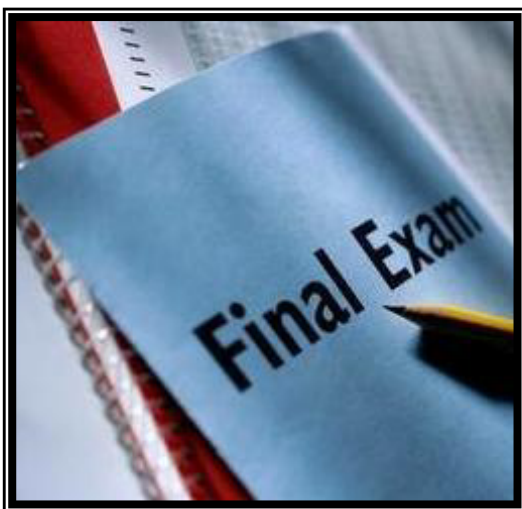


# Final Exam Preparation Guidebook



MIAMI UNIVERSITY

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LEARNING CENTER

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“Strength of mind is exercise, not rest.”

Alexander Pope

"Striving for success without hard work is like trying to harvest where you haven't planted."

David Bly

“The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.”

Chinese Proverb

“If we did all the things we were capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.”

Thomas Edison

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Studying for final exams can feel stressful and even overwhelming to many Miami University students. Successful preparation for finals should start long before Finals Week begins. Thoughtful planning and effective study habits and techniques are key. There are many techniques and strategies outlined in this guidebook that can help students prepare for finals in a way that fits their needs and the finals for which they are preparing.



## Planning and Preparing for Finals

To engage in effective final exam preparation, you should begin with a complete understanding of the format and content of each exam. There should be no question as to how you will be tested, or what you will be tested on. If a professor does not communicate this basic information, you are encouraged to ask the following questions in class or during your professor's office hours:

- What is the format of the exam?
- How much is each item worth?
- How does the professor define short-answer and/or essay? (if items are included on the exam)
- What material will be covered?
- How does the professor recommend preparing for the exam?

The answers to these fundamental questions should provide direction and guidance for exam preparation.

Creating a table with the pertinent details about each final you have is a great place to start your finals preparation. See an example of such a table on pages 8 and 9 in the center of this booklet. In some courses you may be able to fill out most of the Finals Preparation table from the course syllabus. In other courses you will find that there are details you do not yet know about the final, which will help you to form questions similar to the ones above to ask your instructor in class or office hours.

The next step for effective test preparation is making sure that you have a comprehensive and well-organized set of notes. (For more information on notes see the Note-taking Strategies Guidebook). If you consistently take and maintain good notes for each of your courses, you are engaging in one step of final exam preparation throughout the entire semester. Notes should include key terms, definitions, examples, and paraphrasing of the author's and professor's ideas. It is also recommended that notes include potential exam questions, either offered by the professor or generated by you. There is a strong relationship between a student's ability to self-test prior to and their performance on an exam. Therefore, the more time spent developing and answering potential test questions, the better you should do on the actual exam.

One possible format for taking notes is the Cornell Style of Note-taking, which encourages students to formulate questions about the topics in their notes and summarize the content presented in class. To utilize the Cornell Style, divide a sheet of notebook paper into 3 sections: a roughly 2" column on the left hand side of the page for questions, a 6" section on the right hand side for notes, and a summary section at the bottom of the page. Fill in the note-taking area during class with important information provided by your instructor. After class, review your notes and fill in the summary area at the bottom of the page with an overview of the topics covered on that page in your own words. Then fill in the questions column by developing and writing potential test questions about that material. See an example below of a Cornell Style notes page featured on the Northwest Missouri State University website:

		Name Course name Period Date	
Topic		Tips for Success	
	Why should I ask questions?	<u>Ask Questions</u> - Keeps you engaged in lesson - Teacher views you as good student	
	Where should I sit?	<u>Sit up Front</u> - Keeps you focused	
	Why should I take notes?	<u>Take Notes</u> - Keeps you engaged in lesson - Have something to study	
Questions	What kind of help can I get?	<u>Get Help When Needed</u> - Ask teacher - After school tutoring - Tutorials	
Summary		<u>Summary</u> There are several ways to be successful in class. First, you should ask questions. Second, you should sit in the front of the class. You should also take notes and get help when you need it.	

Diagram labels with arrows pointing to the corresponding sections of the Cornell notes page:

- Topic**: Points to the leftmost column.
- Questions**: Points to the middle column.
- Summary**: Points to the bottom section.
- Heading**: Points to the top right section (Name, Course name, Period, Date).
- Notes**: Points to the rightmost column.

