Study Guide

A Definitive Guide

Clément Aubert

February 3, 2019

Presentation

You have an exam scheduled the `<day indicated in the syllabus>`, at the `<time indicated in the syllabus>`, and you want to make sure you are ready for it? You want to organize your revision, and make sure you don't overlook any aspect of `<class you are enrolled in>`? You would feel better if you had a list of the topics covered during the class, and that could be on the exam?

If the answer to those questions is `Yes!`, then you probably want a study guide, and I strongly suggest you write your own.

Why?

Essentially for three reasons:

1. What works for you may not work for anyone else.
2. Learning is **all** about developing techniques and methods to learn.
3. There are no "surprises" in my exams.

Actually, I believe that providing my own study guide would be *counter-productive*, because it could

1. Make you think that you are learning the "wrong way", by describing a normative way of learning that wouldn't work for you.
2. Prevent you from reasoning on how to learn, and from constructing your own methods.
3. Provide you with a list either too vague or too precise of concepts, while a class is always about a global experience of learning.

How To Do That?

The content of the exam is **predictable** when you listen in class, do the assignment, went over the syllabus and pay attention. Since every exam is cumulative, there isn't really any surprise as to "what will be on the exam": *everything* will be on it. You have **five sources** to make sure you know what the core aspects of the class are:

1. The Syllabus

Read the description of the class, the student learning outcome, and the planned schedule.

2. Your Notes

Your notes should be organized and reflect the plan we followed in class. Identify the key words, the topics, the transitions, the tools and the examples.

3. The Homeworks

The content of the exam is always similar to what was asked in the homeworks. Look again at the exercises, think about how you could combine two exercises into one, make sure you know how to do them without external help and in limited time.

4. External Sources

Even if the class does not always follow the textbook as closely as you may want, there are indications in the syllabus as to where to look for another description of the topic we covered in class. You can also look at the review questions or exercises it offers.

5. The Previous Evaluations

Look at your previous evaluations (quizzes, projects and exams if there were any), and wonder: what did you missed? Why did you missed it? Was it because of lack of time? Lack of attention? Lack of knowledge? Depending on the answer, work on having a better focus, a better time management, a better attention to the questions asked, or a better skill as identifying what to revise.

How To Use It?

You wrote your own study guide! Great, now it is time to revise, isn't it? I see two options:

A. You now feel confident. By reviewing the material to write your study guide, you actually realize that you understand it better, and that you are ready for the exam. Great, you are done.

B. You still think that a lot of the aspects of `<class you are enrolled in>` are still not clear. List them, circle them, look for other sources if needed, ask someone (including me!), leave them aside for a while, go back to an exercise, do whatever helps you, but don't panic.

In both cases, remember this graph:

Linear Correlation Between Grade and Time Spent Studying
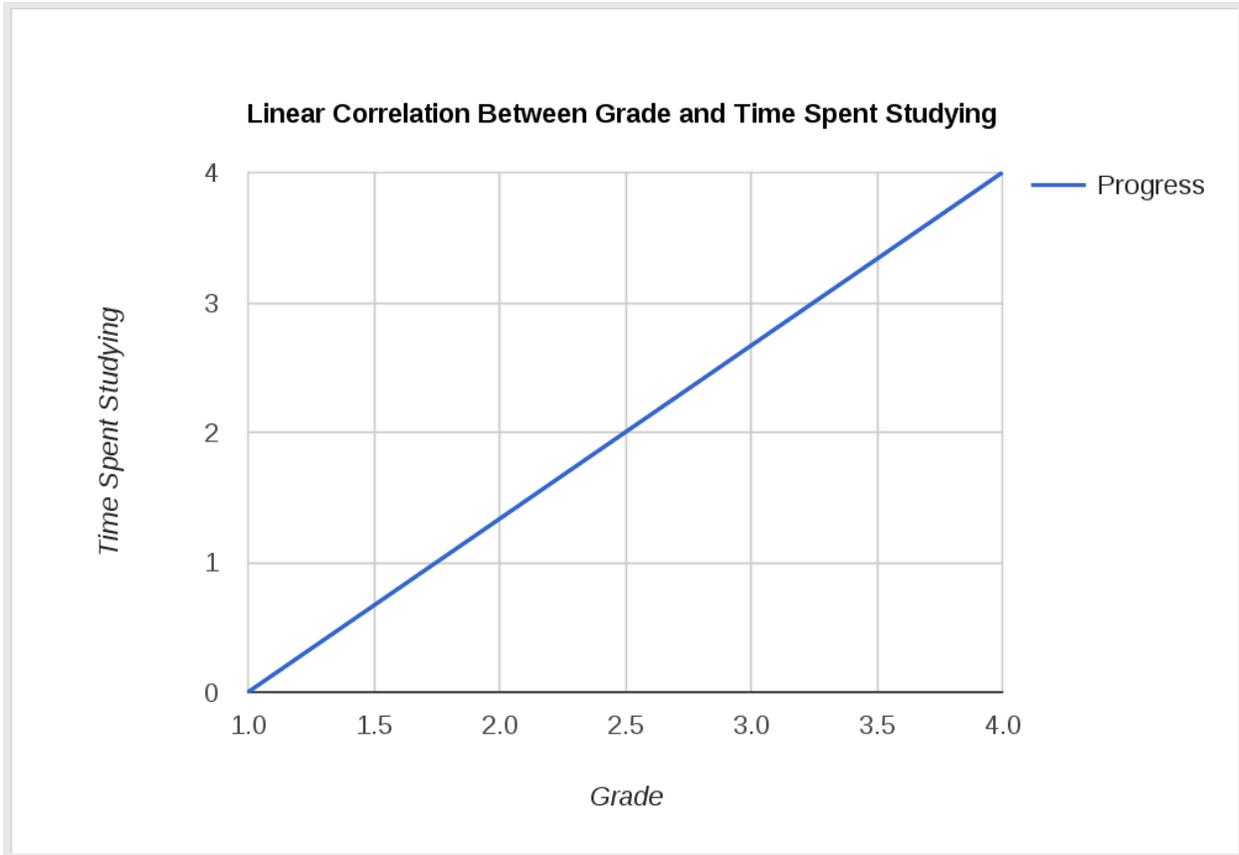
It is **plain wrong** (and not only because there is no unit on the vertical axis): while not studying at all gives you good chance of getting a terrible grade, cramming two additional hours instead of getting a reasonable amount of sleep is almost certain to lower your grade. Plan ahead, study regularly, and if you did actually come to class, worked on the homeworks and various exercises regularly, your revision should be nothing more than making sure you actually master the notions you have been studied for some time.

Most importantly, relax and try to enjoy this opportunity to learn about that exciting topic!