

In the exam

First things

- Orientate yourself.
- Find a positive, calm, focused state of mind
- Check that you have been given the right exam paper. (Mistakes have happened!)
- Read the instructions slowly, at least twice.
- Fill out personal details exactly as required.
- Read the whole paper. Always check both sides, even if you think one side is blank.
- Divide your time equally among questions that carry the same marks. Jot down the times you will begin each question.

Selecting exam questions

- Read each question through at least twice.
- Work out what is expected, in general, for each question. Which part of the course does it refer to? Towards which issues is the question directing you?
- If a question sounds like one you done before, check the wording very carefully before you select it. A slight difference in wording might require a very different answer.
- Tick all questions you could attempt. Tick twice the ones you could answer best. Don't rush this – it's vital that you choose the questions that will do you justice.
- For the questions you select, highlight key words in the title. Notice how many parts there are to the question. Read questions through phrase by phrase to make sure you not misread or misinterpreted them. At this stage you may realize that a question is not what thought, and may need to select a different one.
- At any time, jot down ideas you have about any of your selected questions on a separate sheet. Note the relevant question number beside each idea.

Writing exam essays

Follow a similar procedure to that used when writing any othe essay. Use structure, organization, evidence and a clear line of reasoning – without these, you will get very few marks for content.

Exam essays can be easier to write because :

- you need less evidence and fewer examples than for coursework
- you can write less about each point
- you can miss out some background detail
- you don't need to give a bibliography or supply detailed references
- minor grammatical and spelling errors, and rushed handwriting (provided it's readable), are generally less important.

'What if I go blank?'

- Don't try too hard to remember. Leave a space – it may come back later.
- You may be too tense - use a relaxation exercise you have used before
- Use a 'getting started' trick
- Keep writing. On spare paper, jot down any words that have anything to do with the question. These should eventually start to prompt your memory into action.
- Ask yourself questions, starting with the most basic – who? When? What? How? – until you become more focused

TOP 10 TIPS FOR TAKING EXAMS

You can work so hard to learn large quantities of information for an exam, but if you don't prepare yourself mentally and physically before that exam, all that hard work can sadly go to waste.

When it comes time to take your major exams, you have to relate to yourself as a top class athlete. You need to eat the right foods, have the right mental attitude and let your body rest when it needs to leading up to your exams. These simple things can make all the difference to your mental clarity and performance.

You may be thinking "But isn't this common sense?" but common sense isn't so common these days.

All the time I see university students drinking energy drinks like water, getting very little sleep and eating highly processed junk food whilst cramming for their exams. I have to admit, I've also done this myself and I don't recommend it. It's a recipe for disaster or at best, mediocre grades and a stressful, miserable time.

Here are my top 10 tips for taking exams so you don't burn yourself out:

1. Get a good nights sleep

Studies have found that if you stay awake for 21 hours straight, you have the mental capacity of someone who is legally drunk (in terms of your ability to concentrate, memorise and recall information, etc).

You can't afford to stay awake all night studying for an exam. Why? Because you won't be able to effectively recall information for the exam. It's as simple as that!

Make sure you get at least 8 hours of quality sleep a night.

2. Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, everyday

I make myself to go to the gym for 45 minutes to one hour each day during my exam period, but 30 minutes of walking, jogging, swimming, dancing, etc will be enough.

Often students stop exercising when it comes exam time because they begin to think that they don't have enough time ("I must spend every moment studying!"). Big mistake.

Exercise helps us study more effectively for various reasons. Firstly, it's a great way to relieve stress and anxiety. Secondly, it gets blood flowing to your brain (supplying oxygen, antioxidant and glucose) which can help you to think more clearly.

Think of daily exercise as being an investment in your final marks.

3. Drink plenty of water

Often when we can't think clearly, it's because our brains need to be hydrated. While studying and taking your exams, make sure you take regular sips of water.

