A FREE TEACHING RESOURCE | FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

The Post-Exam Learning Conversation

A two-touch class routine that turns one exam into a better plan for the next

Students may look at the grade, see what they got wrong, and move on. This routine asks two more questions: Why did the errors happen? What will I change?

WHY THIS MATTERS

A grade tells students how they performed, but not why. Without a structured review, students may respond by studying longer using the same methods, or by drawing broad conclusions about their ability. The Post-Exam Learning Review has them compare what they expected with what happened, reconstruct how they actually prepared, find patterns in their errors, and choose one change for next time. The goal is not to explain every point lost or to attribute the result to effort. It is to find patterns students can act on.

YOUR ROLE HERE

You do not need to diagnose why every student lost marks. Your role is to help students use the evidence they have to identify plausible patterns and choose one useful next step.

One exam gives useful evidence, not certainty about cause. Page 5 explains how to keep the conversation on plausible connections rather than perfect explanations.

TOUCH 1 | RIGHT AFTER THE EXAM, 2 TO 3 MINUTES

Immediately after the exam, and before students see solutions or compare answers if possible, have them record what they think happened.

Say: "Estimate your performance range, then note what felt strongest and what felt difficult or surprising. Do not overthink it. The value is having a record of what you believed before you saw the result."

Students may skip this while packing up unless you build it into the closing routine. Give them Part A of the Post-Exam Learning Review, or a small take-away slip with those prompts. If exam materials must be submitted, do not put the prediction on a page you collect.

They need it when the graded work is returned, so tell them to photograph it or keep it with the review.

Keep the prediction private and ungraded, an honest record of their own judgment at the time.

TOUCH 2 | WHEN THE GRADED EXAM IS RETURNED, 15 MINUTES

Ideally the first time students have access to their graded work, while the result is still fresh and before they have moved on.

Students must be able to inspect their own work. If they receive only a score, with no item-level or written feedback, the full error analysis will not work. Page 5 has a reduced version for that case.

The Post-Exam Learning Conversation

PREPARATION

Make graded work and enough feedback available for students to see where their performance was strong and where marks were lost.

Give students the Post-Exam Learning Review. Keep this guide for yourself. Use pages 3 and 4 to run the conversation. Page 4 covers error patterns and reading class-level evidence. Pages 5 to 7 are facilitation support and the reasoning behind the routine.

Students need no prior knowledge of Learning Ownership. New to it yourself? Read pages 5 to 7 once.

If you have class-level information available, note two or three recurring difficulties that may be worth clarifying. The activity does not depend on having item analysis.

Time: 2 to 3 minutes immediately after the exam, plus 15 minutes when graded work is returned.

About 18 minutes across two brief moments. No learning-science expertise required.

WHAT YOU GET OUT OF IT

Students move past the grade to examine preparation, error patterns, and one concrete next step. You may also surface class-level patterns in what students report, which can inform what you clarify or reinforce before the next exam. Page 4 gives you a way to do that without anyone disclosing a grade.

WHAT STUDENTS FINISH, AND WHEN

Right after the exam, 2 to 3 min	Part A. Predicted range, and what felt strong or difficult
In class, 15 min	Prediction comparison, preparation review, patterns, one change
After class, if needed	Finish incomplete details. Complete the transfer sentence in class
Before the next exam	Carry the one change into the first study session

Touch 2: the 15-minute conversation

What to say, what students do, and which part of the Post-Exam Learning Review they fill in.

MINUTES 1–2 Let them look, then compare

In the review: Part B, After the Graded Exam Is Returned

Give students a full minute to simply look at the exam before asking anything of them. Many will need that moment before they are ready to reflect. Then say:

"*Record your actual result, then compare it with what you predicted. This is not about whether you are good at guessing your grade. Ask what the difference tells you about how well you were judging your own readiness.*"

If a student no longer has their Touch 1 record, they can still note whether the result was better, worse, or about what they expected. One difference is information, not a verdict.

MINUTES 2–5 Reconstruct how you actually prepared

In the review: Look at How I Actually Prepared / How Did I Spend My Study Time?

"*Before deciding what went wrong, reconstruct what you actually did. Rough estimates are enough. The goal is not to judge yourself. It is to put your preparation next to your performance.*"

Students estimate how their study time was divided and how much happened in the final 24 hours. The value is moving from "I studied a lot" to "most of my time went to rereading, I did little retrieval, and half of it was in the last day."