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## Finding a Good Study Environment

Find a place to study free from the distractions that usually get you off track. If you are distracted by Facebook or browsing other websites, turn off your computer's internet connection while you study. If your cell phone distracts you, tell your friends and family you won't be available during study times, put your phone on silent and keep it out of sight. When selecting the location to study, be honest with yourself. If you enjoy "people watching" and socializing, don't try to study in the busy areas of King Library or the student center where students are constantly coming and going. Don't study on your bed or a blanket outside if you know that you might fall asleep in these situations. Smaller libraries around campus, quiet areas in King and empty classrooms can all be great places to study.

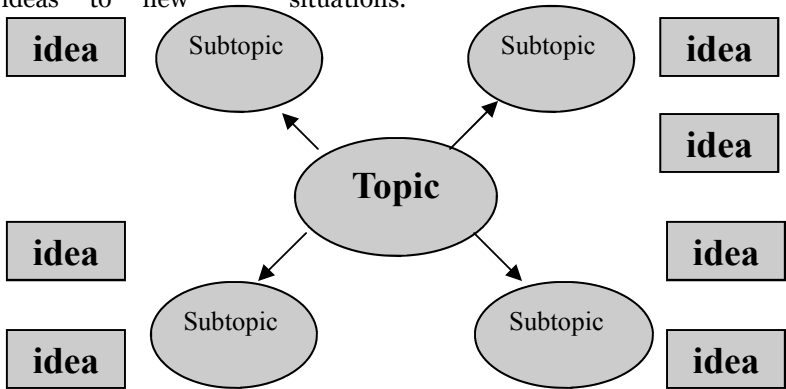


## Test Taking Strategies

Effective studying for an exam does not mean rereading, recopying, reciting, and regurgitating information. Successful review and preparation for an exam involves a process of gaining knowledge, reinforcing that knowledge through study, and practicing effective communication of that knowledge to someone else. Often times, college students invest a lot of time into learning information

but spend little time practicing applying or communicating that information. This can be explained as students spend too much time cramming information into their brain, but not enough time practicing getting that information out of their brain. Thus, to be a successful student and well prepared for exams, many students must start to invest more time into practicing newly acquired skills and articulating newly understood information.

Another way of preparing for an exam is to transform your notes into visualizations or learning representations. Organizing information into hierarchies, sequences, matrices, graphs, and diagrams can help you to build mental connections between ideas and can assist in encoding information into long-term memory. A concept map, illustrated below, is a type of visual aid where the main idea or topic is featured in the center with related ideas radiating out. Visual aids and learning constructs can help you reconstruct knowledge, integrate new knowledge with previously understood information, and apply ideas to new situations.



### Styles of Exam Questions

There are three styles of exam questions to prepare for. The first type is factual or content based. **Factual questions** require you to remember the content of the material presented in class or in the textbook. Often these kinds of questions ask you to recall specific information like names, dates, terms, and events. For factual questions it is often adequate enough to simply memorize or review material when studying. A **concept question** requires you to look at a new situation and identify which concept applies. These questions are usually multiple-choice and require picking between several similar concepts that may apply to a specific or unique situation. For concept questions merely memorizing the concept may not be enough. Practicing applying the concept to numerous examples will help you prepare for this kind of exam question. **Procedural questions** require you to do something with presented data or information. Often, one must recognize what concept is presented and know which rules to follow to get the correct answer. To study for these types of questions you should first commit to memory all appropriate rules and/or formulas, practice identifying and articulating how to solve the problem, and then repeatedly practice following the correct problem solving procedure.

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## How to Study for Different Types of Exam Questions

### **Objective Questions**

Forms:	Multiple-Choice, True/False, Matching
How to Study:	Practice defining terms/vocabulary. Explain the significance of people, dates, and concepts. Develop potential exam questions and self test. Use visual aids, diagrams, charts, and sequences.
How to Test:	Try to internally answer questions before looking at given answers. Often, looking at multiple answers causes students to second guess their own thoughts about what is the correct answer. Make sure to answer the question being asked. Understand qualifying words such as <i>all</i> , <i>most</i> , <i>some</i> , <i>none</i> , <i>always</i> and <i>never</i> and avoid being deceived by double negatives. Underline, circle, or mark these words to pay special attention to them when deciding on the correct answer. Finally, do not spend too much time on any one question.

