Exam Preparation (how to start)

Aim of this factsheet

The aim of this fact sheet is to help you to prepare for any forthcoming examinations.

A prepared student attends lectures and keeps notes in an organised way. From day one, you should know if you are being assessed by an exam. If so, prepare for it!

Know yourself

To revise successfully you need to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses. Work through the following checklist and answer each question as honestly as you can before planning how you can achieve the best working environment for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know yourself</th>
<th>Preference</th>
<th>Plan of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I work best in the:</td>
<td>• morning • afternoon • evening • night time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to work in:</td>
<td>• my room • the library • other location</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I like to work:</td>
<td>• by myself • with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work best:</td>
<td>• in silence • with soft music playing • with background noise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can concentrate for:</td>
<td>• 30 minutes • 60 minutes • 90 minutes • 120 minutes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I am good at organising my work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I can work to a timetable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I take regular breaks to:</td>
<td>• eat • drink • sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn best:</td>
<td>• visually • kinaesthetically • aurally</td>
<td></td>
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If you do not know your preferred learning style make an appointment with an academic skills tutor who can help you to assess it, email: academicskills@staffs.ac.uk. You should really be developing all the learning styles and not rely on one, see the Learning Styles factsheet.
Be mentally prepared
Take control and do not let yourself become overwhelmed by the thought of having to take examinations. Keep positive and develop a ‘CAN DO’ mentality. Success and failure can be a self fulfilling prophecy. If you believe you can you will and if you believe you can't you won’t. Remember that if you have put in the work you have every chance of success but you need to keep on top of your inner voice and be confident that you can succeed. If you feel stressed, see the Stress Management factsheet.

Understand the exam format

Exams come in different shapes and sizes so you need to ask the following questions:

➢ What format is the exam e.g. multiple-choice, essay, report, short answer, open/closed book, case study, and oral?
➢ How many questions need answering and is there a choice from different sections?
➢ Are all the questions worth the same number of marks?
➢ Am I allowed a resource(s) in the exam, for example, a legal manual?
➢ Is time allocated for using the resource or am I expected to know the information?

To find the answers to these questions read the module handbook, find the information on Blackboard or ask your tutor. You need to be confident that you understand the requirements of the exam you are about to take.

Plan the time management for each examination paper

Each exam paper may have a different structure and weighting, so get to know each paper. For example, you may have to answer three essay questions, one from part A and two from part B. If the question from part A is worth 50% of the marks, then you should give it 50% of the time available. The two questions on part B are each worth 25% of the total mark therefore you give each question a quarter of the total time available. If you are taking an essay examination, make sure you deduct some time from the overall length of the exam for reading through and choosing questions as well as time to check that you have answered the question when you have finished.

If you have many short questions to answer work out the time you have for a 1, 2, 3, 5-mark answer and so on. You will need to be strict with yourself and not spend too long in attaining just 1 mark. A question worth say 2 marks is usually looking for 2 points in the answer and so on depending upon the marks available.

Prepare the areas for study

Make sure that you understand the module learning outcomes that are being tested. Link your lecture notes to the learning outcomes and check to see whether your tutor has recommended any further reading you should do. If available, look at past papers and note which topics come up regularly. Get a feel for the types of questions that are asked. Use active revision techniques such as writing out model answers in the time available and checking with your tutor to see whether you have addressed the questions fully and met the assessment criteria. Make sure that you understand the terms used in questions such as: evaluate; assess; summarise etc.. Use the terms and definitions factsheet to ensure that you know exactly what is required.
Once you have revised your chosen topics try writing your own exam questions and sketching out model answers using the exam timings.

**Make a revision timetable**

Once you know which topics you are going to revise, create a revision timetable for all the exams you have to take. If you have more than one examination, you could try studying for your final exam first, that way you are revising for your first examination last. This means that you will go straight into your first test thereby reducing revision time as you have not had to revisit notes you made early on for that paper. Plan to work at the time of day you are able to concentrate most. Remember the timings for each question and be realistic about the amount of information you can realistically write in order to pass. Plan your revision in blocks linked to your ability to concentrate. You should not work non-stop but build in regular breaks to rehydrate, eat, sleep etc. Make use of your phone and record your revision notes then you can listen to them while travelling, shopping etc. Remember that active revision based upon using and organising material is more effective than passive revision which is about reading material and copying notes.

**Know the exam requirements**

Be prepared! Know the location and time of the examinations you have to sit and what is required for each: proof of identity, student card, pens, pencils, calculators, rulers, texts etc. Also, know what are you not allowed to have with you, for example: phone; opaque pencil case; calculator watch etc. Make sure that you have your timings worked out for the paper you are sitting. To reduce stress don’t arrive too early before the exam room opens. Try not to engage in talk with fellow students when you arrive as this can reduce your self-confidence especially if they have chosen to revise different topics to you.

**References and further reading**


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**For an appointment or further advice:**

**Click:** [http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills](http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/AcademicSkills)

**Call:** 01785 353500

**Email:** academicskills@staffs.ac.uk

**Visit:** Skills Space, Thompson Library, Stoke / Blackheath Lane, Stafford / Shrewsbury Hospital

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