

TURNING TEST ANXIETY INTO TEST TRANQUILITY:
YOUR GRAD GUIDE TO EXAMS

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UNDERGRADUATE → GRADUATE

- In general, grad school tends to have less exams because you are honing your expertise in a certain area and have already proved your knowledge of the general.
- However, each department (and degree) functions differently, and certain fields have exams during the duration of the program to assess your knowledge.
- Additionally, every PhD program has some type of examination after coursework is complete (usually around the third year) in which a doctoral student is assessed on all the knowledge they've accrued so far.
 - These exams are generally referred to as **comprehensive exams** or **qualifying exams** or **preliminary exams**—or **comps** for short.
 - Sometimes, **qualifying exams** are a step toward the end of the second-year to make sure students can move forward into their third year, where they will also take comps.



Non-Thesis-Based Master's Degree Map

Semester 1

- Program of Study

Semester 2

- Comprehensive Exam (not all programs require)

Semester 3

Semester 4+

- Nomination for Graduation

Ph.D.
Degree Map

Semester 1

- Program of Study

Semester 2

Semester 3

- Qualifying Exam

Semester 3+

- Request to Schedule Comprehensive Exam
- Comprehensive Exam
- Dissertation Proposal Approval

Semester 4

- ABD (All But Dissertation Status, 4 semesters allowed)

Last Semester

- Nomination for Graduation
- Request to Schedule Oral Defense
- Dissertation Defense Results
- Dissertation Final Copies
- Library Rights Statement
- Signature/Approval Cover Page

A FEW NOTES ON SELF-ADVOCACY

- Although each department functions differently, generally it is up to you, the graduate student, to keep on-task with your degree's benchmarks
- By the time you are completing coursework, you should also be forming a committee, if you are to take comprehensive exams.
 - Your committee will have a major role in the formation/administration of these exams
- Generally, your comps are taken within one year of completing coursework
- Meet with your faculty to discuss scheduling your exams as well as the scope and format your exams will take. If you're not sure where you should be in your program at the moment, schedule a meeting with your department head ASAP
- You will also need to set a date for your Comps, so make sure to talk to your Major Professor or the Committee Head about that

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR COMPS

Time management for Comps requires two key ingredients:

- 1) Having set an examination date with your committee (or having a general working knowledge of when your exams might take place)**
- 2) Having a knowledge of what exactly you will be tested on**
 - A. Submission of a long academic paper (or several papers) based on reading lists
 - B. A formal oral exam
 - C. Review of an academic portfolio or set of experiments
 - D. One or more proctored examinations

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR COMPS

Once you know your examination date(s) and what your tasks are, it's time to work backwards.

1. **Look at the big picture**, and consider if there are any stages or ways to 'group' your tasks into certain projects to help visualize the organization.
2. **Write down the basic information:** Are there due dates for any of these tasks? Do you need to deliver them to anyone or meet with other people? Jot down those key dates.
3. **Begin to think small.** Identify the steps or subtasks involved in getting your task done. Write down each step. Make sure each step is specific. Instead of "work on list of articles for my comps" think about what it will take to research, review, etc.
4. **Review each step.** See if it can be broken down even further and add any new subtasks to the list. If you are still feeling in your gut that a task is too "big" or you have a sense of overwhelm when you think about it: there's a chance your tasks are still too big.
5. **Lastly, make a plan.** This means locking in certain dates on your calendar for certain steps.



SQ3R READING COMPREHENSION METHOD

- SURVEY
- QUESTION
- READ
- RECITE
- REVIEW



SQ3R METHOD

- **S—SURVEY**

- Survey the material—peruse the overall organization in 3-5 minutes.

- **Q—QUESTIONS**

- Write questions regarding the reading BEFORE you read. What are you aiming to learn? Why are you reading this?

- **R—READ**

- Read the material looking for answers to the questions you posed.

- **R—RECITE**

- Recite (or rephrase) what you learned IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

- **R—REVIEW**

- Review how this book fits within the larger framework of material you are studying.

THE JOURNEY ALONG THE WAY

- Be in conversation with your committee about potential questions that might come up during your exams, so you can specifically prepare for those
 - Don't be afraid to ask if you can provide sample questions based on your expertise to your committee. The worst thing they can say is "no."
- Take notes along the way. Annotate! Record thoughts! Write in the margins of your articles! Keep a dedicated log or notebook of all your ideas/thoughts!
- While it is generally discouraged to do any writing before the exams actually start, you should have documents at-hand that contain outlines, mindmaps, notes, ideas, key concepts, key quotes, and other aspects to make your exams easier when you actually have to sit down and write them

USE A CITATION MANAGER

- Zotero is a popular “free, easy-to-use tool to help you collect, organize, annotate, cite, and share research.”
- You can save and attach article PDFs inside of it.
- For written exams, consider working on your Works Cited page in advance!

The screenshot displays the Zotero application window. On the left is a sidebar with a tree view of the library structure, including folders like 'My Library', 'Book Reviews', 'Colonial Medicine', 'Dissertation', 'Science and Empire', 'Teaching', 'Mapping', 'Open Access', 'Text Mining', 'Visualization', 'My Publications', 'Duplicate Items', and 'Trash'. The main pane shows a list of items with columns for Title, Creator, and Year. The selected item is 'Circulation of Medicine in the Early Modern Atlantic World' by Cook and Walker, 2013. On the right, the 'Info' tab is active, showing details for the selected item: Item Type (Journal Article), Title (Circulation of Medicine in the Early Modern Atlantic World), Author (Cook, Harold J. and Walker, Timothy D.), Abstract (The search for powerful drugs has caused people and commodities to move around the globe for many centuries, as it still does...), Publication (Social History of Medicine), Volume (26), Issue (3), Pages (337-351), Date (2013/08/01), Series (Social History of Medicine), Series Title, Series Text, Journal Abbr (Soc Hist Med), Language (en), and DOI (10.1093/shm/hkt013).

Title	Creator	Year
Guerre, maladie, empire. Les services de santé militaires en ...	Zaugg	2016
Officiers de santé et soignantes créoles face à la fièvre jaune	Nobi	2016
The Emergence of Tropical Medicine in France	Osborne	2014
Colonial Disease, Translation, and Enlightenment: Franco-Briti...	Charters	2014
Trading in Drugs through Philadelphia in the Eighteenth Centu...	Wilson	2013
The Medicines Trade in the Portuguese Atlantic World: Acquisi...	Walker	2013
Leprosy and Slavery in Suriname: Godfried Schilling and the Fr...	Snelders	2013
Medical Experimentation and Race in the Eighteenth-century ...	Schiebinger	2013
The Circulation of Bodily Knowledge in the Seventeenth-centu...	Gómez	2013
Circulation of Medicine in the Early Modern Atlantic World	Cook and Walker	2013
Synthesis of scholarship on "medicines" to restore focus o...		
Full Text PDF		
Colonial Medical Encounters in the Nineteenth Century: The Fr...	Thoral	2012
Networks in Tropical Medicine: Internationalism, Colonialism, a...	Neill	2012
Early Clinical Features of Dengue Virus Infection in Nicaraguan...	Biswas et al.	2012
Medicine in an age of commerce and empire: Britain and its tr...	Harrison	2010
Finding the "Ideal Diet": Nutrition, Culture, and Dietary Practic...	Neill	2009
Battles of the Self: War and Subjectivity in Early Modern France	Pichichero	2008
The Experiments of Ramón M. Termeyer SJ on the Electric Eel ...	de Asúa	2008
Disfranchisement in the South: A Statistical Study of the ...	McLaren and Vaughan	2007

AS YOUR COMPS APPROACH...

- Make your exams the **main focus** of your life
- Set up a quiet, dedicated workspace that is conducive to your work
- Make sure you have everything you need (pen, paper, water, snacks) to reduce distractions and ensure that you maintain your focus

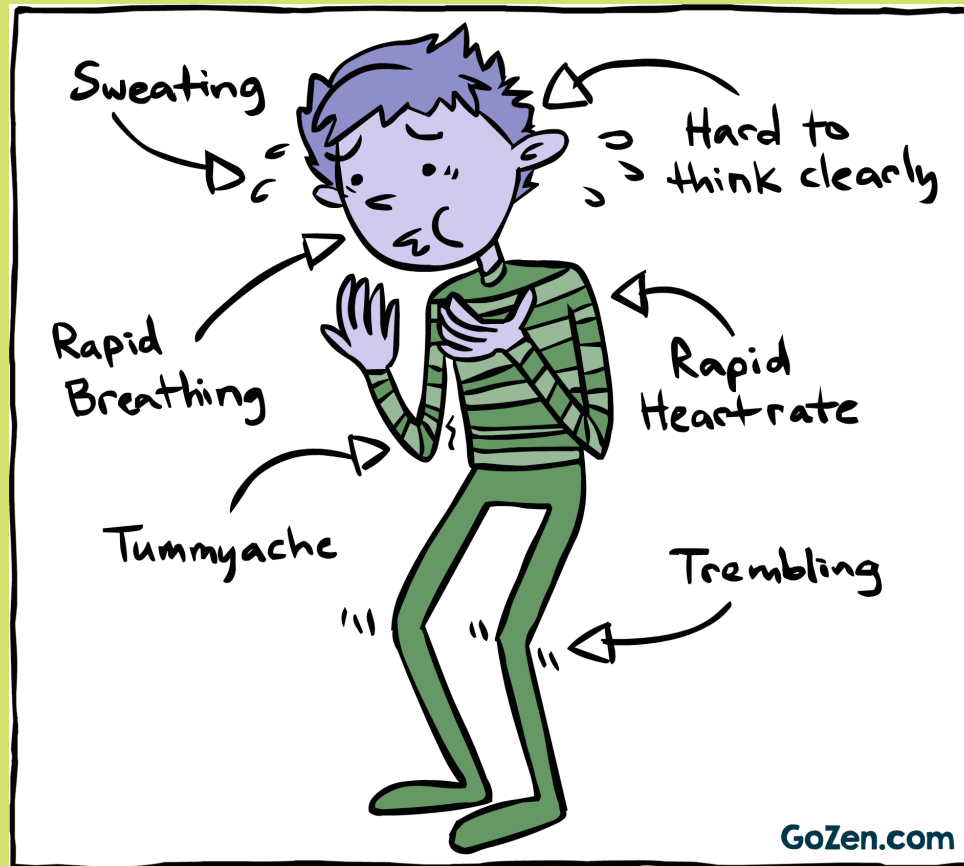
The week(s) of exams:

