

Exam Survival Guide, Part One: The Best Apps for Studying for Exams

December 3, 2015

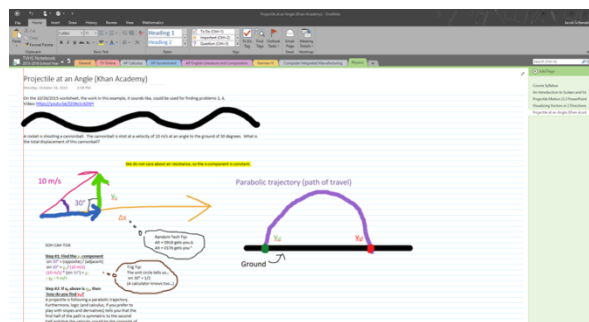
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Today is December 3. Elective exams at TVHS are on December 14-15, and core exams are on December 17-18. This means that the first day of exam week is eleven days away. I apologize for causing a spike in your stress levels. Exams, in terms of final grades for the year, are worth exactly half of what your quarterly grade in a class is. No pressure, right? Luckily, TV Online is here with the top tech tools for preparing for your exams, starting with the first of this two-part Exam Survival Guide series, the best apps for studying for exams.

Generally Studying the Main Concepts



One of the most basic methods of exam studying is, simply, regurgitating the concepts you need to know for the exam and details that go along with them. These are usually found in the textbook course textbook, if there is one. Many textbooks come in an online format and can be opened in an app on a computer or tablet, such as the Pearson eText app for Pearson textbooks on Android and the iPad.

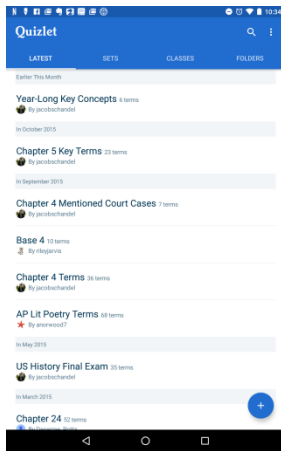
These apps typically have tools that allow for the book to be marked up with annotations and highlighters, which can be helpful for reviewing topics in a class, especially those ones that are pesky and hard to remember. If you need to review a novel, you can review it using SparkNotes or CliffsNotes, which provides in-depth summaries of stories. (Just be sure to have read the story, first.) If taking the key points of something and making an outline works better for you, note-taking apps like OneNote and Evernote allow you to type outlines to print out or save on your phone or tablet for later studying. We did an in-depth breakdown of these two apps, which you can check out [here](#). However, both apps can effectively serve the purpose of simply writing outlines. It is also good to note that a shared Google Doc is a good place for a group to collaborate on a study guide, and that posting a shared link to Classroom to share it with a class is a good way to get a digital study group going!

Making Flashcards

Flashcards are amazing for memorizing key concepts and ideas. They are easy to go through on the fly, and can be used for anything from memorizing key terms to remembering the steps for a math problem. There are a plethora of notecard apps available that can do the job easily and work without a hitch. However, two apps are the most popular.

StudyBlue is one of these apps. It has a robust set of tools for studying, from the ability to add pictures to a card to use thumbs-up and thumbs-down buttons to, respectively, mark cards as answered

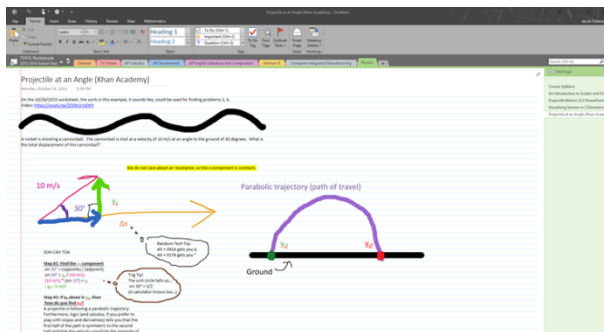
correctly, meaning they perhaps do not need the heaviest focus, or incorrectly, which tells the app that a particular card may need some more review. The Achilles heel of the app, however, is that it is what is called a "freemium" app. Freemium apps are apps with a free option with basic tools to get done a basic job that also offer a premium version, typically for a small monthly cost, with more robust tools or helpful perks for doing the basic job the free version does. When executed properly, a typical user can win strongly with the free version of a freemium app. StudyBlue, unfortunately, is not a good example of this. In my testing, the freemium aspects of the app get in the way of this being the best flashcard app, especially in sharing "decks" of cards with other people, usually causing the people receiving the decks to only see the first five cards, if any, without springing for one of the pro versions starting at \$7 per month. If you can live with these quirks, the app is available online, on Google Play, and on the App Store. Moreover, this, along with other freemium roadblocks, make this app hard to recommend, especially if you want some of the more basic features in the pro versions.