4. Remember, your teachers want you to do well

Years ago, I started thinking that my teachers and lecturers were out to get me and would mark me down wherever they got the chance. As a result of this thinking, I became too scared to write anything in one of my first tests at law school! After receiving my terrible mark, my brother said this to me:

"Remember sis, your teachers want you to do well. They will try to give you marks wherever they can. It's in their interest to do so."

Don't worry about writing a perfect answer. If you're unsure, still write it down (even if it's in dot points). You may not get any marks for it, but they won't take marks off. Just remember, your teachers really are on your side (despite all evidence to the contrary).

5. Focus on what you do know rather than what you don't know

Chances are there will always be something that you could have studied more thoroughly or don't know so well come the day of the exam. By that stage, you can't do much about that, so is there any point worrying about it?

You are better off focusing on the fact that you now know so much more than you did before and you'll be able to answer many questions in the exam.

6. Eat a nutritious breakfast

Studies have found that students who skip breakfast experience a 20-40% reduction in cognition (i.e. concentration, memory and alertness). You want to eat a nutritious breakfast to feel fuller for longer, stabilise your mood and give you plenty of energy for the day.

Here are some healthy breakfast ideas:

- *Raw museli or porridge with nuts and chopped fruit*
- *Wholegrain toast with a variety of toppings (e.g. baked beans, tomatoes, avocado, etc) and a piece of fruit*
- *An omelette made with added vegetables (i.e. onion, spinach, tomato, and mushrooms)*
- *A smoothy*

For more healthy breakfast ideas, click [here](#).

7. Avoid drinking caffeine (e.g. energy drinks, coke and coffee)

Caffeine is a stimulant. It gives you a rush and makes you feel good in the short-term, but eventually it wears off and leaves you feeling cranky and wanting more.

It's also a diuretic, so it makes you urinate, which means you lose water, become thirsty and want to drink more soft drink.

Studies have found that when we have a cup of coffee or can of coke, we are actually inducing a state of stress. Caffeine drives the adrenal glands to produce stress hormones that in turn produce the fight or flight• response.

Why not consider gradually replacing your caffeinated beverages with good old, simple water? You can jazz it up with some infused fruit or use a Soda Stream to carbonate it.

8. Go straight home after the exam

How many times have you stayed back after an exam to talk to your friends about what you put for each questions? How many times have you felt anxious after doing so?

It can certainly be reassuring to know that you wrote the same answer as your friends. But if you find out that you wrote something different and you have another 4 or 5 exams to take, this may throw you off your game.

The exam is over. There's nothing much you can do about it, so move on and focus on studying for the next one.

9. Take a few deep breaths when you get stuck

If you come across a question that you're not sure how to answer in the exam, stop for a moment and take a few deep breathes (in for the count of 3 and out for the count of 3). If you are not sure how to answer it there and then, move on to another question.

The worst thing you can do is start to panic, because as they say "Stress makes you stupid". You won't be able to think clearly.

10. Dealing with writer's cramp/elbow

I'm sure many of us are familiar with writers cramp/elbow. This can be due to holding your pen too tight. Loosen your grip or get a pen that you won't have to press down so hard on the paper.

The reality is, even with a good pen, your elbow will start to hurt at some point if you're taking a 3 hour exam. When it does hurt, have a rest for a few moments (yes, you have time to do this!) and stretch it out on your desk.

Doing well in exams

Common pitfalls in examinations ..

1 Doing silly things

Make

Silly things can fail exam candidates or right the examiner's goodwill. paper. Be the answer

time

2 Mystifying the exam

The examiner won't pore over your get script for hours, nor see through your answer to what you don't know. There is no 'magical ingredient' you have to the deliver. that

your

is

tutors

through

external

bad

3 Using exam time poorly and answering too few questions spent

... and how to avoid them

Well before the exam, find out what is required.

sure you turn up at the right exam center on the

day. Check that you have been the right exam sure to write your name or exam number on

paper. Answer the right number of questions. Put

aside to check such details carefully.

