

STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

No 5

Exam success: a practical guide

Most people do well in exams by being well-prepared. The best preparation is that which you do over the course of the whole semester, not just at the last minute. You can also learn some exam techniques which will improve your chances of success.

Be prepared

Having a confident outlook will help you to perform well in an exam. It is easier to feel confident when you are well-prepared with a sound knowledge of your subject. Make sure you have a copy of the exam timetable and you know where your exam locations are. You will also feel more at ease if you arrive early for the exam having maintained healthy eating, sleeping and study patterns.

Avoid cramming all the information in at the last minute. Make a detailed revision plan for each unit. Revise the course material by methodically summarising and applying what you know to past exam papers and or tasks used in the unit.



Techniques for learning and remembering

Before exams

- **Summary writing** – Summarise unit materials such as readings, lecture notes and extracts from your texts as a basis for revision. Develop summaries that include **key words**, short overviews of theories, key understandings, and possible applications.
- Write separate summaries for key principles, issues or formulas.
- **Visualise the information** - Visualisation helps you to recall information in the exam. It is easier to recall pictures or diagrams than words. Draw pictures or diagrams of the information to be revised where possible.
- **Keep the text of your summaries short** - Key words and outcomes (results) are all that is necessary. Key words will trigger further detailed information when needed.
- **Examine past exam papers** – Obtain copies of past exam papers so you can prepare yourself mentally for the sorts of questions you can expect in the exam. Past exam papers can be obtained from the Curtin Library website by searching the catalogue.
- **Actively learn** revised information by constantly reviewing it and applying it to particular **situations**, such as case studies, reports or past exam questions.
- **Case studies** - Practise answering case study questions so that you are confident with understanding what you are being asked to do. Be familiar with the structure, limitations, and formal language that goes with case study questions.
- **Team up with other students** – find study buddies preparing for the same subjects so you can share **ideas** and focus your own revision in the lead-up to the exam.



The day before the exam

Revise by using your summaries. Keep focussed on understanding the meaning and application of knowledge rather than just memorisation of facts. Try to maintain your usual eating and sleeping patterns so that you are not overly tired on the day.

On the day

- Bring your photo ID student card – NO ID CARD, NO EXAM.
- Recheck the time and place of the exam and arrive early.
- Try to be confident and positive – Having a positive approach can enhance your performance.
- Take time to relax – Avoid getting fired up with coffee or sweet drinks. It is better to drink water.
- Decide whether or not to engage in pre or post exam conversation with others.

In the exam

- **Use reading time strategically**
Work out which questions you will answer and in what order and how much time you will dedicate to each.
- **Read the entire exam paper thoroughly and pay attention to instructions**
Before starting to write, be clear about all instructions. What are you being asked to do? Do you need to: Discuss? Analyse? Summarise? Explain? Describe? Evaluate? Comment on? Compare? Follow instructions and answer the question that is asked! Begin with a plan, no matter how rough or simple.

Write notes on a page of your answer booklet which you label as “not for marking”, to remind yourself of key words, theories, authors, and applications.

- **Answer the questions you know best first**
Carefully read the paper to make sure you answer first the questions you find easiest and divide your time between the questions that are left.
- **Make sure your writing is legible –**
Write as fast as you can but ensure your work is readable. Write what you mean. Keep sentences short, sharp and clear.
- **Keep an eye on the clock –**
Make sure you write an answer for each question. Plan to leave a few minutes before finish time to proofread and edit your work. If time is running out, and you have not completed the paper, then quickly write bullet points or list key information that you would have included in your answers.

Be prepared – be confident. This will help you to succeed.

Find out more at the CBS Academic Communication Development website:

<https://businesslaw.curtin.edu.au/study/student-experience/academic-communication-development/>

You might also be interested in *Handy Handout 11. Time management*.

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