**Planning Your Study Time**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Scenario: It’s Monday. You have an exam on Friday over four chapters. Below are five possible study plans. Read through them, then answer the discussion questions below. | | | | |
| **Plan A** | **Plan B** | **Plan C** | **Plan D** | **Plan E** |
| **Monday**: Do other stuff | **Monday**: Do other stuff | **Monday**: Read ch. 1 | **Monday**: Read chs. 1 & 2 (at least) | **Monday:** Have all chapters read by today; test self over ch. 1 and review |
| **Tuesday**: Do other stuff | **Tuesday**: Do other stuff | **Tuesday**: Read ch. 2 | **Tuesday**: Test self over chs. 1 & 2; Read chs. 3 & 4 | **Tuesday:** Test self over ch. 2 and review chs. 1 & 2 |
| **Wednesday**: Find quizlet of terms; start reviewing quizlet | **Wednesday**: Start Reading | **Wednesday**: Read ch. 3 | **Wednesday**: Test self over chs. 3 & 4; review chs. 1 & 2 based on self-test | **Wednesday:** Test self over ch. 3 and review chs. 1, 2, & 3 |
| **Thursday**: Finish reviewing quizlet | **Thursday**: Finish reading and review | **Thursday**: Read ch. 4 and review all chapters | **Thursday**: Review chs. 3 & 4 based on self-test; review and self-test all chapters | **Thursday:** Test self over ch. 4 and review all chapters |
| **Friday**: Take exam | **Friday**: Take exam | **Friday**: Take exam | **Friday**: Take exam | **Friday:** Take exam |

**Discussion Questions**

1. Consider the strengths and weaknesses of each plan, which of them do you think would be most effective and least effective for learning? Explain your reasoning.
2. Which plan best describes how you have studied in the past? If none of them does, describe how you study.
3. Which plan do you think you should follow and why? What might be some barriers to your implementing the plan, and how can you try to overcome them?

**Instructor Discussion Guide for “Planning Your Study Time” Activity**

Plan A represents a common student approach to studying: find a preexisting set of flash cards and then study them. It is an easy method that can easily go wrong. First, because someone else created the note cards, it may not be accurate, comprehensive, or reflect the learning priorities of the teacher. Second, note cards can lead to rote memorization of facts and definitions, which will not help students if they are tested on conceptual understanding and application. It is better if students create their own note cards that include examples and linkages to related concepts (e.g., [Senzaki et al., 2017](https://doi.org/10.1177/1475725717719771)). Better yet, students can create a cognitive map of the chapter or section, showing both concepts and relationships among them.

Plan B represents cramming—concentrating study time immediately before the exam. While cramming can be an effective study strategy for immediate recall, it is a poor study strategy for long-term recall because forgetting is rapid from massed studying. It is also a highly risky and stressful strategy. If it turns out that the material is more complex than the student anticipates, there is no additional time that the student can allocate for studying. If the student cannot grasp the material quickly or has questions, there is no opportunity to get help. If the student has misconceptions from the reading, there is no way to discover these before the exam. Students, especially struggling students and those who are aiming just to pass the exam, may easily fail the exam using this strategy. It is a good idea to discuss how cramming may come about not because students think it is a good strategy but because it is the only option for students when they use poor time management, are overcommitted, or have coinciding deadlines.

Plan C represents a methodical approach to studying. Every chapter is read once. Students may see this as a good study plan because it is thorough, but reading a chapter only once is not sufficient for learning complex new concepts. There is no mechanism for feedback about proper understanding (metacognition) or misconceptions. In addition, come the exam, students are likely to have forgotten chapters they read early in the week. Students need to have an opportunity to read the chapter, reflect on it, get answers to any questions about it, get feedback about their understanding, and review the material. Although comprehensive, this is not a good study plan for long-term learning.

Plan D is an optimal plan. It will lead to enduring learning and gives the student a good chance of developing a deep, accurate understanding of the material, but it requires more effort to carry out than previous plans. By reading, self-testing, then reviewing, students have a chance to reflect on the material, discover knowledge gaps and misconceptions, formulate questions, and get answers to those questions. This plan incorporates spacing, interleaving, and retrieval practice, all highly effective long-term learning strategies. This method requires more planning and self-discipline than the previous plans, but it is less stressful than cramming at the last minute and being uncertain about one’s level of understanding.

Plan E is an optimal plan for students who have the self-discipline to keep up with the readings or even read ahead. Students spend the week reviewing material they have already read. Like Plan D, this plan incorporates the proven learning strategies of spacing, interleaving, and retrieval practice. The time demands of multiple courses may prevent students from using this plan or doing so consistently.

\*\*\*

This handout appears in Stephen L. Chew, “Teaching Students How to Study,” *The Teaching Professor*, January 15, 2024, <https://www.teachingprofessor.com/topics/student-learning/study-strategies/teaching-students-how-to-study>.