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# HOW TO BE AN ASPER ACADEMIC WEAPON

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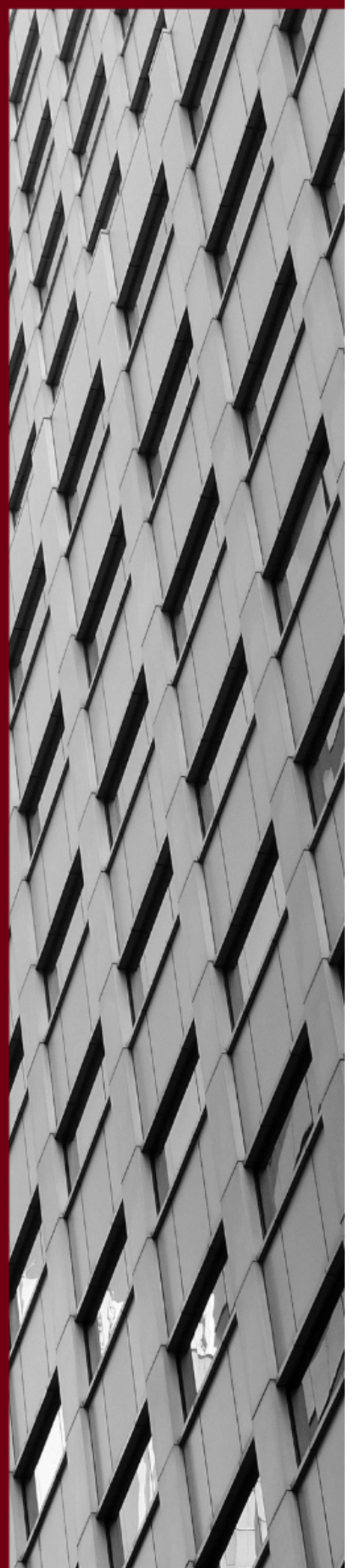
Study Resource Guide

**2024/2025**

# Table of Contents

# Pages

01	Land Acknowledgement	03
02	Introduction	03
03	General Study Tips & Advice	03
04	Note-taking Methods	06
05	Common Study Mistakes & How To Fix Them	08
06	Procrastination	11
07	Midterm & Exam Preparation	11
08	Health & Self-Care	11
09	Recommended Student Apps	12
10	Responsibly using AI for work	13
11	Recommended List of Additional Materials	14
12	Contact Us	15



# Land of Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are located on Treaty 1 territory and the original lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Anisininew, Dakota, and Dene peoples and the Homeland of the Red River Metis Nation. Furthermore we acknowledge that our drinking water here in Winnipeg is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, Treaty 3 Territory. We understand the mistakes and harms of the past and commit to working together within the spirit of truth and reconciliation.

## Introduction

Welcome to the CSA Study Resource Guide! The CSA Study Resource Guide aims to be a comprehensive document that supports student learning and academic development. We know how overwhelming it can be when you have multiple classes with multiple assignments to complete, so we created this guide as a way to provide you with study tips and resources to help you excel in your classes.

This guide was put together by the CSA's Student Development Coordinators, Jenna Buchwald and Jan Yvette Madarang, CSA's Vice President Academics Angelinne Seguinte, and with the help of content creator, Carol Girgis.

Before you continue reading, we would like to note that everything can be read as a stand-alone section so feel free to skip to which sections you feel most drawn to and come back whenever you need a refresher. We hope that you learn something of use by the end. Happy reading, and may you continue being an academic weapon!

## General Study Tips & Advice

### **1. Read your syllabus thoroughly**

At the beginning of the semester, you should have access to your course syllabus for each class. The syllabus acts like a contract in which it outlines the important information you need to know to be successful in the class or general housekeeping rules such as office hours and the contact information of your instructor. It may also include the course schedule which details units, chapters and recommended practice questions week by week.

You must understand the content from your syllabus. Keep track of the assessment tools used and how much they will affect your final grade. By noting how much your assignments weigh vs. that group project, you can prioritize accordingly and get on top of your schoolwork.

The bottom line is that your syllabus is important so don't skimp on reading it. You will be much more equipped with the knowledge and able to work efficiently throughout the semester if you know what you're getting graded on, when your deadlines are, and what you should be studying week by week.

