Webinar Script
Exam Prep: Tips, Techniques and Resources for Studying While Physical Distancing

Presented by Rebecca Shaw, Student Success Coordinator
Friday April 3, 2020
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Introduction
We’ve put together some tips and resources to help you get started with studying for your exams. There are lots of strategies to help you study, so we’re just giving you some ideas that you can take some away to explore and discover what will work best for you.

We’ll start with some general study habits and resources and then dig in a little deeper into some techniques that enhance meaningful learning from visualization techniques that can help your memory to reflective writing techniques that can help you generate ideas.

Throughout, we’ve included tips on how to incorporate study techniques into online platforms so that you can support and be supported by your peers whether this means having an online study buddy or having a larger online study group.

We’ve built in some activities to make this webinar as interactive as possible. We’re also attempting to record this so that students can access it on-demand, but we’ll see if technology cooperates! I’ll also make sure we post the slides and a transcript where everyone can access it.

I also have my colleague Tomike assisting me today. She’ll be helping me with any technology glitches we might encounter, monitoring the chat and also will post links to the resources I talk about in the chat so that you can click the links and save them in your bookmarks for later.

I’ll pause at the end of each segment to see if anyone has any questions before moving on.

To be honest, I’m kind of winging using this webinar technology right now, but that’s fun, right? Let’s get started!

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Activity: Crowd-Sourced Motivation Strategies

Something that the staff at CSE has been grappling with lately is how to stay motivated and upbeat while working remotely.

I thought we could start off this webinar by crowd-sourcing some ideas to promote self-motivation. We’re a bit of a crowd today so having everyone try to speak might be too chaotic, so I’ll ask that everyone open up the Chat function and type in your ideas there. If you are wondering how to open up the Chat, hover your “mouse” at the bottom of the screen, you should see a “chat bubble” icon. Click on that and the Chat will open up on your screen.

The question is: How have you been staying motivated?
Resource Share: Queen’s University Student Academic Success Service “Manufacturing Motivation”


This handout also provides some ideas on how to get motivated. Feel free to open the link and save it so that you can take a look later.

Study Habits

Now let’s get into the meat & potatoes, the nitty-gritty. Studying really starts with developing learning habits that will set you up for success. Some of these habits might be familiar to you and you might already be implementing some of them. So let’s start with an anonymous poll, I’ll give you a few seconds to respond and then post the results.

Activity: Poll: What’s your study style?

Which of the identities to you resonate the most with?

- **Procrastinator:** I leave all my studying until the last possible moment and then stay up all night studying before a test.
- **Short-Cutter:** I read over my notes and the chapter summaries once. That reminds me of all that I need to know.
- **Multi-Tasker:** I study for all of my exams at once while watching TV, painting my toenails and planning my next meal.
- **Forward-Thinker:** I plan my study time well ahead of my exam and ensure that I have a balance between studying and other priorities so that I won’t be distracted.
- **Inner-Critic:** I don’t study. It won’t make a difference anyway.

Benefits of Distributed Practice:

Distributed practice is a learning strategy, where practice is broken up into a number of short sessions – over a longer period of time. For example, when studying for an exam dispersing your studying more frequently over a larger period of time will result in more effective learning than intense study the night before.
• Research favours this method for effective learning outcomes
• Effective for long-term retention and learning continuous tasks
• Less tiring; allows for mental and physical recovery
• Leaves time for feedback and self-reflection
• Better overall learning in the same amount of time spent studying


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Tips for Your Study Plan:

• Plan specific times for studying and stick to it
• Limit distractions during your study time (We’ll watch a short video about multi-tasking next)
• Schedule breaks within your study time
  o Studying too much at one time can be tiring and ineffective. Taking short breaks will help to restore your mental energy.
• Set specific goals for your study times
  o Goals will help you stay focused and monitor your progress. Simply sitting down to study has little value. You must be very clear about what you want to accomplish during your study times.
• Don’t put off the difficult stuff to later, start with your challenges
  o Dealing with the tough stuff when you have the most mental energy will reduce stress and ensure that you tackle your challenges rather than giving up on them.
• Check out this resource:
  o Academic Coaching Program Milestone Mapping Tool
  o The Milestone Mapping tool will guide you to reflect on your task, your goals, and the resources that you need to accomplish them.
• Don’t use planning as a procrastination tool!
  o Planning is very important, but don’t get bogged down in creating lists and strategies on how you’ll study. Sit down for a defined period to plan and then get started!

