

Why Flunking Exams Is Actually a Good Thing

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The New York Times:

Imagine that on Day 1 of a difficult course, before you studied a single thing, you got hold of the final exam. The motherlode itself, full text, right there in your email inbox — attached mistakenly by the teacher, perhaps, or poached by a campus hacker. No answer key, no notes or guidelines. Just the questions.

Would that help you study more effectively? Of course it would. You would read the questions carefully. You would know exactly what to focus on in your notes. Your ears would perk up anytime the teacher mentioned something relevant to a specific question. You would search the textbook for its discussion of each question. If you were thorough, you would have memorized the answer to every item before the course ended. On the day of that final, you would be the first to finish, sauntering out with an A+ in your pocket. And you would be cheating.

But what if, instead, you took a test on Day 1 that was just as comprehensive as the final but *not* a replica? You would bomb the thing, for sure. You might not understand a single question. And yet as disorienting as that experience might feel, it would alter how you subsequently tuned into the course itself — and could sharply improve your overall performance.

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#)