



JIBC

Studying and Learning Strategies

Plus test anxiety management and exam tips

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Organizational strategies

Strategies and tips to consider to assist you in submitting assignments on time:

1. Map out the term at the beginning:
 - a. Look at all your course syllabi and jot down the due dates for all assignments, essays, projects and exams on one piece of paper (for all courses).
 - b. Get either a planner (that has a calendar with space to make notes) or a wall calendar (that has blocks/space for each date to make notes).
 - c. Write the due dates for all assignments, essays, tests etc. in red in the planner or calendar (for all courses).
 - d. Write down any events (such as holidays, weddings, vacations, sports practices etc.) on the calendar or planner (in another colour: maybe blue). These events are part of life and will impact your planning and ability to get things done. **Important:** these will be added and changed as life happens, so you need to be flexible with your due dates. Remember, this is only a plan to help keep you ahead of the game: you will need to adjust timelines as priorities shift but if you can stick as close as possible to the timelines you will lessen your likelihood of falling behind.
 - e. For each of your assignments (essays, presentations, projects) estimate how long it will take you to complete the assignment (factoring in employment, homework, exams, other assignments, family events etc.):
 - i. Write on the planner or calendar the start date for the assignment (this is the date you hope to start working on the assignment—if there are multiple things due at the same time, you may have to choose to start some projects much earlier: try not to be working on multiple things at the same time as that can be

harder to manage and more stressful: instead, spread out the start dates for assignments based on priority and how much free time you have).

- ii. Write down milestone dates for each assignment on the calendar or planner to help keep you on track (this is important). For example, for a research essay for CRES 1850 do something like this:
 - Due date -October 15: write CRES 1850 Research paper due (in red) on the calendar or in planner
 - Start date/choose a topic – September 20: write CRES 1850 Research paper start date/choose topic (in red) on calendar or in planner
 - Start research – September 21: write CRES 1850 Research paper start research on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Complete research – September 26: write CRES 1850 Research paper research complete on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Draft thesis – September 29: write CRES 1850 Research paper thesis done on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Write outline – October 3: write CRES 1850 Research paper outline complete calendar or in planner (in red)
 - First draft – October 8: write CRES 1850 Research paper first draft complete on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Revise outline and draft – October 11: write CRES 1850 Research paper outline and draft revised on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Type final paper – October 12: write CRES 1850 Research paper final paper written on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Review and correct typos and put together references – October 14: write CRES 1850 Research paper ALL DONE on calendar or in planner (in red)
 - Submit paper – October 14.
- iii. As I said above, your plans will need to change. Be flexible, but try your best to stick to your plan. If there are multiple assignments due the same week (which is typical) then spread out the pain and get the smaller and easier assignments done early. This approach will give you time to work on the longer and more challenging assignments later. If you fall a bit behind, don't stress. Try to plan to submit the paper a day or two early, so if you fall behind you can still get it done by the deadline.

2. **Plan the next day the evening before:** about an hour before bed, think about the next day and jot down what your day will look like. It need not be complicated, but rather list what needs to get done, when and how long it will take. If you do this you can help avoid lying awake in bed worrying about the next day and what you have to get done. When you wake up, you may need to make some changes as things unfold, but at least you are rested and have a plan of action.

Example plan:

7am: wake

7:30am: review notes from yesterday

9am-12pm: CRES 1850

1-4pm, BUSN 1100

5-530pm: exercise
7-9pm: write CRES 1850 outline
9:30-10:15pm: read Chapter 23 for BUSN 1100

Memorization strategies

1. **Dual coding:** try to create both a visual and a verbal memory for the same information. Once the information is associated with two senses instead of one, retrieval becomes much easier.
Examples: try to translate a written passage from the textbook into a drawing or flow chart. Instead of studying in silence, try explaining the concepts out loud, even if it's just to yourself.
2. **Sleep effect:** review information you're trying to memorize right before you go to sleep. When you are sleeping, your brain recuperates and reorganizes information gathered during the day. Deep sleep is very important in memory consolidation. This is why it's a good idea to spend a few minutes reviewing a chart or going through some flashcards right before bed. For best effects, try to test yourself shortly after you wake up.