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Watch The Problem with Multi-Tasking video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpBi0_nuLME&feature=youtu.be

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Accountability/Seek Support

We talked a bit about staying motivated, but what about staying accountable? Consider ways that you can connect with others to stay accountable to your study plan.
**Study Buddy:** One way is to have a study buddy. This doesn’t have to be someone in your specific class, but a friend who is also studying would be a good fit. The purpose of having a general study buddy is to share your goals and stay accountable. You could connect together on an online platform like Skype, Zoom or FaceTime including quiet study time, and also breaks where you check-in with each other.

There are also some interesting resources out there that you might want to check-out.

**Focusmate.com:** If you are unable to connect with a friend or a classmate, Focusmate.com offers 3 free 50-minute sessions per week where you can connect online with someone else looking to be productive and accountable to their work.

**Study with Me:** Search YouTube for numerous “Study with Me” videos. Most videos aren’t live but you might be surprised at how inspiring it can be to have another person working quietly in different scenarios. There are more and more livestream videos of people simply being productive popping up every day as well.


**Online Study Groups:** You may also want to schedule an online study group. We at the CSE having been using Zoom, and this webinar is on Zoom right now. It is a great tool that allows multiple people to meet. I’m sure you’ve all got your own preferred online meeting platform, but there are some things to keep in mind when having an online study group, regardless of what platform you end up using.

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**Tips for Online Study Groups/Partnerships**

- **Set clear goals** – what do you want to accomplish and in what timeframe?
- **Create an agenda and stick to it** – Make a plan based on your goals and estimate how much time you’ll need for each part of your study session. Be sure to include breaks if your study session is longer than 1 hour.
- **Plan how you’ll manage the online space** – Online spaces can be a bit more difficulty to manage than an in-person meeting. It can be chaotic if everyone is speaking at once. Consider having each person contribute a thought at a time. This will also be helpful to ensure everyone’s voice is heard.
- **Collaborate and have fun** – Before your study session, have each person in your group take on one topic or concept. The challenge is to come up with a fun way and effective way to cover the material during your study session.
- **Teach to learn** – Tying into the above point, you’ll retain information more if you teach it to at least one other person. That’s why having your group teach and discuss different concepts and topics to each other is so powerful.
- **Encourage and celebrate** – Times are stressful right now. Acknowledge that by sharing encouragement with each other, and be sure to celebrate your victories even if it’s in small ways.

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Mixed methods
A quick note about “mixing it up”.

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Before we move on, does anyone have any questions so far?

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Study Strategies & Resources

Activity: Poll: Have you used any of the following strategies/resources before?

- UTM’s Old Exam Repository
- Quizlet
- Flash-cards
- Mind-mapping
- Memory Palace
- SQ3R or SQ4R
- Free-writing

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Self-Assessment Strategies

Self-assessment is a great way to not only practice exam questions but also to gauge what content you need to study more and what content you generally already have a good handle on. As was mentioned before, it makes the most sense to start by studying material that you find the most challenging.

A great place to start is to see if your class has a past exam in UTM’s Old Exam Repository.

Old Exam Repository Post Link http://exams.library.utoronto.ca.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/

I recommend that you take things further than just reviewing old exams though. Create your own study sets on Quizlet to test yourself and share them with your study buddy and/or study groups. Quizlet is free for 7 days and then about $2 a month if you wish to continue your subscription.

Quizlet Post Link https://quizlet.com/

Study group tip! Have each member of your study group prepare and deliver a quiz on a topic in your class. Creating the quiz will help you learn concepts and sharing your quiz will help others!

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Visualization Strategies

Visualization is one of the most powerful ways to learn.

