

FOCUSED SOLUTIONS | LEARNING SUPPORT COACHING

Finals Prep Playbook

An evidence-based, fill-in-and-use booklet
for students who want a plan that actually works

Fillable organizers | 5-week timeline | Spaced repetition plan | Study guide builder | Professor email templates | Campus and calm supports

Designed for students with ADHD and executive function challenges, and helpful for every learner.

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It's never too late to start. Pick the next small step.

Click any shaded box to type. Use Contents (page 2) or the bookmarks panel to jump anywhere.

Contents

Click any line to jump to that page. Every page also links back here.

Start Here p. 1

Cover 1
Welcome: How to Use This Playbook 3

1 The Science of Studying p. 4

What Works (and What Does Not) 4
Four Big Ideas Behind This Playbook 5
Executive Function and Finals 6

2 Finals Command Center p. 7

Course Inventory and Exam Calendar 7
My Why, My Obstacles, My If-Thens 8
Topic Tracker (Red-Yellow-Green) 9

3 The Countdown Timeline p. 10

Roadmap: Your 5-Week Countdown 10
Planned Repetition (Spaced Practice) 11
Week 4 Goals: Map and Gather 12
Week 4 Weekly Planner 13
Week 3 Goals: Build and Condense 14
Week 3 Weekly Planner 15
Week 2 Goals: Test and Fix 16
Week 2 Weekly Planner 17
Week 1 Goals: Simulate and Sharpen 18
Week 1 Weekly Planner 19
Finals Week Goals: Perform and Protect 20
Finals Week Weekly Planner 21
Repetition Tracker (Spaced Review Log) 22
Daily Game Plan 23

4 Build Your Master Study Guide p. 24

The 5-Step System: Slides + Notes + Readings 24
Source Integration Matrix (Slides + Notes + Readings) 25
Master Study Guide Page (One Topic) 26
Cornell Notes Template 27
Concept Map 28
Compare and Contrast Organizer 29
Process and Cause-Effect Organizers 30
Question Bank and Flashcard Planner 31
Brain Dump: Free Recall Sheet 32
Practice Test and Error Log 33

5 Talking With Professors p. 34

Email Tips and Office Hours Etiquette 34
Email Templates 1-2 35
Email Templates 3-4 36
Email Templates 5-6 37
Email Templates 7-8 and Meeting Prep Sheet 38

6 Your Campus Support Map p. 39

Campus Support Directory 39
Which Support, and When? 40

7 Calm, Rest and Fuel p. 41

Calming Tools Backed by Research 41
My Calm Toolkit and Wellness Tracker 42

8 Executive Function Toolkit p. 43

Executive Function Toolkit: Start, Focus, Finish 43
Study Session and Time Log (Estimate vs. Actual) 44

9 Exam Day Playbook p. 45

Night Before and Morning Of 45
In the Exam: Your Game Plan 46
Post-Exam Reflection 47

10 References and About p. 48

References and Further Reading 48
About Focused Solutions 49

Welcome: How to Use This Playbook

Finals do not have to be a scramble. Here is how to get the most from every page.

This playbook pulls together study methods that learning scientists have repeatedly found to work, plus the planning and accountability supports I use every day as a coach for students with ADHD and executive function (EF) challenges. Every page is built to be **used, not just read**: click a box to type, check off goals, and print any page you like.

1 Map it

Fill in your Course Inventory and Topic Tracker so you can see exactly what is ahead.

2 Plan it

Follow the 5-week Countdown Timeline. Each week has specific goals and planned repetition.

3 Build it

Merge slides, lecture notes and readings into one Master Study Guide per course.

4 Protect it

Use the calm, rest and support pages so you can perform your best on exam day.

Tech tips for the fillable pages

- **Open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader** (free), or a recent Chrome, Edge or Apple Preview. Click any shaded box and type. Press **Tab** to jump to the next box.
- **Save often.** Choose File > Save As and keep a copy with your name on it. Some browser viewers will not keep your typing unless you download or print the filled version.
- **Prefer paper?** Print any page. The boxes print cleanly, and you can print extra copies of the planners and logs.
- **Phone or tablet?** A PDF app with form support works best. Pages are letter size and read well when zoomed.

Your first 30 minutes (do these today)

- [ ] Fill in the **Course Inventory** with every exam date and time (page 7).
- [ ] Pick your **start week** on the roadmap. If you have fewer than five weeks, start where you are (page 10).
- [ ] Open the **Weekly Planner** for this week and block your classes and commitments first (page 13).
- [ ] Write **one If-Then plan** for the moment you are most likely to put off studying (page 8).
- [ ] Send **one email** to a professor, tutoring center or coach using a template (page 35).

A note on the evidence

Strategies in this booklet come from cognitive and educational psychology research (see Section 10). Several EF supports, such as body doubling and the focus-timer variations, are **coaching-informed practices** rather than results of large trials, and they are labeled that way. Every brain is different. Treat each tool as an experiment, keep what works, and change what does not.

Support matters

This booklet supports learning and planning. It is not medical or mental health care. If stress feels bigger than studying, reach out to your campus counseling center or health center, and see the crisis resources on page 39.

What Works and What Does Not

Ten popular study techniques, rated by a major review of the research (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

HIGH UTILITY

Practice testing
Quiz yourself closed-book: flashcards, practice problems, old exams, blank-page recall.

Distributed practice
Spread study over several days or weeks instead of one big cram session.

MODERATE UTILITY

Interleaved practice
Mix problem types or topics within a session instead of one type at a time.

Elaborative interrogation
Ask "why does this make sense?" and answer it using what you already know.

Self-explanation
Explain how a step works, or how a new idea connects to something you know.

LOW UTILITY (as a main strategy)

Summarization
Writing summaries. Helpful only with training and feedback.

Highlighting / underlining
Feels productive, rarely improves memory by itself.

Rereading
Builds familiarity, which can be mistaken for knowing.

Keyword mnemonic
Works for some vocabulary, but limited for complex material.

Imagery for text
Creating mental pictures while reading; limited benefit overall.

What this means for you

Build most of your study time from the **top five** strategies. Low-utility techniques are fine as a first step, for example, highlight while reading to mark what you will later turn into questions. Ratings reflect how broadly each technique helped across materials and learners. "Low" does not mean "useless." It means: do not let it be the main event.

Four Big Ideas Behind This Playbook

Why the timeline, organizers and templates are built the way they are.

1 Retrieval builds memory

Pulling information out of memory strengthens it more than reading it again. Reviews of the research find a reliable testing effect across many settings (Roediger and Karpicke, 2006; Rowland, 2014).

Try it: close your notes and write everything you remember. Then check and fix.

2 Spacing beats cramming

Short sessions spread over time lead to longer-lasting memory than the same time in one block. The best gap depends on how far away the exam is. A handy rule of thumb is a gap of roughly 10 to 20 percent of the time until the test (Cepeda et al., 2006, 2008).

Try it: review at +1, +3, +7 and +14 days (page 11).

3 Mixing builds flexible knowledge

Switching between topics or problem types feels harder in the moment, but it helps you learn which method fits which problem (Rohrer and Taylor, 2007). This "desirable difficulty" is a sign of learning, not failure.

Try it: end each week with a mixed quiz from five different topics.

4 Rest and movement are study tools

Sleep supports memory consolidation (Diekelmann and Born, 2010), and regular physical activity is linked with benefits for learning and thinking (Hillman et al., 2008). An all-nighter works against you.

Try it: protect a bedtime window and take a 10-minute walk between blocks.

The feeling of knowing can fool you

Rereading feels fluent, so it tricks us into thinking we know the material. Testing yourself feels harder and less comfortable, and that discomfort is exactly why it works. When a study method feels easy, ask: *"Could I do this with my notes closed?"*

Tracking your own learning

Throughout this booklet you will see a **research basis** label at the top of each organizer. It tells you which idea the page puts into practice, so you can see that every tool has a purpose.

A good test of any study session: **(1)** Did I retrieve information instead of just looking at it? **(2)** Did I space it from my last review? **(3)** Did I fix what I got wrong? If you can answer yes three times, that session counted.

