



Things to Think About if You Didn't Pass

There are many factors that contribute to either passing or failing an exam. These factors are not always obvious. When you pass, you don't really care how you did it, but if you *don't* pass, it can be very constructive to reflect back on the entire experience. By examining your study process, study time, and various external factors that affected your life while studying, you may be able to come up with an action plan for your next attempt.

Often, just making small adjustments to your study process or environment in one or two key areas can make all the difference.

The questions and thoughts listed below aren't necessarily intended to be answered in their entirety. You don't have to answer all or them (or really *any* of them if you don't feel like it!). You definitely do *not* have to share them with me or anyone else either.

This is really a personal "journaling" exercise intended to identify friction points in your study experience that you might be able to reduce or eliminate next time around. By actually writing down answers to these questions, you may see a pattern, or it may become obvious where you need to make adjustments.

Of course, if you'd like my help or want to expand on any of these areas, just let me know, or discuss them with your seminar instructor.

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Study Time

When did you start? Did you have at least 3 months to prepare?

How many hours did you put in? Did you track your hours? It is common to need 400–500 (or more in some cases) study hours to pass a 5-hour FSA exam.

Was your study time regular throughout the week, or more bunched up on weekends?

Quality of Study Time

Quality of study time is a major success factor. If you are rested, focused, motivated, and undistracted while studying, you will get the most out of your time.

Did you put studying off to the end of the day when you are tired? Would it be possible to study at a time of day when your mind is freshest?

Was your study time generally free of distractions? Did you get interrupted a lot? Can you find more distraction-free places to study?

Work Factors

Does your employer provide study time?

Even if you do get study time where you work, is your company culture such that you felt guilty taking it?

Do you feel like your work responsibilities make it difficult to prioritize studying?

Do you have regular work responsibilities like month-end reporting that get in the way of studying? Is it possible to shift these duties to someone else in the final weeks before the exam?

Can you approach your manager about getting more study time, or do you feel that would put your job or business relationship at risk?

Tip: There is an art to “asking for forgiveness” when it comes to study time. Long-term, your career is much better served by prioritizing study time over work duties. Passing the exam has more long-term significance than getting month-end reporting done on time, for example. These work responsibilities are certainly important, but keeping your long-term goals in perspective can help. It’s always better to confront your manager directly and constructively to discuss your study needs, however.

Do you have a distraction-free place to study at work? If not, can you make one? (i.e. use a vacant office or find some unused office space in the building?)

Do you find yourself checking email a lot during study time? Is it possible to cut yourself off from email, phone, coworkers, etc. during study time?

Personal Factors

Do you feel like there were personal circumstances that got in the way?

Are these things likely to happen again, or were they one-off events?

Examples of one-off events that interfere with studying (often justifiably)

- *Illness – personal or close family member*
- *Major life events – birth of a child, death of a close friend or family member, divorce, break-up, new job, moved across the country*

Examples of recurring events that might make studying difficult at home in the future

- *Non-supportive spouse/partner*
- *Small children and family responsibilities*
- *Lack of study environment where you can focus*
- *Distractions, hobbies, social media, or other interests that pull you away from studying*

Do you feel like you can talk with your spouse, partner, significant other, or family members about helping you get more study time at home?

Study Process

Did you attempt to read the source material?

Did you watch all of the videos?

Did you work all practice problems?

Did you use the detailed study manual?

Did you purchase too many study materials and found yourself getting disoriented?

Did you find it difficult or overwhelming to memorize lists and formulas? Do you feel like you got a late start on memorizing because you fell behind earlier?

Which material do you think you struggled with the most while studying?

Did you have a tendency to spend too much time on specific topics? For example, were there topics that you felt you spent too much time trying to get “just right” instead of moving on to spend that time on other syllabus topics?

The Day of the Exam

Did you finish each question, or did you feel like you ran out of time? *If you were pressed for time, try practicing exam questions under time constraints more before the next exam.*

Did you feel organized throughout the exam while writing down question numbers and your candidate number, or were you stressed by that process?

Did you get a full night’s rest before the exam, or did you try to “cram” late into the night? *Tip: sleep is SUPER important for your brain. Cramming may put a couple more bullet points in your head, but you end up compromising your ability to think clearly on everything else. It’s rarely worth it.*

Did your hand get tired to the point where it seemed like you could have written more if your hand had been in better shape? *If so, try writing more by hand in the months and weeks before the exam.*

Which material on the exam do you think you struggled with? Can you focus more on these topics next time?