Benefits of visualization:

- Visualization stimulates the same parts of the brain as when we actually perform the same activity. In fact, we can fool our brain and body into believing visualizations are real. For example, take a minute and imagine the sight, smell, and touch of slicing a lemon in quarters and then taking a big bite. You probably will find that your mouth starts watering because your
body reacts to your visualization. So, if it is easy for you to learn from and remember things that you have experienced, visualizations can often be just as powerful.

- **Visualization communicates a lot of information.** As the popular adage suggests, “A picture says a thousand words.” So, for example, visualizing a scene from history or a complex graph from math can help students remember and recall a plethora of details.

- **Visualization enhances attention** because it keeps the audience focused on the subject matter. For example, when students visualize the content of a lesson or a passage that they are reading, comprehension increases dramatically. Many students report that they create a “movie in their head” and the visuals maintain their concentration and interest.

- **Visualization aids in memory.** Tagging imagery to what is learned helps both the encoding and the retrieval processes, because it makes the learning multisensory. Many students that have mastered visualization even report that they can recreate their notes in their mind’s eye, making test-taking a breeze. One of my friends, who is an artist, shared that his visualizations are so strong that he can project them on a blank piece of paper and trace them.


Actually, using all of your senses is important for learning. This is called multi-sensory learning, so consider ways to blend the following visualization strategies with other senses, like auditory (sound).

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**Effective Flash Cards:**
A very common visualization strategy is using flash-cards.

**Best Practices for Using Flash-Cards**

1. **Make your own Flash Cards**
   a. When you use pre-made flash-cards you’re skipping a part of the learning process – presenting information in your own words. Doing so creates strong neural pathways which will help you to retrieve the information later.

2. **Mix Pictures and Words**
   a. Words are important but you’ll remember a concept better if you include an image, it’s called the Picture Superiority Effect (in cognitive science). “Adding descriptive sentences – or even single terms – alongside pictures, you can increase your brain’s ability to recall what you’re studying.”

3. **Write Only One Question Per Card**
   a. Don’t include multiple facts on one flashcard.

4. **Break Complex Concepts Into Multiple Questions**
   a. E.g. don’t put the full periodic table onto one card. Break it down into element groupings.

5. **Say Your Answers Out Loud When Studying**
   a. This is a way to enact multi-sensory learning, visual and auditory combined.

6. **Study Your Flash Cards in Both Directions**
a. Don’t rely on just going from question to answer, go from answer to question as well

7. Don’t Treat Flash Cards Like a Silver Bullet
   a. Remember flash-cards are just one method of studying. They may not be suitable for the type of material you are learning or how far you are in your learning on a particular topic. Consider what study method makes sense for what you are studying.


Resource Share: Create your own digital flash cards using Anki Post Link https://apps.ankiweb.net/

Study group tip! If you’re having an online study group or have an online study partner, consider splitting up the responsibility of creating flashcards and then share the results. Don’t forget to quiz each other using your newly made flashcards.

Mind-mapping/Diagramming:
If you aren’t familiar with the concept of mind-mapping, here is your obligatory definition from Wikipedia.

“A mind map is a diagram used to visually organize information. A mind map is hierarchical and shows relationships among pieces of the whole. It is often created around a single concept, drawn as an image in the center of a blank page, to which associated representations of ideas such as images, words and parts of words are added. Major ideas are connected directly to the central concept, and other ideas branch out from those major ideas.”


Using a mind map can help you to organize material into categories that are meaningful to you. And chunking your information into smaller groups will help you to remember more efficiently. Mind-maps can help you to see connections between ideas, and be beneficial when you need to organize your thoughts.

There are some online tools that can help you to create mind-maps and other diagrams, or you may choose to create these visuals by hand using different coloured pens and pencils. This adds another level of learning, tactile learning, to your repertoire.

Study group tip! Many of the online mind-mapping tools can be collaborative. For example:

Post Link https://www.mindmeister.com/content/collaboration

Memory Palace
If you are getting bored sitting around at home all day, creating a Memory Palace can be lots of fun and will get your creative juices going while also providing an effective way to memorize material you need to know for your exams.

