Preparing for Exams

Caroline Thornton | English Language and Academic Skills Coordinator

June 2016
Factors Affecting Exam Performance

✓ Subject knowledge
✓ Exam history
✓ Exam preparation and practice
✓ Attitude and mindset
✓ Energy levels and health
Take Responsibility for your choices
Attitude and Mindset

Ask yourself:
- What grades do you want?
- What grades do you expect?
- What is a ‘good’ grade?
- What is a ‘bad’ grade?
- **How much time and effort are you willing to invest?**
Before the Exam
Find out about the exam

This includes knowing:

• WHAT subjects you have exams in
• WHEN your exams are (dates & times)
• WHERE your exams will take place
• HOW the exams are structured (essay, multiple choice, open book?)
Preparation

- Begin studying early
- Make a study plan & stick to it!
- Create a good study environment (with limited distractions)
- Prepare what you need before you start studying
- Prioritise the hardest subjects
Revision

✓ Refresh your knowledge:
  • Hunt and gather materials (lecture notes, assignments, readings and research, etc.)
  • Go through the course contents (units, topics, sub-topics, etc.)

✓ Reorganise and prepare information for aid of recall
  • Take notes of the key ideas and main points
  • Filter, reduce and refine them (in your own words)
  • Use headings and subheadings, bullet points and abbreviations
Revision

✓ Check your understanding
  • Fill in any gaps in knowledge and understanding
  • Active learning – DO something with the information rather than just read it
  • Remember: *Your answers should demonstrate your understanding/critical analysis of the topic (not just how much of the lectures your remember!)*

✓ Check past papers
  • Look up the questions from previous exams
  • Review the exercises, question and answers and sample essays on each topic
Organising your ideas

Support your main point with appropriate citation, examples and outcomes of previous studies where applicable.
Practice

- Practice writing an essay for sample questions (from tutorials/past papers)

- Read your answer or essay

- Ask other people to read and comment on your writing
Check

☐ Have you addressed the question?

☐ Have you included enough details to give an adequate explanation regarding the question?

☐ Have you supported your argument with examples and elaborations?

☐ Have you followed a logical flow in your writing?

☐ Have you considered the appropriate paragraph format and structure?

☐ Have you kept the balance when analysing or comparing sides of the argument?

☐ Have you proofread and self-edited your writing?
Effective Studying

- Take a 5-10 minute break every 30 minutes:
  - Get up and move around
  - Change your environment
  - Breathe!
  - Re-hydrate!
  - Have a snack
  - Get some fresh air
Study Buddies

Set some rules:

- Agree on a sensible place with limited distractions
- Find a suitable time and decide how long the session will last
- Decide in advance what subjects or topics to study together
- Include silent study, coaching and testing periods in the sessions

Do NOT let it turn in to a social event!
To Understand is to Know

The more you understand your material, the less memory cramming you’ll have to do – look for patterns and connections between topics.
The Exam

- Double check the exam start time AND location
- Be on time
  - Set an alarm
  - Get an early bus/train
- Come prepared!
  - Pens/pencils?
  - Student ID card?
  - Calculator (if required)
In the Exam

- Take a deep breath 😊 Don’t panic!
- Quickly read through the entire exam before starting (this will help you plan your time)
- Read ALL instructions carefully
- Watch/manage the time
  - Don’t spend too long on one question
  - Make sure you answer all the questions
  - If there are multiple choice questions AND an essay question – don’t spend all your time answering the MCQs!
Multiple Choice Questions
Multiple Choice Questions

- Read ALL questions carefully
- When using a separate answer sheet, keep checking you are answering a question in its properly numbered space
- Answer the ‘easy’ questions first. Go back and do the harder ones later. Try not to get stuck as this will waste time and make you feel stressed.
- Take special note of phrasing:
  - Negative phrases: e.g. Which option DOES NOT ...
  - Judgement phrases: e.g. Choose the option that BEST describes ...
  - Multiple answers: e.g. Choose MORE than one
- Consider all the options before choosing your answer (particularly important when you are asked to choose the ‘best’ or ‘most correct’ answer)
- Try to answer the question yourself before reading the options given
- Don’t assume you are being tricked!
- Be aware of grammatical inconsistencies between question and potential answers (question and answer should combine to make a grammatically correct sentence)
Essay questions
Essay questions

- Read the question carefully
- Identify the Clue Words
- Plan before you write! This will help make sure you answer the question and only include relevant information and arguments
  - Outline: What to include?
  - Map: Link your ideas
  - Structure: Put it all together
    - Introduction
    - Body:
      - Main idea/argument 1 (including examples/support)
      - Main idea/argument 2 (including examples/support)
      - Main idea/argument 3 (including examples/support)
    - Conclusion
- Watch the time
- Write as legibly as possible (make sure the examiner will be able to read your writing)
- Proofread!
Don’t forget

✓ Be clear and to the point
✓ Include adequate details, examples and support
✓ Be critical – don’t just include facts and information. You need to include your ideas and arguments as well!
✓ Mind the form and essay structure
✓ Keep a logical flow (a plan will help this!)
✓ Use a range of vocabulary and grammar structure
✓ Review and proofread
Good luck!

Top Education Institute

Caroline Thornton | English Language and Academic Skills Coordinator
June 2016