

## PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION – FINDING OUT ABOUT THE EXAM PAPER

If the examination paper isn't what you expect, you will be at a disadvantage right from the start. You can use the specimen examination paper and instructions given in the course material or in a stop press to find out the answers to the following questions:

- Is the paper divided into sections?
- Are there compulsory questions or sections?
- How many questions are there?
- How many questions do you have to answer?
- Do the questions require short or long answers?
- How are the questions weighted in terms of marks?
- Are there any multiple choice questions?
- How much time should you allow for each question or section?
- Do questions relate to particular parts or the course (units, blocks, books) or do they relate to the key course themes?
- Are there any questions which use pre-release material?
- Can you take any material, such as course material or handbook into the exam?
- Can this material be annotated?

**PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION – RESOURCES**

**What resources could you use? Which of these are available for your course?**

**Which of these would YOU be able to use?**

- Course units and other material.
- Summary notes made during the study of the course.
- Video/DVD, television and audio/DVD materials.
- Assignments.
- Feedback from assignments.
- Tutorial notes and handouts.
- Specimen and past papers and answers.
- Advice from your tutor.
- Sources of guidance in the course, eg. revision and review units, supplementary material on exams, Course Guides, etc.
- First class forums.
- Revision day at Aston University.
- Revision weekend.

**PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION - PLANNING**

Even when students have studied a course thoroughly they can fail to do themselves justice in the exam through inadequate or inefficient revision.

**Planning Revision Time**

1. Decide when you are going to start and work out how long that gives you. (Are some weeks more heavily committed than others?) Start as early as possible - don't leave it until the last minute.
2. Decide what to cover and in what depth and when. This needs careful thought and as much advice as you can get. Which resources do you have available? Which are you going to use?
3. Match up your time to revise with the material to revise and plan a timetable which is realistic.
4. Use a revision timetable to plan the last few weeks leading up to the examination.
  - Put on the date and session of the examination.
  - Date the weeks leading up to the examination.
  - Add in work, family and social commitments.
  - In the early weeks, plan your study of material you haven't completed, and time to do the last assignments.
  - Leave the day before the examination for the collection of examination materials and preparation for the journey, etc.

- Leave the last week for concentrated revision or consolidation covering all of the topics you have identified as important.
  - You should now be able to identify the time you hope to have available for revision. Plan which block or unit or topic to do in each section of the timetable.
5. Does your timetable look realistic? Have you allowed time for unexpected events to happen? Will you have enough time to cover everything in detail? If not, you will either have to try to find more time or decide which blocks or units or topics to spend more time on.
6. The timetable you have set yourself isn't set in stone – you will probably find that you will be continually up-dating it, either because your revision of a particular topic hasn't gone as you expected, or outside constraints have resulted in changes. However, if you are continually re-organising your plans, you may need to consider whether you are setting yourself targets which are too demanding.
7. Once you have got an outline plan for your revision, you may decide to make more detailed plans on a daily basis, if possible working a week ahead. Before you make these plans, consider the following:
- Do you work better at particular times of the week?
  - Do you work better at particular times of the day?
  - Do you work better in short sessions broken by breaks or long continual sessions?

If there are times when you work better, plan to cover the more important topics at those times, and leave the less important ones to the less productive times.

## OUTLINE REVISION TIMETABLE

Weeks to exam		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
7	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
6	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
5	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
4	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
3	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
2	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							
1	a.m.							
	p.m.							
	eve.							

**REVISION AND EXAMINATION WORKSHOP: DETAILED TIMETABLE**

**WEEK BEGINNING :**

<b>DAY</b>	<b>WHEN</b>	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>TASK</b>
<b>SUNDAY</b>			
<b>MONDAY</b>			
<b>TUESDAY</b>			
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>			
<b>THURSDAY</b>			
<b>FRIDAY</b>			
<b>SATURDAY</b>			

**PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION – REVISION METHODS****1. Course Mapping.**

Stand back from the block you are working on and try to map out the course as a whole, drawing out the links in it. This helps you to get an overall view of the course, and how it hangs together.

**2. Condensing Exercise**

Take notes on a block and try steadily to condense them further and further until you have, say, 2 sides of A4 per block. This helps you focus on the main themes and arguments, the overall picture.

Towards the end of your revision, you might reduce the notes further, down to a small file card, using only the main headings and associated key words.

**3. Summarising Using Assignments**

Compare assignment questions and specimen and past examination questions on the same topic. How do the questions differ? What would be the key difference between an assignment answer and an exam answer on the same topic? Reduce the assignment to a card containing headings, key words and formulae, to use for your revision in the last week.

**4. Diagrammatic notes**

Take a large blank sheet of paper. Draw a box in the centre of the page and write in it the unit/block topic. From memory, add in the main themes/arguments, important authors, etc. in sub-boxes radiating from the centre (diagram form). Doing this from cold will show you that you remember more than you thought.