A Memory Palace is an imaginary location in your mind where you can store mnemonic images – images that call to mind a particular concept. During this time of social distancing, probably your home has become very familiar to you. What an ideal location to use to build your Memory Palace.

In the spirit of visualization, I’m going to show you a short video to explain this technique.

Watch: Constructing a Memory Palace – Epic Science #27: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JnDBYf9odc

Some tips:

- Your mental images should make your senses come alive, what would the idea/concept look like, smell like, feel like?
- Exaggerate and use humour for more impact.
- While this is a visualization exercise, it will help if you write your Memory Palace “story” down.
- Read your story out loud for better retention
- Travel through your memory palace a few times before testing your memory
- Consider sharing your Memory Palace with your study buddy or study group

Another Resource: Post Link https://artofmemory.com/wiki/How_to_Build_a_Memory_Palace

Before we move on, does anyone have any questions?

A Note about Open-Book Exams

Many of you might have been assigned an open book exam or assignment given our switch to online learning.

Remember, open-book tests and exams aren’t necessarily easier. Your instructors will expect you to synthesize and articulate information meaningfully in your own words. You’ll also likely need to employ your critical thinking skills.

Effective Reading with SQ3R

If you exam requires you to read or re-read textbooks, articles or course material, you may find the SQ3R method of effective reading of interest. SQ3R stands for:

- **Survey** - Before you start reading, survey the text. This will give you ideas about what to expect in terms of the content and its organization. Survey the following: •Titles •Headings •Summary •Practice Questions •Study Guides •Captions for figures, graphs, and tables
• **Question** - Brainstorm questions based on the text. Try these strategies: •Turn every heading into a question. •Connect the content back to your lectures. •Note what you already know about the content.

• **Read** - As you begin reading, find the answers to the questions you made. Break up the text into smaller pieces and read each one. Try these other strategies: •Pay attention to bold, italicized, or underlined words. •Refer to the textbook’s side notes and annotations. •Check other resources for alternate explanations or further clarification.

• **Recite** - Without looking back at the text, summarize the key ideas in your own words. Write down the answers to the questions you made. Apply your knowledge by solving reading comprehension and practice questions included in the text. If there aren’t any questions, try making your own.

• **Review** - Take a break after reading, and test yourself by answering the questions you created. If you’re not satisfied with your answers, review the reading and add to your notes. While you were reciting, were there any gaps in your understanding? Go back and fill in those blanks.

**Resource Share:** Post Link

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**Free Writing**

Remember back to the beginning of this webinar? We talked about motivation. Sometimes it is so hard to get motivated! One really basic motivation strategy is to just start!

One technique that I personally use to “get started” is free-writing. A free-write is sort of what it sounds like: the practice of writing freely and with no controlling goals or expected outcome. There are timed free-writes, where you write for a specified amount of time, and focused free-writes, where you begin with a narrower topic.

This was particularly helpful on Monday morning this week, when I knew I had to get my script ready for this very webinar, but I was seriously dragging my feet. The weekend had been gloomy, and I’d binged watched the Tiger King, so I was feeling strange and disconnected. I timed myself for 5 minutes and wrote on the prompt, “what do I want to include in a webinar about study techniques and resources?”

After just a few minutes of writing I realized that I had lots of ideas, and I started to get engaged and interested with my topic. I was able to launch from my free-write into preparing an outline for this webinar, and then I started to build my script AND I had fun doing it.

You may or may not have come across this in different ways in your classes. Your instructor may have had you do a 1 minute paper at some point to get you to reflect on a concept or topic you were learning. There’s no reason that you can’t employ this strategy yourself to support your studying.

It is particularly helpful in discovering what you already know and remember about a topic.

**Free-writing for well-being and focus**
Personally, I find free-writing a great tool right now to help me focus. I've had a lot on my mind, worrying about my colleagues, my friends and my family. Worried about the world in general. Taking 5-10 minutes to free-write about what’s on my mind gives me time to explore my feelings, allowing me to “get it off my chest” and then I can focus on my other work. Otherwise, all of my thoughts just continue to whiz around in my head.

