

## Helping Students Learn from Tests: Exam Wrappers

*"To realize that you do not understand is a virtue; not to realize that you do not understand is a defect." --Lao Tzu*

An exam wrapper is a simple questionnaire that does two things: it helps students identify what they did and did not understand on a recent test, and it helps them formulate a specific plan to improve. An exam wrapper usually has four parts:

- A list of study strategies (both more and less effective). Students show which they used.
- A list of major topics and question types. Students check off where they lost points.
- An open-ended area where students identify two things they plan to do differently for the next test.
- An open-ended area where students can indicate how the instructor might help them

When returning a test, instructors ask students to complete wrappers. Students sign them; the instructor collects them and returns them about a week before the next test. In my classes, I like to remind students that one of the best approaches to exam preparation is to check for understanding or 'to know what you don't know' at least one week before the exam so they have ample time to clarify misconceptions over the course of the week. Each of my students begins the semester writing down a study technique that they are willing to 'commit' to trying as they begin the course. By writing down their studying commitment on an index card and completing their 1<sup>st</sup> exam wrapper, students are better able to assess the usefulness of their study technique(s) and re-evaluate what might be a more realistic approach for their exam preparation needs

Exam wrappers rest on solid research. Current understandings of learning emphasize the importance of monitoring our learning and adjusting our approach as needed. However, students often need help with this process. Moreover, thinking about our learning is context-specific, so what matters in biology likely differs from what matters in history. A simple tool like an exam wrapper can help students engage in effective self-monitoring.

--Veronica Acosta (biology)

**Want to contribute to the CTL's online collection of exam wrappers? Send one—and the name of the course—to [hall@uiwtx.edu](mailto:hall@uiwtx.edu)**

Want to learn more?

Take a look at a sample exam wrapper: [http://www.uiw.edu/ctl/documents/biol\\_exam\\_wrapper.pdf](http://www.uiw.edu/ctl/documents/biol_exam_wrapper.pdf)

"Exam wrappers": <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/examwrappers/>

*How Learning Works* by Ambrose et al. has a practical discussion of metacognition, including wrappers. (Available in the CTL library.)