Exams: Terrific Techniques

Exams?!

- Effective study tips -
  - Before the exam
  - During the exam
  - After the exam

- Managing Exam Anxiety
Before the Exam

The main cause of exam stress is the uncertainty about the exact questions. Your first job is to find out all you can about the format of the exam paper. Be clear about what you have to do so it will help you study effectively and plan your revision. Remember, exams cannot be prepared for at the last moment, so be organized.

**Find out about the exam – Know what you need to know.**
- Examination dates? Type of questions? - Essays, short answer, multiple-choice?
- Number of questions? Mark allocation/weightings?
- Is there a choice of questions? Do I have to answer them all?
- How much time is available for each section/question? How long does the exam go for?

**Find out about the administrative system related to exams**
- What arrangements are possible if you are ill on the day?
- What if you are ill for much of the period leading up to the exam but are well on the day?
- What if you become ill during the exam? Do you have any special needs?
- If you find out how the system works, you are in a much better position to cope with any crisis and eliminate stress. Usually you acquire the documentation and apply for a deferred examination.
Get organized, start your preparations early: The first day of semester is about right!

- Bear in mind that class prep, the classes themselves and class reviews are all part of exam preparation.
- In other words, the reading, thinking, writing, listening and speaking necessary for you to get the most out of your classes make up much of the work you need to do for the exams.

Fear of examinations?

- Sometimes fear is well founded in that the student has not done the necessary preparation.
- Often, however, the fear is more irrational in that students are well prepared. If this is you, spend more time using relaxation techniques.
Effective study tips to help you memorise:

- **Refresh your memory** - go through your notes the week or two before the exam. What you do in this revision period will depend largely on what sort of exam you have to do. Write down important words and phrases, making lists of the main points.

- **Active reading** – will help reinforce what you have read. Look up from your notes and try to remember the main points.

- **Reciting** – saying the words out loud helps you fix them in your mind.

- **Writing** – write down your own version of notes from memory (brief notes) and repeat the sequence as many times as you can.
Effective study tips to help you memorise:

Study techniques

- *Enhancing memory* – memory cue cards. On the front of each card, write a term you need to know and on the back write the definition or the points you want to remember. Use them to test yourself.
- *Mock exams* – find old exam papers available in the library or online and practice these. Look at the possible questions and your notes. Familiarise yourself with the topic. Select a question and from memory try to structure an answer to the question.
- *Create mock exams* – test subject knowledge early, time your answers, practice planning essay structure quickly, practice writing quickly, get into exam answering “voice”.
- *Test your handwriting* – Timed essays help you test how your handwriting stands up to sustained pressure. An unreadable exam script is doomed to fail. Check your handwriting by asking someone to read the last page of your timed essay. Get them to also check for clarity of your expression.
Before the Exam
Total Recall - Revising

Active processing

- Distill notes
- Repeat and write
- Read ideas out loud in a dramatic manner
- Map concepts, draw diagrams
- Re-organize ideas (think)
- Get an overview
- Limit the amount to learn
- Visualise, or draw an image
- Link concepts
- Test yourself repeatedly
- Explain ideas to someone
- Develop or use photographic memory
- Move while repeating the main points, walk, dance, kick a ball, then write them.
- Develop a mnemonic for the most important points

Active revision

Be determined to learn

- Quiet environment
- De-clutter your study space
- Deal with distracting thoughts
- Eat well – avoid sweets/coffee
- Exercise well- good for your brain to function at its best
Before the Exam
Effective Study

Study timetable – Planning is essential to maximise the time available.

- Draw up a realistic revision timetable for all your subjects including exam start and end dates.
- Plan your revision on a weekly timetable
- Include essential non-study
  - Work
  - Sporting commitments/exercise
- Number of study slots per week?
- Allocate slots needed
- Allow more time slots for difficult subjects
- What kind of learner are you?
  - Morning/afternoon/evening
  - Concentration span
- Allow time for relaxation – necessary for maintaining motivation and clarity of mind.
- Environment – have a clear study space - light and airy.
- Be selfish – give your study time the highest priority, it is OK to say ‘no’ to social commitments during the exam period
- Pace yourself, don’t burn yourself out!

