Examinations

Examinations (often shortened to “exams”) are a common form of measuring a student’s knowledge around a given subject area or topic. They can range from a very brief structure with a handful of questions to very involved processes taking up to four hours to complete. Generally, examinations are used at the Higher Education level as a means to test large numbers of students all at once. Examinations can be very stressful for students as they are often “blind” or “secret” situations, where students do not know what the actual questions will be until they open the examination paper. At best, students would be asked to be prepared to answer a question on any of the topics covered in the unit or course they have been studying that semester.

Preparation:

Check what format the exam will take. The information will be either in the Assessment section of Learnline, or you can ask your lecturer to explain the format to your class.

Check what percentage of assessment the exam is worth.

Consider what result you need to aim for on the basis of your current progress in assignments and tests.

Study old exams if the lecturer is known to give similar exams, and if previous exams are available to you. But, don’t be fooled into thinking that since you were able to work through an old exam, it means you understand all the course material in general, and can perform in a test situation.

If you have already done exams in a particular course (e.g. mid-semester exams), discuss your performance with your marker to identify your strengths and weaknesses. Did you lack knowledge of content, focus, reasoning, style, presentation or was it a problem with time management in the exams?

Roughly prioritise material as to its importance, and concentrate your studying on the most significant topics. Remember, your lecturer only has a limited amount of time to test what you know and can do. Thus, keep in mind when preparing for an exam that the problems cannot be too complicated if they are to fit within the allocated time.

Summarise or outline the course or text material in your own words. Writing a summary not only forces you to examine the subject matter in detail, but provides a set of notes to review just prior to the exam.

Rehearse the time allocated for different parts of exams, that is, write out 'mock' answers in the time available. Too often students go into the exam 'knowing' the content, but not knowing how to apply the content.

- Set yourself questions on the material likely to be covered, and then answer them.
Examinations

- Rehearse your timing so that you can perform evenly across all parts of the exam paper.
- Get into the practice of writing quickly, and legibly, by hand.

Study in ways that are suited to you:

- Study with a group or alone based upon which is *really* best for you.
- Do your most strenuous and important work during those times of the day that you work best.

Remember to take a watch to the exam as there is no guarantee that there will be a clock in the exam room, or if there is that you will be able to see it from where you’re sitting (or even that it works). You will not be able to have your mobile phone active or on your desk during the exam so it is imperative that you have another way of keeping track of the time.

Check what you are allowed/not allowed to bring into the exam room, and what you are expected to bring, such as pens, pencils (always bring a spare), Student ID Card.

Plan to arrive for your exam *at least 30 minutes before* it is due to begin so that if you are delayed in some way getting to the exam, for example your bus is running late, or you have trouble finding a car park, you have the time to spare. The extra time will also allow you to find your seat and to settle any nerves you may be feeling.

If you struggle with exam anxiety then convince yourself that ‘all you can do is all you can do’ (give yourself a pep-talk to this effect prior to each exam. If you start to feel stressed during the exam, stop and take a deep breath before continuing with the paper. For more information about exam anxiety read the academic skills document *Do you suffer from test anxiety?*

**Starting the exam:**

Read the instructions thoroughly and carefully.

Skim over the entire exam prior to beginning work.

Identify the questions that you feel the most confident of answering correctly (don't necessarily do the problems in order). Instead, get those problems out of the way you feel confident you can do quickly and well.

Before writing on any given problem, *think*. Taking a small amount of time to think about the question and the answer will save you time overall (for you might choose a more efficient method of solving the problem / answering the question).

**During the exam**
Examinations

It is important that you pace yourself throughout the exam. For example, on a 50-minute exam worth 100 points, you should be accumulating 2 points per minute; thus, a 26-point problem should be completed in 13 minutes. Do this calculation at the start of the exam if the problem weights are given.

If you are running out of time, state the steps you would perform if you were to continue the problem. Show your work and make clear your reasoning in order to have a chance to receive partial credit.

Neatness counts! The marker cannot fairly grade you if they can’t read your work. Make sure your writing is legible.

Always check over your answers if you have time.

Seek feedback after the exam:

Exams are valuable learning experiences, so even if you did well ask to see your exam paper and go through it with your lecturer.

Identify the strengths and weaknesses in your exam performance and take action to address your weaknesses so that you can improve your performance for next time.

EXAM PREPARATION CHECKLIST

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I know the date, time and location of the exam</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I know how long the exam is</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I know what type of exam I am sitting and how it is structured</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I know what I can and cannot bring into the exam room</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I started revising early and used a study timetable</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I have covered all the necessary course material</td>
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