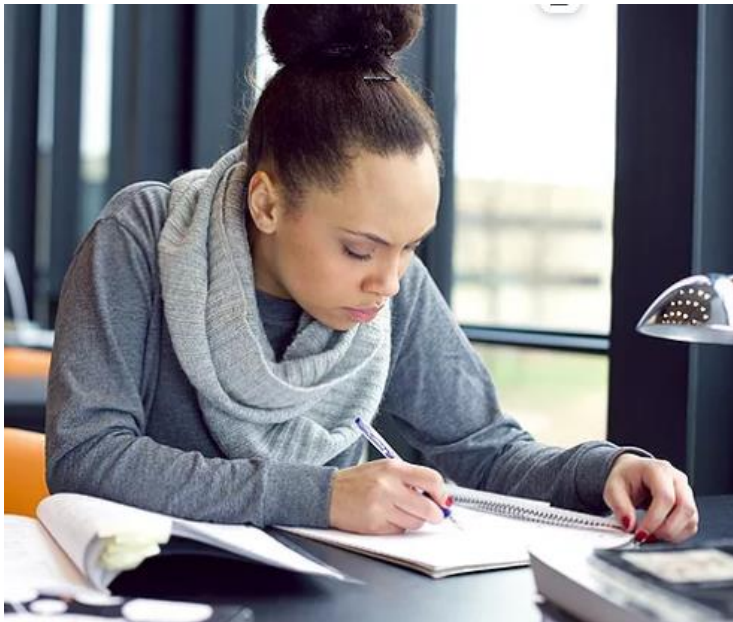# Study. Take Exam. Self-Reflect. Adapt. Repeat.

Enrique Arredondo, Student
Texas A&M University

From elementary to middle school to high school to undergraduate studies, we have been taught to study, take the exam, repeat. If we obtained a grade that we weren't satisfied with, we were told to study longer than we did for the previous exam. However, in my perspective, I saw myself and other students implementing this study longer than the last exam method and still seeing no to little improvement in exam performance.

I was first introduced to the concept of exam wrappers when I started pharmacy school. For those reading this and wondering, "What in the world is an exam wrapper?" an exam wrapper is a tool that many educators in academia utilize to help guide students to reflect on their exam performance and then identify their strengths and weaknesses. Common questions educators ask on exam wrappers are how you prepared for the exam, what kind of errors were made on the exam, and what will you do differently for the next exam (Craig, et al. 2016).

My Personal Experience with Exam Wrappers

When first introduced to an exam wrapper, I was confused and thought how unusual it was for a faculty member to ask me about how I studied, if I was satisfied with my exam performance, and what I would do differently to prepare for the next exam. It was the first time I started thinking about my studying habits and relating it to my exam performance. I realized that it was a form of self-reflecting, and it helped me recognize the strengths and weaknesses of my current studying methods (Global Metacognition Institute, 2020). After completing my first exam wrapper, I decided to implement my OWN suggestions that I wrote down in my exam wrapper to help my studying methods. When the second exam for the course came around, changing my study habits made me nervous by pushing me out of my comfort zone. Through changing my study habits after the exam wrapper, I had studied less time than usual, formatted my notes differently, and decided not to stay up late looking the day before. My mind was running 1000mph with instant regret of changing my study habits. However, after the exam, I felt more confident than ever and realized that I had not been studying efficiently in the past.

I constructed a diagram of what I could identify and what other researchers identified as the difference between using and not using an exam wrapper (see Figure 1). With the implementation of an exam wrapper, I was able to self-reflect on my exam performance and studying methods through the exam wrapper's guidance (Gezer-Templeton, et al. 2017). After distinguishing my strengths and weaknesses, I set new goals and made changes to my studying regimen. I apply these changes, study, then take the exam. The cycle is then repeated. In contrast, without an exam wrapper, there is no guided self-reflective process and it becomes easy to get stuck in a loop of study for the exam, take the exam, study for the next exam. In this loop you do not distinguish whether your study methods are effective and efficient.

Is it OK to Have Different Studying Methods in Different Courses?

As exam wrappers started becoming more common in my other courses, I realized that it's OK to have different studying regimens for various classes. Completing exam wrappers for different courses became more transparent about what studying methods

were more efficient for that specific course. Whether that will be re-watching lectures, making study guides, reading the textbook, making a self-testing tool, studying in a group, or change the way you take notes in class. Throughout our whole academic life, we have been programmed to stick to our most comfortable study method and apply it to every course regardless of the subject. The exam wrapper helps you guide yourself out of your comfort zone and experiment with what method will most be efficient for the course.

