

Final Exams

Your math final exam is likely to be a comprehensive exam. This means that it will cover material from the entire term. The end of the term will be less stressful if you make a plan for how you will prepare for each of your exams.

First, figure out the grade you need to earn on the final exam in order to get the course grade you are aiming for. Check your course syllabus for grading policies, or ask your instructor if you are not sure of them. This allows you to set a goal for yourself. Also, you will know which of your courses you have to spend more time on in your final exam preparations.

How many points do you need to get on your mathematics final exam to get the grade you want?

Second, create a final exam week plan for your work and personal life. If you need to make an adjustment in your work schedule, do it in advance, so you aren't scrambling at the last minute. If you have family members to care for, you might want to enlist some help from others so you can spend extra time studying. Again, try to plan in advance so you don't create additional stress for yourself. You will have to set some priorities, and studying has to be at the top of the list! Although life doesn't stop for finals, some things can be ignored for a short time. You don't want to "burn out" during final exam week; get enough sleep and healthy food so you can perform your best.

What adjustments do you need to make for final exam week?

Third, use the following suggestions to guide your studying and reviewing.

- Make sure you know exactly which chapters and sections will be on the final exam.
- Divide up the chapters and decide how much you will work on each day.
- Begin your reviewing several days before the exam.
- Use returned quizzes and tests to review earlier material (if they have been returned to you).
- Practice all types of problems, but emphasize the types that are most difficult for you. Use the Cumulative Reviews that are at the end of each chapter in your textbook.
- Rewrite your notes or make mind maps to create summaries of important information.
- Make study cards for all types of problems. Be sure to use the same direction words (*simplify, solve, estimate*) that your exam will use. Carry the cards with you and review them whenever you have a few spare minutes.

Managing Stress

Of course, a week of final exams produces stress. Students who develop skills for reducing and managing stress do better on their final exams and are less likely to "bomb" an exam. You already know the damaging effect of adrenaline on your ability to think clearly. But several days (or weeks) of elevated stress is also harmful to your brain

and your body. You will feel better if you make a conscious effort to reduce your stress level. Even if it takes you away from studying for a little while each day, the time will be well spent.

Physical ways to reduce stress are very helpful. Some examples are listed below. Can you add any to the list?

- Laugh until your eyes water. Watching your favorite funny movie, exchanging a joke with a friend, or listening to a comedy bit on the radio are all ways to generate a healthy laugh. Laughing raises the level of calming chemicals in your brain (endorphins).
 - Exercise for 20-30 minutes. If you normally exercise regularly, do NOT stop during final exam week! Exercising helps relax muscles, diffuses adrenaline, and raises the level of endorphins in your body. If you don't usually exercise much, do try to get some gentle exercise, such as a daily walk, to help you relax.
 - Practice deep breathing. Several minutes of deep, smooth breathing will calm you. Close your eyes too.
 - Visualize a relaxing scene. Choose something that you find peaceful and picture it. Imagine what it feels like and sounds like. Try to put yourself in the picture.
 - If you feel stress in your muscles, such as your shoulders or back, slowly squeeze the muscles as much as you can, and then release them. Sometimes we don't realize we are clenching our teeth or holding tension in our shoulders until we consciously work with them. Try to notice what it feels like when they are relaxed and loose. Squeezing and then releasing muscles is also something you can do during an exam if you feel yourself tightening up.
 - Add your own ideas here.
-
-

Mental stress reduction is also a powerful tool that will help you both before and during an exam. In addition to these suggestions, do you have any of your own techniques?

- Talk positively to yourself. Tell yourself you will get through it.
 - Reward yourself. Give yourself small breaks, a little treat, a nice bath—something that makes you feel cared for—every day of final exam week.
 - Make a list of things to do and feel the sense of accomplishment when you cross each item off.
 - When you take time to relax or exercise, make sure you are relaxing your mind too. Use your mind for something completely different from the kind of thinking you do when you study. Plan your garden, play your favorite music, walk your dog, read a good book.
 - Visualize. Picture yourself completing exams and projects successfully. Picture yourself taking the test calmly and confidently.
 - Add your own ideas here.
-
-