

April 2022

# ENGWellness Graduate Newsletter

Produced by: the ENGWellness Ambassador



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## Welcome to Real Spring!

Welcome to the last month of the term and, sadly, exams. While the weather seems to have most definitely taken a swing for the better, academics have taken a swing for the worse as you all begin that grind for the final push before you can relax for the summer. Unless of course you have courses during the summer as well, but we hope you do find some time to get out and enjoy some fun elements like regular people and not the studious university students you are!

## Exam Preparation

This newsletter is going to focus primarily on some of the best methods and advice we can provide to help you all in your preparation for exams. While every method might not work for you, we certainly hope that you do find one or two ideas that help you along this final stretch of the termly journey.

### Studying 101: Study Smarter not Harder

The first and probably the most important piece of information is that reading is not studying. If you are simply just going back through your notes and textbook re-reading the material and not actively engaging with the material your brain won't store it as successfully and you can find yourself going in circles rather quickly. For some people this method can provide a good base to start from, it is not the most useful nor most successful method. The simple way of thinking about it, is that re-reading is an important part of pre-studying while the engagement with the material is the active learning and studying. Kind of like how you warm up before exercise, but the warm up itself isn't how you build muscle.

Some of you may now be asking yourselves, well if re-reading isn't active studying what is? Some simple forms of active studying methods are to create a study guide for the various topics and then create a quiz on the various topics, or to use past quizzes or practice problems your professor has provided you with. If you don't like the quiz method, you can try teaching the material. This can be very beneficial as it forces you to recall the information, provide it to another person in a clear manner, be concise, and be able to



associate it with examples in the real world. The teaching method can be exceptionally beneficial if you study in a small group with your classmates as you will be able to correct each other if one of you makes a mistake, which benefits all of your learning as you are all constantly thinking about the material. One other method of active studying is to create concept maps. These are very useful as it allows for you to condense down massive amounts of text and information into smaller pieces, while also forcing you to interconnect all the material you have learned-allowing your brain to develop more interconnected pathways for learning, which will help with recall of the information during an exam.



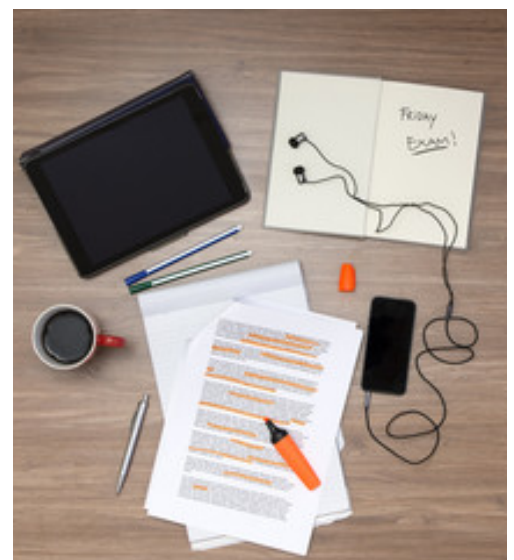
## Understanding the Study Cycle

While the study cycle may seem obvious to you all the first time you read through this, students are often taking shortcuts and miss opportunities to enhance their learning trying to save time. This system builds on each step to distribute your learning throughout the whole term, which is too late to fully utilize now, but still has some very important information for you to learn and use in the next term.

Previewing the lectures is the first step in being successful. This will allow you to look ahead at the content and develop the big picture for how all the content that day fits together and fits in with the rest of the course material. This also gives you a chance to prepare any questions you would like to ask during the lecture or afterwards. Which also gives you the benefit of being aware of when these answers pop up during the lectures themselves so you know to take note of what is being said to help further your understanding of topics that had previously caused you some confusion. Even if there are no assigned pre-readings you can still look ahead on the course syllabus to see which chapters are being covered and do a brief overview of those on your own.

