Exam Autopsy: Learning From Your Last Test

An exam autopsy is a tool to help you understand what happened on a test you already took. Instead of just looking at the grade and moving on, you break down how you studied, what went well, and what didn't. The goal is to learn from the experience and make intentional changes so you can perform better next time.

Why Do an Exam Autopsy?

1. Helps you identify specific gaps in your understanding and study methods.
2. Turns mistakes into learning opportunities rather than sources of shame.
3. Improves your preparation and test-taking strategies for future exams.
4. Builds resilience and a growth mindset by focusing on progress, not just grades.

How to Conduct an Exam Autopsy

1. Review the Exam Carefully:
    a. Where did you lose points? (Was it facts, concepts, application, careless mistakes?)
    b. Were there patterns (e.g., multiple-choice guessing, missing essay points due to unclear explanations)?
2. Reflect on How You Prepared:
    a. How many hours did you study?
    b. What strategies did you use? (Rereading notes? Practice problems? Group study?)
    c. Did you space out your studying or cram the night before?
3. Ask Yourself Key Questions:
    a. Did I understand the material or just memorize it?
    b. Did I practice the type of questions that appeared on the exam?
    c. Did I ask for help when I didn't understand something?
    d. Did I get enough sleep before the test?

Once you've completed your exam autopsy, use your insights to plan differently for the next exam:

1. Adjust Study Methods:
    a. If you only reread notes, add active learning strategies:
    b. Create practice questions or flashcards
    c. Teach concepts out loud to yourself or a peer
    d. Use practice tests or review problems
2. Change Your Schedule:
    a. Break studying into smaller, daily sessions instead of last-minute cramming.
    b. Use spaced repetition (reviewing material multiple times over days/weeks).
3. Seek Support Early:
    a. Attend office hours or tutoring for confusing topics.
    b. Form or join a study group to compare understanding and practice explaining concepts.
4. Improve Test-Taking Strategies:
    a. Practice time management on timed practice questions.
    b. Learn test formats (multiple choice vs. essays) and practice accordingly.
    c. Develop strategies for managing test anxiety (deep breathing, positive self-talk).

An exam isn't just a measure of what you knew on one day , it's feedback! By analyzing your preparation and performance, you can turn every test (even a disappointing one) into a stepping stone toward mastery and confidence.

TEST ITEM MISSED	INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION								TEST ANXIETY				CARELESS MISTAKES						LACK OF TEST WISDOM					OTHER	
	I did not read the textbook thoroughly enough.	The information was not in my notes.	I studied the infomration but could not remember it.	I knew the main ideas but needed the details.	I knew the information but couldn't apply it.	I studied the wrong information.	Missed or did not understand the vocabulary/terms.	Answer did not match the essay directive/key word.	I experienced a mental block.	I was tired during the test and couldn't concentrate.	I was hungry during the test and couldn't concentrate.	I panicked during the test.	I made careless mistakes. I knew the correct answer.	I changed a correct answer to a wrong one.	I misread the directions.	I misread or misunderstood the question.	I wrote an incomplete response.	I did not notice a double-negative statement.	I did not eliminate obviously incorrect choices.	I did not choose the best answer choice.	I did not notice limiting words.	I made poor use of the time provided for the test.	I ran out of time/ I did not budget my time appropriately.		
# OF MISSED ITEMS																									