How to Survive Finals

Quite obviously, you are probably your own worst enemy when it comes to preparing for finals or midterms. I hope the information detailed below will help you better meet the challenge.

TEST TAKING IS:
25% Studying
25% Attitude
25% Taking care of yourself
25% Being "Test Smart"

Study Tips

1. Realize it's a little late, so you'll have to make the most of the time you have.
2. Think about how you learn best, then study that way. Some of us learn most efficiently by reading, some by listening, and some by writing.
3. Repetition is important.
4. Spend time studying what you don't know, not what you DO know.
5. Identify what the professor tests on. If the prof's tests so far have been mostly on the reading, concentrate on the reading. If it's on the lecture, concentrate on your notes. If the test is usually partly from the lecture and partly from the book, PRIORITIZE ACCORDINGLY. If the prof wrote the book, expect to see stuff from it.
6. Take notes on the reading. I suggest you do it chapter by chapter. The idea is that if you take notes on the reading you get twice as much exposure to the important information. PLUS, when it comes time to go through what was in the book, it's much faster to read your notes on a chapter than to re-read the chapter.
7. Take notes on your notes. Basically it's the same concept as taking notes on the book, weeding out the information you don't need so you can concentrate on the information you do need.
8. Read the notes on a given chapter of the book, then read the corresponding chapter in the book. Usually, this will help you make sense of your notes and/or the chapter. Plus it will reinforce the information
9. Create a mnemonic mechanism if you need to memorize a list or body of related items. That is create an acronym containing the first letter of each item you need to remember in the order you need to remember it. Confused? Ask any "Bio" major.

Attitude Tips

Attitude can make as much as a whole grade difference. By this I mean how you approach a test mentally could greatly affect how well you do.

As Hot Lips Houlihan (of M.A.S.H fame) said, "Frank (Burns), you've got to harness that great mass of cowardly energy."
**BE AGGRESSIVE.** If you can't, the anxiety you're feeling will disrupt your concentration, cause mental blocks, and will keep you from doing the best you can.

**Famous Anxiety Causes:**

"If I don't do well on this test, I'll flunk the course, I'll never graduate, I'll never get a job..."

- Don't put your whole future on the line with a single test. It's very unlikely one test will make or break your chances for a future.

"I could study a million years for this test and I'd still bomb it..."

- Don't under-estimate yourself. YOU CAN! Each of us learns at different rates and fatigue may cloud the obvious. If you "don't get it", find someone to explain it to you. There's a "Aha, that's it. How could I be so stupid!" right around the corner.

"My parents have invested so much money in me and I can't let them down..."

- They'll still love you no matter how you do on this test! You will do only as well as you tell yourself you are going to. If you tell yourself that you CAN"T do something, you won't. If you can convince yourself you CAN, nothing can stand in your way.

**Improving your attitude**

1. Take a deep breath and RELAX!!!

2. **Psyche yourself up.** Tell yourself and others that you're going to "kick the day-lights out of this final!" You CAN if you GO FOR IT!!!!

3. Realize you will survive.

**Taking Care of Yourself**

If you haven't slept in three days, you'll have trouble remembering your own name, let alone Chemistry.

The information below is pretty basic, but people still typically blow it off. If you can approximate your normal sleep cycle and daily routine, you'll have a DEFINITE ADVANTAGE over the folks that don't. "Approximate" is the operative word here. There's probably no way you're going to get eight hours sleep.
1. **Budget your time.** Shoot for getting at least SIX HOURS of sleep per night. You will retain information BETTER if you're not falling asleep as you read.

2. **Take a nap.** The best time is just after a final. It will HELP make up for the sleep you missed last night, give your mind and body a chance to recover, and help you relax a bit. All these things will help you study better. There are two words of warning:
   
   * ALWAYS SET AN ALARM CLOCK. Otherwise you may not wake up in time to study.
   * MILD ACTIVITY. Do something mildly active after waking and before starting to study.

3. **Take a short walk before going to bed.** It will give your mind a chance to finish processing the information you just learned and give you a chance to RELAX before going to bed. Plus the cool night air will help you sleep. The better you sleep, the more information you retain!!!!

4. **Eat real food, not junk food.** You will need a lot of plain old PHYSICAL STAMINA to get through test periods. Junk food has a lot of "empty calories and carbohydrates." Your mind and body need the "real things" to function. DON'T overeat. A full stomach means a slow mind.

5. **Don't caffeine out!!** TOO MUCH caffeine means you won't be able to concentrate because you'll be easily distracted. The caffeine will also disrupt your sleep. After a while the caffeine won't keep you awake enough to study, but too awake to sleep. If you are going to quit studying in two hours, stop taking caffeine so you will have a chance to "come off your caffeine high" at about the time you want to sleep.

6. **Get a little light exercise in.** Light is the operative word here. An occasional study break will help your retention.

7. **Use some relaxation techniques.** Take some deep breathes, get a back rub.

**Tips for Taking Tests (beyond the obvious)**

1. **Get to the test site a little early.** Get there early enough to relax and get your head straight, but not so early as to let the anxiety you left outside catch up with you.

2. **Wear comfortable clothing.** You don't earn points for fashion during finals exams. (**The only exception is if it helps you "psyche yourself up.")

3. **Eat a candy bar** (no nuts) shortly before the test to restore your energy level if you are tired. Take something with you too.

4. **Don't eat a lot just before a final.** Physically speaking your stomach would rob your brain of blood. Be a little hungry (of mind and body). It's just like swimming.

5. **Relax.** Flex/Stretch your muscles starting with your feet and then move up.

6. **Take a few slow, deep breathes**

7. **"Psyche" yourself up.** Tell yourself, "When I'm done with this final, it's going to beg for mercy..."
8. **Write any mnemonic mechanisms on your test,** as soon as you can legally start the exam.

9. **Read the instructions carefully.**

10. **Budget your time.** Don't spend too much time on any one question.

11. **Do the easiest question first.** If you don't know the answer SKIP IT and go to the next question. Once you've finished the questions you know, you can go back to it.

12. **Look for the answers/clues** to questions you don't know in other questions. You'd be surprised.

13. **If you hit a block,** close your eyes, take a deep breath, and let it out slowly while trying to clear your mind.

14. **Be careful of words like "always","never", or "sometimes".**

15. **Make educated guesses.** If you don't know the answer, ELIMINATE the answers you feel unlikely, then choose from the remaining answers.

16. **Always check over your answers.** Make sure you didn't make a mistake transposing the answers to the answer sheet. Also the pressure may be lessened now so you might notice a question you answered incorrectly.