Executive Function and Finals

Knowing what works and actually doing it are two different skills. Here is where support helps most.

EF skill	What it can look like during finals	Tool in this booklet
Task initiation	Staring at the pile, waiting to "feel ready," starting at 10 pm.	5-Minute Start, If-Then plans (p. 43)
Planning and prioritizing	Everything feels equally urgent, or nothing does. Studying the easy stuff first.	Course Inventory, Topic Tracker, Roadmap (p. 7)
Time awareness	Underestimating how long things take. "I will do it later tonight."	Estimate vs. Actual log, Daily Game Plan (p. 23)
Working memory	Losing track of due dates, steps and materials. Forgetting what you just read.	Externalize: planners, checklists, recall sheets (p. 13)
Sustained attention	Drifting during long readings or lectures. Phone pulls.	Focus blocks, body doubling, phone-away rule (p. 43)
Emotional regulation	Panic, shame spirals, avoiding what feels scary, all-or-nothing thinking.	Calm Toolkit, reappraisal, expressive writing (p. 41)
Flexibility and shifting	Getting stuck on one course. Hard to switch tasks or recover from a bad exam.	Interleaving, post-exam reset, Reflection (p. 47)

Strengths matter too

Many students with ADHD bring real strengths to finals: creativity, energy, big-picture thinking, and the ability to focus intensely on interesting work. The goal of coaching is not to change who you are. It is to build **scaffolds** (external structure, reminders and accountability) so your strengths show up on the exam. Every student is different, so use what fits.

Where these ideas come from

These EF tools are drawn from research on executive functions (Barkley, 2012) and on implementation intentions (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006), plus coaching-informed practice. Executive function support is a skill-building process: small experiments, honest check-ins, and a lot of encouragement.

Course Inventory and Exam Calendar

Get every exam on one page. Facts first, feelings later.

RESEARCH BASIS *Planning requires seeing the whole task. Accurate plans fight the "planning fallacy" (Buehler et al., 1994).*

My courses and exams

Course (and professor)	Exam date and time	Room / online	Format	% of grade	Confidence (1–5)	Priority (1 = first)

Exam calendar at a glance (soonest first)

Date	Course	Time	Days to prep	Support booked?
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐

How to decide what comes first

Priority score: soonest exam + biggest grade weight + lowest confidence. A course that scores high on all three gets your first and best study blocks. Rank them in the last column above.

Logistics checklist

- ☐ Accommodation requests submitted for every exam (many offices need advance notice)
- ☐ Exam rooms, times and allowed materials confirmed (notes, calculator, formula sheet)
- ☐ Conflicts or back-to-back exams reported to professors early
- ☐ Travel, parking and technology plans made for each exam

My Why, My Obstacles, My If-Thens

Motivation gets you started. A specific plan gets you through the moments when motivation disappears.

RESEARCH BASIS *Implementation intentions ("If X happens, then I will Y") improve goal follow-through (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006).*

MY GOAL FOR FINALS SEASON

WHY IT MATTERS TO ME

Obstacles and If-Then plans

Examples. If it is 4 pm and I have not started, then I will set a 10-minute timer and open the practice problems. If I catch myself scrolling, then I will put my phone in another room and restart the timer. If a topic feels overwhelming, then I will write one question about it and answer it.

#	IF (the situation or obstacle)	THEN I will (one specific action)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

My support team

Person or place	How they will help	Check-in day and time

MY REWARDS (after a goal, not before)

Topic Tracker (Red-Yellow-Green)

List every topic you could be tested on, then rate your confidence after trying it closed-book.

RESEARCH BASIS *Rate yourself after a closed-book attempt, not after rereading, because rereading inflates the feeling of knowing.*

R Red Cannot explain it yet **Y Yellow** Shaky: I recognize it **G Green** Can explain and answer without notes

Course	Topic or learning objective	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Next step (what will I do?)

Your 5-Week Roadmap

Start where you are. If you have fewer than five weeks, compress Week 4 into one day and keep going.

4

WEEK 4

Map and Gather

goals and planner on pages 12-13

- Fill in the Course Inventory and Topic Tracker
- Contact professors and gather every resource
- Book tutoring, coaching and accommodations

3

WEEK 3

Build and Condense

goals and planner on pages 14-15

- Build one Master Study Guide per course
- First pass through every topic, reds first
- Start daily closed-book retrieval

2

WEEK 2

Test and Fix

goals and planner on pages 16-17

- Practice tests and Error Log for every course
- Interleave topics and reteach hard ideas
- Re-rate the tracker and confirm logistics

1

WEEK 1

Simulate and Sharpen

goals and planner on pages 18-19

- Timed practice exams under real conditions
- Shrink each guide to a one-page recall sheet
- Dress rehearsal and a steady sleep rhythm

F

FINALS WEEK

Perform and Protect

goals and planner on pages 20-21

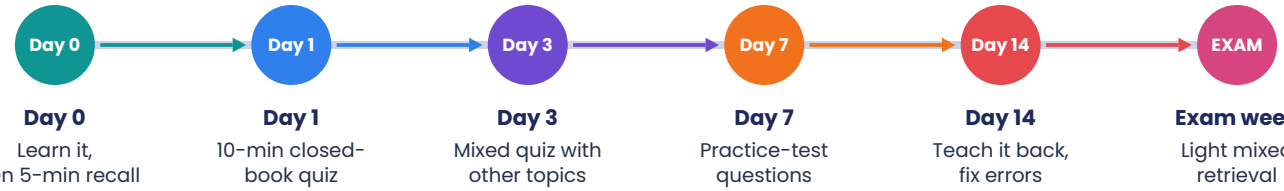
- Light retrieval for the next exam only
- Night-before checklist and brain dump
- Debrief after each exam, then rest

Daily rhythm that works for most students: a 3-minute plan, 2 to 4 focused blocks with breaks, one mixed retrieval session, a 5-minute shutdown (what is next tomorrow?), and a consistent bedtime.

Planned Repetition: The Expanding Schedule

Every topic gets met several times, with gaps that grow. This is how study time turns into long-term memory.

RESEARCH BASIS *Distributed practice and testing both rate "high utility" (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Cepeda et al., 2006).*



Why the gaps grow: each review happens just as the memory starts to fade, so recalling it takes effort, and effort strengthens it. If a review feels too easy, wait longer. If you cannot recall anything, shorten the gap and restudy briefly. A reasonable rule of thumb: gaps of roughly 10 to 20 percent of the time left before the exam (Cepeda et al., 2008).

The Leitner box system (paper or app flashcards)



Schedule it in three steps

- **Date it.** When you first study a topic, write the date in the Repetition Tracker (page 22).
- **Plan it.** Write the +1, +3, +7 and +14 review dates in the tracker and in your Weekly Planner so they cannot hide.
- **Do it closed-book.** Each review is a 5 to 15 minute retrieval attempt: quiz, blank-page recall or practice questions. Then check and fix.

Worked example

Example: Learn Chapter 4 on Monday of Week 4. Review Tuesday (+1), Thursday (+3), the following Monday (+7), two Mondays later (+14), then touch it lightly in a mixed quiz in finals week. Five short touches beat one long night.

Week 4 Goals: Map and Gather

4

WEEK 4

MAP and GATHER

Know exactly what you are facing, gather every resource, and book your supports early.

Week of: _____ **to** _____ **My energy level this week (1-5):** _____

Specific goals (check them off)

- [ ] **Complete the Course Inventory.** Exam dates, times, rooms, formats and grade weights for every course.
- [ ] **Ask each professor about format and emphasis.** Use Email Templates 1 and 2 to book office hours and ask what the exam covers.
- [ ] **Gather and sort every resource.** One folder per course: slides, lecture notes, readings, assignments, quizzes and review sheets.
- [ ] **Build your Topic Tracker.** Turn each syllabus or objectives list into topics. Give a first red-yellow-green rating after a closed-book try.
- [ ] **Schedule the next five weeks.** Block classes, work and commitments first. Then add 3 to 4 study blocks on most days.
- [ ] **Book your supports.** Tutoring, writing center, coaching and testing accommodations. Many offices need advance notice.

PLANNED REPETITION this week

- Start the clock on spacing: write the date you first study each topic in the Repetition Tracker.
- Skim the last two weeks of class notes, then close them and write what you remember (5 to 10 minutes per course).
- Start your Question Bank: write 5 exam-style questions for every topic you cover.

Suggested pacing

This is a setup week. About 45 to 90 minutes a day is plenty. The win is clarity, not hours.

End-of-week check-in

What worked?	What got in the way?	One adjustment for next week

Week 4 Weekly Planner

Block fixed commitments first, then add study blocks. Write review dates from your tracker in the last column.

TOP 3 FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIXED COMMITMENTS (classes, work, practice)

Day / date	Morning block	Afternoon block	Evening block	Repetition due	Done
Mon					☐
Tue					☐
Wed					☐
Thu					☐
Fri					☐
Sat					☐
Sun					☐

WELLNESS GOALS FOR THE WEEK

Sleep (bedtime window) _____

Movement (what and when) _____

One thing for fun or connection _____

Week 3 Goals: Build and Condense

3

WEEK 3

BUILD and CONDENSE

Turn scattered materials into one master study guide per course and begin daily retrieval practice.

Week of: _____ **to** _____ **My energy level this week (1-5):** _____

Specific goals (check them off)

- ☐ **Build a Master Study Guide for each course.** Merge slides, lecture notes and readings with the Source Integration Matrix (Section 4).
- ☐ **Finish a first pass through every topic.** Start with red topics and the earliest exam. Meet each topic at least once.
- ☐ **Turn guides into questions.** Convert headings, slide titles and key terms into Question Bank items or flashcards.
- ☐ **Start daily retrieval practice.** 20 to 30 minutes a day of closed-book quizzing, mixed across courses.
- ☐ **Meet one support for your toughest course.** Office hours, tutoring or a study group. Bring the Office Hours Prep Sheet.
- ☐ **Protect your sleep.** Choose a consistent bedtime window and keep it, even on weekends.

PLANNED REPETITION this week

- Review Week 4 topics at +1, +3 and +7 days (see the Repetition Tracker).
- End each study block with a 3-minute brain dump of what you just learned. Then check it.
- Sort flashcards into Leitner boxes: right answers move up a box, misses go back to Box 1.

Suggested pacing

Build up to 2 to 4 focused blocks per day (25 to 50 minutes each) with real breaks. Adjust to your schedule.

End-of-week check-in

What worked?	What got in the way?	One adjustment for next week

Week 3 Weekly Planner

Block fixed commitments first, then add study blocks. Write review dates from your tracker in the last column.

TOP 3 FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIXED COMMITMENTS (classes, work, practice)

Day / date	Morning block	Afternoon block	Evening block	Repetition due	Done
Mon					☐
Tue					☐
Wed					☐
Thu					☐
Fri					☐
Sat					☐
Sun					☐

WELLNESS GOALS FOR THE WEEK

Sleep (bedtime window) _____

Movement (what and when) _____

One thing for fun or connection _____

Week 2 Goals: Test and Fix

2

WEEK 2

TEST and FIX

Shift from learning to testing. Find the gaps, fix them, and keep the spacing going.

Week of: _____ **to** _____ **My energy level this week (1-5):** _____

Specific goals (check them off)

- ☐ **Take a practice test for every course.** Use old exams, review sheets, textbook questions or your own Question Bank.
- ☐ **Complete the Error Log.** For every miss, name the cause: content gap, misread, careless slip, time or anxiety. Then write the fix.
- ☐ **Interleave your practice.** Mix topics and problem types in a session instead of finishing one unit at a time.
- ☐ **Reteach it.** Explain each hard topic out loud to a friend, a study group or an imaginary class.
- ☐ **Update the Topic Tracker.** Re-rate every topic. Move yellows toward green and give reds extra blocks or tutoring.
- ☐ **Confirm logistics.** Accommodation arrangements, exam rooms, allowed materials and travel plans.

PLANNED REPETITION this week

- Review Week 4 and Week 3 topics at +7 and +14 days.
- Use mixed quizzes: pull 3 questions each from 5 different topics.
- Revisit the Error Log twice this week and retry the missed questions cold.

Suggested pacing

Practice tests are the main event this week. Keep blocks focused and finish each one with an error check.

End-of-week check-in

What worked?	What got in the way?	One adjustment for next week

Week 2 Weekly Planner

Block fixed commitments first, then add study blocks. Write review dates from your tracker in the last column.

TOP 3 FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIXED COMMITMENTS (classes, work, practice)

Day / date	Morning block	Afternoon block	Evening block	Repetition due	Done
Mon					☐
Tue					☐
Wed					☐
Thu					☐
Fri					☐
Sat					☐
Sun					☐

WELLNESS GOALS FOR THE WEEK

Sleep (bedtime window) _____

Movement (what and when) _____

One thing for fun or connection _____

Week 1 Goals: Simulate and Sharpen

1

WEEK 1

SIMULATE and SHARPEN

Rehearse exam conditions, shrink each guide to a one-page recall sheet, and sharpen the weak spots.

Week of: _____ **to** _____ **My energy level this week (1-5):** _____

Specific goals (check them off)

- ☐ **Run timed practice exams.** Same time limit, same materials, similar room if possible. Practice your pacing.
- ☐ **Shrink each Master Guide to one page.** Formulas, frameworks, key terms and "if you see X, think Y" rules on a single recall sheet.
- ☐ **Attack the remaining reds and yellows.** Short, focused blocks with tutoring or office hours. Avoid starting brand-new resources.
- ☐ **Do a dress rehearsal.** Plan the route, pack the bag, and test the technology for any online exam.
- ☐ **Set your sleep and meal rhythm.** Practice the schedule you will need on exam days.
- ☐ **Plan finals week day by day.** Fill in the Finals Week planner with study blocks, meals, breaks and exam times.

PLANNED REPETITION this week

- Final spaced reviews for the earliest exams: topics learned 2 to 3 weeks ago get their last full pass.
- Do one closed-book recall of each one-page recall sheet every day.
- Cycle through Leitner Box 1 daily and Box 2 every other day.

Suggested pacing

Quality over quantity. Stop new material about 48 hours before each exam and shift to retrieval and rest.

End-of-week check-in

What worked?	What got in the way?	One adjustment for next week

Week 1 Weekly Planner

Block fixed commitments first, then add study blocks. Write review dates from your tracker in the last column.

TOP 3 FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIXED COMMITMENTS (classes, work, practice)

Day / date	Morning block	Afternoon block	Evening block	Repetition due	Done
Mon					☐
Tue					☐
Wed					☐
Thu					☐
Fri					☐
Sat					☐
Sun					☐

WELLNESS GOALS FOR THE WEEK

Sleep (bedtime window) _____

Movement (what and when) _____

One thing for fun or connection _____

Finals Week Goals: Perform and Protect

F

FINALS WEEK

PERFORM and PROTECT

Keep memory fresh with light retrieval, protect sleep and energy, and take each exam one at a time.

Week of: _____ **to** _____ **My energy level this week (1-5):** _____

Specific goals (check them off)

- [ ] **Study only for the next exam.** Switch courses after each exam, starting with a 15-minute reset.
- [ ] **Do light retrieval, not cramming.** 20 to 45 minutes of closed-book practice with your one-page recall sheet.
- [ ] **Run the night-before checklist.** Pack, plan, set two alarms and stop studying at your cutoff time.
- [ ] **Use your exam-day game plan.** Brain dump first, read directions, triage the questions and check your work.
- [ ] **Debrief after each exam.** Ten minutes in the Post-Exam Reflection. Then celebrate and rest.
- [ ] **Reach out early if things wobble.** Professor, coach, counselor or a friend. Asking sooner always helps.

PLANNED REPETITION this week

- Day before an exam: one last closed-book pass through your recall sheet, then stop.
- Morning of: skim the recall sheet once. No new material.
- Between exams: spend 15 minutes on the next course's weakest topics, then rest.

Suggested pacing

Short, sharp sessions. Sleep, meals and movement are part of the plan, not rewards for after.