Pros in the Perspective of The Student:

- Identified my strengths and weakness on my studying habits
- Adapted my studying habits to each specific course
- Increased or maintained my exam performance
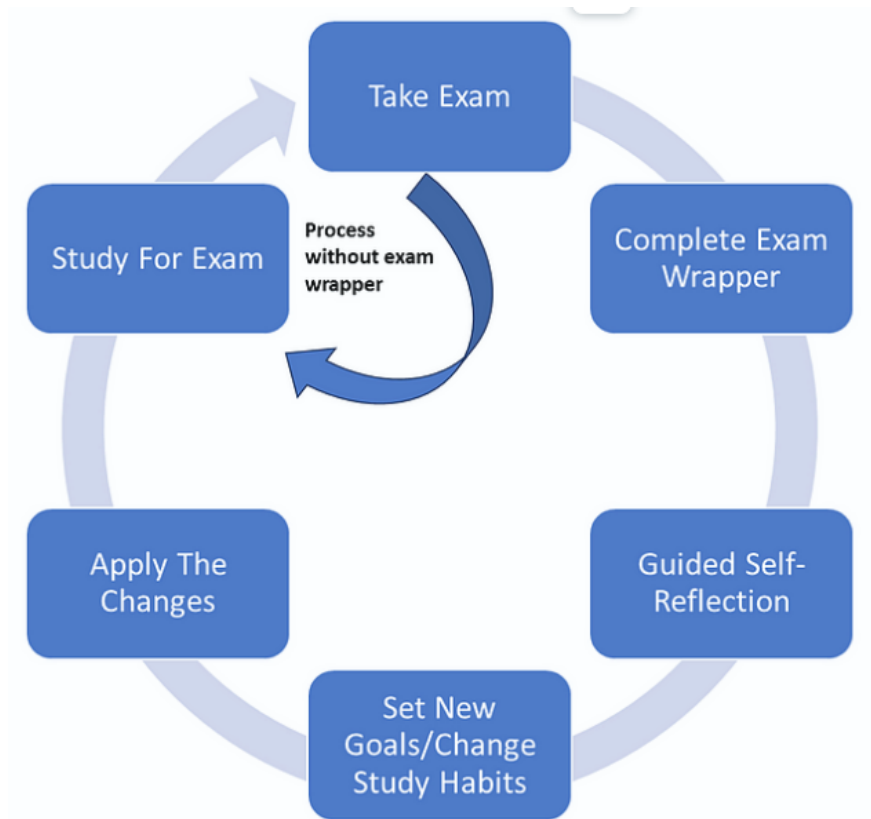- My studying became more efficient

Cons in the Perspective of The Student:

- Mental fatigue from throughout the semester prevented me from fully utilizing exam wrappers
- After a few exams, it's hard to keep improving studying methods
- Becomes repetitive

Overall Thoughts

In conclusion, from a graduate student's perspective, I have become appreciative of the exam wrapper. Exam wrappers help me to realize my strengths and weaknesses specific to each subject and the changes I need to make for the following exam. In my opinion, an exam wrapper is a tool that should be taught to students in high school exams, or even earlier. Knowing how to use exam wrappers could serve as a doorway for preparing young scholars to be more effective at taking college exams. Exam wrappers are important in that they break the myth that by always studying more, you will see better results. It is time to study smarter, not harder.

Exam Process With and Without the Implementation of an Exam Wrapper:

Discussion Questions:

1. Engage in a quick webquest to identify the details of a typical exam wrapper? What aspect of the exam wrapper do you find most interesting? What concerns you about teaching students how to do exam wrappers?

2. How might you make exam wrappers impactful toward the end of the course as semester fatigue progresses?

3. If exam wrappers aren't scored and made part of the course grade, what are some ways you might keep students engaged in completing them?

References:

Michelle Craig, Diane Horton, Daniel Zingaro, and Danny Heap. 2016. Introducing and Evaluating Exam Wrappers in CS2. In Proceedings of the 47th ACm Technical Symposium of Computing Science Education (SIGCSE '16). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 285-290.

The Global Metacognition Institute. Do Exam Wrappers Work? (2020) Blog Post. https://www.globalmetacognition.com/post/do-exam-wrappers-work

Gezer-Templeton, P.G., Mayhew, E.J., Korte, D.S. and Schmidt, S.J. (2017), Use of Exam Wrappers to Enhance Students' Metacognitive Skills in a Large Introductory Food Science and Human Nutrition Course. Journal of Food Science Education, 16: 28-36. doi:10.1111/1541-4329.12103