

Exam Study Tips for Students in Their First Semester

I: Make the Most of Reading Period

Establish a sensible schedule during Reading Period.

- Plan your time in advance, day by day
- Avoid unproductive distractions (social media, your phone in general)
- Devise healthy rewards for each day's hard work
- Stop periodically for small rewards (a cup of tea, a brief walk)
- Regulate your sleep schedule: if you have a 9 a.m. exam during finals, it'll help to get in the habit of rising early (rather than sleeping in until midday), since doing so will make getting up for the exam less of a shock to your system.

Study with a purpose and reflect on the big picture

- Consider each course and its major themes
- Review the syllabus to get a sense of the larger purposes and goals of the course
- Know why you're reviewing your course notes or course readings
- Consider how might you be able to apply the knowledge you've gained on the exam. Instructors often ask students to synthesize (rather than regurgitate) information on their exams, so it will be useful to think about how a given text or lecture might help you demonstrate your mastery of the course materials.

Two ways to prepare for non-technical exams:

- Write brief summaries of major concepts and ideas
- Convert your lecture notes into small paragraphs that explain key concepts

Two ways to study for a language exam?

- Break down your studying into brief (30- to 45-minutes) intervals over 4-5 days. Cramming a semester's worth of verb tenses and vocabulary into one 3-hour study period will be unproductive and stressful
- consider writing out verb conjugations *by hand*: studies show that handwriting leads to more efficient memorization

General tips

- Consider forming a study group
- Find a study environment that works for you: some first-years study well in their rooms or at a café or coffee shop, while others need to be in the residential college library or tucked away in the stacks

- Ask a “study buddy” to keep you motivated and on task
Encourage one another to keep working for set periods of time, and then take breaks together
- Exercise, and avoid depressants or stimulants (like alcohol and caffeine, respectively) that alter your sleep habits.

II: Respect the Community

- Please be reasonably compassionate towards others' short fuses
- Be sensitive to the study needs and stress levels of others
- Consider surprising a friend with a small gift or a kind note
- Try not to isolate yourself from those who care about you
- See your dean or [YC3](#) if you're worried about yourself or a friend

III: Remain Calm

- Get your sleep so that you can think clearly. Lack of sleep often leads to bad studying and decisions. Have a good nap, talk to friends or family, or go see your residential college dean for a reality check.
- Exams do not measure who you are as a person. Maintain your perspective, and please keep in mind: one credit is only 1/36th of the minimum requirement for the degree. In the overall scheme of things, any given exam is a minor moment in your college experience
- Along those lines, exams may present you with anxiety and adversity, but they generally are not “crises.” If you're shifting into a panic mode, take a break or talk to someone (a friend, your dean, [YC3](#), etc.)
- Maintain academic honesty. Students don't enroll at Yale dreaming of how they will cheat their way through the term. Academic dishonesty most often results from a lack of sleep and stress (which usually go hand in hand); poor time management over a period of many weeks; and last-minute panic. The harsh penalties for academic dishonesty are not worth it
- A restful and well-deserved winter break is almost here, so hang in there! You can do this!