End-of-week check-in

What worked?	What got in the way?	One adjustment for next week

Finals Week Weekly Planner

Block fixed commitments first, then add study blocks. Write review dates from your tracker in the last column.

TOP 3 FOR THIS WEEK

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

FIXED COMMITMENTS (classes, work, practice)

Day / date	Morning block	Afternoon block	Evening block	Exam / next prep	Done
Mon					☐
Tue					☐
Wed					☐
Thu					☐
Fri					☐
Sat					☐
Sun					☐

WELLNESS GOALS FOR THE WEEK

Sleep (bedtime window) _____

Movement (what and when) _____

One thing for fun or connection _____

Repetition Tracker

Date every topic when you learn it, then check off each planned review. Print extra copies if you need them.

RESEARCH BASIS *Planned, expanding reviews (+1, +3, +7, +14 days) put spaced retrieval on the calendar.*

Topic	Course	Learned (date)	Review 1 (+1 day)	Review 2 (+3 days)	Review 3 (+7 days)	Review 4 (+14 days)	R-Y-G
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	
			☐	☐	☐	☐	

Daily Game Plan

Three minutes of planning saves an hour of wandering. Print this page as often as you like.

DATE _____ **TODAY'S ONE BIG WIN** _____

TOP 3 PRIORITIES

	Time guess	Actual	Next step if unfinished
☐			
☐			
☐			

TIME BLOCKS

7 am
8 am
9 am
10 am
11 am
12 pm
1 pm
2 pm
3 pm
4 pm
5 pm
6 pm
7 pm
8 pm
9 pm
10 pm

FOCUS BLOCKS (check each one done)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8

PARKING LOT (thoughts, to-dos, worries)

BODY AND BRAIN CHECK

- ☐ Slept enough last night
- ☐ Ate real meals and drank water
- ☐ Moved my body for 10+ minutes
- ☐ Took a screen break outdoors or away
- ☐ Connected with someone

THREE WINS TODAY

_____

_____

_____

TOMORROW STARTS WITH

_____

The 5-Step Study Guide System

How to turn PowerPoint slides, lecture notes and readings into one comprehensive study guide per course.

1 GATHER — Collect every source in one folder per course

2 MAP — List topics from the syllabus and objectives

3 MERGE — Combine slides, notes and readings by topic

4 QUESTION — Turn every heading into an exam-style question

5 TEST — Quiz yourself, fix gaps, repeat on a schedule

How to work with each source

POWERPOINT SLIDES

- Slides are the professor's **outline**, not the full story. Use slide titles as your topic list.
- Print or export handouts with note lines, and add what the professor said out loud beside each slide.
- Turn each slide title into a question ("What causes...?") and answer it from memory.
- Mark slides that were stressed, repeated, or linked to quizzes and assignments.
- Record slide numbers in your Integration Matrix so you can find sources fast.
- Do not just reread slides. Treat them as **cues**, not content.

LECTURE NOTES

- **Review within 24 hours.** Fill gaps, fix errors and add examples while memory is fresh.
- Use the Cornell format (page 27) to turn notes into cues and questions.
- Circle anything repeated, written on the board, or flagged as "important for the exam."
- Compare with a classmate's notes or an approved recording to fill holes.
- Star confusing items and bring them to office hours or tutoring.

READINGS

- You do not need to reread everything. Use **SQ3R**: Survey headings, Question, Read to answer, Recite from memory, Review (Robinson, 1946).
- Prioritize summaries, key terms, headings, figures and end-of-chapter questions.
- Link each reading to a learning objective and write a "so what?" in your own words.
- Read deeply the sections that lectures emphasized.
- Use end-of-chapter and practice questions as retrieval practice.

Worked example: Introduction to Psychology

TOPIC	SLIDES (14-19)	LECTURE NOTES	READING (Ch. 6)	MY SYNTHESIS
Classical conditioning	Pavlov experiment. Terms: US, UR, CS, CR. Acquisition and extinction.	CS must come just BEFORE the US. Phobia example. "Know the four terms cold."	Spontaneous recovery. Taste aversion example. Ethics of the Little Albert study.	A neutral signal (CS) paired with a reflex trigger (US) comes to cause the response (CR) on its own. Exam: label US, UR, CS, CR in a scenario.

How the pieces fit together

One Master Study Guide per course = the **Source Integration Matrix** (organize by topic) + a **Master Guide page** for each big topic (synthesize in your own words) + a **Question Bank** (practice) + a **one-page recall sheet** for the final week. The next pages give you a fillable version of each.

Source Integration Matrix

For each topic, pull together what the slides, your lecture notes and the readings say. Then write one sentence in your own words.

RESEARCH BASIS *Combining sources invites elaboration and self-explanation (Dunlosky et al., 2013).*

COURSE _____ **UNIT OR CHAPTERS** _____

Topic / learning objective	SLIDES (slide #s and key points)	LECTURE NOTES (what the professor stressed)	READINGS (pages and key ideas)	MY SYNTHESIS (1 sentence) + likely exam question

Master Study Guide Page (One Topic)

Make one of these for each big topic. Fill it in from memory first, then check your sources and fix it.

RESEARCH BASIS *Self-explanation, elaboration and practice testing in one page (Dunlosky et al., 2013).*

COURSE _____ **TOPIC** _____ **EXAM DATE** _____

THE BIG IDEA (one sentence, in my own words)

KEY TERMS

Term	My definition (own words)	Example or memory hook

PROCESS, STEPS OR FORMULA TO KNOW COLD

EASILY CONFUSED WITH (and how they differ)

QUESTIONS I COULD BE ASKED

Answered closed-book?

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TEACH IT BACK: explain it simply, as if to a friend outside the class

HOW THIS CONNECTS TO OTHER TOPICS

CONFIDENCE (R-Y-G) **Round 1** _____ **Round 2** _____ **Round 3** _____ **Next review** _____

Cornell Notes Template

Turn lecture notes into a self-testing tool: notes on the right, cues and questions on the left, summary at the bottom.

RESEARCH BASIS *The Cornell system (Pauk, 1962) sets up retrieval practice: cover the notes and quiz yourself from the cues.*

COURSE _____ **TOPIC** _____ **DATE** _____

CUES and QUESTIONS	NOTES (during and right after class)

SUMMARY (2 to 3 sentences, in my own words)