### **Short Answer Questions**

Forms:	Definitions, Fill-in-the-blank, Brief Descriptions
How to Study:	Practice defining terms/vocabulary. Practice writing out explanations of concepts and ideas. Develop potential exam questions and self test. Use Cornell Notes, definition cards, and chapter summaries to reinforce understanding.
How to Test:	After receiving the exam, jot down easily forgotten words or ideas on the back or in the margins of the exam. Survey the exam and start with questions that are straightforward, reserving more difficult ones for later. If exact words, terms, or definitions cannot be remembered, write down any and all information that can be remembered about the topic. On occasion, professors will give partial credit if some knowledge can be demonstrated. Unless otherwise specified, do not leave questions unanswered.

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<b>Course:</b>	
<b>Grade Prior to Final:</b>	
<b>Expected Grade after Final:</b>	
<b>Weight of Final Exam:</b>	
<b>Outstanding Assignments:</b>	
<b>Chapters to be tested on:</b>	<b>Comprehensive List of Topics to be Covered:</b> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/> </div>



	<b>Exam Date:</b>	<b>Exam Time:</b>
	<b>Exam Location:</b>	
	<b>Exam Type:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Cumulative <input type="checkbox"/> Section <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Choice <input type="checkbox"/> Short Answer <input type="checkbox"/> Essay <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving

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## ***Essay Questions***

Forms:

How to Study:

Short and Long Essays

Generate a list of potential exam questions

Practice writing out explanations of concepts, ideas, and themes.

Focus on understanding relationships between events, concepts, and ideas.

Look for supporting evidence and facts that could potentially strengthen and illustrate the argument.

How to Test:

Upon receiving the exam jot down easily forgotten ideas and terms on the back or in the margins of the exam. Survey the questions and determine how many must be answered and the value of each. In the first sentence, directly answer the question posed. Use this sentence to structure the remainder of the essay. Write the essay as if the audience (the professor) has no prior knowledge of the topic. Be explicit about every aspect of the answer. Offer concrete examples to illustrate the argument. In the conclusion of the essay, offer insights into the significance of the topic. Do not re-summarize the argument in the conclusion.



## **The Test Taking Strategy**

- Be physically prepared. There is a direct relationship between the condition of the body and the effectiveness of the mind. Get adequate sleep the night before and eat prior to taking the exam. This can reduce avoidable physical distractions.

- Be prepared and comfortable. Arrive to the exam location early and bring all necessary materials (pens, pencils, dictionaries, calculators, notes). To reduce test taking anxiety, get comfortable and relax by choosing a location in the room that is the most conducive for focusing. Avoid being rushed just prior to taking an exam, as it could cause or exacerbate anxiety.

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- Upon receiving the exam, survey the number and types of questions being asked and confirm understanding of the instructions. Prior to answering questions get an overall sense of the structure of the exam and how much time to allocate to each question. When surveying, jot down important recalled information that could be helpful in answering the question(s) later. Remember to allow for more time when:
    - \* The question carries a higher point value
    - \* The question requires a longer answer (short answer or essay)
    - \* The question format or content is unfamiliar
  - Start by answering the easiest questions first. Correctly answered easy questions will guarantee earned points and will also build confidence during the test taking process. Reserve addressing difficult and anxiety-provoking questions for the end. Avoid spending too much time becoming anxious about any one question, as anxiety can hinder memory.
  - When answering a multiple-choice question, attempt the following:
    - \* Try to mentally answer the question prior to looking at the offered choices.
    - \* After looking at the options, read all choices completely. Do not stop after reading the first or second choice.
    - \* Cross out options that are obviously incorrect. This will eliminate distracting wrong answers and encourage focus on good options.
    - \* Be critical of options that are similar. Highlight or circle qualifying words that make similar options different.
    - \* Answer all questions, unless there is a penalty for guessing.
    - \* When skipping a question, make a notation in the margin to come back to the question later.
  - When answering an essay question, attempt the following:
    - \* Do a data dump. Write out a list of words, ideas, concepts, and/or facts that should be included in the essay.
    - \* Read all of the test questions and underline **significant words**.
    - \* While reading the question, write down key words relating to the answer that come to mind.
    - \* Answer the easiest questions first.
    - \* Directly answer the question being posed in the first sentence and/or paragraph.
    - \* Develop a basic outline or structure for the essay.
    - \* Check off key ideas from the data dump as they are incorporated into the essay.
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## Significant Words to Understand

