Getting Ready for Finals

Here are some principles from the book *Making the Grade* by Patrick Grassik (Macmillan of Canada, 1983) to help you get started planning for upcoming finals:

1. Get organized.
2. Get a place where you can study.
3. Train other people in your life to leave you alone when you are working.
4. Take change-of-pace breaks.
5. Take transition -time breaks.
6. Tell people what your needs are during the weeks/days before finals.

Five Review Strategies

1. Start preparing for the exam early
   a. As soon as possible after each lecture, spend five or ten minutes reviewing and editing your notes. Do the same after reading and making notes on a section of a textbook.
2. Review step by step
   a. Prepare a master calendar, breaking down the term’s work into manageable units and allowing time for cumulative review and cramming. Distribute review times throughout the term.
3. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam
   a. As soon as possible in the course, try to clarify the skill and behaviors you will be expected to demonstrate during the exam.
   b. If at all possible, get a hold of copies of past examination in the course. Collate questions. List the issues discussed.
4. Get feedback on your performance before the test
   a. Whenever you do anything in a course, make sure you get feedback that would allow you to do that thing better the next time.
   b. Form a study group that meets regularly to work on assignments, do readings, and prepare for exams.
5. Safeguard your physical and emotional well being
   a. If you encounter difficulties in your social, personal, or physical life that you cannot handle after making reasonable efforts, get help - and the sooner the better.

Preparing a Schedule for Review

1. Review step by step
   a. Make sure you obtain, or prepare for yourself, a course outline and reading list for every course in which you are enrolled.
   b. Keep your master calendar current. As you become aware of tests and assignment deadlines, add them to your calendar and indicate the time you will devote to preparation for these events.
   c. About once a week, plan your activities for the next week. Plan how you are going to meet requirements for study and review and your other needs. Plan to keep current in all subjects.
d. On a daily basis, keep track of the goals you have accomplished, and transfer forward the tasks you still need to do.
e. Borrow from free time when changing your schedule, don’t steal from time you need for work or reviewing purposes.
f. Think small. Plan study, work, and review sessions for short periods. Give yourself small goals to accomplish.
g. Attend the last few lectures before the test.
h. Schedule major cramming sessions as close to the exam as possible.
i. For every test, complete a five- or ten-minute cram just before the test begins.

2. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam
   a. Don’t review similar subjects one after the other

3. Get feedback on your performance before the test
   a. Make special efforts before the test to identify and resolve any difficulties you have with the course material. Ask questions of the instructors. Check material you are unsure of with your classmates. Use alternative textbooks.

4. Safeguard your physical and emotional well being
   a. Make sure you allow time for goofing off.
   b. Arrange to have pleasant events follow difficult or tedious activities.
   c. Allow your self to be distracted only when you choose to be distracted.
   d. Avoid cramming at the expense of physical and intellectual efficiency.
   e. Structure your study activities so that you can wind down before you go to bed.
   f. Just before an exam, make sure you allow time to take care of important physical needs, like eating, sleeping, exercise, and so on.
   g. The night before the test, lay out everything you need for the next so that you don’t have to rush to get organized in the morning.
   h. Make sure you can arrive at the exam on time, with as little rushing as possible.
   i. Just before a test, concentrate on what you know, not on what you don’t know.
   j. Just before a test, do not talk to anybody about what might be on the test.

Figuring Out What to Practice

1. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam
   a. If you have difficulty with basic operations and the ideas that the instructor thinks everyone has mastered, identify a source of instruction and specifically schedule time to remedy your deficiencies.
   b. If you usually make a specific kind of error on tests, learn to avoid these mistakes. Practice, practice, practice doing it right.
   c. Identify a resource that you can use to clarify technical vocabulary and other ways to supplement your textbook.
   d. Early in the course, design a global map that will allow you to see the logical structure of the course. Build your global map throughout the course.