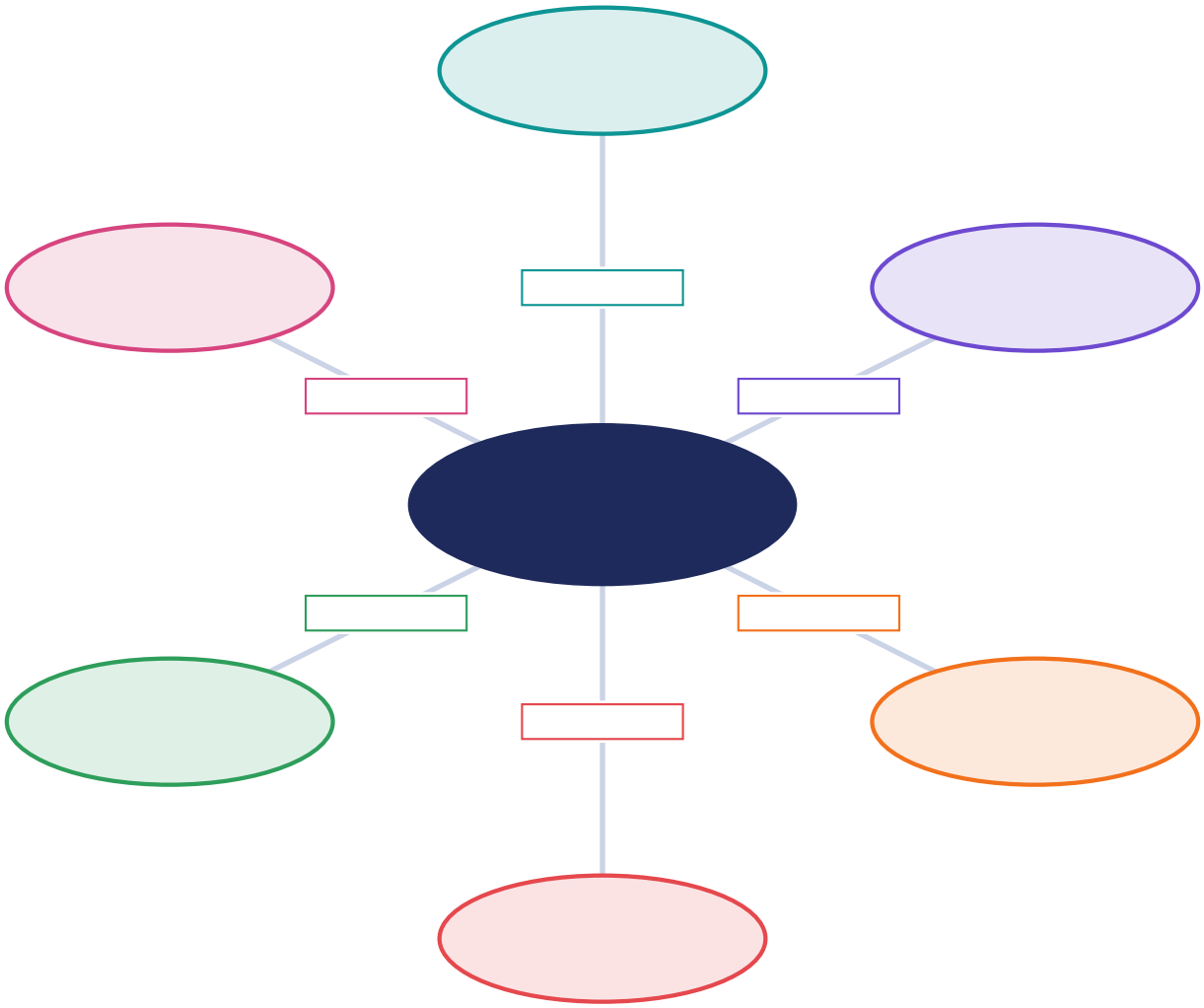
How to use it

1. Take notes on the right. **2.** Within 24 hours, write cues and questions on the left. **3.** Cover the notes and answer each cue aloud. **4.** Write the summary last.

Concept Map

See how ideas connect. Put the big idea in the middle, add key ideas around it, and label every connection with a linking word.

RESEARCH BASIS *Concept maps link ideas with labeled relationships (Novak and Canas, 2008).*



CROSS-LINKS: which branches connect? Describe the connections.

How to use it

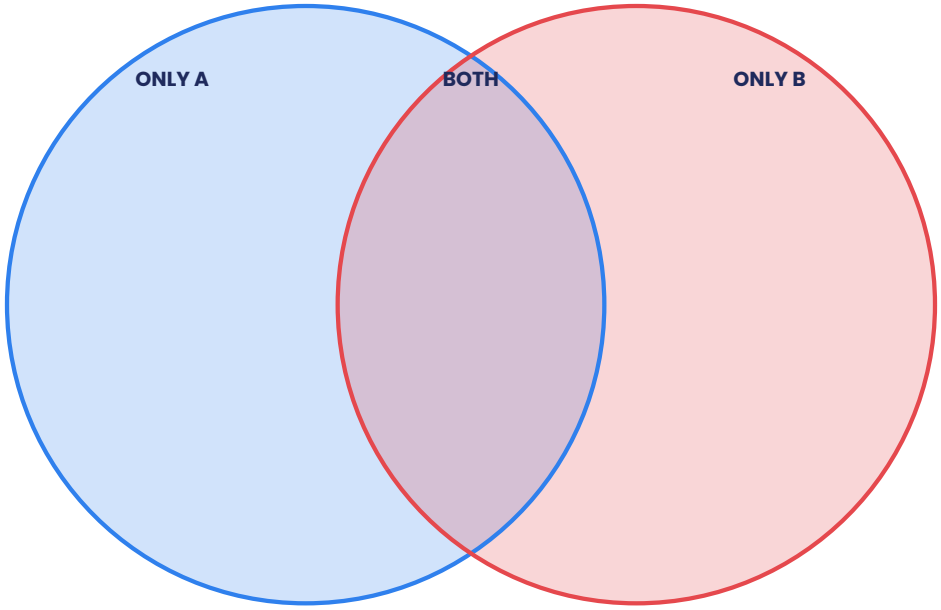
1. Write the main concept in the center. **2.** Add 4 to 6 key ideas. **3.** Write a linking word on each line (causes, is an example of, requires) so it reads like a sentence. **4.** Cover it and redraw from memory.

Compare and Contrast Organizer

Two ideas students often mix up? Put them side by side and decide what makes each one unique.

RESEARCH BASIS *Asking "how are these alike and different, and why?" prompts elaborative interrogation (Dunlosky et al., 2013).*

IDEA A _____ **IDEA B** _____



SIDE-BY-SIDE CHECK

Feature to compare	Idea A	Idea B

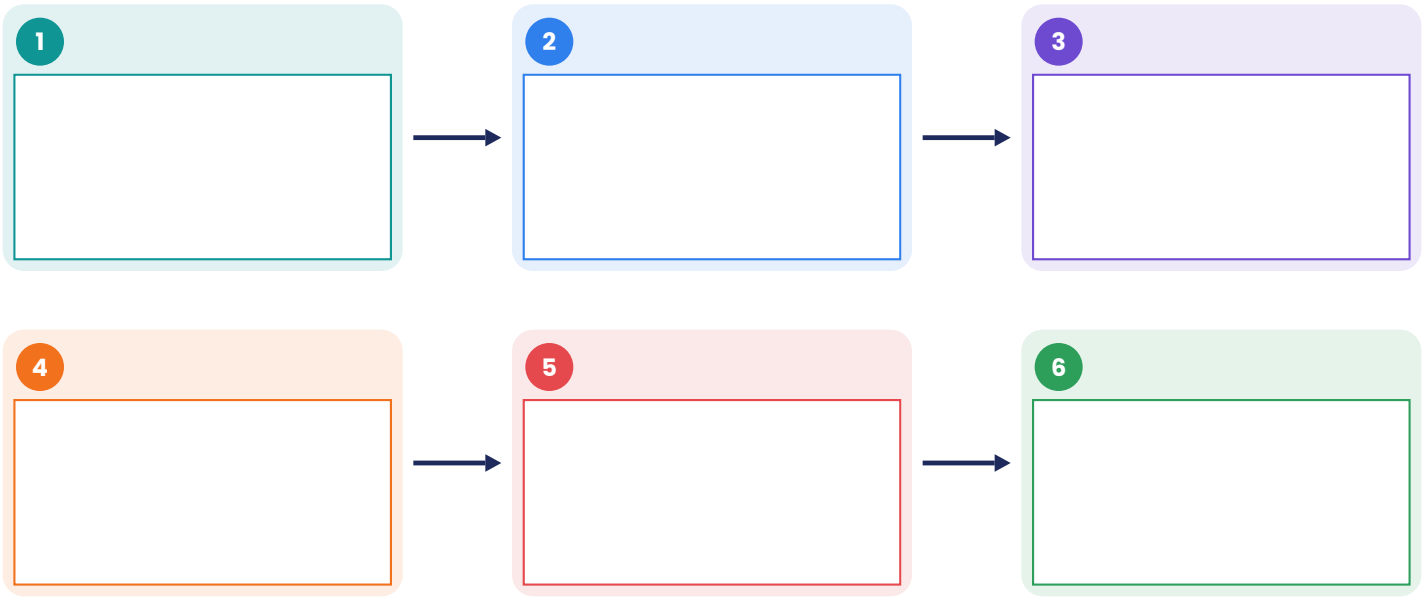
WHY IT MATTERS: how would I tell them apart on an exam?

Process and Cause-Effect Organizers

Use the top for steps, timelines and cycles. Use the bottom for causes and effects.

