By: Megan Sumeracki cover image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay Note: this blog post is a tad longer than usual. I’m hoping the headers will help you navigate to the sections that will be most useful to you: Spaced Practice, Working Memory and Resource Depletion, and Chen et al Experiments (1). Even among the top effective, evidence-based study strategies that we write about, spaced practice is one of the best. Spaced practice is all about when you engage in practice. It is better to spread practice out over time, rather than massing (cramming). This is true whether you are reviewing course material (e.g., repeated reading), or better yet practicing retrieval (i.e., bringing information to mind, like when you take a practice test). One reason spaced practice is among the very top learning strategies is that it is efficient. Spaced practice does not really involve more time than cramming. (Technically, spaced practice involves a bit of advanced planning, and marking time in one’s calendar takes a bit of time, but this is minimal. You also then don’t have to spend time worrying about procrastination and can just relax when not studying, so there is a tradeoff here.) For example, imagine you are a student. It is the Fall semester, and you have a final exam coming up in 4 weeks. (Given the timing of this blog post, this scenario might be closer to reality than an imagination activity!) This student could wait until the day or two before the exam and then cram. They might spend 12 hours in the library studying those two days before – 6 hours each day, or even worse, 12 hours the day and late into the night before. Or, they could start studying now, studying for say, an hour three days per week, or 30 minutes each week day and one weekend day (six days per week) until the exam. In both cases, 12 total hours are spent studying. However, when the time is spaced out, the student learns more, and what they learn is more durable in the long run. Spacing means our fictitious student will likely do better on their final exam in 4 weeks. And, possibly more importantly, in the Spring when they are in the next class, building upon the knowledge they were supposed to learn this Fall, the student will be in much better shape. Doing well on an exam is only part of what students ought to want. Long-term retention, and the ability to use the information in the future, is extremely important. Spaced practice will help with this.