

# Exam Preparation



## Why is revision important?

Exams often form a big part of your final academic assessment. This is a summative assessment which shows your success in meeting the criteria for a course or programme and contributes to your final mark or grade. It requires you to remember information from the whole course you've studied and use it to answer questions successfully.

It is very hard to remember all the relevant information from a long course of study and exams can be stressful. Preparing for exams is a skill you can learn. If you revise the work you have completed, you have the best chance of preparing for your exam. Little and often is a good attitude to ensure you revise enough and are well prepared.

If you develop good study skills and adopt a positive and organised approach to revision, you will develop transferable skills you can use in further study, at work or at home. This involves studying your course materials and preparing yourself to increase your confidence and memory skills.

### Successful revision

There are two key areas which influence each other strongly: managing time and preparation.

### Managing time

If you are organised early and have a good idea of what you need to do, you have a better chance of passing your exams. To help you prepare, you should have a clear idea of how you will use your time. This should ensure you don't forget to do anything, or run out of time to revise. For more information on time management, see our Time Management guide.

Top tips:

- Create a timetable of your exams, submission dates and assessments and use a paper diary or an electronic app on your phone, for example
- Remember to add your out-of-College commitments, for instance when you are working, so you know when you can study around them
- Set up a study programme around these commitments
- Create to-do lists and prioritise each task/area of revision
- Take breaks from studying – work in blocks of around an hour
- Develop self-discipline

### Preparation

### **Prepare your revision environment:**

- It is very important to prepare your revision environment and make sure you are comfortable.
- Try to limit noise and distraction; remove TV's and phones from your study area.
- Check you have enough space and that it's suitable for the work you need to do and make sure you are comfortable
- Use the quiet study area in your library if there are too many distractions at home
- Eat regularly and stay hydrated with water while revising. This will help you to stay alert
- Find a place where you work best even if it's your local park. Everyone has different preferences so it is important to make sure your study space is suitable for you

### **Prepare your revision:**

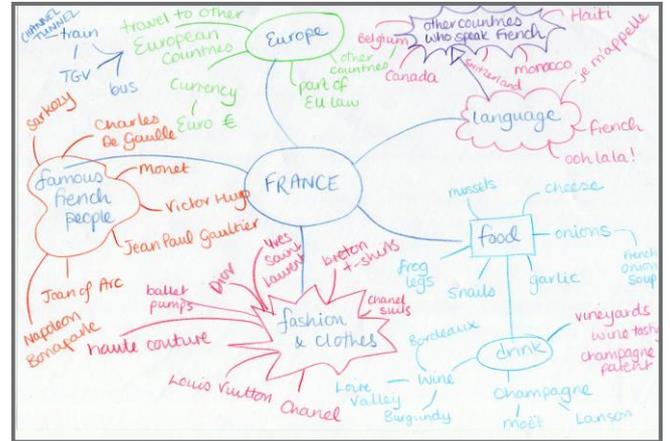
- Create study checklists – identify all the material you will be tested on; an organised checklist will enable you to study in manageable chunks and this in turn, will help reduce any potential anxiety
- Re-familiarise yourself with your class notes
- Make linear/bullet point notes or create summary notes
- Generate a list of possible questions you would ask if you were making the exam then see if you can answer them
- Explain your answers to others - a parent, a sibling, the cat! This will help you get it clear in your head and highlight any knowledge gaps
- Use a variety of revision methods and find the way that best helps you retain information

## Revision Methods

### Mind Maps – brainstorm!

Map out important ideas and their relationships by linking them together visually

- Begin by writing down or drawing the most important topic or keyword
- Think about your keyword carefully; circle it
- Write other important words and concepts outside of the circle and link ideas together
- Set the map aside
- Later, continue development and revision
- Expand the map over time; right up to an exam



### Flashcards

Making simple flashcards can help you to study and remember information for an exam.