MINUTES 5–10 Find the patterns

In the review: Learn From the Patterns

This is the heart of the conversation. The review lists eight common error patterns, one for what worked, and an Other option. Page 4 pairs each one with a possible next move. Say:

"*Do not stop at which answers were wrong. Look for patterns across the whole exam. Choose up to three patterns that matter most. For each one, write what happened and what you will keep or change next time.*"

For students satisfied with their performance: pattern 9 is for something that worked. Have them identify two parts of their preparation worth repeating, and one thing they want to keep deliberate or strengthen next time. That keeps them working without asking them to invent a weakness.

MINUTES 10–15 Connect it, then carry one change forward

In the review: Learn From the Result and Transfer It Forward

Students note what seems to have helped, and what they postponed or avoided. Then narrow it to one thing. Say:

"*Do not leave with six things you should do differently. Choose one change important enough to carry into the beginning of your next exam plan.*"

"*Write it in the final transfer prompt: one lesson to use in your first study session next time.*"

Have them copy it somewhere they will find it again: at the top of their next Pre-Exam Learning Plan, or photographed on their phone. If this was the final exam, ask them to carry the change into another course instead.

If time allows, ask what patterns people are noticing. Never ask what anyone scored. Page 4 gives privacy-conscious ways to surface class patterns, preferably through an anonymous poll.

ONLY HAVE FIVE MINUTES?

Give students one minute to look at the exam. Then have them identify one or two patterns that explain important errors, and write one change for the first study session of the next exam. Skip the prediction comparison and the preparation reconstruction. Pattern-finding and transfer are the core.

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR | REFERENCE

Reading the Evidence

Error patterns, and what the class as a whole is reporting.

PATTERN, AND A POSSIBLE NEXT MOVE

Possible responses, not prescriptions. The pattern numbers match the Post-Exam Learning Review.

1 Did not know the material	Learn the missing content, then retrieve it across sessions
2 Recognized, but could not retrieve or explain	Retrieval practice and explaining without notes
3 Understood, but could not apply or solve	Practice on unfamiliar examples and problems
4 Confused related ideas or methods	Compare and contrast, then mixed or interleaved practice
5 Wrong level, or strategy did not fit	Match practice to the thinking the exam required
6 Misread, rushed, or checking errors	Identify whether it was reading, pacing, or checking, then practice that routine
7 Ran out of time	Timed practice and a pacing plan
8 Did not expect the topic	Use course outcomes or instructor guidance to plan coverage
9 A strategy, strength, or response worked well	Repeat it deliberately next time

10 Other: if none of the nine fits, help the student name what happened as specifically as possible before choosing a next move. Do not force it into one of the listed patterns.

SURFACING CLASS PATTERNS WITHOUT DISCLOSING GRADES

If an anonymous poll is available, ask which one or two patterns appeared in their review. If not, read two or three aloud and invite a show of hands, only from students comfortable taking part. Never ask for scores. This gives a rough sense of what students are reporting, not a diagnosis of the class.

If many report the same pattern, it may be worth addressing before the next exam.

It may also inform teaching: if many report they could recall but not apply, consider both how they prepared and whether they had enough chance to practice application beforehand.

Reading the Evidence

IF STUDENTS CANNOT INSPECT THEIR WORK

Do not ask students to diagnose errors they cannot see evidence for.

If you can share aggregate information or discuss representative questions: use one or two examples to clarify common difficulties, then have students reconstruct how they prepared and choose one change for the next exam.

If you have no item-level evidence to share: skip the error diagnosis. Students can still compare expected with actual performance, reconstruct how they prepared, identify one change they want to make, and carry it into the next Pre-Exam Learning Plan.

ONE STUDENT FROM RESULT TO NEXT EXAM

A worked example. Note the wording: a plausible connection, not a causal diagnosis.

Prediction	80 to 89 per cent
Actual	60 to 69 per cent
Preparation	Mostly rereading, little self-testing, much of it in the last 24 hours
Error pattern	Recognized concepts but could not retrieve or explain them independently
Plausible connection	Preparation emphasized recognition more than retrieval
Adjust	Begin self-testing earlier and revisit weak material across sessions
Transfer	"In my first study session for the next exam, I will close my notes and retrieve the major concepts before reviewing them."

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR | FACILITATION SUPPORT

Support and Special Cases

Read once. These are the situations most likely to come up in the room.

