

chapter **5** **POST EXAM REORGANIZATION:**
Even a Wake Can Be a Good Party



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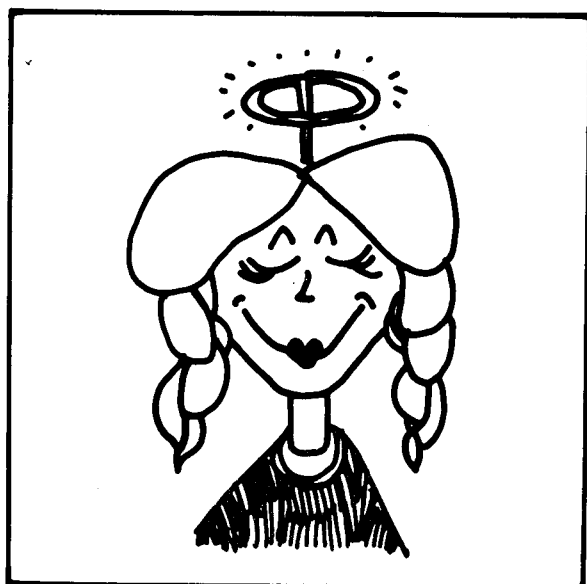
5.1 MONDAY MORNING QUARTERBACKING

Regardless of whether you are celebrating VICTORY or agonizing over a SETBACK, run through the following checklist.

Table 5.1. Post Exam Checklist

| Things you did RIGHT | Things you did WRONG |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was fully rested and working at 100% efficiency. | <input type="checkbox"/> "There was too much to do", so I got less than 8 hours sleep. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> After all the daily "practice exams", this was nothing new. | <input type="checkbox"/> It was a life-and-death situation. This was a "must" exam. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easy problems were answered first. Others were read carefully, then passed over on the first round. | <input type="checkbox"/> I did problems in the order given. There was no time to "mess around" looking for easy ones. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I carefully considered whether my response answered the question that was <i>asked</i> . | <input type="checkbox"/> I got each answer down and MOVED ON! |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time was divided to get maximum points per minute. | <input type="checkbox"/> I got the answers down. Let the prof handle the points business (and I hope he's/she's compassionate). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I recalled the objectives and the prof's relative emphasis. | <input type="checkbox"/> I was watching for those *#@% SNEAKY MISERABLE TRICK questions. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I utilized all of the time allotted. | <input type="checkbox"/> I finished early, but didn't check my answers. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I made mental estimates to see if my answers were reasonable. | <input type="checkbox"/> Whatever the calculator said should have been right. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I used a VERY SHORT "mental crib" list. (Chapter 4) | <input type="checkbox"/> I had a ton of things to memorize just before the exam. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My work was neat and well organized. | <input type="checkbox"/> I got it down any old way. Organization is an "outside of exams" activity. |

That's 10 comparisons for you to make. If you marked them honestly, compare your test grade and your responses—it should tell you something. If you're celebrating a victory, continue with section 5.2. If you're agonizing over a set-back, go to section 5.3, page 65.



5.2 TURNING ONE VICTORY INTO A WINNING CAMPAIGN

5.2a Good for You! Congratulations!

Doesn't it feel good?!! Reach around and pat yourself on the back. You deserve it! (If that seems too mild, you can send \$1000, in small bills, in a plain brown wrapper, to the authors. They will send you a personal "congratulations" card and think kindly of you while having one heck of a fine party!) Of course, YOU could just have your own celebration by going to a movie, indulging in your favorite pastime, or just sharing the good news with your friends.

DO REWARD YOURSELF! However,

5.2b Don't Stop! (Don't Even Pause!)

Even on exam day you should do your scheduled studying in this course. On this day try to identify thin ice successfully crossed.

Go over your exam and grade it **HARDER** than your prof did (or will). On multiple-choice and true-false questions, mark off all guesses and answers you *doubted*. Now check these items, plus any you missed, according to the directions for **ADVANCED PRE-GUESSING** on page 67. Then return here for an analysis of what you got right on the exam.

5.2c Keeping the Act Rolling

EFFICIENCY is still the watchword. Did you answer exam items correctly for the **CORRECT** reason? That is, how well did the objectives you had *identified* cover these questions? Did your list of objectives cover a lot of material that was not needed on the exam? How could you have done a better job of pre-guessing which questions would appear on the exam? How was the exam material covered in class? In the text?

The ideal expenditure of effort should lead you to meeting your chosen goal in each course—but not much more except in your **SUPERSTAR** areas. If that sounds non-professional, you need to reassess your **GOALS** (page 42) until it sounds just fine.

5.2d Was this Exam Easy, But the Next One Might Be a Terror?

Sometimes first exams *are* easier. But the usual reason they seem so easy is that you already knew a lot of the information before the course started. As you proceed toward the next exam, ask yourself whether the amount of **NEW** material is larger. If it is, you will have to use more time.



BUT, the best possible procedure is *still* the SAME. The way to evaluate your progress is *still* the SAME. Play the game the SAME way (but be prepared to spend more time IF meeting your objectives requires it).

