WHEN YOU HAVE AN EXAM · STOP REREADING

Stop Rereading Everything

A quick retrieval and spacing plan

Moves practiced: Plan + Practice First + Monitor. Use this when: you need a retrieval and spacing plan.

Rereading feels effective because repeated exposure creates familiarity, but familiarity is not the same as being able to retrieve, explain, apply, or use the material. That illusion is one reason students can feel prepared and still struggle on an exam.

Instead of only...	Try...
Rereading notes	Retrieving ideas from memory, then checking accuracy.
Highlighting	Explaining the idea in your own words.
Studying one problem type repeatedly	Mixing problem types so you practice deciding when to use each strategy.
Cramming everything once	Spacing study sessions over several days.
Checking answers immediately	Trying first, then reviewing errors.

Desirable difficulties: Some useful study activities feel harder because they require you to retrieve, explain, apply, or choose before checking the answer. That effort can strengthen learning and reveal what still needs work.

Your plan: retrieve, check, space

Aim for multiple study sessions across several days. Try first, check what was missing, and use that evidence to decide what to revisit next. Do not restart from the beginning each time.

Days before exam	What I will retrieve or practice	How I will test myself
e.g. 7 days before	*Chapter 2 key concepts*	*Explain without notes, then check accuracy*

My honest gap check: what can I already retrieve, and where are the holes? *Base this on evidence: what you can produce without looking, not on what feels familiar.*

Spacing rule: Several shorter sessions across days generally support longer-term retention better than one long session.

If the exam is tomorrow: Do not try to reread everything. Start by testing yourself on the most important topics and likely question types under conditions that fit the exam: before looking at your notes for a closed-resource exam, or using only the resources you will be allowed for an open-resource exam. Check your answers, then focus most of your remaining study time on the gaps you uncover. Then stop and sleep.

Want the full system? Think First expands this tool into a complete Learning Ownership System for studying, assignments, exams, AI use, weekly planning, feedback, and recovery. It includes Quick checks, Core tools, comprehensive assignment and exam tools for added scaffolding, and Deep reflection prompts. Start anywhere: the Find Your Problem index begins with the situation in front of you, not page one.

In the book: See Part 4: Better Studying, the Retrieval and Spacing Plan, and the Comprehensive Exam Ownership Tool.

Think First: The Learning Ownership System for Studying, Assignments, and Learning with AI · Peter Arthur, PhD · Scholarly Learning · Turn studying, assignments, and AI into real learning. · Available on Amazon · More free tools at LearningOwnership.com/ThinkFirst

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