

Study Tricks That Have Nothing to Do with the Luck of the Irish

Some of the best ways to ace exams are just common sense: keep up with the reading, do the homework, don't miss class. Of course, this late in the semester, you may find yourself in cram mode regardless of how much prep work you've accomplished. So here are some quick tips to help keep you focused and on target for your best exam season yet.

- **Find a Study Buddy.**

By the end of the semester, you've probably found at least one classmate you can hang with—someone who's working at your pace (or better yet, a bit ahead of you) and someone who's willing to put the time in. Even if your schedules won't allow for regular in-person meet ups, you can still share notes and connect through study apps.

- **Test Yourself.**

Quizzing yourself may be one of the best ways to prepare for the real deal. Focus on topics you're likely to see on the exam, and if it's an essay exam, actually practice writing out your responses. And don't beat yourself up if you can't remember who ruled France in 1809 (it was Napoleon): The harder it is to remember a piece of information in practice mode, the more likely you are to remember it in the future.

- **Use a Pen (or Pencil).**

Chances are, you hardly ever use a pen or pencil outside of class. Make studying the exception. [Research suggests](#) that when you write your notes out by hand—typing doesn't count!—we store information more securely. So start by re-copying the most important notes from the semester onto a new sheet of paper.

- **Read Out Loud.**

Reading out loud lets you mentally store information two ways: seeing it and hearing it. Of course, you'll probably get shushed in the library, so maybe save this technique for the dorm.

- **Give Yourself a Break.**

Just like exercising your body, exercising your brain requires breaks between reps. You just can't maintain your optimum level of concentration without taking time to recover from the work you've put in. Take a walk, go to the gym, chat with a friend, or grab a snack. It might feel like procrastination, but it's not. Taking regular short breaks will not only improve your focus, it can boost your productivity too.

- **Take a Nap.**

If a quick walk around the block just isn't enough to get you refocused, maybe it's time to catch some Z's. (This one might get you kicked out of the library, too, so again: save this one for the dorm.) Pulling an all-nighter might seem like the way to go—especially when you're staring down a textbook full of equations—but staying up all night has actually been linked to impaired cognitive performance and a [greater sensitivity to stress](#). In the days leading up to a big exam, aim to get those seven to nine hours a night, so sleep deprivation doesn't undo all the hard work you've put in.

- **Stay Offline.**

We've all been there, facing the siren call of a friend's Facebook wall on the eve of a giant exam. If a computer is necessary for studying, try an app (such as [this one](#)) that blocks the Internet for a short period of time and see how much more you get done.