## **2. Take note of deadlines**

In conjunction with the previous tip, when you have read and understood your syllabi, you should also record your deadlines for all the exams or assignments you have. Depending on your preference, you may use a physical notebook, spreadsheets or a digital calendar (the choice is completely up to you). This will come in handy as the weeks go by because you will have an overview of your semester and can plan to prepare for each deadline.

For example, if you have a presentation and an exam on the same day, you may create a study plan for the week leading up to the exam and reach out to your group members in advance to delegate work as soon as possible. Knowing your deadlines will prepare you to divide the work into small tasks and will be more manageable compared to cramming for your exam, and handing in unsatisfactory work. When you know your deadlines, you can think backwards and divide your goals into small tasks, leading to gradual success.

## **3. How much you get done is related to how focused you are**

For most people this is obvious but how many of us give 100% of our focus to studying? If you spend 5 hours multitasking, texting friends, or going on social media, you are not as engaged as you could be with your material. Giving your 100% focus for an hour is better than 50% focus for 4 hours of studying.

## **4. Study systems > Goals**

Goal setting is a great practice to keep yourself motivated and give you direction throughout your school year. Your goals signify your intentions and desires and serve as a key factor in your decisions. Goals can be personal, professional, academic, social, spiritual, etc. However, goals are only part of your success.

To execute your goals, you will need an effective study system to achieve your academic goals. Study systems are characterized by anything that contributes to and benefits your goals related to school. A study system can consist of anything from sleeping 8 hours daily to hosting study groups with classmates or getting tutored bi-weekly.

Create your study system based on your class schedule, availability and goals. What do you want to achieve this term? How many classes do you have? Are you working during school? What other responsibilities do you have that need your attention? How will you prevent burnout and manage stress? What habits would you like to implement that will help you achieve your goals?

Each student has a different schedule so study systems can look different for everyone. Learning what works for you will take time so be patient and try to enjoy the process!

## 5.Challenge the way you are studying

Do you ever get bored with how you study? Well, the way to go is to find your “sweet spot”, which is when the difficulty level of what you are studying is not so high that you don’t do it and not so low that you get bored. Find ways to make your studying techniques challenging so that you retain information and topics much more effectively. For example, instead of rereading your notes, try closing your notes and explaining what you learned to someone.

## 6.Romanticize university life

This is your sign to romanticize aka indulge yourself in the most mundane parts of being a student. There are some inevitable parts of being a student such as commuting, studying for an exam, or walking a far distance in between classes but learning how to romanticize university life will improve your mood and motivate you in the long run. Even if you practice these once in a while or turn these activities into habits, you are investing in yourself and making your life easier where it can be.

Some ways to romanticize university life:

- Do your makeup or hair or both
- Wear clothes and accessories that you feel confident in
- Get your favourite drink before class
- Listen to relaxing or motivational music to set your mood while studying
- Get cozy in a local cafe to get your studying done
- Invite a friend to study with you
- Watch your favourite Youtuber during study breaks
- Practice gratitude every day
- Take pictures when you see something funny or adorable on campus
- Use stationary that compliments your taste

## 7.Reward yourself and learn to take breaks

Studying should not be your only focus because you need to rest and revive your energy too. Schedule your breaks as you do your study sessions to relax and gain back energy. You should also celebrate your small and big wins because you deserve it. Learning to be okay with resting and rewarding yourself should be a part of your time in school. This is also to prevent yourself from burning out and losing your motivation. So, whichever classes you have, you fully deserve rest and treat yourself.