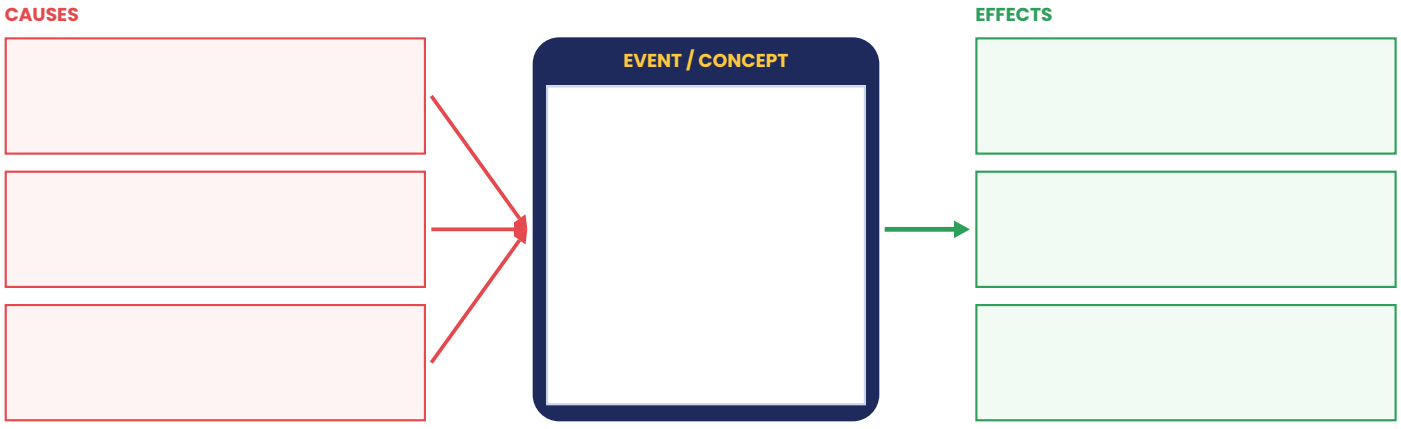
RESEARCH BASIS *Explaining how each step leads to the next is a form of self-explanation (Dunlosky et al., 2013).*

PROCESS, SEQUENCE OR TIMELINE Title:



WHY does each step lead to the next? (explain in your own words)

CAUSE and EFFECT: what leads to what?



Question Bank and Flashcard Planner

Write questions as you build your guide. Answer from memory, then track the Leitner box each question has reached.

RESEARCH BASIS *Practice testing is rated high utility (Dunlosky et al., 2013). Boxes 1 to 3 space the reviews (page 11).*

#	Question (exam style)	Answer from memory	Source (slide / page)	Box 1	Box 2	Box 3
1				☐	☐	☐
2				☐	☐	☐
3				☐	☐	☐
4				☐	☐	☐
5				☐	☐	☐
6				☐	☐	☐
7				☐	☐	☐
8				☐	☐	☐
9				☐	☐	☐
10				☐	☐	☐
11				☐	☐	☐
12				☐	☐	☐
13				☐	☐	☐
14				☐	☐	☐
15				☐	☐	☐
16				☐	☐	☐
17				☐	☐	☐
18				☐	☐	☐

Brain Dump: Free Recall Sheet

The fastest way to find out what you really know. Do it before you open your notes.

RESEARCH BASIS *Free recall without notes is a powerful form of retrieval practice (Roediger and Karpicke, 2006).*

TOPIC _____ **DATE** _____ **TIMER** _____

1. CLOSE YOUR NOTES. Write everything you remember.

2. OPEN YOUR NOTES. What did I miss or get wrong?

3. FIX PLAN: what will I do about it?

How much did I recall? (0 to 100 percent) _____ **Next review date** _____ **R-Y-G** _____

Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes. Write, draw or list anything you remember in any order. Do not peek. The gaps you find are your best study guide.

Practice Test and Error Log

Every miss is data. Name why it happened, write the fix, then retry the question cold a few days later.

RESEARCH BASIS *Retrieval practice works best with corrective feedback and a retry (Rowland, 2014).*

COURSE _____ **TEST / SOURCE** _____ **SCORE** _____ **TIME** _____

Q #	Topic	Content gap	Misread	Careless slip	Ran out of time	Anxiety	The fix: what will I do differently?
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

PATTERNS I NOTICE

RETRY DATE _____

RETRIED AND CORRECT? ☐

Email Tips and Office Hours Etiquette

A short, specific, polite email is easy to say yes to. Here is how to write one and how to make the meeting count.

Anatomy of an email professors answer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Subject line	**Greeting**	**Who you are**	**The specific ask**	**What you did**	**Availability**	**Thanks + name**
Course name + the ask	Dear Professor [Last Name]	Course, section, semester	One clear request	Show effort so far	Offer 2 to 3 times	Signature with course

DO

- Use your school email and include the **course name and section** in the subject line.
- Check the syllabus and course site first, then ask what is not answered there.
- Ask one specific question or make one specific request.
- Propose two or three meeting times. Make it easy to say yes.
- Proofread, keep it short, and send it at a reasonable hour.
- If there is no reply in 2 to 3 school days, send one polite follow-up.

DON'T

- Do not ask "What is on the final?" without checking the syllabus first.
- Do not send a wall of text or a long explanation of your whole semester.
- Do not demand a same-day reply or email at 2 a.m. expecting an answer.
- Do not ask for exceptions or extensions in the first line.
- Do not apologize repeatedly. A clear request with a thank-you is enough.
- Do not wait until the day before the exam.

Questions that get great answers in office hours

- "Can you check whether my understanding of [concept] is right? Here is how I would explain it."
- "What would a strong answer to a question like [example] look like?"
- "What mistakes do students often make on this topic?"
- "I have limited time. How would you prioritize [topic A] and [topic B]?"
- "Here is how I solved this problem. Can you show me where I went off track?"

Bring to the meeting

- [ ] My Master Study Guide page or one-page recall sheet
- [ ] A practice test or the Error Log, with specific questions marked
- [ ] A notebook and pen to write down advice and next steps
- [ ] The Office Hours Prep Sheet (page 38)

How to use the templates

Replace everything in [brackets], delete lines that do not apply, and read the email out loud once before you send it. The templates on the next pages are fully editable. Click inside any email and type.

Email Templates 1–2

Fully editable. Click in the box, replace the [brackets], and copy it into your email.

EMAIL 1 | REQUEST AN APPOINTMENT

Use when: you want a one-on-one talk about how to prepare

SUBJECT Request to meet about preparing for the [Course] final exam

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I am a student in your [Course Name and Section] class, and I am building a plan to prepare for the final exam on [date]. I would really appreciate the chance to meet with you, during office hours or at another time that works for you, to talk about how to study effectively for it.

So far I have [reviewed my lecture notes and started the practice problems in Chapter X]. I would especially like to ask about [two or three specific topics, such as Unit 3 and how it connects to the case study questions].

I am available [days and times], and I am glad to work around your schedule. If it is easier, I can come to your regular office hours on [day and time]. Please let me know which you prefer.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,
[Your full name]
[Course and section] | [Your email]

EMAIL 2 | ASK ABOUT EXAM FORMAT AND EMPHASIS

Use when: you need to know what the exam covers

SUBJECT Question about the [Course] final exam format

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I am making my study plan for the [Course] final exam and want to be sure I focus on the right material. Could you share, or point me to, information about the following?

- The exam format (multiple choice, short answer, essay, problem solving) and length
- Which units or chapters are covered, and any that carry extra weight
- Whether there will be a review guide, practice exam or past exam to practice with
- What materials are allowed (notes, formula sheet, calculator)

If this is already in the syllabus or on [Canvas, Blackboard or your course site], I am happy to look there. Just let me know where to find it.

Thank you very much.

Best regards,
[Your full name]
[Course and section]

Email Templates 3-4

Fully editable. Click in the box, replace the [brackets], and copy it into your email.

EMAIL 3 | ASK FOR FEEDBACK ON YOUR STUDY GUIDE

Use when: you want to check your focus and level of detail

SUBJECT Could you look over my study plan for [Course]?

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I have put together a study guide for the [Course] final that is organized around the learning objectives in the syllabus, and I have been practicing with [practice problems, old quizzes, or my own questions].

Would you be willing to look at a short sample (one page) and tell me whether I am focusing on the right level of detail? I have attached [the page] to this email. I know this is a busy time, so even a few quick comments would help a lot.