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Rules of Free Writing

While free-writes are deliberately unstructured, they are something you must commit yourself to. Here are some rules that can make freewriting easier:

1. *Keep your hand moving the whole time.* Don’t pause to reread the line you have just written. That’s stalling and trying to control what you’re saying.

2. *Don’t cross out and especially don’t erase.* That’s editing, not writing. Even if you write something you didn’t mean to write, leave it.

3. *Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar.* Don’t even care about staying within the margins or lines on the page.


5. *Go for the jugular.* If something comes up in your writing that is scary or unexpected or vulnerable, don’t be afraid of it. It probably has lots of energy.

These rules are adapted from Natalie Goldberg in her book *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*.

The inner-critic can get you stuck, make you procrastinate because you don’t even feel confident enough to start. If your inner-critic is particularly strong, free-writing activities can help you practice ignoring that voice.

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Additional Resources

There are lots of resources out there. I encourage you to take a little time to explore some of them, but not too much time! Don’t use looking for resources as an excuse to procrastinate, like I do.

Please be sure to check out the RGASC’s Study Skills Resources.

Post Link https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/study-skills-resources

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Activity: Chat Crowd-Source: What other resources do you know of?

Do any of you have any additional resources that jump to your mind right now? Tell us about them in the chat and we’ll add them to our list. I’ll post the full list of resources that I’ve mentioned in the webinar plus any additional resources we gather right now. You just need to email me at Rebecca.shaw@utoronto.ca and I’ll let you know when everything is posted and send you the link.
I found this resource about making studying fun! [https://collegeinfogeek.com/how-to-make-studying-fun/](https://collegeinfogeek.com/how-to-make-studying-fun/)

Before we move on, does anyone have any questions? We’re getting to the end of the webinar now. Just a few more slides.

### Staying Positive and Healthy

I’m sure you’ve been hearing tonnes of stuff about caring for your mental health during this time of uncertainty. I’ll add my voice! It’s also a great reminder for me.

Here are a few healthy habits that will improve your chances of success.

- **Sleep!** (getting enough sleep is crucial for learning and for your memory)
  - Watch The benefits of a good night’s sleep [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gedoSfZvBgE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gedoSfZvBgE)

- **Reward yourself**
  - Build small rewards into your study plan. When you hit one of your goals, reward yourself with a little treat whether it is an edible treat or an experiential treat like going outside for some fresh air, or watching one of your favourite Netflix shows.

- **Stay connected**
  - Also be sure to schedule time to connect with your friends and family. Just because you can’t see everyone in person doesn’t mean you can’t reach out. Perhaps one of your study rewards could be a round of online trivia with a friend. Check out the Houseparty app!

- **Encourage yourself and others**
  - I don’t know about you but I tend to give advice to others that I sometimes forget to follow myself, especially when it comes to being gentle and kind to myself. The voice of the inner critic can be very powerful during times of stress, so we have to very intentionally fight back against that voice.
  - Remember that putting yourself down will not help you to do better on your assignments, tests and exams. It is not a proven study strategy; not at all!

### Note-to-Self Activity

- Make a card by folding a piece of paper in half, and then in half again
- Use markers, pencils, colourful pens to draw a picture of something that inspires you on the front (don’t worry – no artistic ability required!)
- On the inside of the card, write words of encouragement that you would like to share with other students right now
- Address this note to yourself!
- If you do feel like sharing, please send a picture of your words of encouragement to utm.engage@utoronto.ca. We’ll post these pictures on our Instagram.

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Conclusion
I have had such a great time speaking with you today. I hope that you’ve absorbed some helpful tips and found out about some resources that will help you with your studying.

Don’t forget to stay connected with the CSE at @utmengage. Our staff are working hard to keep everyone’s spirits lifted during this time of social distancing.

From the bottom of my heart I thank you for your attention and your engagement, and I wish you luck with your exams!