

## Test Prep: What is a Study Plan?

It is easy to feel like you don't have time to create a study plan prior to an exam and it will be more time efficient to just dive in. You may find yourself sorting through a multitude of materials – textbooks, lecture slides, notes, previous exams, homework examples – and feeling overwhelming to determine which direction is best. This is distracted studying, where you spend more time preparing what to study versus actually reviewing material in a way that “sticks.”

*So, why should I create a study plan?*

**It only takes 15-20 minutes** to map out your study plan over the course of 5-7 days.

**There is a difference between preparing and reviewing material.** Both pieces are central to studying, but both must be *completed* to actively learn. It isn't enough to make flash cards, re-copy notes, or look at practice problems. You must also sort flash cards, recite answers from your notes in different orders, and work the practice problems without a formula/answer sheet.

**This “prep” work allows you to maximize your study time.** You've already mapped out each day with exactly what you want to accomplish. You have thought through your top priorities for the day, the materials you need, and estimated how long it will take. Your brain doesn't have to do that extra work and you can focus on the material itself.

**You are more likely to hold yourself accountable, which means less cramming.** We all have heard that cramming the night before an exam isn't effective, but it is sometimes hard to avoid. Procrastination is a difficult habit to break. However, if you know that it will take 5-7 days of dedicated study sessions to feel prepared for your exam, it is a motivator to stick to it, go to your study space, and focus.

**Short, focused, and frequent study sessions are critical to learning.** Why? You are able to chunk information into smaller pieces so they are easier to learn. You also give your brain time to rest in between sessions and approach it again in a refreshed headspace.

**It will help you feel confident for the exam.** Test anxiety is a common experience for many students. While this will not fully erase anxious feelings that are associated with test-taking, studies show that preparedness is linked with decreased feelings of test anxiety.

**You'll actually remember the material.** This goes beyond just the test itself. This material is more likely to be something you'll understand long-term, which will help your future self-studying for future tests in the exam.

**Next exam, you'll be able to study smarter (not harder).** Now that you have a written plan that you have stuck to, you'll have a better strategy for the next test. You'll be able to review your study plan and determine what material was most important for this last exam (e.g. Maybe you need to focus more on practice problems than lecture material).