Reading strategies

Example: based off 20 pages from *Essentials of Paramedic Care Volume = 2 to 3 hours*

- 1) Read the abstract or overview if there is one **(2-3 mins)**
- 2) Read the guiding questions/objectives or end of chapter questions if provided (reading these will let you know what to expect in the reading: they highlight what is most important) **(1-2 mins)**
- 3) Read the chapter or article title, then read the headings and subheadings (so you get a high level sense of what is contained in the reading) **(1-2 mins)**
- 4) Read the intro and conclusion/summary **(2-4 mins)**
- 5) Skim the article (this helps to prime your memory and orient your thinking) **(5-8 mins)**
- 6) Read the article through slowly but don't take notes or highlight **(40-60 mins)**
One strategy for longer chapters is to 'chunk' the reading into sections. For the example of a 40 page chapter break it into 10 page segments (or chunks) and take a break after each chunk. This will keep you fresher and more focused.
- 7) Read again and highlight **(20-30 mins)**
- 8) Take notes from highlighted sections **(30-45 mins)**
- 9) Make flashcards from notes (if needed) **(15-20 mins).**

Note-taking strategies

1. **Pre-read the chapter and/or review the Power Point slides (if available) before class:** if you have time, make headings in your notebook from the reading on critical sections of information (e.g. "Radiology") so that you can start categorizing your notes while in class. Write these notes in one colour and add to these notes through the lecture in another colour so you can distinguish (when studying) what was in the text and what the instructor taught in class. Generally, what the instructor focuses on is the material s/he will test you on later. These notes will become what you (mostly) will use to study for tests. When reviewing the assigned readings write down things you are challenged by in the notebook (highlight them) and see if your

instructor touches on these ideas/subjects during the lecture and add what she/he says to your notes.

2. **Take effective notes in class:** don't write everything you hear down.
 - a. Focus on the main points which typically could be:
 - i. Ideas, terms, subjects that were outlined in the assigned readings associated with the lecture
 - b. Listen and think about what you are hearing: try to 'understand' the information not just hear it and regurgitate it into your notebook. Engage in class (ask questions and participate—you will remember things more readily).
3. **After class take a break then:**
 - a. Review your notes from the class
 - i. Try to clarify and understand what you wrote down: if you don't understand something you wrote down, try to locate it in a reading or ask a classmate
 - ii. Highlight what is important and research what you don't understand
 - b. Clean up your notes so you can read them and they make sense
 - c. Go back to the textbook and see where the information from the lecture and the book meet/overlap (as this is likely the most important information).
 - i. Synthesize your notes with the readings: if you took notes by pen and paper then put your notes into categories or under topics/headings and then add relevant and associated ideas and information from the readings.
 - ii. Synthesize your notes by typing them out and read them out to yourself while you are typing them. This will help with memorization and retention of critical information and these notes will be what you use to study.
 - iii. Make flashcards out of difficult concepts or terms
 - d. Explain what you just learned to a classmate or friend or out loud to yourself

General study tips

1. Be organized: plan out your study schedule in advance (as least the day prior) and map out what you will study, for how long and list a few 'goals' and as you accomplish each 'goal' check it off: reward yourself after each goal is accomplished with a snack, a short break etc. If you are not focused then walk away for a minute, gather yourself and return. Know what you are studying and why!
2. Study in blocks: set the goal that you will study for 30-40 mins then take break, come back and review what you learned and then test yourself. If good, move on. If not, study it again.
3. Try to associate terms and definitions with the big picture- where does it fit in and why are you learning it? Understand versus must memorize.
4. Move around when studying (try it to see if it helps: touch words on the book: highlight key phrases and concepts: read it out loud to yourself).
5. Put your phone (IPad) in another room: it is a study killer and procrastination king. Going to your phone during your break can be your reward.