- Anything that is not absolutely necessary, **cut it out of your schedule!**
- Yes, this includes getting peers to cover your work shifts or teaching gigs!
- Parents to humans and pets should arrange care in advance
- Prep food in advance (e.g.: freezer meals) to maximize time during exams
- Have friends, family, and therapists ready in case you need to vent

A MOMENT OF SELF-REFLECTION

- Before we move on to talk about test anxiety in more detail, let's do a brief writing exercise. You can take out a sheet of paper or open a Microsoft Word or blank Google Doc for this exercise.
 - **For 3-5 minutes, write to answer the following:**
 1. What exams do you have coming up in your department/field? If you're not sure, try to write down some steps you can take to find out answers.
 2. What will be the steps in these exams? What is required? What is being asked of you?
 3. At a glance, how can you break down these steps into tasks and subtasks to reduce the amount of overwhelm you might feel?
 4. Is there anything we've talked about so far that made you think "Oh!" What are some considerations you should make or prepare for in the future regarding your exam journey?

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY



OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Establish a consistent routine**
- Learn what works for you, and follow the same steps each time you get ready to take a test.
- This means creating a quiet, distraction-free environment to study.
- Consistency will make it easier to study, and it will also help ease your stress level and help ensure that you're well-prepared.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Routine isn't just about studying**
- Making sure you're eating enough healthy foods at relatively the same time each day will help make your other routines fall into place
- Same goes with sleeping: going to bed around the same time each night and waking up around the same time will have a direct effect on your academic performance
- Consider a time-blocking schedule to lock tasks in place

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Study as early as you can once you have your routine**
- It's much better to study a little bit over time than cramming your studying all at once.
- Also, spending your time studying in the same or similar places that you take your test can help you recall the information you need at exam time.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Advocate for yourself + talk to your professor(s).**
- Make sure you understand what's going to be on each exam and know how to prepare.
- If you're taking comps, discuss what potential exam questions might come up.
- If you're taking a test that is specific to your field, try to find study guides, test examples, etc.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Practice, Practice, Practice:**
- Engage in regular practice sessions, such as timed mock exams or practice questions.
- Practice not only reinforces your understanding of the material but also builds confidence in your ability to tackle the exam.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Implement Stress Reduction Techniques:**
- Incorporate stress reduction techniques into your routine, such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or mindfulness meditation.
- These techniques can help calm your mind and body, reducing anxiety levels.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Develop Positive Self-Talk:**
- Monitor and challenge negative self-talk related to the exam.
- Replace self-doubt with affirmations and positive statements about your abilities.
- Remind yourself of past successes and strengths.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Visualize Success:**
- Use visualization techniques to imagine yourself successfully navigating the exam.
- Picture yourself feeling confident, focused, and capable.
- Visualization can help reinforce a positive mindset and reduce anxiety.
- Remember that no one is actually 100% prepared for any of this! Everyone is stressed out to some degree!

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Focus on the Process, Not the Outcome:**
- Shift your focus away from the outcome of the exam and onto the process of learning and growth.
- Embrace the opportunity to deepen your understanding of the material and develop valuable skills, regardless of the exam result.

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

- **Don't ignore your disabilities!**
- If you have any disabilities, accessibility needs, or other accommodations, reach out to DAI at URI to begin working on a letter
- They've worked with grad students before on exams and would love to hear from you!

THANK YOU! + QUESTIONS

- Are there any questions that you have that weren't covered by this presentation so far? Ask now!