I can also bring it to your office hours on [day] if you would rather talk it through.

Thank you for considering this.

Sincerely,
[Your full name]
[Course and section]

EMAIL 4 | OFFICE HOURS DO NOT FIT YOUR SCHEDULE

Use when: you have a class or work conflict

SUBJECT Finding a time to meet about [Course]

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I have a class conflict during your regular office hours ([days and times]), and I would still like to meet with you before the final exam on [date]. Would any of these times work?

- [Option 1: day, date and time]
- [Option 2: day, date and time]
- [Option 3: day, date and time]

I am also glad to meet by video call, or to send my questions in writing ahead of time if that is easier for you.

Thank you for your flexibility.

Best regards,
[Your full name]
[Course and section]

Email Templates 5-6

Fully editable. Click in the box, replace the [brackets], and copy it into your email.

EMAIL 5 | CONFIRM EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS

Use when: you have approved accommodations

SUBJECT Exam accommodations for the [Course] final - [Your Name]

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I receive approved academic accommodations through [name of your disability or accessibility services office], including [for example: extended time, a reduced-distraction room, or another approved accommodation]. I want to make sure everything is arranged for the [Course] final exam on [date and time].

I have [submitted my exam request through (portal or process)] / [planned to submit my exam request by (date)]. Could you let me know whether you will administer the exam yourself or send it to the testing center, and whether you need anything else from me? If it would help, I can connect you with [coordinator name and contact].

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
[Your full name]
[Course and section] | [Student ID, if requested]

Good to know

You do not need to share your diagnosis with a professor. Your accommodation letter from the accessibility office is enough. Contact that office early, because many have exam request deadlines.

EMAIL 6 | ASK FOR GUIDANCE WHEN YOU ARE WORRIED

Use when: you feel behind and want direction

SUBJECT Asking for guidance as I prepare for the [Course] final

Dear Professor [Last Name],

I am reaching out because I am concerned about my preparation for the [Course] final exam. I have been [attending class regularly and keeping up with the readings], but I am finding [a specific unit or the amount of material] challenging.

I want to use the time before the exam well. Could you suggest priorities or resources (practice materials, tutoring, a review session) that would help most? I would be grateful for a short meeting or a reply by email, whichever is easier for you.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
[Your full name]
[Course and section]

Email Templates 7–8 and Meeting Prep Sheet

Finish with a thank-you, and walk into every meeting prepared.

EMAIL 7 | THANK-YOU FOLLOW-UP

Use when: after any meeting or helpful reply

SUBJECT Thank you for meeting with me - [Course]

Dear Professor [Last Name],

Thank you for meeting with me on [day]. Your advice about [specific takeaway] was really helpful, and I have already [started practice problems for Unit 4, or reorganized my study guide by topic].

My plan is to [next step, such as take a practice exam by Friday]. I appreciate your time and support.

Best regards,
[Your full name]
[Course and section]

EMAIL 8 | BOOK TUTORING, WRITING HELP OR COACHING

Use when: you are scheduling campus support

SUBJECT Appointment request: [tutoring, writing center or coaching] for [Course]

Hello,

I am a [year] student taking [Course] with Professor [Last Name]. I have a final exam on [date] and would like to schedule [a tutoring session, a writing consultation, or a coaching appointment] before then.

I would like help with [specific topics or skills]. I can meet [days and times], either in person or online. Please let me know the next available appointment and what I should bring.

Thank you,
[Your full name] | [Student ID, if requested] | [Phone or email]

OFFICE HOURS AND MEETING PREP SHEET

COURSE _____ **WITH** _____ **DATE / TIME** _____

MY GOAL FOR THIS MEETING

WHAT I HAVE ALREADY TRIED

MY QUESTIONS (most important first)

AFTER THE MEETING: ACTION STEPS AND DATES

☐ Thank-you email sent (Email Template 7)

☐ Action steps added to my Weekly Planner

Campus Support Directory

Look up each support on your school's website and fill in the details now, before you need them. Print it and keep it handy.

Support	Name and location	Phone, email or link	Hours	Booked?
Tutoring center				☐
Writing center				☐
Library and research help				☐
Academic coaching or learning center				☐
Peer study groups or supplemental instruction				☐
Department help room or TA hours				☐
Disability or accessibility services				☐
Testing center (extended time, quiet room)				☐
Counseling and mental health				☐
Health center				☐
Wellness, recreation and sleep programs				☐
Food pantry or basic needs				☐
Dean of students or case management				☐
Financial aid or bursar				☐

If you or someone you know is in crisis, help is available right now

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (US): call or text 988 | Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741

Emergency: call 911 | Campus safety or police number: _____

Outside the US, search for your country's crisis line. Reaching out is a sign of strength, and it is never too late.

Which Support, and When?

Matching the problem to the right person saves time and stress. Reach out early. Most offices are glad to help.

WHEN THIS IS HAPPENING	REACH OUT TO
I do not understand a concept or a type of problem	Professor or TA office hours, tutoring center, study group
My final is an essay or paper and I am stuck organizing it	Writing center, then professor or TA for the rubric
I know the material but cannot get started or stay on track	Academic or executive function coach, an accountability partner
I need extra time or a different testing setting	Disability or accessibility services (arrange early)
I am overwhelmed, anxious, or not sleeping	Counseling center, health center, a trusted person
I am sick or facing an emergency	Contact professors right away and the dean of students office
I am struggling to afford food, housing or materials	Dean of students, basic needs office, financial aid
I am in crisis	Call or text 988, or call 911

Questions to ask when you contact a support

- What can you help with, and what should I bring to our first appointment?
- How far ahead do I need to book, and how many sessions can I have before finals?
- Is there a drop-in option, an online option, or extended hours during finals week?
- Can you help me build a plan for the exams I am most worried about?

My support plan for finals season

Support I will use	Date and time booked	What I will bring or ask

Calming Tools That Have Research Behind Them

A little stress can sharpen focus. Too much gets in the way. These tools help you turn the dial down.

Cyclic sighing (1 to 5 minutes)

1. Inhale through your nose.

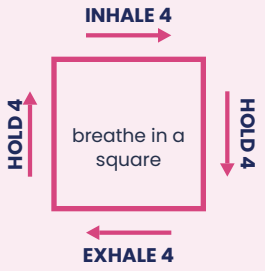
2. At the top, take a second short sip of air.

3. Exhale slowly through your mouth, longer than the inhale.

4. Repeat for 1 to 5 minutes.

In a randomized study, daily cyclic sighing improved mood and lowered breathing rate more than mindfulness meditation (Balban et al., 2023).

Box breathing (4-4-4-4)



Commonly taught for calming. It was also compared in the same study.

RESEARCH **Write down your worries (10 minutes before the exam)**
In classroom and lab studies, writing about test worries just before an exam improved scores for students prone to test anxiety (Ramirez and Beilock, 2011).

RESEARCH **Reappraise the jitters as energy**
Students who were told that arousal can help performance did better on a test (Jamieson et al., 2010). Try: "My body is getting ready to perform."

RESEARCH **Move your body, even for 10 minutes**
Regular physical activity is linked with benefits for learning and thinking (Hillman et al., 2008). Walk between study blocks.

RESEARCH **Protect your sleep**
Sleep supports memory consolidation (Diekelmann and Born, 2010). Keep a steady bedtime window and skip the all-nighter.

PRACTICE **Ground yourself with 5-4-3-2-1**
Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste. A widely used grounding practice for racing thoughts.

PRACTICE **Progressive muscle relaxation**
Tense each muscle group for about 5 seconds, then release, from your feet up to your face. A widely used relaxation practice.

RESEARCH = supported by published studies. **PRACTICE** = widely used in counseling and coaching, with less direct research on exam performance. Try each tool when you are calm first, so it is familiar when you need it.

My Calm Toolkit and Weekly Wellness Tracker

Plan your calm before you need it. Then track the basics that keep your brain ready to learn.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS I notice

MY GO-TO CALMING MOVES

PEOPLE I CAN REACH OUT TO

Stop signs: several nights with little or no sleep, not eating, panic attacks, or hopeless thoughts are more than study stress. Talk to a counselor, a doctor or a trusted person, and use the crisis lines on page 39 if you need immediate help.