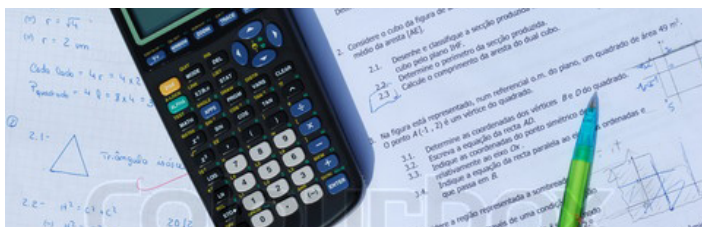
COMPARE	Look for similarities and differences between ideas/concepts.
CONTRAST	Look primarily for the differences between ideas/concepts. Make clear the differences.
DEFINE	Give a brief and accurate definition of the idea or concept. State the meaning of the term, concept, or idea. To enhance a definition offer an example to better explain.
DESCRIBE	Explain the primary characteristics of the idea or recount the important elements of a story or process.
DISCUSS	Be analytical and critical about the idea or concept presented. Offer pros and cons and various aspects of an argument.
EVALUATE	Give both the positive and negative sides of an issue or topic.
EXPLAIN	Offer reasons for and meaning behind an idea or concept.
ILLUSTRATE	Give an overall picture of an idea or concept by using examples. When appropriate use diagrams or visual aids.
JUSTIFY	Give reasons for the conclusions that have been made.
LIST	Give an itemized list; number items.
PROVE	Offer factual evidence to support an idea, argument, or statement. This could include logical or mathematical proofs or theorems.
REVIEW	Give a summary and comment on the significant components of that summary.
SUMMARIZE	Offer a summary without comment or criticism.
TRACE	Describe the process or causes of a linear happening or event.

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## Problem Solving Exams

Mathematics and some sciences require a different kind of learning and thus require different strategies for test preparation and taking. Instead of simply understanding and remembering ideas, courses like calculus, statistics, chemistry, and physics require students to not only understand material, but also to be able to apply concepts and formulas to solving problems. Another way that these courses are different is that they are cumulative in nature; meaning that content knowledge gradually builds on itself and later understanding is dependent on mastery of precursory knowledge. Whereas a history class can learn material in chapter 2 and then skip to chapter 4 without substantial impairment to understanding; in courses like calculus and chemistry, students must understand chapter 1 before going onto chapter 2. Thus, a commitment to attending class and practicing the problem solving process is key for success on problem based exams.



### - Test Preparation

- \* Attend class and keep up with homework assignments.
- \* Ask for clarification as soon as problems or processes become confusing.
- \* Commit to memory all formulas, theorems, or processes that must be applied to the exam.
- \* After completing all practice problems, spend time practicing identifying how to solve each problem type. Verbally articulate the steps that must be completed to successfully solve each kind of problem.

### - Test Taking

- \* Start by identifying how to solve the problem.
- \* Make sure you are answering the question being asked.
- \* Review steps for accuracy.
- \* If you cannot get started on a given problem, skip it and move onto the next question.

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## Health and Wellness During Final Exams

When you're in the midst of preparing for and taking final exams, it can be easy to get so wrapped up in your studies that you forget to practice basic healthy habits. It's important to remember to take care of yourself in order to do your best on your final exams!

- Be sure to get adequate sleep throughout final exam week. Avoid “all nighters” because you may not be able to think and process information as clearly when you take an exam if your mind and body are exhausted.
- Eat healthy, regular meals.
- Maintain your regular exercise routine during finals.
- Take a break! Set aside small chunks of time within your study schedule to take a walk, grab a snack, or another brief activity to give your mind a rest for a few minutes. Then be sure to get back to work!
- Avoid consuming too much caffeine, as it can result in feeling “jittery” and anxious.



### Test Anxiety

It is very normal to experience some anxiety about any test, especially final exams. Being adequately prepared, rested, and taking care of yourself will help to alleviate some of this apprehension and stress. If you experience anxiety that feels overwhelming to you or is getting in the way of preparing for your finals or other parts of your life, contact the Student Counseling Service at 513-529-4634 to make an appointment to discuss your concerns with a counselor.

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## Resources

If you are interested in learning more about final exam preparation please explore the following resources:

### Final Exam Prep Websites

<http://www.southernct.edu/student-life/academic-success/study-skills-enrichment/links/final-exams.html>  
(website with tips to prepare and study for final exams)

<http://www.upb.pitt.edu/uploadedfiles/final%20tips%20newsletter.pdf> (PDF document with tips to study for exams and manage stress throughout finals week)

<http://www.efc.dcccd.edu/al/writingcnt/H101Ways.asp>  
(website with list of 101 ways to prepare for final exams)



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If you are interested in working with a Learning Specialist to better improve your note-taking, test-taking, or general study strategies, please contact:

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