Quizlet is the easier app of the two to recommend. Like StudyBlue, it is a flashcard app, but it shines in areas where the competition just cannot. Quizlet's best feature is its simple design. It does not try to drain a student's wallet with a pro-focused take on freemium, though teachers can pay for a special set of extra tools. The app goes above and beyond the free version of StudyBlue with the ability to share card sets easily as well as auto-define words, a major time-saver for the time-crunched student. Quizlet does have a few features reserved for the aforementioned paid Quizlet Teacher version, notably the ability to add a voice recording to a card, but things this small are easy to live without. Quizlet is available online, on Google Play, and on the App Store.

Math Magic?

Math. It is scary for some people. However, practice can easily fix this. How can someone practice math? Simple. Either look to old problems and rework them, or find some practice in your textbook. Oh, man! I don't have the answer to that math problem to make sure I am right! No problem, there is a fix to this tiny dilemma. There are free apps and programs that can fix this.



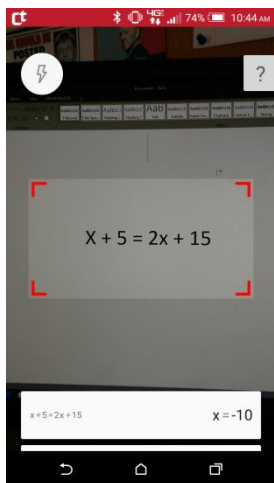
The first one is an old-school favorite of mine. Microsoft Mathematics is an old, free download from Microsoft which is like a graphing calculator injected with extra tools and powers, such as the ability to solve any equation you throw at it or the ability to solve an equation for a variable.

The app also has the ability to show how to get a solution step-by-step. It even has a special add-in which works with Word and OneNote for importing equations or pictures of graphs. The only problem: the program is old school. The design may not be easy to understand for some, and the add-in has a minor quirk: it doesn't install nicely on a computer with Office 2013 or 2016, yet if it is installed on a computer that has not upgraded from 2010 to



2013/16, the add-in works in Office 2013 and beyond. If you can use the app itself, it is a Windows exclusive available for download from the Microsoft Download Center. (There is a direct link to download it in the web version of this article.) If you need mobility, then go for the MalMath app on Google Play. It has the same standard features as Mathematics, plus it has a slightly more simple design than Mathematics.

Next is another old favorite: Wolfram|Alpha. While you can pay for the app on Google Play or the App Store, there is a free web version for mobile and desktop which works just fine. The concept is simple: enter a math problem and it spits out an answer. The only trick to this app is knowing how to key in a problem (per se, $x^2 = x^2$). Also notably missing is the ability to see a step-by-step solution for free. Other than that, the app is an amazing tool for quickly finding answers online.



If you are too tired from your strenuous studying to type in a problem to find a solution, the app PhotoMath allows for someone to use their device's camera to scan a problem and find a solution. It doesn't seem to scan handwriting, but if you have a typed problem on a textbook or worksheet, all you have to do is open the app, point your camera, and the answer pops up! No strings attached. It won't graph a function or find something complex such as a derivative, but it can handle basic equation solving. It is free on Google Play and the App Store, with a Windows Phone app in the works.

These apps can be helpful studying aids. However, this is important to note: these apps are best for checking answers, not just doing problems. Without working the problems, these apps do not help with studying. However, if you use these apps for just checking answers and finding steps to hard problems, these apps can be amazing.

Block Out Distractions

Of course, the hardest part about studying is the fact that many things can become distractions, especially if it lights up and has buttons. Luckily, there is a Google Chrome extension called StayFocusd on the Web Store, which allows for a website to be temporarily blocked (such as Facebook or Twitter) so it doesn't become a distraction. You can download the extension [here](#). Other similar apps are available for mobile, though unfortunately, Apple's locked-down app ecosystem means that it will be easier to find one of these apps on Android than iOS. One such app is called Stay Focused (note the different spelling) on Google Play. These apps can be great tools for temporarily blocking distractions out while you study.

Videos: A Preview of Part Two

In our second installment of TV Online's Exam Survival Guide, we will look at the top video sources online to study for exams. From Khan Academy to Crash Course, there are quite a few top video apps from reputable sources which lay out topics in an easy-to-follow manner, from the key details of the Civil War to understanding chemical bonds. Whether these have apps of their own or are popular YouTube channels, these apps can be excellent crunch-time study tools. We hope you will check out part two of the TV Online Exam Survival Guide next week.