The second step is to attend class, and we don't just mean show up to the lecture and fill a seat which we all do at some point. When you're there you need to actively engage with the professor and the material that is being talked about. This will help you learn what the expectations are for tests and assignments as you will have a better understanding of which content is covered and which is not being covered. In addition, this is also one of the best opportunities to see what other questions students are asking as it can help to further your knowledge of the topic and to develop a sense of which content students are anticipating will be most important.

You may be able to guess the next step in the cycle, which is review. Reviewing your notes as soon as possible after the lecture is delivered is very important as the material is still fresh in your mind in case a portion of your notes don't make sense or there is a part of them that you want to further round out and add details to. As you're going through these notes, make sure you are actively reviewing them by making yourself summarize the key points and pick out key phrases as opposed to just letting your eyes glide over the paper and simply re-reading what you have just written, as that will not help your knowledge and retention as much.



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The fourth step for success, which is where everyone is now at this point in the term, is to actually study. Tons of studies have found that shorter intensive study sessions are more beneficial to students than long study sessions are. This is due to the fact that for most people it is hard to focus their attention on one task for greater than an hour, therefore it is better to study hard for 30 - 40 minutes and take a 10 minute break then study again. This break allows your brain to refocus on the materials and also helps reward your good behavior, further encouraging you to study well. For some people the long study sessions may work for them, but the one piece we caution you against is cramming all your study sessions into the night before as you will not place the information into your long-term memory and may struggle to recall it the next day during the exam. So please start your studying a week or two in advance and change between subjects so you don't become bored.

The last step in the cycle is to check in with yourself. This is the most important part and one that a lot of people forget to do. After you study you should be looking back on what you're doing and make sure the information you just covered is actually sticking in your mind, and if it is not, then you should be open to adapting and changing your study methods so that you can be more successful in the future. After all, you don't want to be spending large amounts of time preparing in a manner that is not beneficial. You can accomplish this by doing some self testing or working with a partner to quiz each other on the material to see if it is in fact lodged in your brain, or if it is still floating somewhere out there in the textbook and your notes.

### Four Bad Study Habits to Avoid

The worst bad habit, which a lot of us are probably guilty of, is pulling an all-nighter to cram for the exam. The biggest issue with this method is that the brain uses the time we spend sleeping to process and retain the information we learned that day. So if you pull an all-nighter before an exam, not only will you be exhausted and tired, your brain likely will not have completely stored the information. Meaning that your recall will be slow and some of the stuff you learned the night before might not even be possible to recall at all. A second part to this is that if you rely on this method, then over time you will develop sleep deprivation which can lead to a whole host of other problems that can range from oversleeping through alarms and missing your exam to developing depression.

The next bad habit is directly tied to the previously all-nighters, usually the next morning you are exhausted and crack open an energy drink. The consumption of energy drinks is not great for your health by any means, while they will wake you up for the test and might help to increase your focus a little bit, overtime your brain will develop a dependency on these drinks. Which over time can cause harm to your physical and mental health just as any other addiction can, such as increased anxiety, insomnia, headaches, depression, and in this case, maybe even cardiac arrest.



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Another bad habit we tend to develop as our spare time goes away, is that we begin to rely on junk food for our meals. Sure having some junk food here and there is fine, but relying on it for extended periods of time does our bodies no good. It prevents us from getting the nutrients we need, the calories, and pretty much everything healthy food gives us. With our bodies lacking these basic necessities to life, it will begin to tire more quickly cause us to lose our ability to concentrate and study effectively.

The fourth bad habit we have is that we underestimate distractions. This can be from your immediate surroundings, problems outside of your academic life, and long term worries you have. The most obvious distractions we can recognize is our phones, every minute of each day they are sitting there beside us begging to be picked up and used. Which eventually we do and we get sucked down the endless rabbit hole of social media. Additionally, while these distractions are harder to minimize or stop, stuff from outside of your academic life can begin to distract you when you are trying to focus on your studies. For example, with the term drawing to an end you might find your lease expiring and you are having to pack up and prepare to move while studying, or you might be having relationship problems and they are making their way into your ability to think about other things. Ultimately, try to minimize distractions in your life, such as setting clear boundaries with friends and family as to when you are studying and put your phone on silent and out of easy reach.

