



The study schedule that survives the semester.

A timetable is not a wish list of hours. It is a plan for what your memory does with those hours. This document shows how to build one that holds up in week nine — and what the published evidence says about why the usual version collapses.

1 Why most timetables collapse by week three

Nearly every timetable fails for the same reason: it schedules *time* instead of *activity*. "Two hours of Micro Economics" tells you when to sit down and nothing about what to do. When the material is hard, the default response is to read it again — which feels productive and is one of the weakest things you can do.

"Practice testing and distributed practice received high utility assessments."

Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan & Willingham (2013), reviewing ten study techniques

SOURCE Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Marsh, E. J., Nathan, M. J., & Willingham, D. T. (2013). *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 14(1), 4–58. "doi:10.1177/1529100612453266"

2 Four rules that do the work

RULE 1 — SPACE IT

Three one-hour sessions across a week beat one three-hour session. The gap matters more the further away the exam is.

EVIDENCE Cepeda, Pashler, Vul, Wixted & Rohrer (2006), *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(3), 354–380.

RULE 2 — RETRIEVE IT

Close the book and write what you remember, then check. Self-testing beats rereading — and beats concept mapping — for durable learning.

EVIDENCE Roediger & Karpicke (2006), *Psychological Science*, 17(3); Karpicke & Blunt (2011), *Science*, 331(6018).

RULE 3 — INTERLEAVE IT

Mix question types in one sitting instead of twenty of the same kind. You must choose the method, which is the actual exam skill.

EVIDENCE Rohrer, Dedrick & Stershic (2015), *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 107(3), 900–908.

RULE 4 — SLEEP ON IT

Sleep is when memory consolidates. Reviewing the hardest material shortly before sleep, and protecting seven to eight hours, is part of the timetable.

EVIDENCE Rasch & Born (2013), *Physiological Reviews*, 93(2), 681–766.

WHY "HARDER" IS THE POINT

Spacing, testing and interleaving all feel worse than rereading while you are doing them, and all produce better retention. Bjork and Bjork call this "making things hard on yourself, but in a good way" (2011). If a study session feels comfortable, that is not evidence it worked.

3 The arithmetic of a semester, done honestly

Five modules at three contact hours a week is 45 contact hours a semester. A common planning convention in higher education assumes about two hours of independent study for every contact hour — roughly six hours a week per module. That convention is a planning aid, not a UNZA regulation; your own module outlines are the authority.

What matters is the shape of the number. Six hours a week is not one long evening; it is three two-hour contacts, or six 50/10 blocks across three days.

The honest totals	Week	Semester
Contact hours (5 modules × 3 h)	15 h	225 h
Independent study at the common 2× assumption	30 h	450 h
Six 50/10 blocks a week — a realistic plan	5 h	75 h
Gap you are deciding how to close	—	375 h

WHY THIS MATTERS A 375-hour gap cannot be closed by intending to work harder. It is closed by one repeatable block that you actually keep.

4 Six ways the plan is lost before the exam

- **Reading as revision.** No recall, no retrieval benefit.
- **Blocked practice.** Trains repetition, not selection.
- **One subject per day.** Spacing collapses; four modules wait until the last week.

- **No error log.** Mistakes repeat because they were never collected.
- **Coursework read as optional.** Unsatisfactory CA can bar you from the exam — page 3.
- **Hours, not activities.** The decision is remade when you are tired.



5 Build the weekly grid in five moves

- 1 Block what you cannot move**
Lectures, labs, tutorials, placements, worship, family duty, work — in first, and in grey.
- 2 Give every module a "next action"**
Not "study Chemistry" but "rework Tutorial 4, questions 2, 5 and 7 without notes".
- 3 Put retrieval before new reading**
Begin with ten minutes of closed-book recall of last week. Retrieval first, reading second.
- 4 Spread each module across three days or more**
Two short contacts on Tuesday and Friday beat one long block on Saturday.
- 5 Leave one evening and one half-day empty**
A schedule with no slack breaks in the first week it is tested. The gap is where you catch up.

THE 50/10 BLOCK, WRITTEN DOWN

Minutes	What happens
0-5	Closed-book recall of the last session. Write, don't reread.
5-25	Work three mixed problems or one exam question, fully.
25-45	Only now consult notes, textbook or marking key.
45-50	Write the two things you got wrong and the rule behind each.
50-60	Break, away from the screen. "Scroll" is not a break.

NOTE Three of these blocks is a serious study day. Six is not.

6 Worked example — a five-module semester week

A real pattern, not a template to copy exactly: five modules, two of them quantitative. Shaded cells are fixed teaching commitments. No module appears on fewer than three days.