Weekly wellness tracker (print one for each week)

Week of: _____

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Hours of sleep							
Ate real meals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drank water	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Moved 10+ minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Break outdoors or away from screens	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connected with someone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Calming tool used	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mood (1 to 5)							
One small win							

Small and steady beats perfect. Aim for most boxes most days, not every box every day.

Executive Function Toolkit: Start, Focus, Finish

Strategies to try as experiments. Keep what works for your brain, and drop what does not.

The 5-Minute Start

1. Name the very first physical action (open the file, write the first question). **2. Set a timer for 5 minutes. 3. Do only that. 4. When the timer ends, choose:** keep going, or stop and try again later. Starting is usually the hardest part, and momentum often takes over.

START

RESEARCH **If-Then plans** Link a situation to an action: "If it is 4 pm, then I open the practice test" (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006).

PRACTICE **Tiny first step** Shrink the task until it feels almost silly: "write one question about Topic 3."

PRACTICE **Body doubling** Study alongside someone else, in person or on video, even if you work on different things.

FOCUS

PRACTICE **Focus timers** Try 25 on / 5 off, 15 / 3, or 50 / 10. Pick the length you can actually start, then stretch it.

PRACTICE **Phone in another room** Remove the pull instead of resisting it. Use website blockers if your computer is the distraction.

PRACTICE **One tab, one task** Keep only what you need open. Park stray thoughts on the Parking Lot (page 23).

TRACK TIME

RESEARCH **Estimate vs. actual** People tend to underestimate how long tasks take (Buehler et al., 1994). Log both, then pad future estimates.

PRACTICE **Visual timers and clocks** Make time visible with an analog clock, a countdown timer, or a calendar view.

PRACTICE **Time buffers** Add 25 to 50 percent to your estimate and leave gaps between blocks for transitions.

REMEMBER AND RESET

PRACTICE **Externalize everything** Keep one planner, one list, and phone alarms. Do not trust working memory with due dates.

PRACTICE **Shutdown ritual** End each day by writing tomorrow's first step and the first item on your list.

PRACTICE **Reset between blocks** Stand up, drink water, step outside, or stretch. Switch tasks only after a real break.

RESEARCH = supported by published studies. **PRACTICE** = coaching-informed strategies that many students find helpful, with limited direct research on exam preparation. Treat them as experiments.

My EF experiments this week

Strategy I will try	When and where	Helped? (1-5)	Keep, tweak or drop? Why?

Study Session and Time Log

Track what you planned, what happened, and what you will adjust. Over a week, patterns show up fast.

RESEARCH BASIS *Comparing estimates with actual time counters the planning fallacy (Buehler et al., 1994).*

Date	Course and topic	Strategy used	Plan (min)	Actual (min)	Focus (1-5)	What worked? What is my next step?

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT MY TIME AND FOCUS

MY BODY-DOUBLING PLAN (who, when, where)

Night Before and Morning Of

Decide tonight so you do not have to decide tomorrow. Check each box as you go.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

- [ ] Confirm exam time, room, and travel plan (add 15 extra minutes)
- [ ] Pack: student ID, pens or pencils, calculator, allowed notes, water, snack, layers
- [ ] Charge devices and test technology for any online exam
- [ ] Do one last closed-book pass through the one-page recall sheet
- [ ] Put the recall sheet away. No new material tonight
- [ ] Lay out clothes and set two alarms
- [ ] Screens off and wind-down routine started
- [ ] In bed at my planned time

THE MORNING OF

- [ ] Eat something with protein and drink water
- [ ] Skim the recall sheet once. No new material
- [ ] Do 2 minutes of cyclic sighing or box breathing
- [ ] Leave on time. Arrive 15 minutes early
- [ ] Silence the phone and put it away
- [ ] Use the bathroom before the exam starts
- [ ] Repeat: "My body is getting ready to perform"
- [ ] Online exam: quiet space, backup internet plan, other tabs closed

My exam-day times

Stop studying at	Bedtime	Wake-up time	Leave home at	Exam starts

Packing list: my extras

Why stop studying?

Sleep beats a late-night cram. Stopping on time protects the memory you have already built. If you lie awake, keep the room dark and calm, try a slow breathing practice, and remind yourself that rest still helps.

In the Exam: Your Game Plan

A simple routine keeps panic from taking the wheel. Rehearse it on practice tests so it feels automatic.

1 SETTLE
One cyclic sigh or box breath. Feet on the floor.

2 BRAIN DUMP
If allowed, jot formulas, frameworks and key terms on scratch paper.

3 SCAN
Read directions. Skim the whole exam. Note points and question types.

4 TRIAGE
Answer the sure ones first. Mark the tough ones and come back.

5 WATCH TIME
Check at the halfway point and 10 minutes from the end.

6 CHECK
Re-read questions, units and directions. Answer every question.

If I blank

1. Breathe out slowly. **2.** Skip it and mark it. **3.** Do an easier question to get moving. **4.** Come back and write what you do know. Partial credit counts. **5.** Say: "Blanking is common and it passes."

Question-type tips

Multiple choice: read the question first, predict an answer, then look at the options. Eliminate clearly wrong choices.
Short answer and essay: spend the first 2 to 3 minutes outlining. Change an answer only when you have a clear reason.

My time budget (fill in before the exam, check during)

Section or question type	Points	Minutes planned	Check time (clock)	Actual minutes

MY ONE-LINE MANTRA FOR EXAM DAY

Post-Exam Reflection

Ten minutes after each exam turns experience into skill. Then rest, celebrate, and reset for the next one.

COURSE _____ **DATE** _____ **HOW I FELT BEFORE (1-5)** _____ **AFTER** _____

WHAT I DID THAT HELPED

WHAT I WOULD CHANGE NEXT TIME

WHAT SURPRISED ME ON THE EXAM

WHAT I WILL DO FOR MY NEXT EXAM

- ☐ Ate, hydrated and moved
- ☐ Slept enough
- ☐ Celebrated a small win
- ☐ Took a 15-minute reset

COURSE _____ **DATE** _____ **HOW I FELT BEFORE (1-5)** _____ **AFTER** _____

WHAT I DID THAT HELPED

WHAT I WOULD CHANGE NEXT TIME

WHAT SURPRISED ME ON THE EXAM

WHAT I WILL DO FOR MY NEXT EXAM

- ☐ Ate, hydrated and moved
- ☐ Slept enough
- ☐ Celebrated a small win
- ☐ Took a 15-minute reset

After a hard exam, give yourself the same kindness you would give a friend. One exam does not define you. What you learn about how you prepare does.

References and Further Reading

The research behind the strategies in this playbook.

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Free resources worth bookmarking

- **The Learning Scientists** (learningscientists.org): downloadable posters on the six effective strategies
- **Retrieval Practice** (retrievalpractice.org): guides and examples of retrieval in action
- **CHADD** (chadd.org) and **Understood** (understood.org): information and community for ADHD and learning differences
- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** (988lifeline.org): call or text 988 in the US

About Focused Solutions

Support that fits how your brain works.



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Claude is an executive function and learning support coach with more than 40 years in education, including a long career in special education and work in public, private, therapeutic and international schools. Focused Solutions coaches high school and college students with ADHD and executive function needs, helping them build the planning, study and self-advocacy skills that turn effort into results.

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How coaching can help with finals

- **Build the plan.** A realistic finals timeline built around your courses, your energy and your life.
- **Put proven strategies to work.** Practice testing, spaced review and study guides, with support to actually do them.
- **Stay on track.** Friendly check-ins that feel like encouragement, not nagging.
- **Find your supports.** Tutoring, accommodations, counseling and campus resources, and how to ask for them.
- **Celebrate progress.** Momentum is built one small step at a time.

One last thing

Whether finals are three weeks away or three days away, it is never too late to get support. Pick one page, fill in one box, and take the next small step. You have got this.

This playbook is for educational purposes and is not a substitute for medical, mental health or legal advice. Campus names, policies and deadlines vary by school, so confirm details with your institution.