

Final exams: 5 tips to beat year-end fatigue and do your best

It's that time of the year when students experience what is called 'year-end fatigue' - whether they be matrics getting ready for the most important exams of their school career, senior high school students aiming to perform at their best as they progress towards Grade 12, or graduate students at universities preparing for their end-of-year assessments.



Image: Supplied

For all of these students, the coming weeks are going to be a test of their focus, strength and endurance as they aim for top marks. Yet at the same time, they have to contend with the fatigue that has most likely set in after all their hard work during the past year. But by reframing their mindset and ensuring they stick to some tried and tested guidelines, they can all dive into the last quarter of 2022 with renewed enthusiasm to ensure they finish the year strong, an education expert says.

"Signs of year-end fatigue include low energy levels, a feeling of being unable to keep up, a lack of motivation, feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, being unable to sleep, and low levels of concentration while possibly feeling anxious," says Dr Rufaro Audrey Mavunga, senior head of programme in the Faculty of Law at The Independent Institute of Education, SA private higher education provider.

She says this situation may lead students to start slacking when they can least afford to, for instance by bunking classes, not participating in school or university activities, procrastinating and putting off revision they planned hoping that they might feel more motivated to tackle tasks later, and by checking out of their circumstances by sleeping too much or watching too much television.

"If you are feeling like this, rest assured that it is normal to feel tired and overwhelmed and that you are not alone. However, you should also know that it is possible and important to overcome these feelings so that you can finish strong, and that it is within your ability to do so if you act decisively right now. There is still enough time to make sure you can get a handle on things again and get on top of your academic work to the best of your ability."



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Dr Mavunga advises students as follows:

Take some time off

This may sound counterproductive, but it can help to take a day or two to regain your focus without feeling guilty. In these days, you can catch up on sleep, get out in nature for some relaxation, and remind yourself about the why and the how of what you are doing right now. Get your mind in the right place, and resolve to start the final stretch with vigour. Also use this time to lay out your schedule and plans for the coming weeks, right until you've put down your pen on your last exam.

Revisit your study timetable and manage your time efficiently

To finish strong, you need to continue with regular study sessions every week till the end of your exams. Do not count on doing an all-nighter just before you write an assessment. You should revisit your study timetable and ensure that you have set up fixed hours for study every day. Plan for enough time to study each module and add your study sessions to your calendar like any other commitments. This guarantees that you keep in mind that this is time set aside exclusively for studying. Bear in mind a study plan works best when it is followed consistently. It is imperative that you stick to your plan, as this will ease tension and anxiety if you can see your consistent progress.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Exercise has many benefits, but it has been proven that exercise releases endorphins, which can improve your mood and reduce stress levels. Fatigue and tiredness could also be an effect of a lack of proper nutrition. Make healthy meal selections wherever possible and consume lots of water. Make sure you factor enough sleep into your schedule and don't use that time to endlessly and mindlessly browse social media. Stay away from activities that are going to tire you out for days to come and keep a single-minded focus on your priorities right now. This too shall pass, and you'll be happy you stayed true to yourself when results day comes.



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Get help if you need it

Sometimes one feels so helpless and it may feel like you are stuck in a deep dark hole with no way of coming out. Give attention to the positives you encounter and embrace them. Consult school or campus support staff to gain different perspectives on how to ease the fatigue and to get over negative feelings you may have. If you need additional assistance with the academic side of things, approach a teacher or a lecturer for guidance. If you need additional emotional support, ask trusted adults at home or at your institution to assist in getting the support you need.

Keep your eye on the end goal

Commit to finishing strong. In your downtime, look at your path ahead – what dreams and aspirations will become accessible if you perform well during this stage of your academic journey? What avenues of study may open up for you? What possibilities and opportunities may arise?

"At this time of year, it's easy to get lost in the fog of studying and worrying, and it's easy to lose perspective about the bigger world out there and the fact that all of this is part of life's journey. The end of this year will soon come around, and your effort will be rewarded if you know that you gave it your all on the road to making your dreams a reality," says Dr Mavunga.

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