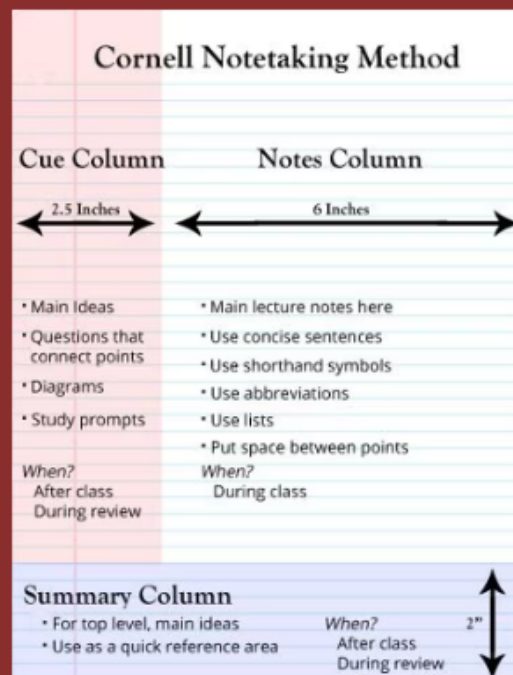


# Note-taking Methods

There are different note-taking methods for different types of classes and what your learning style is like. This section is targeted towards traditional note-takers and iPad users who use a form of writing instrument such as a pencil or Apple pen. Nonetheless, all note-takers can benefit from the information given here. Here are three ways students can take notes, how and when to use them:

**1.Cornell Method** - The Cornell Method is one of the most popular note-taking methods because it challenges students to use active recall and summarize what they are learning. It also helps users retain information more:

- A) You divide your page into four sections: one for the title name, side comments, main notes and a summary section each
- B) The title will go on top of the page
- C) Main notes will go on the right column of the page
- D) Comments, questions and other hints go on the left column of the page
- E) The summary of notes goes on the bottom of the page
- F) Feedback: Great for most cases, from lectures to writing meeting notes, but not recommended for creative, free-form blank use, theory-based, discussion-based topics like social sciences, media studies or humanities

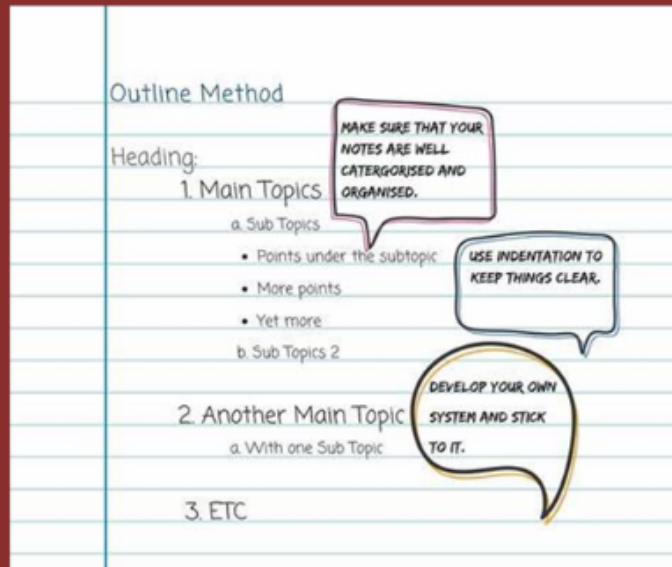


**2.Outline Method** - A simple method students can use when they want to write notes quickly. This method is ideal for when you want to jot down information quickly like during lectures or a meeting. These notes are easy to skim and divide your notes into parent topics and in-depth information:

A) In the outline method, you create main points as bullet points and give supporting ideas beneath as smaller bullet points

B) Feedback: Don't use when you need to use diagrams or charts because this method may be too structured and take up a lot of space on the page

C) Recommended for STEM subjects such as Math and Chem which require fewer words and can be easily jotted down using this method

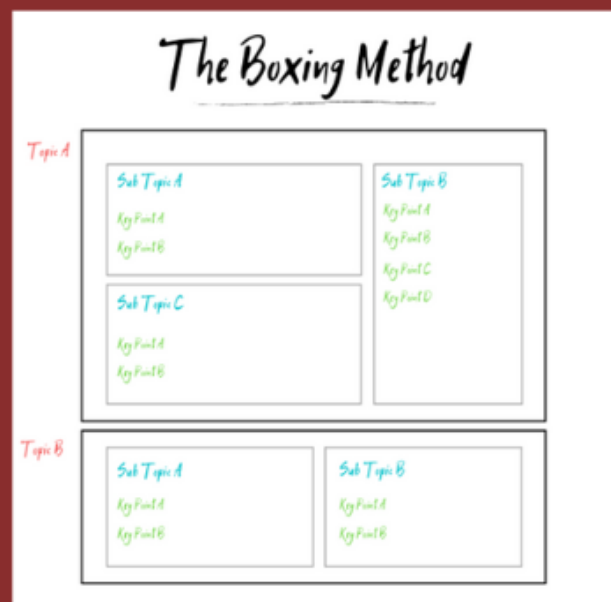


**3.Boxing Method** - This is a note-taking method that allows students to have more creativity in their notes. Using this method, students divide topics into boxes, allowing them to compile related topics on one page. By the end, you'll have something that can look like an art gallery of notes:

1.Feedback: This is great for folks who like their notes to be more visually appealing. This method is also great for re-organizing information that will help you learn the topic better i.e to revise

2.Recommended for summarizing high-level topics in subjects such as history, literature or philosophy classes

3.Not the best for taking notes on the spot



# Common Study Mistakes and How to Fix Them

University is extremely different compared to high school. Instead of getting practice and time to finish most of your school work during school, you need to take responsibility for your education outside of class. This is a time for learning how to discipline yourself and find motivation when things become difficult. Reading is crucial because you will have textbooks, syllabi and many different materials to read. Your professors won't chase you down if you don't hand in your assignments. You can fail classes and you have to be self-disciplined to not fall behind.

There's a huge learning curve for most students because either their studying habits are non-existent or they haven't figured out how to adapt better learning techniques. Fortunately, there are ways to overcome these mistakes and make the most out of your academic experience. By knowing which mistakes to avoid, you can save yourself from the stress and consequences of making them. These are common mistakes students make and how to fix them:

## 1. Cramming

Unfortunately, every student has probably done this at least once in their career where they try to pack as much information in their head before an exam. It could be 24 hours before or even the day of the exam when panic starts to seep into your system and you get consumed by the drive to get the best mark as much as you can with the little time you have.

If you have fallen victim to this, plan as much as you can from the beginning of the semester. Determine which projects and assignments are due when and keep a tracking system detailing the deadline and weight. You would also note the chapters and units covered so that you are regularly studying and giving your brain the time it needs to retain information. Some ideas to keep track of deadlines and topics can be:

- Spreadsheets
- Calendar
- Reminders
- Personal Agenda
- Bullet Journal or Notebooks

However, each person has different circumstances and leaving everything to the last minute might become the only option in the end. In that case, studying is better than not studying! If you are pushed to cram, your best bet is to use the Pomodoro technique where you study and take breaks in set intervals, and repeat the process until necessary.

Example) 50:10 - 50 minutes of studying and a 10-minute break  
45:15 - 45 minutes of studying and a 15-minute break  
25:5 - 25 minutes of studying and a 5-minute break



## 2.Going Solo

If you are struggling with a topic or a class in general, the best action you can take is to get help from someone. No one will think you are dumb and chances are the person who's helping you is glad you are taking the time to ask for help, especially if it's a part of their job! If you are gifted with smart friends, you can also ask them for help because they probably know how to explain it in a way that clicks with your student brain. As long as it's within the bounds of academic integrity, utilizing academic resources or getting help is your basic right as a student.

## 3.Multi-tasking

Multi-tasking is when you are doing more than one thing at a time, and switching different subjects rapidly. While it's good that you are determined to finish work efficiently, make sure that you are giving yourself ample time to understand and internalize content materials and concepts. Allow yourself to learn new subjects and slow down when facing a difficult task.

To fix this, you will need to plan and assign which days you will study for each subject. For example, on Mondays, you will dedicate 2 study sessions to writing your rough draft for a reflection piece and on Tuesday you will read Chapters 5-6 for XYZ subject and create notes for ABC subject. Give yourself enough time to fully develop your knowledge and test your knowledge as you go along.

## 4.Getting Distracted Easily

Knowing what type of environment you focus best in is one of the things that will help you get the best studying sessions. What time are you mentally at your best? Are you more productive at night or in the morning? Do you like to study alone or in groups? By determining the best environment for you, you optimize the space you take up when you dedicate yourself to studying. You should also avoid or limit distractions as much as possible because they can reduce your focus and cut your flow.