5.3 STRIKE ONE?

OK, BUT YOU'RE *NOT* OUT YET!

If things did *not* go your way on the exam, it's time to figure out why. If you DID reach your stated goal, you simply want to make sure you'll also do it next time (that's Section 5.2).

5.3a Why Did You Miss?

POSSIBILITY (1): Not enough study.

This is *NOT* the real reason if you have followed your schedule. (If you *didn't* use your schedule, you *really should* go back and repeat Chapter 2 for a week—then go to Chapter 3 again. You'll come back to this chapter after the next exam.)



POSSIBILITY (2): You studied the wrong material.

The fact that the exam did not cover 100% of the material you studied does not say that you studied the wrong material. If you really *did* study the wrong material, you must now polish up your pre-guessing techniques. How well are you doing in pre-guessing the lectures? The most likely case is that you never got deeply into the pre-guessing process at all (page 22). If you *really* tried to pre-guess, take a look at ADVANCED PRE-GUESSING (page 67), to improve your skills.

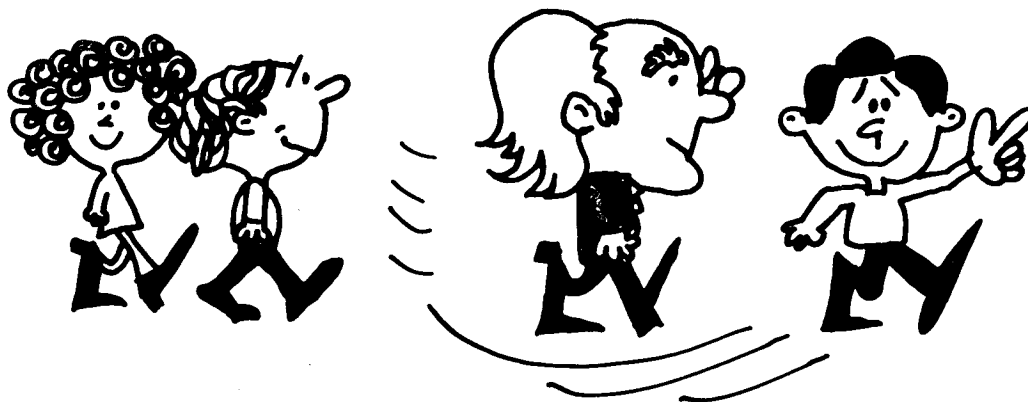
Were the areas (items) you either missed or were in doubt about covered in class? In the text? In both? Were they obviously major points or *seemingly* minor details?

Use this analysis to define a set of objectives (pages 23 and 68) which *would* cover the questions that were asked. Did the OBJECTIVES you had identified before the exam cover these questions? Were the objectives you had identified sufficiently *detailed* to predict each question?

POSSIBILITY (3): You could kick yourself because you missed problems you SHOULD have answered correctly.

The usual reason for this feeling is that the exam served as the review that brought you up to that level. Many students are lulled into a *false* sense of security during class. They find that they can "follow the prof" easily. They nod

(and perhaps even smile) as something is explained. They “understand what the prof is doing” as examples are worked. The logic all seems “reasonable”. However, this is very much like watching an Olympic skater. FOLLOWING the movements, leaps and spins seems easy enough. It’s NOT so easy when you first try to do it yourself.



In fact, FOLLOWING is MUCH easier than leading. But in exam situations, YOU must LEAD. There is no longer anyone to follow. The pre-guessing and the “practice exam” studying are the exercises that produce winning LEADERS.

Were your review CUES (page 25) reduced to a *small number* of “MENTAL CRIB NOTES” (page 53)? They *should* have been!

POSSIBILITY (4): You made a lot of STUPID mistakes!

Stupid mistakes are similar to “stupid questions”. A “stupid question” is merely one that SHOULD HAVE BEEN ASKED, but WASN’T. A stupid mistake is merely one that you *did not analyze properly*. That’s the ONLY reason the mistake is *really* “stupid”. The following are actual examples which the students thought were “stupid mistakes”.

Table 5.2. Mistake Analysis

| “STUPID” MISTAKE | ANALYSIS |
|--|---|
| $\begin{array}{r} 23 \\ + 1 \\ \hline +16 \\ \hline 50 \end{array}$ | You did NOT come to college to learn to add! This student’s REAL mistake was RUSHING TOO FAST on the “simple” parts. |
| The question was: “Which of the following statements is incorrect? Choice (a) was CORRECT so the student chose it. | The student’s <i>real</i> mistake was failure to circle the key word, <u>incorrect</u> , and to write “F” (for “false”) next to it. |
| The question was: “What mass of N_2 would result from explosive decomposition of 40g of ammonium nitrate at $300^\circ C$ and 700 torr? The student correctly calculated the VOLUME of N_2 (which was harder to do). | The student’s <i>real</i> mistake was in failure to circle the key phrase, <u>mass of N_2</u> , and then to cross out the “ $300^\circ C$ and 700 torr”, as “distracting data” with no relationship to the answer requested. |

Everyone makes a stupid mistake once in a while. **SUCCESSFUL** people analyze their mistakes and plan (and practice) to avoid repeating the same kinds of mistakes. Rushing too fast on “easy parts”, failure to circle key words, failure to read questions (or answer choices) carefully, mentally changing a question to match a similar (but really different) question that you practiced are mistakes that **YOU CAN CURE**. Hang in there and keep practicing those “examsmanship skills” that were discussed in Chapter 4.

