

AAPEX
ATHLETIC, ACADEMIC, AND PERSONAL EXCELLENCE

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READING PERIOD AND FINAL EXAM TIPS

Reading Period can be overwhelming at times, especially for those who have yet to experience it. To help guide you, members of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee asked fellow athletes, as well as Peer Advising Fellows, for the advice they wish they had had during their first Reading Period. AAPEX added to that advice. Here is a list of pointers to help you be successful during Reading Period and finals:

1. Make a "Training Schedule" for Reading Period and Exams
 - a. Make a daily "training schedule" of when to study each subject (see attached grid).
 - b. Balance is the key to productive Reading and Exam Periods.
 - i. Include study time, review sessions, project deadlines, and exam dates.
 - ii. Do some physical activity at least every other day. It will help you relax and focus more on your work.
 - iii. Do one fun thing every day. It's important to incorporate some fun, to break up your work routine. This will make your work periods more productive.
 - iv. Take downtime that's physically distant from your study space. It won't feel like a break if you are in the same place. Plan time to go into Boston or take walks around Cambridge.
 - v. Reading Period is a good time to investigate study abroad opportunities, summer internships, etc.
 - c. Make a schedule that works for *you*. Don't be too influenced by how others are approaching their exams.
 - d. Fill the hours you would spend in class with study time, then add a bit more as necessary. Final projects are often more demanding than regular assignments, even if they have the same official title.
 - e. Set personal deadlines that are earlier than the official deadlines, and leave wiggle room.
 - f. Be mindful about what times of day you're most productive – for example, you may be better solving math problems in the mornings, but you may be a more productive reader just before bed.
 - g. Check, and then double-check, your paper due dates and your exam schedule. Then write it down. It's not a bad idea to have a friend check these with you, and vice versa.
 - h. Prioritize your courses as appropriate, but don't over-focus on one exam if you have several.
 - i. If you have back-to-back exams, definitely study for the second before the first is over.

- j. Be aware that it's really easy to procrastinate in courses that you don't like or that scare you. Don't fall into this trap! Avoid it by starting to study *early* for those exams.
- k. Don't delude yourself into thinking you can wait until the night before a final to start studying for it. It's not worth all the stress, and you really can't synthesize, integrate, or process a semester's worth of Harvard material in 12 hours even if that worked for you in high school.
- l. Your schedule should help get you into a regular work and sleep routine. Although you want to make sure you are not cooped up in the library the whole time, try not to make a habit of being out really late every night and sleeping in every day. Be awake during the day. Getting up for that 9:15am final exam is much more difficult if you've let your body get used to waking up at 2 in the afternoon! So practice being awake in those early hours. Not having class may make it feel like you can stay up till sunrise with no repercussions, but you will end up paying the price.
- m. Study when it is time to study, and relax when it's time to relax.
- n. Be *realistic* when figuring out how much time things will take. Don't underestimate by saying that finishing a 5-page paper will take just 2 hours, or you'll set yourself up for failure and will abandon your schedule.
- o. Be *specific* when writing your schedule. If possible, rather than writing just "WORK" into a time block (too vague), write something like, "Review problem sets from Unit 1."
- p. It is okay to revise and adjust your schedule as needed.
- q. A daily and weekly schedule is important, but don't forget to look even further ahead at what is coming up.
- r. After taking a final, assume you'll be too tired to study for any subsequent exams for the rest of that day and night.
- s. Try not to worry too much about Reading Period. It can be perfectly okay to have lot more free time than usual.

2. Study Strategies

- a. Study actively.
 - i. Simply re-reading notes might not be the best way to absorb material.
 - ii. Consider copying your notes to engage with them.
 - iii. Do practice problems.
 - iv. If possible, take at least 1 practice exam under timed, exam-like conditions.
- b. If you've never been inside the exam room, visit it beforehand, during Reading Period, so you can visualize yourself there, knowing where you might want to sit, etc.
- c. Think about using less crowded study areas. Do you really want to be in Lamont with 500 classmates? Try the Widener stacks for a more private setting.
- d. Studying with your best friends may sound like fun, but make sure it will be productive.
- e. Keep all your courses in mind, and shift gears from studying one course to another if you get stuck or bored.
- f. Visit <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~exams> to see old finals for many classes.

- g. Before fall exams, the Bureau of Study Counsel (BSC) usually offers workshops called "Making the Best Use of Reading Period" and "Exam-Taking Strategies." Call 617-495-2581 or visit the BSC at 5 Linden Street for more information.
- h. Your classes may offer extra office hours. Use them!
- i. Attend review sessions. They might give a hint of the material on the final exam. And you'll get more out of the review session if you've reviewed the material yourself, first.
- j. It's easy to spend 3 hours in Annenberg. Beware of extended meals!
- k. If Facebook or other password-protected distractions are too tempting, get a trusted friend to change your password while you're studying.

3. Working With Others and Around Others

- a. Use study groups if they truly help you. Some people just don't like study groups or find them less effective than studying on their own, and that's okay. Group studying can be helpful, but make sure that group time is actually productive. Pick people you will actually study with
- b. "Divide and conquer" the work by making a study guide with classmates. Control your study guides so they're manageable; a 1,500-page study guide is brutal!
- c. Have a reliable friend or roommate plan to give you a wake-up call the morning of the final as a back-up to your alarm.
- d. Talk with roommates *in advance* about what your room will be during Reading Period and finals. Will people study there? Socialize there?
- e. Be considerate. If music can be heard outside your room, it's too loud.
- f. Remember that people have different Reading Period and exam schedules.
- g. Keep in mind that there are exams on Saturday. Your friends and roommates might have plans different from yours on Friday night.

4. Exam Eve and Exam Day

- a. Arrange for a wake-up call from a friend, as a backup to your 2 alarms.
- b. Cramming the night before isn't helpful. Schedule time to relax, and to "review gently," on the evening before an exam.
- c. Eat a decent breakfast on exam day.
- d. Take comfort in the fact that your classmates really *are* as nervous/anxious as you are.
- e. Remember to bring all important materials to the exam – pens, pencils, calculator, water, snacks, etc. Don't forget any allowed course materials.

SCHEDULE

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 a.m.							
2 a.m.							
3 a.m.							
4 a.m.							
5 a.m.							
6 a.m.							
7 a.m.							
8 a.m.							
9 a.m.							
10 a.m.							
11 a.m.							
12noon							
1 p.m.							
2 p.m.							
3 p.m.							
4 p.m.							
5 p.m.							
6 p.m.							
7 p.m.							
8 p.m.							
9 p.m.							
10 p.m.							
11 p.m.							
12midn't							