

Skills for Learning

Guide to Exam Preparation

What is Exam Preparation and Why is it Important?

Effective exam preparation can have a significant impact on exam results. Developing exam strategies, revision techniques, and time management skills can lessen exam anxiety and enable you to fully demonstrate your knowledge and abilities in an exam setting.

Exams test more than just knowledge; they allow you to show off your organisational skills, the strength of your study skills, and your ability to perform well under pressure and time constraints.

Which Skills are Required for Successful Exam Preparation?

Successful exam preparation is all about being organised, recognising your individual strengths and weaknesses, and setting mechanisms in place to compensate for them.

Top Tips for Exam Preparation:

1. **Scope the task ahead** so that you are aware of all the factors affecting your examination. Attend final lectures and take note of what your lecturer tells you about your assessment. Remember - your lecturers will be creating these exams, so don't be afraid to ask questions by email or in-person.
2. **Plan to succeed.** Work out how much time is left and set yourself a timetable. Be aware of your prime time for revision and use it to do tasks that require concentration. During your non-prime time (e.g. bus journeys/walking the dog), do more administrative tasks - test yourself, write out flashcards, record yourself and listen back. Timetable in everything - social plans, breaks, work commitments, so that you know exactly what time you have left.
3. **Be realistic** about what you can achieve in the time you have available. Accept that you will temporarily have less social and free time - it won't be forever.
4. **Take a break.** When revising, build in regular breaks every 20-50 minutes. Your brain will absorb much more information this way and your revision sessions will be more productive.
5. **Make your revision time count.** Commit to being uninterrupted for that time period, with no distractions. Concentrate on your planned revision activity and try not to procrastinate or be

side tracked. Set yourself a specific task for the session - be realistic about what is achievable and at the end of the session walk away and do something else.

6. **Use a variety of revision techniques** to keep yourself interested. Some techniques will fit better with some subject areas or exam types, or will be more effective for you personally.
7. **Practice active revision**, not passive. Active revision is about understanding and using the information, testing your knowledge and using it to construct something. Passive revision is memorizing or learning by rote without real understanding of the subject matter.
8. **Build in review time** on a daily/weekly/end of topic basis. This will enable you to reflect, see what else needs to be covered and amend your timetable and plans accordingly.
9. **Take care of yourself.** Eat well, sleep, and don't forget fresh air and exercise. You won't function well without fuel and sleep.
10. **Don't panic.** Easier said than done, but allowing time for relaxation and even just taking some deep breaths can help keep things in perspective.

On the Day of the Exam:

1. **Read the instructions** and listen to the invigilator's directions. Do you have to answer all the questions? Do they all have the same mark weighting?
2. **Set yourself a rough timetable.** Take a few minutes at the start to work out how long to spend on each question, and allow time for review at the end.
3. **Try to answer all the questions** to maximize your potential score.
4. **Be calm** and prepared.

Help and Advice

For further help and advice, please see the [Skills for Learning](#) website.

Further Resources

For more information on exam preparation, please see our [Skills for Learning](#) course on Canvas.

We have an array of print and electronic resources about exam preparation including:

Becker, L. (2018) *14 days to exam success*. London: Palgrave:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/13ndfb5/alma991003065039104901

Cottrell, S. (2024) *The study skills handbook*. (chapter 17 - devising your exam strategy; chapter 18 - memory). London: Bloomsbury:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/13ndfb5/alma991003182027104901

McMillan, K. and Weyers, J. (2021) *The study skills book* (part 5 - succeeding in exams). Upper Saddle River: Pearson:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/13ndfb5/alma991002959000304901

Northedge, A. (2021) *Ace your exam*. London: Macmillan:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/8bamsd/alma991003065039004901



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