Final exams are stressful, but they don't have to be distressful. Because exams require you to produce information and results, not just receive them as in lectures, they are stressful. Your mind and body naturally react to the anticipation of these demands. Getting "psyched up" about finals helps you stay alert, attentive, and focused. Too much worry, however, may lead to final exam panic, a syndrome known to many PCC students. Below are symptoms.

You waste time worrying about your GPA rather than preparing for finals.

Instead of studying more, you study less…until the last possible moment.

You don't sleep much the night before the exam. You stay up late to cram.

You are convinced that you will receive a bad grade or that your mind will go blank during the exam.

You are fine all semester, then you catch a cold or get sick during or right after finals.

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The panic preceding finals appears to result from two general causes: distorted thinking about exams and behavioral patterns in preparing for them.

Distorted thinking is the unrealistic way students think about themselves and their exams. Some feel inadequate and are afraid exams will reveal their true inabilities. Several worry excessively about the grades they think they'll receive as if worrying over grades will help them prepare better. Many endlessly compare themselves with classmates or fret over how family or friends will react.

Behavioral patterns, such as study habits, are a second cause. Below are three types of study habit patterns of PCC students. Although not psychologically researched types, they can be helpful in understanding how final exam panic develops. See which type best describes you this semester.

TYPE A ("Regular"). Concerned about learning the material as well as performing on exams…From day one, paces self through semester with regularly scheduled study and review periods…Usually does not have to cram…Has positive attitude toward exams and professors (1) Understands the format and conceptual constraints “Main Points” of the Material being tested, (2) if there are inconsistencies what is being lectured, vs. what is tested, the student adopts and focuses on what the lecturer is conveying, if there are still dis-connects or grades are low, seek assistance from the lecturer (without putting blame, but rather, let the lecturer know sincere effort is being placed, be prepared during office hours with specific questions, and or description of what you perceive may be the problem (LD, illness, undergrad/postgrad (master’s) habits which may have been effective, but may need adjusting during Doctorate level courses) May be pleasantly surprised by the help or insight lecturers provide, as they have also had to go through a similar process to attain Doctorate. Can also seek opinion from: Advisors, Mentors, Colleagues, others who have been able to overcome similar situations. …Sees exams as opportunities to demonstrate well prepared understanding of material…Gets a good night's rest before exams.

TYPE B ("Irregular"). Concerned about performance, but more on an exam basis…Motivation for study sparked by the approaching exam date…Prone to procrastination…Inconsistent study schedule…materials, but reviews only when absolutely necessary…Stays up late and often has fitful sleep before exam.

TYPE C ("Infrequent"). Desire for study usually occurs at the last moment and intensity of study not high…No study plan…Preparation based on how student feels-study when the mood hits…Regular review periods replaced by cramming…Some lecture notes missing…Most material read only once and often just before exam.

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Here are some tips on minimizing final exam panic. Type As won't have to change their routine too much. Type Bs will probably recognize the suggestions and will need to work on them. Type Cs may have a hard time seeing how these will help, but should try them without delay.

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Rational Self-Talk. Remind yourself that an exam is a professor's measure of your knowledge or skill in a course and not a reflection of who you are as a whole person. Don't fret about what friends or family think. And, forget about comparing yourself with classmates; do the best you can. Remember, finals are necessary and useful. Besides, would you study this hard if there were no finals?

Don't Catastrophize. Jumping to the conclusion that you will fail or have a mental block on the exam only creates a wall of fear that interferes with concentration. Your negative predictions are not facts. Focus on the present and what study steps you can implement to prepare.

Positive Self-Statements. Give yourself pep talks to spark inspiration. Create self-motivating statements and use them several times each day. Try…"Studying really helps;" "I learn more when I set aside time;" and "I'll feel better later if I study now."

Practice, Practice, Practice (By reviewing the material consistently)

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Use "Balanced Time." Preparing for finals requires more time than regular exams. It doesn't mean, though, that every single remaining minute should be devoted only to study. Comprehension suffers when you cram. Arrange for strategic breaks during I to 2 hour study periods. Refresh yourself with a stretch, splash cold water on your face, eat some energy food, get fresh air, or have a brief conversation with a study partner. Though you will devote more time to studying, don't deprive yourself of everything.

Design a Realistic Schedule. Plan an hourly schedule of activities for each remaining day before finals. List class time, what you **plan to study**, employment, **recreation, and personal time**. Check off tasks when you have finished them. You should know what, where, and when you'll be doing something at all times. Be realistic. You're not going to study 20 hours a day, but you might be able to handle 6 to 8 hours if you pace yourself. Proficiency will be down in your other responsibilities. Some non-academic activities have to wait until after finals.

Prioritize. Decide which courses need more attention. Identify your weak areas within each subject. Review these daily. Subjects in which you're stronger won't require as much time.

Review Previous Quizzes and Exams. Although questions may not be repeated, the underlying concepts may be. Familiarize yourself with the kinds of questions asked.

Be Prepared. Have study sheets or flash cards with you at all times. When you have an extra 5 minutes, review the handy materials. Arrive at the test site ahead of schedule. Avoid mingling with test-anxious classmates just before the exam. Anxiety can be contagious.

**Stay in Good Physical Shape**. If your mind is to be alert, your body has to be functioning well. Try a few minutes of general calisthenics each day. Eat sensibly. Be mindful of the effects of excessive caffeine and sugar on nervousness. Avoid non-prescription drugs and minimize your alcohol consumption. Get regular, restful sleep at night.

Learn to Relax. Some anxiety is necessary to keep alert, but too much may contribute to panic. When you think of panicky or fearful thoughts, your body reacts accordingly. As soon as you think a negative thought, try breathing slowly and deeply, counting to ten, smiling, stretching or telling yourself, "the answer will come when I think things through calmly."

Solicit Support. Let people close to you know it's finals time. Ask them to help out with family responsibilities. Postpone some activities if they interfere too much. Form study groups with classmates and quiz each other.

Good luck! Remember, to really beat final exam panic next semester, begin the very first day of class and pace yourself with regular study and review. If you're feeling the PANIC, you may wish to consult a member of the counseling psychology staff. During finals week, the Psychological Services offers expanded walk-in times where you may come in without anappointment. Please check in L108 for the hours.