



## Purposes of an exam

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- Test **knowledge** of course material
- Test the ability to **present** this knowledge in an **organised** and **coherent** way
- Test the ability to present your expertise when under **pressure**
- Create a fair and level playing field

## Exam technique

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- Make sure you **read the entire exam paper** and avoid writing (5-10mins). Put your pen on the desk and, if you must, sit on your hands to stop yourself from trying to write at the same time as trying to read.
- Work out **which questions you will do** and the **order** you will do them in, keeping in mind the **number of marks available** for each question and sub-task.
- Simultaneously **plan your time**. How long will you devote to each question? 45 mins to an hour per essay?
- **Write down memorised key facts** or points on the first sheet when you arrive (mind-map and/or bullet points). You can cross these out later.
- **Don't necessarily go for 'comfort zone' topics**
- **Re-read each individual question** carefully before starting
- **Move on if you get stuck** – leave room to return and add information later
- **Leave room for planning** and within each planning section
- **If you're running out of time:**
  - Do first sections of questions (usually easy marks to be made in early sections)
  - Write bullet points
  - Come to a conclusion!
  - Never leave an exam early

## Planning in an exam

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- It is important not only to revise material for the exam, but also to practise the skills you need to succeed in an exam: planning, timing, proofreading and checking your work.
- Planning in an exam is essential:

- Keeps you calm at the start of an exam.
- Allows you to focus on the question.
- Can be used to fill in gaps if you get stuck during an exam – will motivate you.
- If you plan answers with ‘working out’, you can get marks for your method.
- Careful planning takes into account both timing (how long each section will take –keep an eye on this once you’ve started), and allowing time to check your work at the end.
- Practise checking and proofreading during revision period. Make sure you check over your work and notes carefully. Are there recurrent mistakes? Do you forget to start new paragraphs? Punctuation? To clearly distinguish calculations from final answers?

## Identifying the task

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Look for action verbs in the question and think about the implications for constructing an appropriate answer.

<b>Analyse</b>	Identify and examine closely the component parts of a... (e.g. situation, model, theory)
<b>Argue</b>	Present a case for and/or against acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of both sides
<b>Compare</b>	Examine qualities, or characteristics, emphasising similarities, although differences may be mentioned
<b>Contrast</b>	Stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems
<b>Explain</b>	Focus on the "how or why," emphasising the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.
<b>Justify</b>	Prove or show grounds for decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.
<b>Criticise</b>	Make a judgement about the value of...and support it with evidence (may be positive or negative)
<b>Discuss</b>	Examine an argument, give reasons for and against; consider its wider implications
<b>Review</b>	Analyse and comment briefly in organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Present an authoritative and, to a lesser extent, personal appraisal of the advantages and limitations
<b>Outline</b>	Give an organised description, presenting the information in a systematic way
<b>Summarise</b>	Give in condensed form the main points or facts omitting details, illustrations and elaboration

## Multiple choice exams

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There are different formats for multiple choice exams with their own distinct challenges; make sure you know which one yours will be:

- True/False
- Odd one out

- Most accurate answer
  - Grid format (e.g. '1. Answer 1 if A is correct / 2. Answer 2 if A and C are correct' etc.)
  - Extension questions (select answer that completes the question statement)
- Is it negatively marked? If so, make sure you understand the implications of the guessing correction.
  - Read the instructions carefully before you begin.
  - Know how long you can spend on each question.
  - Read each question very carefully, highlighting key words or phrases.
  - Try to think of the answer before looking at the options. There may be two that are worded similarly but with different meaning, so be sure to select the correct answer.
  - It is not a race! Take time to think of the options and answer calmly.

## What examiners like to see

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- Correct use of key words and phrases.
- Questions answered in the correct format.
- Not writing *all* you know on a topic: focus on the set question.
- Discussing course material critically, not just descriptively.
- Using time well. Don't rush conclusions or provide answers where some sections are disproportionately long or short.
- Neat presentation. Your exam script must be legible. Practise writing by hand for sustained periods during the revision period.

## During the last few days before the exam

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- **Take care of your mind** - think positively in the final run up to the exam
- Have a **quick look** over the material you have revised. Avoid cramming in the last 24 hours before the exam: you're unlikely to take in much information but will probably make yourself more nervous.
- **Take care of your body** (remain well hydrated; eat decent meals regularly; refrain from snacking in a way that could cause blood sugar levels to spike; sleep and eat properly, exercise to disperse excess adrenaline and make yourself feel calmer)
- Take **breaks** and **time to relax** and let your brain rest
- **Plan out how to use your time** during the exam
- Make sure you have all the books, materials (calculator, pens etc.) you need the **night before the exam**, and that you know where the exam is and how to get there!

## On the day of the exam

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- **Arrive early** - will reduce stress unrelated to exam content
- Bring **spare pens, pencils** etc.
- **Avoid discussing exam** with classmates before (and after) - this can make you unnecessarily anxious.
- Use **relaxation techniques** to keep calm.
- **Stay positive** - motivational music? Phone call with a friend to motivate you?
- Take **water** with you to the exam and sip throughout.
- Take your time, **read questions carefully**, identify the task and what the questions is asking you to do
- **Budget your time** (read and understand the questions, plan and proofread)
- **Don't panic** if you see other people finishing before you
- **Breathe deeply** and slowly – it will help you stay calm

## Additional resources

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- University of Greenwich – useful fact sheets:  
<http://www.gre.ac.uk/studyskills/exams>
- Leeds University Library – exam skills:  
[http://library.leeds.ac.uk/skills-exams#activate-choosing\\_what\\_to\\_revise](http://library.leeds.ac.uk/skills-exams#activate-choosing_what_to_revise)

## Other relevant 301 Academic Skills Workshops

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- Exam Revision Planning
- Beating Procrastination

## References

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Some material adapted from:

- University of York (2012) Exam Tips and Techniques [online] Available at: [http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~dajp1/Exam\\_Hints/Exams.html](http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~dajp1/Exam_Hints/Exams.html) [Accessed 15 February 2013]
- Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2005) *Essential Study Skills*. London: Sage (p113)