General anxiety/relaxation tips

1. **Don't suppress your anxious thoughts:** instead, thank your brain for alerting you, breathe deeply and imagine mentally moving this worry into a safe space.
2. **Determine if what you are worrying about is a minor or major problem:** write them down to see them on paper (so they are concrete and no longer abstract thoughts floating around) and then trust yourself to make a decision: isolate the major issues from the minor and put together a written plan to deal with them. If distractions creep into your studying, write them down quickly as they come up and remind yourself you can look at them later (after studying) and deal with them then. Remember, worrying does not solve the problem: **YOU SOLVE IT!**
3. **Worrying can come out of nowhere and it can disappear into that same nowhere.** Not every thought needs your attention. Consider the thought/worry and determine if it needs your attention or if you can breathe and let it go.
4. **Don't fear your anxiety.** Accept you have it and work with managing it by writing down negative thoughts and then countering with positive thoughts.
5. **Pay attention to your physical and mental cues and Mindfulness**
 - a. During stressful situations (like SIMS or tests) are there certain physical or mental symptoms that occur, such as getting warm, sweating, rapid breathing, a racing mind, tightening muscles, a temptation to want to argue or disagree, frustration/overwhelmed? If you notice these symptoms you are likely going to 'react' to them in some way, possibly by getting loud, agitated, rude or conversely quiet, withdrawn, non-assertive etc. It is natural during stressful or challenging events for people to take a fight or flight approach. My suggestion is to check in with yourself prior to your exam or SIMS—determine how you are feeling, are you feeling anxious, overwhelmed etc. (see symptoms above). If you feel you are not in a good state of mind (which manifests physically into clenched fists, sweats, jumpiness) then take a STOP moment. Walk away for a moment and do the following:
 - i. Close your eyes and take big deep breaths (focus on the sensation of your breath). Make sure you feel your feet on the ground (this is a simple grounding/calming exercise). Learn more about Mindfulness Exercises at: <http://mindfulwaythroughanxietybook.com/exercises/>
 - ii. Next, breath in and clench up your shoulders so the muscles tighten (hold them up for 5 seconds) then slowly breath out and relax your shoulders and repeat 3-5 times. This is called progressive relaxation.
 - iii. Quietly remind yourself (under your breath or in your head) that you are ready, you have studied and you are determined to be successful. Do not think of anything else but the task at hand and how you will reach the end of the exercise/task successfully.
6. **I strongly suggest you do some vigorous exercise about 45 mins or so prior to an exam or SIMS.** At a minimum do some jumping jacks or go for a quick walk but optimally go for a bike ride or run if you can. This will help calm you down and focus your nervous energy. Drink lots of water after the exercise and before the test or SIMS. Stretch too so your muscles won't tighten due to stress during the exam.
7. **Positive self-talk:** Instead of allowing Automatic Pilot to run your life, **CHOOSE** to be in the pilot seat. Be the pilot of your self-talk. Self-talk includes all the purposeful and random thoughts that run through our minds. As in automatic thinking, self-talk is often negative: *"I really messed up on that test, I don't deserve to be in this program."* As the pilot of your thoughts, strive for

neutral or positive self-talk. There are many ways you can re-frame your self-talk. One way is through communicating with your classmates. Neutral and/or positive self-talk is more likely to lead to problem solving and improving situations thereby, decreasing stress.

Being the Pilot of your self-talk requires you to become **AWARE** of your inner conversations. Remember, self-talk can be automatic and have a life of its own if we allow it. Take charge, stand back, and become aware of your thoughts. The first step to changing negative or defeating self-talk is AWARENESS. For those of you who have fallen into a pattern of negative self-talk, learning to take control of self-talk may be a challenge but it is worth the effort. Changing habits takes 28 days of conscientious and dedicated practice.

8. **Thought-stopping** is another technique used to eliminate negative thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts. Here's how it works:

First: once you are aware of the negative self-talk, practice letting it go. For example: The negative might be *"I can never complete this program."* First, **challenge** the thought by saying *"That is not true!"*

Second: **replace** the negative thought with *"I was admitted to this program, I do all my readings, I am dedicated to studying tests and I have been successful as a student before. This is a challenging program. I believe I can be successful."* To use thought-stopping, will need to be very aware of your internal self-talk as the thought-stopping technique will not occur automatically. With enough practice, neutral or positive self-talk becomes more automatic.

