



## Careers, Counselling & Pathways Service

### PREPARING FOR EXAMS

#### PREPARATION

- Long term preparation - work steadily throughout the year - revision as well as set homework
- Short term preparation - prepare well in the last few weeks
- Exam day - Use correct exam technique.

Your preparation will be better if you keep physically fit by:

- Regular meals
- Regular adequate sleep
- Regular exercise.

#### LONG TERM PREPARATION

Your long-term preparation for the final exam should start early in your course. All through your course you should try to take good notes (see handout on note taking) and make short summaries of each topic. These summaries will be the basis for your short-term preparation, although it is wise to continually revise throughout the year.

Keep up to date with set homework and assignments so these don't interfere with study for exams.

Keep a record of information that needs to be learned by heart such as formulae, equations, definitions and so on. A small notebook for each subject is useful. Test yourself continually on these - don't try to learn them at the last minute.

#### SHORT TERM PREPARATION

If you have prepared and revised well during the year your short-term preparation will be much easier. It should consist of constantly revising important points, not learning new material.

By this time you should know what form the exam will take - essay, multiple choice, short paragraph answers, one word or one-line answers or a combination of any of these. If you don't know ask your teachers. You should also know approximately how many questions to expect and if you have a choice of what you answer, how many questions you must answer.

**Using old exam papers:** Old exam papers give a good indication as to the format of the exam. Your short-term preparation should include practising old exam papers under exam conditions.

Studying old exam papers will also give you an idea of which questions are asked most frequently. It makes good sense to study these topics, as it is likely they will be asked again. Sometimes it is helpful to pretend you are the examiner and ask yourself what questions you would set.

**Using summaries:** To practice for essay type questions it is useful to memorise a summary then expand it into an essay (without looking at the summary) then condense your essay back into a summary. Check this against your original summary to see if you have forgotten any important points. This is much better than memorising an essay because you can change your essay to suit the question asked.

### Memory Aids (also see “Effective Study Techniques” handout)

- Try to remember a forgotten fact by association - when or where you first heard it or read it, or some closely related facts.
- Use memory aids such as mnemonics whenever possible. (These are explained in the “Effective Study Techniques” handout)
- Earlier we mentioned using a notebook for formulas etc. Cover one side of the formulae with a piece of paper and try to write the part of the equation you have covered. Remember to test the first side of the equation as well. Flash cards can also be used. These are especially good for formulae and learning languages. Put the question on the front and the answer on the back.
- Diagrams can be helpful e.g. a time chart for historical events.
- Often it helps to explain verbally to a friend the main points of various concepts within your course. By acting as the teacher and not relying on written material you get the concept clearer in your mind.
- Don't forget to review any practical experience, excursions or work done outside the class if these are going to be included in exams. (You should have already included any important points from these in your summary of each topic).

### EXAM DAY

Don't study too late on the night before your exam. Decide that you have done enough and stop. Try to get a good night's sleep. Some students find it helpful to set two alarms so they will not worry about sleeping in.

Accept that it is normal to feel a little nervous before any serious test. In fact this can be a good thing because it will enable you to write quickly and concentrate well. ***If you are overly anxious, see a student counsellor as early as possible before the exam for some help with reducing this anxiety.***

Get up in plenty of time and do things you need to do steadily and without getting flustered. Do not try to learn anything new - perhaps just read over a couple of summaries. Leave in plenty of time to get to the exam (you should have double checked the time and place previously).

### IN THE EXAM

1. Read the exam paper when you are allowed to. Scan through the paper first to get the general idea then read it carefully in detail.
2. If you don't have to answer all the questions, underline the number of questions required and mark any questions you know you will answer.
3. Roughly allocate the amount of time each question or section should be given, making sure questions worth more marks are given more time. Remember that examiners are looking for evidence of what you know so include any information that could be relevant in your answers.
4. Use a blank space or spare paper to jot down any memory aids or essay plans you have memorised as soon as possible, while your mind is still clear. Then when you are answering questions you can refer back to these as prompts.
5. Answer first the question you can handle most confidently. While you are doing this your initial jitters will pass.
6. Write quickly but legibly. Lay out answers neatly and label them clearly so it is clear which question you are answering.
7. Ideas about one question may flash into your mind while you are working on another. Jot the point down and continue working.
8. If you have a blocked thought or a fact you cannot remember, leave a space and go on working. The chances are you will remember it later in the exam.
9. Always use all the time allotted. Re-read essays and check calculations if you have time. If you still have time, improve concluding paragraphs, or rework diagrams or sketches.

## MATHEMATICAL EXAMS

Show all the workings of a mathematical problem because you will receive some marks for method even if you make mistakes in calculations and/or give the wrong answer.

Check mathematical calculations using basic, quick methods e.g. round off the figure and roughly work out the answer to see if it approximates the answer you have given. Make sure you include units (such as kgs, \$, etc) in your answer where needed.

## MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAMS

If there is no penalty for guessing, never omit a question and guess intelligently by eliminating obviously incorrect answers.

## ESSAY EXAMS

Plan your answers before you start any essays. It really is worthwhile spending about 5 minutes per essay to do this.

- Jot down the main ideas and important details, then everything else you can think of. Make use of mind maps and memory aids like mnemonics that you have memorised.
- Form them into a skeleton outline giving a logical sequence of paragraphs
- Write the essay (refer to the handout on essay writing for correct essay form).

If possible, start each essay on a new page. This allows you to add information and/or make changes, as well as making it clearer for the marker.

Read each question carefully again before you start to answer. Underline key words and phrases. Remember every question has a definite point – make sure you tailor your general essay plan to answer the specific question asked. Make it clear in the introduction and conclusion that you understand and are answering the question asked.

Never omit a whole question. If you feel unsure, jot down points for a plan and write as much as you can in a paragraph about each point. Often you will surprise yourself by remembering more from discussion and revision than you imagined.

If you don't have time to complete your answer in the time you have left, quickly set down the remaining points (in order, if possible) that you wanted to discuss. It is second best to finishing but better than leaving an essay unfinished.

Remember, whatever the exam, never leave before time is up, even if you think you can't possibly think of another answer. Stay in the room and keep trying to think of more answers and improve those you already have.

## AFTER THE EXAM

If the exam is a trial or class test, not a final exam, use it to improve your knowledge for the final exam. Find out what you don't know so you can learn it for the final exam. Compare your answers to other students who get good marks.

If possible, keep a record of questions and record the correct answers to questions you get wrong so you have the right answers when revising. ***Discuss any questions/answers you do not understand with your teacher.***