

## Exam Wrappers Improve Study Habits—and Test Scores



### What are they?

Exam wrappers are short handouts that help students review their **completed exam** to understand their grade and to learn about how their own behaviors contributed to the exam results, e.g. the adequacy of their preparation and how they may improve their strategies for studying for exams.

Knowing how to study for a test—having an informed, tactical plan of attack—might be the key to mastering the material and acing the exam.

Researchers reviewed 14 studies on the effectiveness of exam wrappers, **simple handouts often given to students before and after tests that prompt them to answer reflective questions** like “the content I am still confused about is,” “my plan to prepare for the exam is,” or “my graded exam shows I lost points because of.”

While the emphasis before big tests is usually on brute-force review of the content, exam wrappers conveyed both short- and long-term benefits, improving “levels of metacognition, and changes in future study habits” as well as exam grades: In one study reviewed, final course grades improved by one-third of a letter grade.

**The *how* of learning, then, is as important as the *what*,** and regularly asking students to think about the ways they learn best is an easy, effective strategy that sets them up for future success.

**Here’s how it can work.** Generally, the teacher returns a test/quiz with the grade received. Attached to it is an *exam wrapper*—a piece of paper with the question number for a student to analyze “I lost points because of...”

When the student returns the exam wrapper to the teacher with their corrected answer and an **analysis** of **why** they missed the point, what they **did wrong**, and/or what they still **don't understand**, the student receives a few additional points.

Exam wrappers resemble “do over” or “test correction” strategies except that an exam wrapper requires the student to put in writing **why** they missed the question or lost points. Metacognition at work!

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*From the [University of Vermont website](#)...*

## How can you use them?

- Add the questions to an online test and give them credit for answering them
- Distribute wrappers in paper form the day a test is returned (may be stapled to exams)
- Ask students to complete the exam wrapper and consider it on their own
- **Collect the completed wrappers, briefly review, and offer the full class comments on any patterns you see**
- Collect the completed wrappers and return them to students as they prepare for the next exam.
- Ask students who want to discuss an exam in office hours to bring their exam wrapper

*From the website of [Carnegie Mellon](#)...*

Here are some examples of exam wrapper templates.

The Physics one is a blank template. The Biology one has student analysis written in it.