The test

Pre-test tips:

1. Take care of yourself (mostly common sense stuff):
 - a. Sleep well the night before
 - i. Do not drink the night before as alcohol stimulates anxiety
 - ii. Get off your technology at least an hour before bed
 - b. Eat a good meal before the test
 - i. Avoid too much caffeine or sugar, especially energy drinks as these fuel anxiety.
 - c. Exercise about an hour before the test: go for a run, vigorous walk (this helps to physiologically prepare for a test: it helps relax you) or maybe a hike in the woods.
 - d. Bring water to the test
2. Do not get into a negative thought pattern: rather, be confident that you are prepared and know the material
 - a. Avoid talking to other people before the test (in the hallway before the class; avoid texting and phone calls) as other people may have anxiety and that will fuel your anxiety. Do not engage in discussions about the test with others at any point in advance as they will have different opinions which can fuel rumours and cause you to overthink things.
3. Get to the test early (but again, avoid talking to others about the test)
 - a. Get a good seat (place with less distractions like not near a window or the door)
 - b. Ground yourself (put your feet flat on the floor: take 5 big breaths: close your eyes and have a positive visualization (go to your happy place): this will calm you

- c. Tell yourself you can do this and know the information
- d. Turn off your phone and put it away (it will just distract you)
- e. Wear ear plugs to block out distractions (if allowed)

During the test:

1. First, skim all the questions
 - a. Don't try to read the questions to fully understand them but rather just look at them one by one to help you recognize there are no surprises awaiting you—this is just the test you have prepared for.
 - b. Answer the questions you are most confident about first (if it is a written exam then find one you feel good about it and do it first—confidence breeds confidence).
 - c. If you draw a blank on a question move to another one: don't dwell on it too long --go back to that one(s) at the end.
2. Ground yourself during the test if you need to:
 - a. Practice tension-release exercises
 - i. Breathing
 - ii. Close eyes and find your happy place
 - iii. If tensing up: focus on a group of muscles and contract them for 10 seconds then relax them. Feel the difference between the contraction and release and focus on that. Example: scrunch up your shoulders for 10 seconds, hold, and then release and breathe out.
3. If you are getting writer's block then just start writing something, even if it is not good. You will get into a flow.
4. If your mind goes 'blank' find a question you are more comfortable with. Start with all the easier questions or the ones more confident about then work to the next level and finish with the hardest ones. If you are still 'blank' on a question just start writing down a few ideas and add to it until you have ideas taking shape on paper.
5. Tap your foot (quietly) if you are a kinesthetic learner (someone that likes to touch and feel to learn)—it may help you to get going.
6. Stay hydrated (but don't drink too much water so you don't have to go to the washroom too much).

After the test:

1. Don't talk to people about the exam: this just leads to anxiety as nobody knows what was right or wrong at this point: you cannot change the outcome after the exam!
2. Reward yourself: go to something you enjoy (make it a smart, healthy choice).

Resources

JIBC has lots of online resources on our website (see links below):

- **Learning resources and tips:** <http://www.jibc.ca/student-services/student-support/learning-resources>
 - Time and stress management tips
 - Scheduling

- Mindfulness
 - Exam strategies
 - This is a good one: **ETS:**
https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing_test_anxiety.pdf
 - Study, reading and note-taking tips (including some simple tips for memorization)
 - Writing supports (Peer Writing Support Program)
 - Online workshops (test anxiety, pre-writing techniques, reaching comprehension etc.)
- **Health and wellness resources and tips:** <http://www.jibc.ca/student-services/student-support/mental-health-and-wellness>
 - Healthy living creates a healthy mind
 - Useful Apps for students (ask Mark for these)
 - Mindshift (Anxiety)
 - Headspace (Meditation)
 - Code Blue (Depression and bullying)
 - Catch It (anxiety and depression)
 - Chill Panda (relaxation: removing worries)
 - Talking to your family about your schedule (ask Mark for tips)
 - Keeping your 'eye on the prize' (how to stay motivated—ask Mark for tips))
 - Cohorts (benefits and challenges – ask Mark for tips)

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