### My Personal Method to Studying

These next seven tricks are what I personally use going into exams and all the study preparations that entails. So there have been no studies conducted regarding these practices, but I base them all off other information and what I have personally found works best for me. So hopefully, if none of these other parts so far have really inspired you or you haven't found something you feel will work for you, maybe these tricks from another student will. While I might not have written the exact exam you are about to write I have written many with success so far. Ultimately, it is up to you to find the method that works best for you as we are all unique individuals who have different learning styles and practices.



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My first step before I begin studying is to create my study plan and space. The study plan is of great benefit as it helps stop me from drifting between topics and allows me to see my progression over the study session, giving me a sense of completion. It also really helps to make sure that I do not miss any of the topics or subjects I need to cover during that time. When I create my study environment I remove all distractions I possibly can, usually this means turning off my phone, letting anyone in the house know I don't want to be disturbed, and putting a few pre-emptive snacks and drinks in my room so I don't wander out into the kitchen and get distracted. It also occasionally involves selecting a good, but not distracting, playlist to play softly in the background.

The second step is quite simple actually, I take three deep breaths. This may sound silly, but taking those three deep breaths helps to focus your brain. Over time if you do it often enough it also become a conditioned stimulus, meaning that whenever I take those three deep breaths my subconscious enters that study mode and knows to stop thinking about other things and focus directly on the material at hand.

The next thing I do, but sometimes I will skip this element, is to pull up any online videos I think I will need, such as Khan academy or recorded lectures. For the most part I try to avoid being online at all to minimize the chance of distraction and to just rely on hard copies of notes. Sometimes being slightly connected to the cloud becomes necessary though as you may need to Google something or find a note online.

After all of these preliminary steps are finished I launch into my actual study pattern. For me I have found the the Pomodoro technique is the most effective method, meaning that I study intensely for 25 minutes and then take a 5 minute break. I then repeat that pattern until I have finished all the material I was to cover that day. During that break period I make sure to step back from my study space and do something entirely different. The reason I leave my study space is that I don't want there to be any association in my mind between a study space and a relaxation space. This can be as simple as leaving the room, or as complex as leaving the building for a short walk and breath of fresh air. During the break I will still continue to avoid my phone though as social media and the news can sometimes cause a distraction in my mind beyond the break if I continue to think about it.

My next piece to the puzzle is that after about 3 or 4 of these study chunks I will take 20 minutes to do self testing, followed by a 10 minute break. This self testing helps to check to make sure that the information I am covering is sinking in and that my brain isn't just going through the motions without retention. This slightly extended break also is a good point for me to check in with myself and see if I need to stop for a longer period of time before resuming again, as eventually, no matter our best efforts, the brain simply does not want to take in any more information without a substantial break.



My sixth, and second last step, to study is I create my "worry" list. On the list I put down all the subjects or little topics that still seem to be giving me problems so that I can remember to include them in my next study period, without having to constantly think about them in the back of my mind. The reason behind this is I will usually break from a subject for a day or two to focus on other subject to give my brain a variety, and during those study periods I don't want to be constantly worrying that I can't remember something from a different subject. This I have found to be really beneficial for helping me stay focused and to worry less about what I don't know, as it is now written down and won't be forgotten about during the chaos of exam prep.

My final trick to studying is to ALWAYS make sure I get 8 hours of sleep the night before an exam. Yes on a day-to-day basis I can function on about 6-7 hours of sleep with no issue, but to make sure my brain is rested and has the recall capacity I need it to for an exam I give it those 8 hours. Ultimately if you stay up the night before cramming in the last bits of information in until 4am before a 9am exam, you are just going to wake up tired and useless and not feeling mentally prepared in the slightest for that exam.

