

Exam Wrapper: Reflecting on Exam Prep

Educator: Josh Holden, Professor of Mathematics

Context: Out of class; Calculus III

Keywords: exam wrapper, study skills, test-taking skills

Student Activity Time: 30 minutes - 1 hour

After an exam, students reflected on their exam preparation and the connection to their performance on the exam.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

After receiving dissatisfying exam scores, students reflected on their exam performance, and more importantly, on the effectiveness of their exam preparation. The purpose of this reflection activity was to support students in thinking about their exam preparedness in relationship to how they performed on the exam.

In the exam wrapper students were asked to answer questions about how satisfied they were with their grades, when they started preparing for the exam, time spent preparing, types of preparation activities, and types of exam errors. After students submitted their exam wrapper, the educator graded the exam wrapper using a specifications grading approach—5 points for all questions with sufficient detail, 4 points for not enough detail, 3 points for one question left blank, and 0 points otherwise. If students received a 0, they had an opportunity to try again after the next exam. Once the exam wrappers were graded and returned to the students, the educator debriefed the class on what he saw in the exam wrappers. Additionally, the responses informed the professor about students' experiences with the exam and how he could best support their future learning. Based on this information, he adjusted the course in various ways (e.g., re-taught material in new ways, used different teaching methods).

In terms of outcomes, after students reflected on their exam preparation, there was potential for them to learn from and change their future exam preparation.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Decide what questions you want to ask in the exam wrapper.
2	Introduce students to the exam wrapper assignment.
3	Grade the exam wrapper assignment using a specs grading approach.
4	Debrief students based on what you see in the exam wrapper assignment.

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

Recognize the different options. I've used exam wrappers in a couple of different ways. Sometimes I call it an assignment, and sometimes I don't. I also give extra credit for it. So, sometimes it's been an assignment, plus exam extra credit when I didn't want to emphasize as strongly the required part.

Give students feedback before the next exam. I try to give the graded assignment back to them before the next exam. Ideally, they should get it back when they are just starting to think about studying for the next exam.

Write something encouraging on every student's reflection activity. I always write something positive on every student's reflection activity, even if it's just "Good idea!" This strategy is to help motivate all students.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? I knew students were going to be dissatisfied when they received their exam scores. I thought this reflection activity would be a positive way for them to reflect on and learn from their exam preparation, so they could improve before the next exam.