

How to pass exams

Find out about the exam

- ✓ How long is the exam?
- ✓ What is the pass mark and what marks are necessary for each grade (i.e. credit, distinction)
- ✓ How much does the exam mark count toward the overall mark?
- ✓ How many questions are on the paper?
- ✓ How many questions do I have to answer?
- ✓ Will there be any compulsory questions?
- ✓ How are the marks divided up between the questions?
- ✓ What form do the questions take (essay/ multiple choice/case study)?
- ✓ What information is provided with the exam (is it an open or closed exam)?
- ✓ Who is marking the exam?
- ✓ When and where is the exam being held?

Subject	Date & time	Length (hrs)	Total No. of Q's	Q's to answer	Compulsory (Y/N)	Type of Q	Info supplied	Focus	
English	4 Feb 2pm	3	8	5	1 (40%)	Essay 2 long 3 short	none		
Maths	9 Feb 10am	3	15	8	no	6 short 3 long	Formula sheet		

(Hamilton 1999:19)

Make sure you:

Review old exam papers (usually found in the library).
Listen for clues; lecturers are usually good at dropping subtle hints about their exam. Consider what your lecturer's pet interests in the subject are.

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Passing exams

Improve your chances of a higher grade by incorporating the following seven components:

Answer the question

One of the most common reasons why students do badly in exams (or assignments) is that they did not answer the question.

Make sure you read and re-read the question thoroughly before you start writing your answer. Pick out the main points, underline the key words to ensure that you are totally clear what the question is asking you.

Make sure that you address all parts of the question.

Demonstrate your understanding

Don't just regurgitate the facts, you need to demonstrate your deeper understanding behind knowledge of the facts. At best, writing an exam paper highlighting the facts will give you a pass, but to get a higher grade you need to show that deeper level.

Relevance

Relevance is connected to answering the question. You may be tempted to include information that you personally found interesting, or happened to study but found was not in the exam. Take care when doing this, if it is not relevant the examiner will be wondering whether you really understood the question. You will also be wasting valuable examination time that could be better spent on answering other questions.

Aim for quality rather than quantity.

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Clarity

Examiners do not expect you to write an essay to the standard that you would in a course-work assignment. With course-work assignments you have plenty of time to prepare. In exams you have less time to prepare and edit your work and examiners make allowances for that. However, it is still important to make your work as clear and concise as possible by:

- getting straight to the point (don't waffle)
- assume the reader knows nothing when writing your answer
- avoid using big fancy words – you won't impress anyone, opt for plain English.

Legibility and neatness

It helps if the examiner can read your work!

Your main focus should be on what you are writing, however ensure you clearly label, use headings, number pages, leave spaces – it all helps in the legibility stakes.

Outline the steps

This is particularly important when sitting a math's exam, showing your working out may provide points if you followed the correct sequence but failed to arrive at the correct answer.

