

## Study Skills: Preparing for Exams

### 1 Organisation

If you organise your work throughout the course with exams in mind, you can later access this work in an efficient manner.

#### 1.2 Ways of organising:

a) Get used to noting (e.g. in top left-hand corner of every page of notes you take) the date, subject, area etc - anything that will help you file at a later date.

EG: 18 10 98 / Study skills / Exam Technique

You may find it useful to start a new sheet every time you take a new set of notes.

Of course, if you have reviewed your notes and created either mind maps or good clear linear notes it will help with both the organisation of your revision and the learning process itself.

b) Use of loose-leaf files

c) Use of divisions within the file - colour coding

d) Use of Card index: EG, Essay Plans reduced to key words & phrases.

e) Use of section headings & sub-headings (Create a contents page for each of your files with chapters, sub headings etc, and perhaps a contents page for each section within a file.)

f) Use of mind maps to show the main areas of study within a section, and perhaps the use of mind maps to expand on these areas in more depth.

Organising your work will not only make revision more efficient, it will also help you in the understanding of your subject: Courses & Textbooks are usually (Hopefully!) organised in some way that makes sense within the conceptual framework of the subject you are studying.

### 2 Revision

2.1 We have already emphasised that active learning involves the reviewing and organising of your material: the more work you do throughout the year (i.e. NOW!) on working with your material the more you will understand and remember later - which can only improve your self-confidence.

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2.2 Take advantage of end of term breaks to make sure that you understand what you have been learning if you don't get round to it then, when will you?

2.3 Get used to writing essays in exam conditions: in 45 minutes (or whatever time length is appropriate) rewrite an essay that you have had marked, without using notes. Evaluate your performance: Was your timing good; did you use a plan; does your essay follow a logical course; does your conclusion follow from what you have said previously?

If you can spot your weaknesses then perhaps you can do some work to help overcome them.

2.4 Start Revision in good time: at least a couple of months before the exam. Many people find that it is useful to construct a revision timetable so that they can systematically plan their revision.

Be honest with yourself -: break the revision into manageable portions; be as specific as you need when you plan your timetable.

### 3 The Exam

3.1 Make sure you have all the necessary details you need to enter the exam: The time, date & place, identity number etc - check the details with the examinations officer: they are usually more clued up than tutors on things like exam fees, last date of entry etc.

3.2 Make sure you have seen past papers or sample papers so that you become familiar with any conventions associated with your subject / exam board.

Do you have to start each question on a new page; Do you need to include the question number at the top of each page; Are you allowed any reading time; are some sections of the paper compulsory/discretionary?

3.3 As far as I know anyone can contact an exam board and ask for past/sample papers and examiner's reports - although you may have to pay. Most colleges will have copies of past papers in their libraries.

3.4 In the period leading up to the exam make sure you eat and sleep well: the better your condition is physically the more chance you have of doing well intellectually.

On the day of the exam make sure you are physically comfortable: you may have to spend 3 hours sitting and writing. Have enough to eat and drink so you don't run out of energy.  
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3.5 In the exam read the paper carefully. Allot a similar amount of time to questions of equal marks. If a question is split into smaller questions then allot your time in relation to the marks awarded for each section: You may find it helpful to choose all the questions you are going to answer and plan them all before you start to write the first one. If you are expected to write an essay in, say, 45 minutes then allow 10 minutes to plan an answer.

Next week: More on Essays & Exams

- a) Common mistakes & things to avoid.
- b) More on interpreting Questions.