Why Analyze Returned Exams?
Academic Resource Center  919.684.5917

There is much to learn from returned exams. This handout introduces those benefits and offers examples of how to use past exams to prepare for an upcoming one.

Use exams to adapt your weekly study routine by:
- Characterizing and, hence, familiarizing yourself with the way your professor poses exam questions.
- Getting an idea of the areas of knowledge and level of detail you will be tested on.
- Identifying areas where your knowledge is weak in order to review material necessary to understand new course material.

Use exams to plan your final review for an upcoming exam
(two methods)
Method A—using the information you provided for the above:
- Review all questions and answers that you answered correctly.
- For all questions or problems answered incorrectly:
  - Circle or highlight all keywords and phrases in the question.
  - Ask yourself, “What do I need to know to answer this question?” Write your answers down or indicate them in your notes or text for your final review.
  - Determine what you will still need to memorize during your final review.
  - Attempt to answer the question or solve the problem.
- If you are unable to answer the question or solve the problem:
  - Review relevant course materials
  - Put relevant information in your own words to be sure you fully understand.
  - Try the question again.
- If still unsuccessful, find a friend, tutor, TA, or anyone who can help explain what you need to know. Write down these explanations for use in your final review.

Method B—using practice exams:
- Obtain practice exams from your professor. Otherwise, create your own practice exam by choosing random questions and/or problems from your textbook or make up questions based on your notes and other material.
- Use practice exams to:
  - Identify areas where your knowledge is weak to focus your review.
  - Practice doing what you will be asked to do on the final exam.
  - Become more comfortable completing exam material with a time limit.