

POST EXAM SELF ANALYSIS: THE CALCULUS STUDENT'S GUIDE TO THE EXAM POST-MORTEM

After each exam you should undergo an exam analysis to find ways to improve your testing strategy, your test preparation methods, and your test scores. This is important if you did worse than you'd like and want to do better in this future, but is especially important if you ended up doing worse than you anticipated.

Before you begin this process, plan ahead. Make sure you TAKE AND KEEP GOOD NOTES! This exercise will be vital to helping you prepare for the next exam and for the Final!

1. EXAM REVIEW

The first part of the exam post-mortem is to go back through all the problems on the exam. For each problem you lost points on, work through the problem correctly. Try this first without any aids and do not look at your previous answer. Is your new answer correct? If not, now go get help to find the correct method. Start with the book and your notes, then go to your fellow students. If you need to, ask your GA, the MRTC or your instructor *but only do this after you've tried the problems yourself and have looked through the book*. You'll do much better if you can build yourself a mental map of the locations of important information.

1.1. Where did the exam come from?

1. Which of the problems on the exam looked similar to quiz questions?
2. Which of the problems on the exam looked similar to HW questions?
3. Which of the problems on the exam were on previous exams?

On every exam, there are always some questions that came directly from earlier work. This is one of the reasons why the post mortem from the *previous exam* is so important.

1.2. **Small errors.** For the problems that you missed, determine why. Had you prepared that technique? Did you know how to solve that problem? If not, what topics needed more study? Make sure you work now to understand those topics. They might be on the next exam and they will be on the final.

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If you find yourself making lots of small errors, make sure you review those core skills before the next exam. Often errors in algebra, in trigonometry, uncertainty with the rules of exponents and logs and with the standard rules of integration and differentiation make up the biggest portion of our lost points. Make sure you have good resources for these skills. *Make sure you routinely review the techniques from your previous courses.*

And perhaps you had a bad day. These things can and do happen (and will again). Try to separate anomalies from systemic errors in your study approach.

2. HOW TO BETTER PREPARE.

One of the most important things you can do is use this experience to help you better prepare for the next exam.

As you prepare for each new exam:

1. Start early. Your preparation begins the first day of class and the day after the previous exam.
2. Give yourself at least two weeks to start reviewing.
3. TAKE AND KEEP (only) GOOD NOTES. These will help you not only on this exam, but on the final and in future courses. You don't need everything, but you do need a lot.
4. Work through the *Review Section* at the end of each chapter.
5. Look over all your HW and fix any mistakes.
6. Make sure you know the right methods for all the quiz questions.
7. Test your abilities by working through a sampler of the "Basic Skills" questions from each of the sections represented on the exam.
8. Look at all the questions on previous exams and make sure you know how to complete them. (USE YOUR PREVIOUS POST-MORTEM!)
9. Make and complete a practice test. If you can, swap with a study partner and One of the toughest challenges we have is correctly gauging our own understanding. Treat this practice test as an actual test, with no notes or help and a strict time limit. This will tell you what you need to work on before the exam.