POSSIBILITY (5): You panicked!

This is rarely the *real* cause. In *true* panic cases you add $13 + 12$ and get 52; you subtract $47 - 13$ and get 60; you spell April as “aperill”. You *don't* selectively forget the course material that was *properly* learned. Your prof won't buy that story, so don't try to sell it to yourself either. Panic is different from the more serious “exam trauma” discussed in Chapter 4. If nervousness and anxiety caused you problems **DURING** the exam, you should have stopped work for 20–30 seconds and used the “calm down” method discussed on page 59. Practice tests taken regularly will eliminate any *real* panic cases.

POSSIBILITY (6): You are a poor exam taker.

Then simply study Chapter 4 and join the experts.

5.4 ADVANCED PRE-GUESSING

If this is your first contact with pre-guessing, you'll sprain the head muscle at this level. (See Chapter 2 for the starting process.)



For practiced pre-guessers, the following may help to sharpen the technique a bit.

5.4a Quantitative and Qualitative

Have your guesses included quantity (amounts) and mathematical procedures as well as concepts? Use both aspects.

5.4b Emphasis

How accurately have you pre-guessed the *relative emphasis* placed on each item presented in lecture or assigned as homework? Don't overlook homework problems and questions as objectives. For each assigned problem or question, ask yourself what objectives it represents. Very few assigned problems appear on tests, but the *objectives* they represent certainly do!

5.4c References

When lectures (and exams) deviate significantly from the text, which reference work follows the material more closely? If your prof shows enough imagination to read more than a single book, you can profitably follow his lead. It may take a bit of looking, but it makes fine speed-reading practice,

too. The activity is especially important if you pre-guessed accurately **EXCEPT** for the material covered on the exam.

5.4d Order (Organization)

Have you pre-guessed the *logical sequence* your prof uses? Sure, it may not seem logical when you listen, but even old Prof “Grizzly Bear” has a logic pattern *in his mind*. The poorer the lecture seems to you, the more you need to untangle the prof’s logic. How your prof sees these parts tied together will reveal amazing new degrees of emphasis.

5.4e Exam Review

What quirks did your prof exhibit when he covered the specific items that subsequently appeared on the exam? This is just like a quarterback who grits his teeth only when he intends to throw a screen-pass to the left. Does your prof grit his teeth? Raise his hand in benediction? Erase quickly? Underline? Mumble into his hand? Direct you to homework problems? Smile like a fox eating yellow-jackets? Don’t get lost in mannerisms, but *do* learn how this prof indicates relative importance. That’s what he uses to write his exam questions.

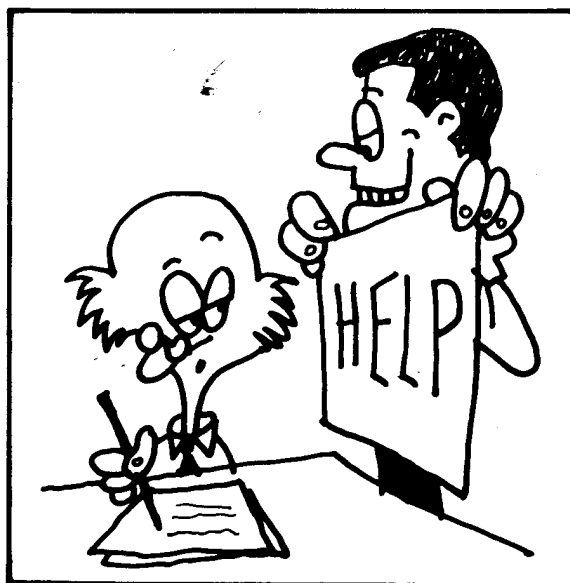
5.4f Self-Grading

As the course has progressed, how much has your pre-guessing **IMPROVED**? Was the **IMPROVEMENT** reflected in which questions you were able to answer fully and correctly?

5.5 HELP!

If you still need help, it is *to define those objectives accurately*. Use the suggestions from Chapters 2 and 3 first, because they are more complete and give you an easier mechanism for checking yourself. If you have done that and are still in trouble, it’s time to **GO** for **HELP**. This help can be obtained from your prof and/or from former students. Many profs often tend to give you more to do than is necessary, while former students sometimes tend to oversimplify what needs to be done. Anything that sounds like a list of “things to learn” is the *wrong* advice. Good objectives really outline a set of questions you should be able to answer. Objectives should serve as practice exams, just as much as they are guides to what to study.

Really good students can write these objectives quite well. Start with the pre-guessing. Then use assignments, lectures, text questions, and the exam items to improve the pre-guessing and fill in details.



POSTSCRIPT:

Now recycle through Chapters 3, 4, and 5 until you reach the Drop Date or other “Reassessment Time”. (Chapter 6)