

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR EXAM GRADES

WHAT TO DO AFTER A POOR PERFORMANCE

Take these positive steps right away:

1. Examine how you prepared for the exam (be honest with yourself.)

- a. How thorough was your preparation?
- b. Did you commit sufficient time to study and review?
- c. Did you go to class and pay attention?
- d. Did you do the assigned work?

2. Review the exam.

- a. Were your mistakes spread out across topics or were they focused on one particular topic?
 - i. If they were spread out, then you might need a careful review of your study strategies.
 - ii. If they were focused on one topic, then you need to evaluate why that topic gave you particular difficulty. Visit the Learning Lab or your instructor for further guidance.
- b. Did you misinterpret instructions or questions?
 - i. You may need to talk with your professor about how to follow instructions or how to interpret questions correctly.
- c. Look at your errors and see if you recorded in your notes the information needed to answer the question.
 - i. If not, you may need to enhance your note taking skills.

3. Talk with your professor.

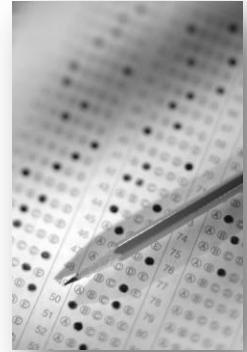
- a. Discuss how you prepared for the exam and what you discovered from reviewing your exam.

4. Examine your study habits to see if they are effective.

- a. Good study strategies are effortful and require you to process information deeply and meaningfully. For example, mindlessly recopying notes is ineffective while actively organizing and thinking about the connections within your notes is an effective study strategy.

5. Develop a study plan.

6. Whatever you do, don't panic or go into denial. You can succeed!



FOUR PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE YOUR STUDY HABITS

1. **Elaboration:** As you study, elaborate on the material for connected learning. For example, ask yourself, “How does this concept relate to other concepts?”
2. **Distinctiveness:** Think about the distinctiveness of the concepts; that is, what distinguishes one concept from another. Ask yourself, “What are the key differences between this concept and other concepts?”
3. **Personal Association:** If possible, try to make the information personal by relating it to yourself. Ask yourself, “How does this concept relate to my own experience, or what personal example can I think of that illustrates this concept?”
4. **Retrieval and Application:** Study with retrieval and application in mind. Rather than reading over material repeatedly, close your books and practice recalling and applying the information in the ways your professor expects on exams.

These principles work well as you study on your own; you may also try using them with a study partner or group for additional insight and learning.

MORE HELPFUL STRATEGIES TO RAISE YOUR GRADE

1. **Commit time and effort.**
 - a. Begin studying for exams early, allowing plenty of time to ask questions of a tutor or of your instructor.
2. **Minimize distractions.**
 - a. Multi-tasking and distractions such as checking text messages or Facebook degrade studying.
3. **Attend all your classes.**
 - a. Attending class is vital to your achievement. Skipping class will almost certainly negatively affect your grades because you will miss information needed to succeed.
4. **Set realistic goals.**
 - a. Space out study time, avoid cramming, and maximize review time.
5. **Stay on track.**
 - a. Come up with a method for keeping track of assignments and upcoming exams. For example, use a planner and mark upcoming due dates on a whiteboard.
6. **Every point counts.**
 - a. Follow instructions carefully, ask questions when unsure, finish and turn in every homework assignment, and complete any extra credit assignments offered.
7. **Improve study habits.**
 - a. Visit the Learning Lab or talk with your instructor about improving your study skills.

Handout adapted by E. Foster at the Pinnacle Learning Lab from the following resource:

Chew, S., & Samford Communication Channel. (2011). *How to Get the Most Out of Studying*. YouTube Video Series.