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
08:00-10:00	Micro lecture	Maths lecture	Chem lecture	Micro lecture	Maths lecture	Rework the week's errors
10:00-12:00	Chem lab	Maths: 3 mixed problems	Chem lab	Chem: recall + problems	Physics: exam question	Two past-paper questions, timed
14:00-16:00	Micro: recall, then problems	Physics tutorial	Maths: worked examples	Physics lab	Open — buffer	Free
19:00-20:00	Physics: recall, 20 min	Chem: 10-mark question	Micro: mixed MCQ set	Maths: recall, 20 min	Free	Free

WHAT THIS GRID GETS RIGHT

Every module is touched on three or more days; every session opens with closed-book recall; quantitative topics get mixed problem sets rather than blocks of identical questions; Friday afternoon is deliberately empty.

WHAT TO AVOID IN YOUR OWN VERSION

A "study" block with no stated activity. A whole Saturday on one subject. A plan so tight that one missed lecture destroys the week. Reading as the main activity for a subject you will be examined on numerically.

7 When the week goes wrong — the twenty-minute recovery

- 1 Do not rebuild the whole timetable**
Rebuilding is procrastination that feels like discipline. Change one thing.
- 2 Find the first missed block**
Whatever that block was protecting is now the priority — not the newest task.
- 3 Protect retrieval, drop reading**
A missed reading costs comprehension; a missed recall session costs retention.
- 4 Write one line in the error log, then start**
The week is recovered when the next session begins on time, not when the plan is perfect.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE ABOUT THE GRID

- Nothing is longer than two hours.** Long blocks get postponed; short blocks get done.
- Recall comes first.** Ten minutes of closed-book writing changes what the next hour is worth.
- Sunday is empty.** A plan with no unallocated day has no room for the week that does not go to plan.

**8 The three-week countdown to the paper****THREE WEEKS OUT**

- List every topic the syllabus names and mark each **can do / shaky / not started**.
- Start with **shaky**, not with what you like.
- One full past paper under time, open book. You are calibrating, not training.

TWO WEEKS OUT

- One timed paper per subject, closed book, marked against the key.
- Keep one **error log**: question, mistake, rule, fix. Re-read only the log.
- Alternate subjects within a day. No subject gets a whole day.

FINAL WEEK

- Retrieval only. No new material, no new chapters.
- Redo the error log cold.
- Sleep is the priority. An all-nighter buys hours and loses consolidation.

EVIDENCE Spacing gains grow with the retention interval (Cepeda et al., 2006); retrieval practice produces durable learning where restudying does not (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011); sleep actively consolidates memory (Rasch & Born, 2013).

9 Anxiety, and what actually reduces it

Test anxiety is not a character flaw and it is not fixed by being told to calm down. It tracks reliably with weaker outcomes, and structured interventions measurably reduce it.

AN HONEST NOTE ON MINDSET

Believing ability can grow is linked to motivation, and Dweck's work is widely quoted — but the largest independent meta-analysis found the average effect of mindset interventions on achievement was *small* and concentrated in struggling students (Sisk et al., 2018). Treat mindset as a helpful attitude, not a substitute for the four rules.

THREE THINGS THAT HELP

- Rehearse the conditions** — timed, closed book, no phone. Much of the fear is fear of an unfamiliar format.
- Write the worry down** before the paper. Naming it frees working memory.
- Breathe slowly for two minutes** before reading anything.

EVIDENCE von der Embse, Jester, Roy & Post (2018), *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 227, 483–493; Ergene (2003), *School Psychology International*, 24(3).

10 Two institutional rules that override any timetable**CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT CAN BAR YOU FROM THE EXAM**

UNZA's quality assurance framework states that a student whose continuous assessment is unsatisfactory will not be allowed to sit the final examination. Coursework is not a warm-up for the exam; in some modules it is the gate to it.

SOURCE University of Zambia, *Quality Assurance Framework*, Directorate of Quality Assurance, 2018, §6.3.8.

DIARISE THE SESSIONAL DATES

Examination windows, result publication and the deadline for result appeals are published in advance. Put the appeal deadline in your calendar the week term starts.

SOURCE University of Zambia, *Sessional Dates 2025/26*, Office of the Registrar — “Friday 20th November, 2026 Deadline for Appeals for Examination Results for Regular Students”

11 Printable — the blank weekly grid and the error log

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
07:00–09:00							
09:00–11:00							
11:00–13:00							
14:00–16:00							
16:00–18:00							
19:00–21:00							
Question	What I did		The rule I missed		The fix		
e.g. Test 2, Q4	Read the price off MR		Price is read off the AR/D curve, never MR		Circle the curve before reading any value		