4 Secrets to Find the Time to Pass the FRACGP Exams

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1. How much time do I actually need to pass the FRACGP Exams?

The generally accepted number of hours needed to pass the FRACGP exams in Australia is around 400 hours.

Now this number has a couple of assumptions that you are working in General Practice in Australia 35 days a week. It also assumes that you are seeing a standard diverse, crosssection of the Australian population as a GP not just all women, or all children etc.

If you are an extremely good doctor or have had a lot of indepth further training in GP topics then you may need less hours.

If you are either looking to do very well, not working enough or just seeing a selective population then you may need to increase these hours to more like 600, 800 or even 1000 hours.

Without these number of hours under your belt, you may be better off waiting for more study time before taking the FRACGP exams. For instance, you may be better to start your preparation and study at least 12 months or more out from the exams.

A 6 week, lastminute cram is unlikely to work for the exam due to the very wide range of material that can be covered in the FRACGP exam questions.

2. How many hours do I need to study each week?

Sitting for the exams is very much a story of the tortoise and the hare.

Starting early with a plan and timetable to get you in a study routine will enable you to fit in much more study over the long term, rather than trying to fit large amounts of study and cram your preparation into a short period of time.

From the estimate of the total amount of hours needed above, take that number and divide it by your weeks available until your date of sitting the exams.

\[
\text{Total Study Hours Required} / \text{Weeks Available} = \text{Weekly Study Time}
\]

For myself, I was working full time, but I also had two children at the time which limited how much time I could actually spare each week.

I wanted to put in 400 hours of study and I started out a year in advance.

Putting these numbers into the formula above I worked out
So, I knew that if I put in 8 hours a week for 50 weeks, I would be on target to meet my required study goal. I also started far enough in advance that I could plan to take the time off for Christmas, sickness, holidays, birthdays and family celebrations.

Notice that if you have less time, the required time each week rapidly becomes greater and this may be unrealistic and unmanageable if you have other personal commitments like work, health, fitness and taking care of family and children.

For instance if you had 25 weeks your required time per week increases to...

- **400/25 = 16 hours per week**

And if you only had 12 weeks then its a very high 33 hours per week.

- **400/12 = 33 hours per week!!**

As I had to take care of my children, finding 16 hours per week to study was a very difficult task. There was simply no way that I had 33 hours extra in my week without cutting back to 4 hours sleep a night which I was not willing to do.

I knew that I had to start early enough in the 12 months before the exam to make sure that I had enough weeks to get up to the total number of hours of study required.

I also tracked my study hours, so that I could see the amount of time adding up each week. Recording and accounting for my time kept me motivated to continue the good work and also I was able to look at this spreadsheet before the exam and know deep within my bones that I had put the hard work in.

This is also easy for you to do, either with Excel spreadsheet, Google Drive, a Calendar or even just a notepad that you tick off an hour for each hour that you study.

3. But ‘my life’ is so busy, how do I find the time in my week?

You may already be very busy as a GP working 5 6 days a week with oncall commitments too, so finding even the 8 hours a week may be a significant challenge. None the less, if you want to have a good chance of passing your FRACGP exams, you will need to find this time.

Below are some secrets to finding the time to study...

a. **Sacrifice nonessential activities from your week**...

Now this isn’t your exercise program, or time with your children but rather time spent watching tv, scrolling through facebook, going to the movies, etc. Cutting out these nonessential activities, to replace them with study should freeup significant amounts of time in your week.
b. *Study during lunch*

You may only have 10 minutes or 30 minutes at lunchtime, however rather than just chatting, this time can be used to study. Over the 612 months of preparing for the exam, this will add a small but significant amount of time to your overall study preparation.

*Many people only discover this time in the last couple of weeks as their stress levels rise.*

However, it is available to you from the beginning of your preparation if you are able to discipline yourself to use it.

c. *Early morning study*

This was where I found my time. I would wake at 5am and study until 6am before my family woke up. It was hard for the first week as my body adjusted to the time change. After this, it was actually quite a pleasurable time to study the world is quiet and is very amenable to study.

*It also allowed me to know that any further study I did during the day was a bonus, as I’d already reached my quota of study hours!*

I did try late at night early on, however I found that after working and after my duties as a father were complete, I was absolutely exhausted and had no ability to stay focused on study, or even stay awake!

That’s when I changed to early morning study. I highly recommend using this time.

d. *Get cover from your partner (if you have children)*

You may be able to find another couple of hours each week if your partner is willing to look after your children for 13 hours while you study. This is only for the time while you are preparing for the exams.

*You can also consider buying study time by hiring a babysitter for a couple of hours each week.*

While expensive, it is highly effective at making sure that you do study during this time as you know exactly the cost each hour of study is worth.

There may be other strategies that you are able to think of for your specific life circumstances. The most important thing is to get them up and running so that you can find the time to put towards your study.

e. *Finding a study group*

It is very beneficial to form a study group. Find a group of other doctors sitting the exam and arrange a weekly time to meet weekly or fortnightly for 23 hours Use the study group time to study together and discuss questions. The study group is a very effective way to ask questions so you can clarify specific study topics.

If you are in a very small town, then consider setting up with other doctors on Skype or Google Hangouts and use these tools to facilitate the meeting. It will save on travel time and still get you in a group to help you prepare for the exams.
4. How do I maximise the effectiveness of the time that I am studying?

This last secret touches on the essential question of making sure that the hours that you are studying are worthwhile.

Due to the very large amount of content that can be covered in the FRACGP exams, one crucial factor is to focus on understanding rather than rote memorisation.

Certainly memorisation is a part of the study. However if there are concepts to be understood or models that explain a disease process, make sure you have a good grasp of these as this make it easier for your mind to retain the information.

Keeping good notes is also crucial. You will likely need to spend the last couple of weeks of your preparation actually reviewing and refreshing in your mind all of the content that you have covered in the previous months of study so that it is fresh and available when you do sit.

Therefore having quality notes does make a huge difference. Some possible formats for taking notes include the classic notepad, word documents and my personal favourite mindmaps. Online tools like Google Docs and Mindmeister.com can make accessing your notes from any location (home, work or travel) very easy.

Remember to take a break for 10 minutes in each hour to allow your mind to process and absorb the information.

This prevents study fatigue and allows you to study for longer. Try setting an alarm for 50 minutes then resting for 10 before starting back on your next hour of study.

Finally, exercising after study can help consolidate your learning. This can be as simple as a couple of star jumps, pushups or situps or can be a full exercise program. It also helps set the end of your study period and prepares you for the next part of your day.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading through this short report on the secrets to finding the time to pass the FRACGP exams. I look forward to helping you even further with your preparation and study for your exams.

Good luck and we wish you every success in passing your FRACGP exams!

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