

EXAM PREP ACTION PLAN

MAKE A MIND MAP

One of the best ways to see where you stand in a particular course is to start with a blank slate—either a white board or a large piece of paper. It may feel strange before you review, but start by writing down the major concepts or topics covered in the course. Then spend 10-15 minutes adding as much detail as possible. When you finish, identify the missing pieces to guide your study.



PRACTICE FIRST

Before you begin a lengthy process of comprehensively reviewing lecture slides and other course materials, do something to simulate the final exam. Depending on the available materials, take a practice exam, write a sample timed essay, or create a quiz for yourself using textbook and homework problems. Think of this as a “pre-test” that will show you what to study.



BE SPECIFIC

“Studying” is not a generic activity, so it’s not helpful to write “study for X exam” in your planner. Instead, you should approach studying as a specific set of actions. Now that you have tried concept mapping and some kind of practice, create a list of targeted review tasks that will address the ‘missing pieces’. After completing each review task, check your retention and mastery of these concepts by making another concept map (hopefully with more detail than the first).



KEEP PRACTICING

You can think of your exam preparation in terms of two categories: review and practice. While the combination of these approaches will depend on each course, you should probably devote at least 70% of your study time to practice. That means either solving problems or writing extended responses, case analyses, and essays. When you get stuck or confused, review lectures and readings, and then dive back into practice!



FOCUS DEEPLY (AND BRIEFLY)

The worst thing to do with a wide-open reading day is to plan to ‘study’ for one exam for ‘the entire day.’ Chances are that this will result in long periods of pseudo studying, when your course materials are still in front of you, but your focus has shifted to something else. Instead, divide your day into 2- to 3-hour chunks, assign a specific action to each chunk, and take a break or change locations in between.