- Write your information down starting with keywords or concepts
- Organise your cards into decks, one for each subject or topic
- Use different colours for different topics/characteristics etc.
- Illustrate the cards if appropriate; the more distinctive the card is, the easier it will be to recall the information on the card
- Carry your cards with you and review them whenever you have the chance; on the bus, in the café, waiting in a queue etc.
- Shuffle the cards each time you review them so that you study them in different orders

## Visual notes

Make a visual image or notes of something you are trying to remember and try to clearly visualise its shape and features. If you are forgetting, think about the shape and your brain will allow you to recover the data.

## Repeat!

Repetition helps us remember, forcefully imprinting information into our minds. If it helps, don't be afraid to write down or type something several times.

Use a variety of revision methods and find the way that best helps you retain information!

## Study groups

Working with a study group can offer many benefits that help you with your revision.

- Motivate and encourage each other
- Learn valuable new study habits from other group members
- Compare class notes with each other as you or they may have picked up on something the other has missed
- Share the knowledge. You may have questions that they have the answer to and vice versa
- Ensure the study group stays on task and does not get distracted!
- Make sure everyone participates and shows respect for each other

## Exam Question Types

### Essay exam

Essay test questions are often presented as a statement that includes a direction word; this word tells you what you should do when you write your answer, for example if you need to explain, describe or compare. You will need to recall broad information and discuss and expand on a topic in an organised and extended writing form.

### Studying for essay exams

- Read all of your class notes carefully and make further detailed notes
- Create flashcards containing the most important information and refer to them repeatedly
- Make detailed mind maps of a topic or area of study and expand it over time
- Think like your tutor; try to predict the type of questions that may be asked, such as compare, explain, evaluate etc.
- Revise how to structure essay questions in an organised way and practise planning an answer with introduction, main body, conclusion etc.
- Refer to the Writing Guide for further information on essay structure and planning

### Tips for during the exam essay

- Focus; think before you write! Make sure your ideas are specific and relevant
- Organise; plan your answer before you write
- Look for the direction word so you know how to respond to the question
- Expand on your answers and provide evidence, using examples
- Don't give your personal opinion unless it specifically asks for it
- If you have time, proofread your work!

## Multiple choice exams

This requires a different method of preparation from an essay exam. You have to recognise a correct answer amongst a set of options that usually include three or four wrong answers. This does not mean you should rely on taking a lucky guess! You will have to be familiar with a broad range of information and usually a greater familiarity with specific details, names or vocabulary.

## Studying for multiple choice exams

- Begin studying early – multiple choice questions usually focus on specific details; revise a little each day and you will build a more reliable long-term memory
- Develop summary sheets of your course material
- Make lists and focus on keywords and vocabulary
- Create flashcards with key information and refer to them repeatedly
- Create acronyms to help you remember information, more details can be found in the Grammar Guide
- Practice old sample question papers

## Tips for during the multiple choice exam

- Read all the answers before selecting one
- Cross out answer choices you are sure are incorrect
- Circle important words in the question
- Look for answer choices that contain vocabulary used by your tutor in class
- If you are unsure of a question, leave it, carry on and come back to it at the end
- Never leave a question unanswered

This type of exam usually requires a briefer and more descriptive answer than essay questions. Subjects like Biology, Geography and Maths will ask you to answer direct questions about facts. Where appropriate remember to show your working as this can get you extra marks.

### Studying for Q & A Exams

- Revise your class notes and make further detailed notes if it helps
- Create flashcards with key information and refer to them repeatedly
- Brainstorm possible questions with a study partner or study group then see if you can answer the questions
- Use past-papers; some hard copies are available in the main college libraries and you'll also get access to past papers for practice from <http://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/findpastpaper.htm>
- Make use of SQA marking schemes which are also available on the SQA website - they clearly explain what you need to do to pick up marks

### Tips for during a Q & A exam

- Answer the questions you find easiest first; come back to the others later
- Read the questions carefully and don't rush; re-read them if you are unsure
- Answer every question; don't leave any blank
- Where necessary, show your working
- Never leave a question unanswered
- The number of marks you can get for a question will reflect how much information you should give and therefore how much time you should spend on that question
- Try to spend around one minute on each mark – that will help you complete the paper in time

## Potential Study Barriers

### Exam anxiety

Exam stress and anxiety is not uncommon and there are many steps that can be taken to reduce this; remember it's not the end of the world!

