

## Exam techniques: Four steps to a successful exam

### 1 Read the instructions carefully, at least twice

- Read the instructions carefully, highlighting key actions, if necessary rewrite the instructions in your own words to ensure that you understand them
- Read through all the questions first so you can choose the best questions for you to answer
- Tick any possible choices, then go back to these choices and read them again and make your final selection

### 2 Understand/analyse the question

To ensure that you understand what the question is asking you to do:

- read the question carefully two or three times
  - Analyse each question, focusing on identifying and highlighting any keywords
- The study skills advice sheet “What does the question mean?” contains a list of common key words and their suggested meanings***
- Allocate your time according to the time available and in proportion to the marks awarded to each question

***If the exam is for 3 hours and you have to answer 3 questions then you need to allocate 1 hour per question. Of this hour allow about 10 minutes for planning your answer, reading your finished answer and making corrections to spelling and punctuation. This leaves 50 minutes for writing your answer.***

***If you have an exam where you have to answer 4 questions in 2 hours but where one question is awarded 50% of the total marks make sure you allocate 1 hour to answering that question and leave yourself 1 hour for answering the remaining 3 questions.***

### 3 Plan your answers

- Because time is so precious, it is tempting to ignore the importance of planning your answers, however, remember that a few minutes spent planning your answer is time well spent
- Remember you can choose to answer the questions in any order that you wish, so start with the easiest question first. This will boost your confidence and get your thoughts flowing
- Brainstorm the question - what do you know that's relevant
- Note your ideas at an early stage to help you remember your key points
- Make a plan of your answer using the method that you have practised in your revision, put your points/information into an order that is logical and coherent
- Write your answer, adhering strictly to the time you have allocated



- Leave a few minutes at the end of each question to check your work through for any obvious errors

#### 4 Stick to your time-plan

- Make a note of the time you have allocated to each question and stick to it, even if you have to finish mid-answer, you may have time at the end to go back and finish an incomplete answer
- Remember you must make an attempt to answer all of the questions required. If you write nothing for one answer, you will get zero marks for that question. Four incomplete answers are better than three complete answers and one missing
- If you do run out of time, lecturers will often award some marks to an essay plan so if the worst happens, write a coherent plan of the essay you would have written, if you'd had time

#### Other types of exams: multiple choice and short answers

Start by carefully reading the instructions and by checking the structure of the paper. Most multiple choice papers require you to answer all questions, so go through the paper answering the questions that you are sure of. This will boost your confidence and get your brain working, which will help when you go back to take another look at the remaining questions. Remember to underline or highlight keywords in questions to help you to focus on the exact meaning, be sure to read all of the alternative answers before making your final choice.

***Be aware that multiple choice questions often use similar words in the possible answers – read each answer carefully rather than quickly identifying a familiar word and selecting that as your answer.***

#### Finally, exam nerves

It is normal to feel nervous both before and during an exam, however, you mustn't let nerves get on top of you. The best way to cope with exam nerves is to be very organised, you will feel more in control of the whole process and should therefore cope better.

If you use the techniques of regular review during your revision programme, practice on past papers, plus find out as much information about your exams as possible before you enter the exam hall, you should feel confident that you are making progress, are in control and that your revision is working, which should help to allay your fears.

It could also be helpful to talk to somebody about your worries, this could be with a friend, your tutor or perhaps someone from the university's counselling service.



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