Common distractions and how to eliminate them:

- Phone - Set your phone to DND or hand it to someone to safeguard it
- Music - Depending on the difficulty level and topic, you might want to choose appropriate music that enhances your studying vs. music that takes away your attention
- Loud Environments - Choose a study area that suits your preferences and doesn't distract you from working
- Games or entertainment websites - Set a time limit to engage in these websites on your break



## 5. Underestimating Courses

You may think that you will have it easy in a class but when you get your midterm marks it suddenly is not that easy anymore. To fix this, you must be proactive in your learning and dedicate time to testing yourself so that you can gauge your strengths and weaknesses. Take responsibility for practicing questions outside of class, scanning your slides before and after class, or going to office hours.

## 6. Passive Learning

Passive learning is referred to when you are not engaging or challenging yourself to understand new information or techniques. The opposite of this is active learning, which is when you are using your brain power to accumulate new knowledge and understand the material you are being taught. The problem with passive learning is that no learning is being accomplished. You are tricking yourself into believing you understand and know the subject well.

Passive Learning Techniques:

- Rereading notes
- Highlighting the whole page of a chapter
- Only listening to the professor during class and not reflecting after

The solution is to use techniques that test and challenge your memory, problem-solving, critical thinking or comprehension skills as part of your studying system.

Active Learning Techniques:

- Using flashcards
- Doing practice questions and past exams
- Teaching the topic to someone



# Procastination

What is procrastination?

Procrastination occurs when you continuously put off doing a task. This can often happen when you come home from a long day of work and/or school and don't want to study or work on your assignment.

How to avoid procrastination?

A way to help with this is to create a study outline. Break down your studying or assignment into many small sections. Then write the amount of time you plan to dedicate to complete each section. You can then assign each task to a day where you have that amount of time set aside to complete it. This will help show your brain that you only have a small task to complete that day, and eventually, the entire assignment/your studying will be done using this method.

# Midterm and Exam Preparation

Creating a Study Plan

## **1. Identify Exam Details**

- Date
- Method i.e. paper, bubble sheet, UM Learn, etc.
- Location

## **2. List content that you will be assessed on**

- Usually provided on the class schedule or UM Learn announcements

## **3. Discern your strengths and weaknesses**

- Are you understanding your lectures and notes?
- Have you tried the recommended exercises for each unit/chapter?
- Do you have any big questions that are not answered yet?
- What active learning techniques are you consistently using?

## **4. Create a study plan based on your weaknesses**

- Prioritize harder topics first
- Tip: For an accumulative exam, the content after the midterm is usually more favoured so focus more on those!

## **5. Dedicate topics to study sessions and days**

- Take your calendar and begin assigning topics to dates
- Optionally, you can aim to finish your studying one or two days before your exam to efficiently study or avoid cramming
- For example, a week before your exam you plan to complete practice worksheets for two units each day

# Health and Self-Care

It is always crucial to make sure you are taking care of your mental and physical health. While it is important to work hard on your assignments and studying, you must still make sure you are taking time for yourself everyday to not feel overworked and burnt out.

## Self-Care Tips and Recommendations:

### 1.Going on a walk

- a.Going on a walk allows for you to have a mental reset, and get away from your notes and textbooks

### 2.Listening to music

- a.A very minimal and relaxing way to take break, and get lost in the rythm and lyrics of songs

### 3.Read a book

- a.Immerse yourself in a secondary fictional book, just get your mind off school for a second!

### 4.Drawing

- a.Allow for your thoughts and imaginations to run wild. There are no limits here!

### 5.Eat a good meal

- a.Sometimes all you need is to refuel your energy by eating satisfactory, good, and enjoyable meals. Have that sushi you've been craving for days!

### 6.Talk to family or friends

- a.Sometimes all you need is the support of your loved ones!

## Recommended Student Apps

Technology can be a great resource when it comes to studying. Specifically, there are many smartphone apps you can download for free that can be a large help.