Examiners have a large pile of scripts. They want to

through these as quickly as they can, with just a few minutes for each. They may check your introduction and conclusion for the gist of your argument, skim

answer to evaluate your line of reasoning, check

you are using material from the course to support

answers, and evaluate roughly what grade the work

worth. They are unlikely to mark it as closely as

mark coursework. Often a second marker goes

the same process: if she or he disagrees, the

examiner's opinion will be asked. Only excessively

grammar, spelling errors or handwriting are likely to stand out.

Give equal time to question that carry equal marks -

more time to any that carry extra marks. The law of diminishing returns applies to the amount of time

on any one question: if you spend twice as long on

one

question, you are very unlikely to get twice as many marks. You are more likely to pass if you give reasonable answers to the set number of questions than if you spend all your time writing some brilliant essays but miss out one question completely.

If you run out of the time you have allocated to one answer, leave a space – there may be time to come back to it at the end.

- 4 **Writing everything you know -
know about a topic**
listing

are

question,

reasoning,

The examiner is not interested in how much you indeed, you may get no marks at all for simply a lot of information. Just as for coursework, marks are given for showing you can make sense of the relate it to course issues, develop a line of evaluate opposing viewpoints, and offer supporting evidence.

- 5 **Abandoning structure
they
and the usual essay
writing techniques
correctly**

which

Because of the speed at which exam markers work, appreciate answers with clear, well-organized structures, good instructions and conclusions, numbered questions, and clearly labeled scripts are easy to read. You lose goodwill if your script is messy, illegible or confusing to read.

Exam strategy

Do I ...	Yes	No	Things to do, or to watch out for
read the whole exam paper carefully?			
follow all instructions?			
answer the correct number of question in full?			
plan time well, so that I can check through my answers?			
know exactly how long I have for each question?			
share out time according to the marks available?			
use all of the available time?			
read each question at least twice?			
spend time working out what all the questions mean?			
ask myself what the examiner is looking for?			
spend enough time considering the best questions for me?			
feel confident about what I am expected to do?			
find questions that are similar to ones I have practiced?			
find I have revised enough topics?			
know what a 'good' answer looks like?			
know which writing style is appropriate?			
know the correct format or layout?			
plan my answers (on paper or in my head)?			
develop a clear argument (where appropriate)?			
use examples from the course materials?			
keep strictly to answering the question set?			
avoid irrelevant detail and going off at tangents?			
get to the point quickly?			
avoid flowery language and vague introductions?			
include an introduction and a conclusion?			
Keep focused on the exam during the exam?			
check my answers for mistakes?			
check my answers to see if they make sense?			

If you answered 'yes' to most of these questions, then your chance of exam success is high.

If not, look again through the relevant sections of this Handbook and work out what you need to practice. If you are still uncertain about any aspects, consult with your tutor.

Dealing with stress

A mild degree of stress can be helpful, providing a challenge with stimulation, excitement, and focus. Some people deliberately search out stress to make life more exciting.

Studying towards deadlines and exams involves different amounts of stress for each student. Added life pressures, such as shortage of money, difficult relationships, bereavement, or changes in your work, family or housing situation, can all add to your stress level. Excess stress can severely affect physical and emotional health, concentration and memory.

If you suffer from excess stress, you need to take steps to reduce it. The signs can be extremely varied.

Spot the signs

Do you ...

- Lie awake worrying?
- Feel guilty when you weren't working?
- Get frustrated easily?
- Get a dry mouth, have pounding or a 'butterfly' feeling in the heart, sweaty hands, nausea, or twitching muscles?
- Grit or grind your teeth?
- Flare up easily at other people
- Regularly get in a hurry, or go on binges?
- Smoke or drink 'to unwind'?
- Drop or break things frequently?
- Notice signs of increased irritability, tearfulness or moodiness?

Know your own triggers

When do you start getting worked up?

- When things are not going your way?
- When work mounts up?
- When you are trying to please too many people apart from yourself?
- When other people seem to be doing things badly, or better than you?
- When you set yourself unrealistic goals?
- In traffic jams, or using public transport?
- Other triggers?

Reflection: Stressful situations

In your journal, list the times when you get most stressed – or what makes you feel tense. Describe what happens. What do you do to handle the situation? What else could you do?