#### Top tips

- Reduce the 'stressors' in your life; these can be anything from environmental stressors (e.g. too much noise) to social stressors (e.g. family commitments)
- Practice good time management
- Prioritise your tasks and study
- Focus your mind, order your thoughts and see the bigger picture

**Please refer to our Stress Management guide for detailed help.**

### Procrastination

This is putting off or avoiding doing something. It is natural to procrastinate occasionally but if you find that you are always putting off your work then you need to take control and do something about it, before it causes you anxiety.

- Focus on starting; rather than finishing
- Prioritise your tasks
- Set small achievable goals
- Reward yourself when you complete a task
- Work on tasks at the time of day you work best
- Work for short periods of time
- Work with a study partner or group
- Make yourself a manageable timetable and create a to-do list

## Motivation

If you find yourself with poor motivation to study for an exam, you must try to think positively and get your body and brain active:

- Walk around the room ten times
- Do ten sit-ups
- Take a five minute walk outside and get some fresh air
- Close your eyes and imagine how you will feel when you have finished your task or achieved your goals
- Listen to your favourite upbeat song to get you feeling happy

## Memory skills

We all have the potential to remember anything we want; it's just a matter of exercising the brain adequately enough. As a general rule we only remember what is important to us. A good trick is to imagine that everything is vital! We can all improve our memory skills too:

- Be active! Be an active doer, thinker, listener and reader
- Do crossword puzzles, board games, Sudoku, learn a new word every day or play brain games on your phone/tablet/computer
- Focus! Repeat! Repeat! Repeat!
- Pay attention to detail
- Make 'associations' – this is where you establish links between what you're trying to remember and things you already know. This could take many forms; rhymes or acronyms or abbreviations usually work best. An example of a well-known acronym is FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation and an abbreviation is WiFi – Wireless Fidelity

## How to form an acronym:

- Write down the facts you need to remember or an important sentence
- Circle the first letter of each fact or word
- Arrange the circled letters in order to form an acronym that is either a real world or a nonsense word e.g. when learning about the reflexes of newborn babies: 'the rooting reflex = **'trr'** and 'the swallowing and sucking reflex = **'tssr'**

Some things can be remembered more quickly than others, but don't be too hard on yourself for not being fast enough. Concentrate and keep your brain active, but try to stay relaxed!

## This is it – the Exam!

- Make sure you have a good night's sleep. Don't pull an all-nighter! You need to be alert and focused
- Prepare your bag with all the materials you may need for your exam the night before
- Make sure you eat something to avoid feeling tired, hungry or having poor concentration during your exam
- Avoid sugar or caffeine that will only give you a short boost; opt for high energy foods like bread or bananas
- Ensure you arrive at your exam venue slightly before the scheduled time to avoid any unnecessary stress
- Avoid increasing pre-exam nerves by engaging in 'panic talk' with fellow students; focus and concentrate on calming your own mind and nerves
- Take bottled water in with you to keep you hydrated

Be confident, you can do it! Remember you can and will survive exams!

If you need help, just ask. Your tutors and Learning Resources team can assist with study and exam preparation

## Exam golden rules

- Read the questions carefully
- Watch the clock
- Don't leave the exam early
- Ensure you answer all the questions
- Don't spend too long on one question
- Don't panic!
- Leave some time at the end to review your answers
- Get plenty of sleep the night before
- Eat beforehand
- Relax