- Telegram
  - Oftentimes, students in your class will create a group chat on Telegram. This way, classmates can ask questions about course material, clarify instructions, and ask what they missed if they were away. However, it is crucial to ensure you are only asking for guidance on the material for studying purposes, and not for help with answers to an assignment that must be done individually.
- Google Calendar
  - A calendar app is a great place to add due dates for assignments, so you don't forget. You can also add reminders for a few days before an assignment is due to remind you to complete it. Additionally, you can schedule your time and plan out when you have free time in a day to study and complete assignments. A physical calendar may also be effective for some students who prefer to write things down on paper.
- Quizlet
  - Quizlet is an app that allows you to create digital flashcards, to help you study for different tests and exams. This can be useful for courses that require lots of memorization.
- My Homework Student Planner
  - An app like this acts as a digital planner that allows you to input all your due dates and plan when you are going to work on assignments. Staying organized is a great first step to productive studying. A physical planner may also be effective for some students who prefer to write things down on paper.
- Flora
  - Flora is an app to help you get off your phone and spend time studying. On the app you can select how long you would like your study session to be, and during that time if you leave the app, your in-app tree will be killed.

# Responsibly using AI for schoolwork

Artificial Intelligence has gained recognition among students and teachers for its usefulness in the past few years and will continue to shape how we do and view work. However, it raises a few ethical concerns. Check your course syllabus if it discloses any restrictions on the usage of Artificial Intelligence regarding certain assessment tools. While AI is not banned and students are welcome to use it, we must still be careful of how we use it for schoolwork. Here are the pros and cons of using AI tools:

## Pro 1: Gathering information

- You can use AI for idea generation or sparking inspiration for your assignment but not for creating your final paper for submission

## Pro 2: Explaining hard concepts

- You can prompt AI to explain complicated concepts to you in plain language to help you connect and understand better but not give you test answers

## Pro 3: Edits and revision

- You can ask AI to scan for grammar mistakes or give ideas on how to improve poorly structured sentences or paragraphs

## Con 1: Risking academic misconduct

- If not intentional and careful, students could risk academic misconduct by allowing AI to do all of their work

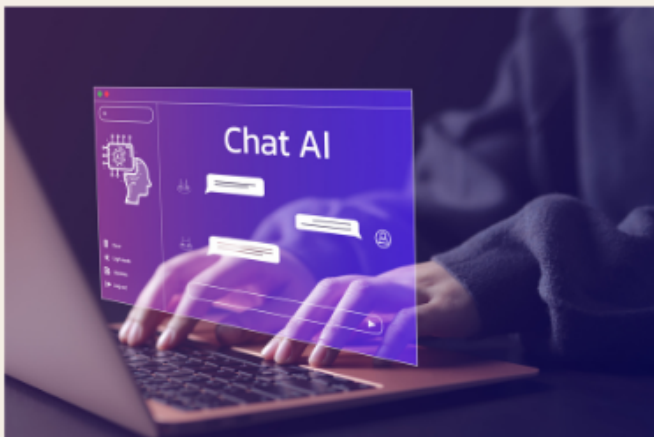
## Con 2: Temptation to take shortcuts

- In addition to the previous con, students may take shortcuts and allow AI to do the work for them in a matter of minutes compared to truthfully producing their work

## Con 3: Accuracy

- Another risk to using AI is inaccuracy because in some cases it provides incoherent and incorrect answers

In conclusion, AI is a helpful tool in idea generation, looking for grammar mistakes and other suggestive work but must be used with discretion to avoid academic misconduct.



# Recommended List of Additional Materials

There are many resources you can use to study other than just your class notes and materials.

- **Practice exams**

- Many courses post practice exams for your use. These exams can give you a good idea as to what type of material may be asked on the exam. They also serve as a way for you to get a sense of what style of questions may be asked, and allow you to practice the format of the exam.

- **Textbook Questions/Online Textbook Study Resources**

- Many course textbooks offer an online website, and many of these websites offer study resources to help you further practice each chapter's material. This may include flashcards, quizzes, and matching games.

- **YouTube Videos**

- YouTube is a great, free resource to find videos of people explaining different topics. A quick Google search can help you find explanations of course concepts, and allow you to pause and rewind to get supplementary teaching. Please note, watching YouTube videos does not replace studying your class notes and using class materials, as Professors and Instructors may teach different methods and material than what is in YouTube videos, but YouTube can act as a way for you to get an additional explanation of course concepts.



# Contact Us

We hope that you enjoyed reading this document, whether it was one section or all of them. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us:

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