PATTERNS, NOT PROOF

One exam gives useful evidence, not certainty about cause. "Most of my time went to rereading, and on the exam I could recognize ideas but not explain them" is a plausible connection worth acting on.

"Rereading caused my 62%" is not something the evidence supports. Ask students for plausible connections, not perfect explanations.

IF THE EXAM WENT WELL

Learning Ownership is not only for repairing problems. Ask what preparation seems to have helped, what evidence supports keeping it, and what should stay deliberate next time. A student who did well but cannot identify what helped has less information for deliberately repeating an effective approach.

Do not ask students who are satisfied with the result to invent a weakness.

Support and Special Cases

IF A STUDENT NEEDS MORE TIME BEFORE REFLECTING

Receiving a disappointing result is not a neutral moment. If a student needs more time, they can complete the review privately after class. Do not require anyone to share a result or an error pattern aloud.

IF A STUDENT SAYS

"I just need to study more."
Maybe. But what would you do differently with that extra time? More hours using the same approach may not address the problem.

"I knew it, I just made stupid mistakes."
Look for the pattern. Was it rushing, misreading, not checking, or something else? A pattern gives you something you can change.

"I am just bad at exams."
Try to make that more specific. What was difficult here: retrieving, explaining, applying, choosing a method, interpreting questions, checking, or managing time?

"The exam is over, there is nothing I can do."
You cannot change this result, but it gives you useful evidence about how to prepare for the next one.

DO I COLLECT IT? DO I GRADE IT?

Generally, no. The review holds a grade range, study habits, and self-identified weaknesses, and keeping it private can make it easier to use as an honest working document. If participation needs to be recognized, ask for the final transfer sentence rather than the grade, the error analysis, or the complete worksheet.

IF AI WAS PART OF PREPARATION

The review lists AI support among the supports students may have used. Treat it as one support among several. Ask whether its use matched what the exam required, and whether the student still practiced the thinking they needed to perform independently. Do not assume that AI use itself explains the result.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not ask students to disclose grades. Keep the review about learning, not comparison.

Do not turn it into "here is why you lost marks." Students need to find the patterns themselves, with the graded exam as the evidence.

Do not assume every error came from how a student studied. Acknowledge ambiguous questions or marking problems where they exist.

Do not ask for a list of resolutions. One change carried forward beats six intentions.

The Learning Ownership System

New to Learning Ownership? Read this section once.

WHAT THE LEARNING OWNERSHIP SYSTEM IS

Seven moves students can use across many academic tasks. Each is a question rather than a rule, so students enter wherever the situation requires and return as often as it takes. The system is a practical translation of research on self-regulated learning, metacognition, retrieval practice, feedback, and motivation. This routine uses three of the seven, and they are the three the exam itself makes possible.

WHERE EACH MOVE APPEARS IN THIS ROUTINE

Monitor	Monitor is not only something that happens while work is underway. Here students use evidence from prediction, preparation, and performance to judge how accurately they understood their own readiness and approach. Part A, and the beginning of Part B
Adjust	What preparation or strategy should change, based on the patterns the evidence suggests? Learn From the Patterns, and the Core reflection
Transfer	What one change will I carry into the first study session of the next exam? This is what prevents reflection from ending as insight. Learn From the Result and Transfer It Forward

This routine concentrates on Monitor, Adjust, and Transfer. Before the next exam, the Pre-Exam Learning Conversation adds Understand, Plan, Practice First, and Verify, while Monitor and Adjust recur as students check and revise their preparation.

THE EXAM LEARNING CYCLE

Before the exam
UNDERSTAND · PLAN · PRACTICE FIRST, then MONITOR · ADJUST · VERIFY

Pre-Exam Learning Plan
What will this exam require?
What can I do now?

After the exam
MONITOR · ADJUST

Post-Exam Learning Review
What patterns does the evidence suggest?

Into the next exam
TRANSFER

One change carried into the first study session of the next Pre-Exam Plan.

THE TWO EXAM CONVERSATIONS ARE ONE CYCLE

The transfer sentence a student writes here is the input to the first study session of the next exam.

Run this routine when graded work returns, then run the Pre-Exam Learning Conversation again before the following exam. Students experience Learning Ownership as a loop rather than as two separate worksheets.

KEEP GOING WITH LEARNING OWNERSHIP

The whole system	The Seven Moves, a one-page reference
Before the next exam	The Pre-Exam Learning Conversation
The complete book	Explore Think First
Everything free	LearningOwnership.com/educators

All free resources