2. Get feedback on your performance before the test.
   a. As you review, quiz yourself on the important information and ideas, checking your global map, in your notes, or in the text to confirm your understanding, retention, and ability to apply the material.
General Test-Taking Strategies
1. Make sure you understand the general instructions.
2. Survey the test before you start.
3. If you think of something, write it down.
4. Budget your time on the test. Plan how you are going to attack the test.
5. Do the easier questions first. Buy time to think about more difficult questions.
6. Read questions carefully, underlining key terms. Decide what you are expected to do.
7. Attack each question systematically.
8. Draft your answers so you can more easily find and correct mistakes.
9. Review and correct your exam before handing it in.
10. Write something down for every question.
11. Use all your time.

Oral Examinations
1. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam.
   a. If you are nervous at the prospect of being given an oral quiz, begin early in the term to desensitize yourself by having as many short, non-threatening conversations with the teacher as you can manage.
   b. Learn and practice the correct pronunciation to technical terms and practice making oral responses to questions prior to taking any oral exam.
   c. In preparation for a major oral exam, stage “practice orals”, with as much realism as you can manage.
2. If you think of something, write it down.
   a. If you think of information about a previous question during an oral exam, make a note of the idea so that you can mention it later, or politely interrupt the conversation to return to the previous question.
3. Read questions carefully, underlining key terms. Decide what you are expected to do.
   a. In oral examinations, look at the examiner while a question is being asked or a comment is being made.
   b. Seek clarification of questions in oral exams, first by paraphrasing the question, and then by asking for additional explanation, if you need it.
4. Write something down for every question.
   a. If you can’t think of the exact answer to an oral question, begin by giving the information that you do know.

Reviewing in Case-Method Courses (including English Literature)
1. Review step by step
   a. In case-method courses, assign a priority ranking of 1, 2, or 3 to all the cases on your reading list, determining the amount of effort you will devote to studying and reviewing each case.
2. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam
   a. Read the cases at least once before the lecture.
   b. Develop a checklist of headings that the instructor uses to analyze and evaluate the cases. Add to this list from secondary sources. Check your understanding of these terms.
c. After the lecture on a case, go back and complete the case description and analysis. Mark your text, locating important examples, and explain what they are examples of, and why they are important.

**Problem Tests**

1. If you think of something, write it down.
   a. Record items from your minor cram as soon as you have paper on which to write in the test.

2. Read questions carefully, underlining key terms. Decide what you are expected to do.
   a. When reading a question on a problem test, be sure to underline each item of data, the units that accompany the numbers, and the specific instruction that tells you what you have to do, as well as important modifiers.
   b. Before you begin working on a question on a problem test, try to predict what the final answer will look like. Write this down in the margin of the test paper.

3. Attack each question systematically.
   a. Before beginning work on a problem on a test, list the data neatly in a table.
   b. Before beginning a question on a problem test, draw pictures, diagrams, or charts that show the data and illustrates the problem.
   c. In working a problem, identify what it is that you have to find and give it a name. There may be several “unknowns” to identify and name.

4. Draft your answers so you can more easily find and correct mistakes.
   a. Don’t try to do mental math on tests. Take time to work out the problems using paper and pencil. If you are using a calculator, be sure to write down each step.

5. Review and correct you exam before handing it in.
   a. In problem tests, check you answer:
      - To see if it matches your prediction
      - To see if it is reasonable
      - To make sure it meets all the requirements of the problem, and
      - To make sure there are no computational errors.

**Open-Book Exams**

1. Practice the skills you will have to demonstrate on the exam
   a. To prepare for an open-book exam, as well as completing your regular form of review, practice answering sample problems using the text as a tool that allows you to be more precise.
   b. If you are allowed to bring a crib-sheet to the test, make sure that you prepare one that is neat, well organized, and easy to read, and that contains only essential, hard-to-remember information.

2. Make sure you understand the general instructions.
   a. Make sure you know exactly what materials may be brought with you to the test.