

Exam Techniques and Revision Tips

Exams are the most stressful times of a student's school year, when excessive anxiety or simply bad planning can ruin a student's performance. Here we try to give some practical recommendations on approaching (1) study skills & revision up to the period immediately before exams and (2) the actual exams.

What are exams for?

Exams test how you interpret facts and ideas by applying them to the questions in the exam paper, thereby determining how well you have learned the subject you have been taught. Therefore, you need to use good study skills including note taking, time management, organisation, memory and concentration skills.

Study Skills and Revision

For most of these exams you will be studying over a 2 year period, but it is vital you establish a study plan starting as you mean to go on as it will make study and revision far easier and more effective. Revision is not something you leave till one day before the exams, because you will constantly be learning new subjects each week and disciplined revision makes facts stay in your memory far longer.

You will be given your study programme by your school or college. Teachers may give you tips on memorising material and revision techniques but build your own discipline as well. You will start intense revision at say Easter in preparation for summer exams. However, these days many schools test their pupils with a mock exam every 2 weeks to see how much you are absorbing.

1. Organise your revision time to focus on the more difficult areas rather than those you know inside out.
2. Make flash cards with bitesize notes. Stick post it notes over your study room walls or even the loo!
3. Watch videos on youtube which has revision suggestions for almost anything you could want.
4. Avoid distractions – from the internet, from your phone and your family / roommates - BUT also pace yourself – take a short break every 60 minutes
5. Practice constantly on previous exam questions. Look at marking schemes to understand what the examiners are looking for. Look at subjects covered each year because you may be able to second guess the type of questions which will come up
6. Be realistic. Some courses give lots of extra recommended reading, but remember you only need to know what is on the specification in the "candidates should know".
7. Make use of mnemonics – there are hundreds of these, usually amusing – designed to regurgitate streams of word sequences from your memory – here are some
 - Order of planets from the Sun ([Mercury](#), [Venus](#), [Earth](#), [Mars](#), [Jupiter](#), [Saturn](#), [Uranus](#), [Neptune](#))

Mean Very Evil Men Just Shortened Up Nature

- For the [EIA electronic colour code](#), **Black(0)**, **Brown(1)**, **Red(2)**, **Orange(3)**, **Yellow(4)**, **Green(5)**, **Blue(6)**, **Violet(7)**, **Gray(8)**, **White(9)**, **Gold(5%)**, **Silver(10%)**, **None(20%)**

Big brown rabbits often yield great big vocal groans when gingerly slapped

- **Wives of Henry VIII names:** Aragon, Boleyn, Seymour, Cleves, Howard, Parr

All Boys Should Come Home Please

- Sequence of colours in a rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet):

"Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain"

The exam, itself

The night before, get enough sleep and eat well – do not cram into the night! Have a good breakfast, preferably brain foods like eggs or fish, which release energy. Avoid coffee or energy drinks like Red Bull whose effect fades after an hour or two.

Check you have the equipment you need – pens, pencil, calculator, water, student ID etc

Arrive early and avoid the stress of running late. Follow the old saying – “if you are not early you are late” However, don’t mingle with other students who are negative and stress you out. Try to mix with positive people who make you feel calm and confident. If you do feel panicky, try taking a few deep breaths.

The first task is to carefully read over the whole exam paper taking 5 to 10 minutes before you write anything. Take a note of the marking scheme to establish how many marks are allocated to each question so that you can calculate how much time to allocate per question. Work out which questions you intend to answer in which order. A good plan always allows for you to answer the easiest questions first and you do not have to follow their order in the exam paper. This will instil confidence in you and help to stop the panic when you progress to the harder questions.

Plan your time accordingly and don’t try to write down everything you know about one particular topic. A long answer does not get you more marks and it might run you out of time to answer all the questions.

Read each question thoroughly using the BUG method:

Box – box the command word – state, describe, explain or suggest, which reveals the type of answer the examiner wants.

Underline highlight key words which jog your memory

Go – go over the question again to analyse the question to determine what the examiner is asking

Don't get stuck with writer's block, move on to the next question. The answer may come back to you later in the exam.

If you are running short of time, try to give a part answer to each of the remaining questions. You tend to score more marks in the first half of a question. Better to get scores for two halves of the last two questions, than only complete one of two. You can abbreviate answers by writing bullet point answers than whole sentences.

Write your workings or explanations in the margins. Even if you get an answer wrong you can sometimes get points if the examiner can see you were adopting the right approach in your workings.

Never leave an exam early!! If you have spare time at the end, go back over your answers and check to see you have not made errors or if they can be improved. There is a mnemonic – ACUTE – which can help you as follows

A for assumptions – did you explain all of yours?

C for calculations – have you checked them? Check again.

U for units – if quantities have measurements (like kilometres or grams) have you stated and recorded them correctly? Do your formulae make sense?

T for truth - have you answered all parts of each question?

E for explain – have you explained what you are doing at all stages? You can get marks even when your answer is incorrect