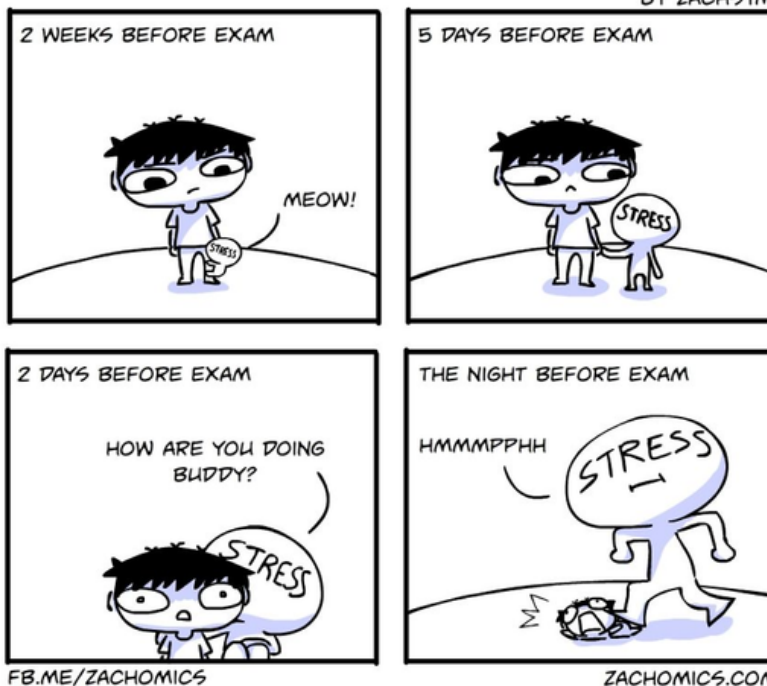


### Good Luck

This will be the last time you hear from me, as the next Wellness Ambassador will be starting their co-op soon. It has been an absolute pleasure writing these newsletters and I hope that along the way you learned a few things, just as I did. So long and good luck to you all with your exams!

### STRESS BEFORE EXAM

BY ZACHSYM



## Additional Resources

The following mental health supports are available to you  
[Counselling Services](#): 519-888-4567 ext. 32655

The following crisis supports are available to you as well  
[Crisis Services Canada](#): 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645  
[UW Police](#): 519-888-4567 ext. 22222

### Academic Support

- [Student Success Office](#): Compilation of learning and life skills resources.

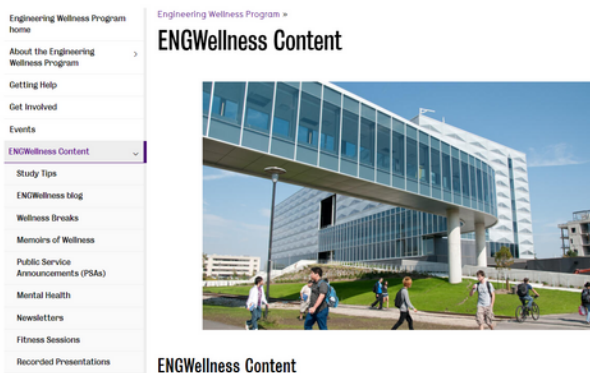
Contacts to book a one-on-one coaching session:

Sam Vandekerckhove (MME) - [srvandek@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:srvandek@uwaterloo.ca) /  
[ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca)

Leah Foster (ECE) – [ljsims@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ljsims@uwaterloo.ca) / [ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca)

## ENGWellness Content

Check out our ENGWellness resources including mental health pages and PSAs. All resources as well as previous newsletters can be accessed under the [ENGWellness Content](#) section of our website.



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## LEARN 'Course'

Get news and access to our content modules through our ENGWellness Learn 'course'! Students can enroll using the Self-Registration function within Learn.

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