

'Let's get on with it'

Success in exams is not just a matter of knowing how to answer the questions but also of using efficient techniques. This guide describes some of these techniques.

Just before the exam

- 01 Be sure you know exactly when and where the exam is being held.
- 02 Get all your pens, pencils and their spares ready the day before.
- 03 Try to have plenty of sleep and relaxation the night before.
- 04 Arrive early at the exam hall so you are not waiting about, nor late and flustered.
- 05 Avoid discussions outside the examination room but use the time to "warm up" your brain by reading through any summaries of the course or other notes.

During the Exam

*Before Writing
your Answers*

- 01 You will have 10 minutes to read your exam paper before you are allowed to write so in this time check that you have the right paper.

- 02 Read the exam instructions carefully so you know:
 - how many questions to answer
 - whether some questions are compulsory
 - whether you have to choose some questions from different sections of the paper.
 - how marks are allocated for multiple choice or how many questions to answer.

- 03 Read all the questions carefully and select the required number from the choices given. At first you may think you cannot answer anything. **DON'T PANIC!** You are sure to be able to answer the questions if you have prepared well.

- 04 For your selected questions:
 - note choices e.g. *Answer 5 questions out of 8.* Answering all 8 will not gain you extra marks.
 - read the whole question properly, so you take in both the direction words and the content words, e.g. *Give three reasons why....* **does not mean Write everything you know about.....**
 - reread the whole question; if it has two parts, answer both.

- 05 Budget your time:
 - allow 10-15 minutes for checking at the end
 - divide up the rest of the time in proportion to the marks awarded to each question. In a 3 hour exam use the following times:
 - 25% of marks - 40 minutes
 - 20% of marks - 33 minutes
 - 15% of marks - 25 minutes
 - 10% of marks - 17 minutes

- note down your scheduled start time for each question and stick to it.



01 If you have memorised any vital points, formulae etc, jot them down immediately. Cross out those notes at the end of the exam.

02 Read each question very carefully several times and underline the key 'direction words' like *discuss, compare* etc.



Reference

(For more information on direction words refer to the Direction Words Guide.)

03 Before starting to write make a quick plan of your answer jotting down relevant concepts, facts, research, viewpoints etc. Check your plan against the question - have you answered all parts of the question?

04 Essay Questions

Think more and write less. Examiners are usually impressed by brevity, conciseness and accuracy, so write simply and keep to the point. Avoid padding with irrelevant material.

In your answers try to:

- show that you understand what the question is about
- indicate the structure of your essay
- make your main points clear
- differentiate between your ideas and other people's
- differentiate between the views of various authors
- make links between paragraphs

- indicate how the sections lead to a conclusion
- state your conclusion early
- write legibly and grammatically

05 Mathematical Problems

- It is very important to read the problem completely several times so you know what you are being asked to solve. Draw diagrams to help you understand the problem. Ask: 'What scientific or mathematical principles do I need to use to answer the question?'
- Show ALL your working clearly. Even if you are unable to solve the problem you should get some marks if the marker can see what you were trying to do.
- Check your answer to see if it is a reasonable value.

06 Multiple Choice Questions

- Don't spend too long on any one question. Do the easy ones first and then come back to the difficult ones.
- Cross out incorrect answers. This helps you to focus on the remaining options.
- If there is penalty for guessing answers leave a blank if you are not sure of an answer. If there is no penalty then make the best guess you can. Check with the lecturers about penalties.

At the end of the Exam

Check over your paper to see whether you have:

- 01** answered all the parts of questions
- 02** made any statements that you did not mean
- 03** said anything which is not clear
- 04** written legibly throughout
- 05** made any grammatical errors
- 06** carried out all instructions
- 07** put your name and student number on the scripts

Some other TIPS

- 01 The first 50% of a mark is much easier to get than the second 50%, so if faced with a difficult question give it a try but don't be tempted to spend extra time on it.
- 02 If you do not know the answer to a question, try to reason it out. Reasoned or approximate answers may get some credit.
- 03 If you are running out of time towards the end of the exam, put down notes of relevant points for the last question, you may get some marks. In a calculation question, set up the formula and put the values in, even if you don't have time to solve it. For an essay question, write an outline rather than leave out a section
- 04 Always attempt the required number of questions, and do not overrun on your time for each one. If you haven't finished leave a gap and go on to the next one.
- 05 Try not to panic if you realise you have made a mistake. Leave it and go back after you have finished the rest of the questions, when you will feel calmer and can see the problem afresh. If you spot an error but don't have time to fix it, make a note in the margin saying what you would do to put it right.
- 06 Pay no attention to your neighbours.