What? Partying isn’t essential??
Before the Exam
Effective Study

- Use your course outline and the unit objectives to guide you
- List what you need to cover
- Tick off topics when completed
- Recognize when you are drifting
  - Stretch
  - Walk
  - Switch topic
  - Take a break
- The night before an exam
  - Revise key points
  - Get enough sleep and eat a good meal
  - Remind yourself that you have prepared well

Regularly test yourself
During the Exam

The first step is to get to the right place at the right time in the right frame of mind. Remember, the next few hours are important ones for you.

- Give yourself plenty of time to travel to the exam room.
- If you arrive early, use the time to exercise your body (and relax your mind) by taking a brisk walk around the block. This is better than hanging around the exam room with a gaggle of hyped-up students, busy inventing their level of nervous tension! 😊
- Have everything you need with you – student ID card, pens, pencils, other materials – texts, notes, handouts, paper, water, tissues etc.

- Check the physical conditions of the exam room.
  - Is your table unsteady? Is it too dark to read or write satisfactorily? Is it too sunny? Is the clock not visible from your seat?
  - Sit away from the walkways, if this can be helped.
  - Try to get the problems fixed before the exam begins and if you can, solve the problem yourself.
  - The supervisors are there to help you, so don’t be afraid to ask.

- Make maximum use of reading time (perusal time, usually about 10 mins)
  - You might be allowed to read the paper before you can start writing.
  - Read very carefully through the instructions at the top of the paper FIRST. Check what you must do.
  - How much time do you have? How many questions must you answer? How many sections are there? Are any questions compulsory?

- What you do next depends on whether you are faced with an essay exam or short answer exam. Look at the questions carefully.
- Read quickly through the paper and start planning your first answer. Be determined to get to work quickly and effectively.

- Manage your time and never start writing without an outline plan
  Plan responses – the outline plan is your map, use it, glance across at it as you write.
  Jot down tricky facts ASAP
  Do your favourite questions first
  Keep to your schedule - keep an eye on the time
  Answer the question - all parts of it
  Keep to the point - follow your plan
  Include key ideas and terminology
  Give evidence of further reading
  Consider both sides of a topic
  Give an evaluative response
  Use all the available time
After the Exam

Give yourself the chance to unwind and look back over your performance.

- You may have several more exams to prepare for, perhaps on the following day. Even so, you have just finished working under exceptionally high pressure, under exam conditions.

- Take an hour to do something completely different, whether it is going for a run, catching up with a friend or even watching a DVD.

- Before moving onto the next round of exam preparation, find a few minutes to look back at your performance in the last exam to see if it gives you any ideas for the next one. Use your experience from the last exam to give you a clearer idea of just how much material you can cover in the next exam.

- Example: If you had no time to do the final question, don’t kick yourself about the marks lost. Use the experience to reinforce the need for timing your answers. Perhaps the basic problem was that you hadn’t prepared any timed essays when you were preparing for the exam.
Exams are very stressful and can overwhelm a person. Focus on what needs to be done. Turn stress to your advantage so you build confidence and use stress to gain focus.

**Cognitive**

- Talk constructively to yourself. “This is achievable”, “It would be good to get through a few chapters”
- Confirm that you will try your best
- Remind yourself of difficulties you have overcome
- Remind yourself that each day you learn more
- Recognise that most students will pass.

**Emotional**

- Acknowledge that you feel stressed
- Contain anxiety with distraction
- Don’t wallow – plan
- Talk to friends
Managing Anxiety/Stress

**Behavioural**

- Keep to your timetable
- Reward your efforts
- Move on from failure, look carefully at what is the reality behind your stress. E.g. How many exams have you failed? How many marks do you need to pass the course?
- Eat well, sleep well, exercise

**Relax**

- Build in relaxation and enjoyment everyday.
- Deep breathing
- Raise feet
- Run it out - exercise
- Focus on parts of the body - try to catch your mind and body as it goes through its stress pattern. Intervene so that stress does not build.
Activity: Coping with Stress

Make up a mnemonic for ways to cope with stress. You can re-order the items.

Develop a mnemonic – for example, a sentence of words whose first letters stand for each of the most important points to cope with stress.

R – Run for 30mins in the afternoon
U – Understand key points through testing myself
N – Never wallow, plan
F – Focus on my body parts
A – Always eat healthy brain food
S – Sleep well
T – Talk to friends and family
Good Luck

It is not about luck...it is about one skill we all possess.

PERSISTANCE

References: