

Preparing for Your Exams

Exams are something that nobody really looks forward to, but keep in mind, the way you respond to an upcoming exam is highly dependent on how prepared you are.

CONSTRUCT A TIMETABLE

Devise a timetable in which you are able to allocate time for your study, rest and relaxation. Within 3-4 weeks leading up to the exam, you should allocate approximately one hour of study per day for each subject. If the examinations of some subjects are worth a greater percentage of your total assessment, you should allocate a bit more time to them.*

Tip: Don't study similar subjects on the same day – it may confuse your memory.

WHAT TO REVISE

For each subject, you will need to decide what topics you will focus your revision on. You should make this decision based on the exam format. For example, if the exam will be based on three of the topics you have covered throughout the year, study at least five.

Tip: Get your hands on some past exam papers to get used to the format. Complete them in exam conditions; you'll get a good sense of what you know well, and what you may need to spend more time revising.

FIND A GOOD PLACE TO STUDY

Your dedicated study area should be uncluttered, well-lit and free from distractions. While you should get into the habit of studying in the same place, some students find it motivating to occasionally change their place of study to different rooms at home, the garden or even a public library.

Tip: Make sure your place of study is organised with everything you need, such as pens, paper, calculator, textbooks and notes.

KEEP A REGULAR ROUTINE

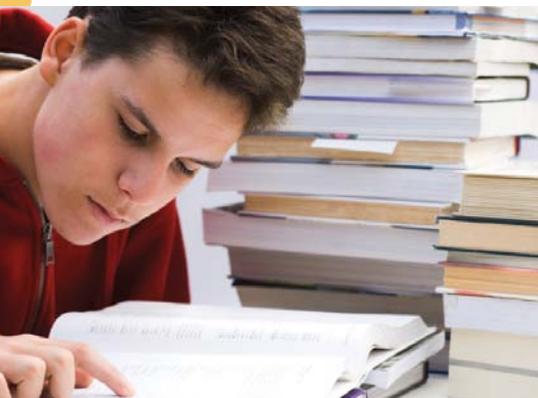
Just like an athlete training for a special event, your body and mind will be at its maximum efficiency if you stick to a routine. The timetable you have created should come in handy for this. Try to go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning, and don't forget to eat regular nutritious meals.

Tip: Keep a copy of your timetable on the wall above your desk so you can refer to it easily.

TAKE REGULAR SHORT BREAKS

Most people have 90 minute cycles of alertness, so a short break every hour or so will maximise the effectiveness of your study.

Tip: Go for a quick walk down the street for some fresh air and to stretch your legs.





NOTES

Make sure you have all of your subject notes and handouts in a logical order. Your teachers have given you everything you will need to know for the exams, but speak to them if you find that you have something missing.

Summarise your notes under key headings and read over them several times. Then put your notes away and write down as much as you can remember about each topic. Once you have finished this, refer back to your notes and see if you have left anything out. Keep doing this until you feel confident that you are familiar with all of the information related to that topic.

Tip: Have someone read the key headings aloud to you and, one at a time, tell them everything you know about that topic. Let them ask you questions about it – you'll refresh your own memory while teaching them at the same time.

REDUCE YOUR SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

While this can be difficult, your priorities for the weeks leading up to and including the exam period should be focused on doing the best you can with the limited time you have. The great news is, this will only be for a few weeks, and it's a small price to pay for the great exam results that await you.

Tip: Pre-plan your social activities during this period. You will have something to look forward to and still be able to prioritise your study.

PAST EXAM PAPERS

Working through past exam papers is a great way to prepare. Not only are you learning the content of the subject, you are getting an idea of the way the exam is structured, how questions are worded and how problems are presented. Look for patterns between papers from different years.

Answer each question without using your notes. If you find that you need to use them, you'll know which topics you need to focus more time on when reviewing.

Remember, you will not have your notes with you during an exam! You'll gain confidence and valuable experience by completing the exams under exam conditions. Make sure you time yourself!

Tip: Pair-up with a friend and sit the exam together. Then have your friend mark your exam while you mark theirs. Discuss your answers.

* This is a general guide only. Please refer to your school's study policy.

Exam Techniques

THE NIGHT BEFORE

Make sure you get a good night's sleep! Staying up late and trying to cram will actually do more harm than good – a quick read through all your subject notes before you go to bed should suffice.

THE DAY OF THE EXAM

The day of your exam has finally arrived! Here are a few techniques to help you get through it with the least amount of stress.

Eat a good meal before your exam

High carbohydrate foods like wholegrain breads and cereals are good options as they release energy slowly and will help keep you alert throughout the exam.

Check your materials

Make sure you have everything you need – ruler, pens, calculator, ID card, etc. – and make sure the items you are taking in with you are permitted.

Getting there

Give yourself enough time to get to school or the exam venue. Unforeseen delays, like traffic, do happen, and it is better to be very early than a bit late. You may also need time to find your allocated seat.

Calm those nerves!

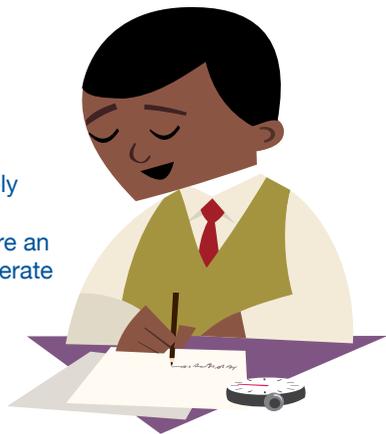
It is completely normal to be nervous before an exam. A moderate amount of nervousness can actually enhance your performance, but too much can cause anxiety and mental blanks. If you are very nervous, find yourself a quiet spot, concentrate on deep breathing and focus on doing the best you can.

Use the reading time wisely

Use the reading time to focus your thoughts and overcome any jitters. Remember to read the longer questions carefully so that you don't waste valuable writing time. You should also use this time to become familiar with the exam format so you can plan which section or question you are going to begin with.

Start with what you know

In exams, there will always be questions you think you don't know the answer to, but don't let this put you off. Start with the questions you do know to help build your confidence. It's possible that questions on the exam are all related somewhat, so answering the 'easy' questions may actually help you with the tricky ones. Questions that look unfamiliar at first will probably turn out to be questions you can answer.



Read the question

Ask yourself, 'So what does this question actually ask me to do?'. Look for key words like: Explain, Describe, Define, Identify, etc. Keep focused, and at the end of every section, ask yourself, 'Am I still answering the question or have I gone off track?'.

Don't look at everyone else

Many students look around while sitting exams, see others frantically writing away and then get stressed about their own performance. Don't do it! Don't worry about what everyone else is doing – this is your exam, nobody else's, so don't let their performance hinder yours.

Attempt every question

Unless stated, you wouldn't normally lose marks for incorrect answers, so attempt every question, even the 'impossible' ones. You may pick up a mark here and there.

Watch the time

Try to stick to the suggested time allocation for each section of the exam. If you're stuck on a question, and you believe you're taking too long to answer it, move on to the next one. You can always return to it later. Also, try to allocate your time accordingly. Don't spend unnecessary time answering questions. For example, if a question is worth 4 marks, it's likely that it requires 4 main points. Spending extra time thinking of a fifth won't be worth it if it won't be marked, so try to avoid over-answering questions.

Review your responses

Once you have finished your exam, there is just one more thing you need to do – review! Check that you have answered all of the required questions and have marked the answer sheet (for multiple-choice questions) correctly. Don't forget to check your spelling, grammar and punctuation.

