

Revision & Exam Skills

Exams are a fact of life. Some students feel intimidated by the whole exam process. This leaflet provides some hints on making your revision and exam period a less stressful time.

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Why are exams necessary?

Exams give you the chance to make sense of your learning and to apply your knowledge under time-limited conditions. In a sense, this is the kind of skill you need in a workplace; rather like “thinking on your feet”.

Revising

The best advice is to make a habit of reading through your class notes at the end of each week. This helps to consolidate the concepts in your mind and helps you identify areas where you might need more information.

Revision tips from students

- Create a revision timetable – include work slots and breaks.
- Add the exam dates to the timetable – note when and where and how long they are. Add a code to show what equipment you can take in.
- Schedule one weekend day which is completely free from work.
- Keep bullet points on crib cards for reading during “dead times” e.g. on the bus.
- If you like to “talk” your revision record your bullet points onto your iPod, mobile phone or other device.
- Eat and sleep properly – don’t start a diet or work through the night. Cut down on your evening/ weekend job.

Revision tips from teachers

- Pick out the key topics and ask yourself questions to make sense of your subject e.g.
*what is the cause and effect?
*How can I justify this conclusion?
*How do these areas relate to each other?
- If necessary brush up on your **reading** and **note taking** skills. For every hour you work take ten minutes off. Don’t work longer than 3 hours at a time. Do something completely different e.g. play sport, watch TV, listen to music.
- Don’t go straight to bed after revision – relax first.
- From time to time revise with friends – discuss topics.
- Practice writing answers under timed conditions – but don’t gamble on a particular question coming up in the exam.

Exam skills: before

The key is to find out as much about the exam beforehand. Obviously knowing the questions would be nice but in the absence of these you can help yourself by checking:

- 1) How long is the exam?
- 2) How many questions do you have to answer?
Use answers to 1) and 2) to work out your exam plan (see below).
- 3) Are some questions compulsory?
- 4) What types of questions are there – multiple choice/ essays etc?
- 5) Common exam question wording – the **What does the Question Mean?** sheet could help you here.
- 6) What makes a good essay? For these and other tips look at the **Essay Writing** advice sheet.

Exam skills: during

Some students find it useful to keep an exam plan. For example:

- 1) Read the whole exam paper through from start to finish.
- 2) Decide which questions you are going to answer and in what order. Underline the key words in the question and be clear about what the question is asking.
- 3) You might feel better about starting with the question you feel most confident with.
- 4) Brainstorm what you know and plan how you will answer the question. Take care to sequence your ideas logically.
- 5) Write your answer but remember not to write everything you know – always keep in mind what the question is asking.
- 6) If you like to write your answers “in rough” first, make sure you have allowed yourself enough time to copy them into your answer book.
- 7) Allow yourself time to read through each of your answers as you write them and again at the end of the exam.

Exam skills: after

Avoid a prolonged post-mortem outside the exam hall. Instead take some time to be alone and think about how you prepared for the exam and what you might do differently for the next exam. Ask yourself questions e.g.:

- 1) Did you revise the key topics in a structured way so that they were easy to recall?
- 2) Did you run out of time?
- 3) Did you fulfil all of the exam’s requirements?