Then sit down and revise: look at the block, your notes, past TMAS, etc. Work for, say, 40 minutes. (If you are really concentrating, fatigue effects soon set in, so breaks help. Have a coffee break every 30-40 minutes, not only is it a reward, it helps to reduce fatigue).

Then go back to the diagram and, from memory, fill in anything you left out. Use a different colour to focus on it.

About 24 hours later try a recall test. Draw your diagram again from memory. Again, fill in anything omitted in colour. Repeat recall tests at intervals, to build up confidence. Try this in difficult circumstances to prove you can recall easily even under stress.

**NB** If you don't find the diagram form helpful, just make conventional notes. Summary tables or grids can be a useful alternative for some topics.

**Why use this Technique?**

- All you have already studied on a topic is there in your memory. You already know it.
- This revision method helps to bring it to the surface and organise the material for easy access.
- It gives you confidence that you do know it.

**5. Use Past Papers and Specimen Papers**

Have a go at:

- tackling questions and writing skeleton plans for answers; include main points of argument and supporting evidence, examples, etc.
- writing a short introduction to a question in, say, 5 minutes. Unlike a TMA, this is helpful in practising getting into a question quickly
- attempting a whole question or paper under timed conditions.
- imagining that you are the Chief Examiner. Take an examination question and imagine that you set it. What were you looking for in this question? List what you would expect and give marks for in an answer.
- taking a block or topic and setting 3 questions of your own with a brief scheme for answers, ie. what you would expect in an answer.

**6. Teach a topic**

Select a topic that you feel you know well, and teach it to your fellow students. This will help both you and the rest of the group to fill in gaps in your knowledge.

If you have the confidence, prepare and teach a topic you are less sure about.

**7. Work with Other Students**

Self help groups can assist by discussing things. A good lively discussion is one of the easiest ways to learn.

**Ideas for Use in Self Help Groups**

- Exchange practical advice on revision and examination techniques that you have found helpful. You have a fund of valuable experience to share, it is not just tutors who know it all! Experience from other situations, like driving tests, can be relevant.
- Look at one another's TMA answers (and tutor's comments) to see how others have handled the same/different questions.
- If two or more want to revise the same block then each take notes on it in advance, condensing to, say, 2 sides of A4. Then compare and discuss notes.
- Plan essay answers or answers to long questions together in a 'brainstorming session'.
- Spend 5 minutes writing an introduction to the same question. Then compare and discuss, look at their relative merits as introductions and perhaps where each might be expected to lead.
- Do the 'Chief Examiner' exercise above as group exercise then compare and discuss your ideas.

**8. Last minute revision**

If you do find that you have run out of time, here is a quick strategy for revising a block:

- remind yourself of the gist of the block by flicking through the pages, looking at TV and Radio notes, reading the introduction, etc.
- turn to the contents page of the units, which will indicate the main headings that you will need to get to grips with.
- read the summary of each section and check that you understand.
- if not, read sections that puzzle you.
- when time is short this has the advantage of keeping the main themes of the block to the fore and preventing you from getting bogged down in details when (a) there is not time and (b) examination answers won't call for very detailed factual knowledge anyway.

**NB:** when courses are in book form or computer based, adapt strategies as appropriate.

**PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION – MISCELLANEOUS TIPS****1. What do ‘process words’ mean?**

Analyse assignment and examination questions to find words or phrases which are frequently included and check your understanding of these.

For example,

*‘Write down’ ‘State’, ‘Give’* mean ‘write down without justification’.

*‘Find’ ‘Calculate’, ‘Determine’, ‘Explain’, ‘Derive’, ‘Solve’, ‘Evaluate’* mean ‘work out and show your working.

*‘Prove’, ‘Show’, ‘Deduce’, ‘Explain’* mean ‘you must justify each step and provide a convincing argument’.

**2. Practice Your Handwriting**

This is important, particularly if you have word-processed your tutor marked assignments. Unless you have special needs which allow you to use a word-processor in the examination, you will need to be able to write quickly and legibly.

**3. Multiple Choice Questions**

If your examination consists partially or totally of multiple choice questions, you will need to practice answering these quickly, and know when to leave a question and go onto the next one.

**4. Annotating The Handbook**

Some courses allow their students to take material into the examination, such as units, set books and handbook. For some courses, material can be written in the handbook (‘annotated’).

- Some handbooks can have words, etc. highlighted or underlined, but nothing extra can be written in.
- Material which can be annotated usually cannot have additional paper added in, including inserts, post-its or index slips.
- Annotation can include past examination questions and their answers.
- You need to be very selective when annotating, as if you put too much in, you won’t be able to find anything during the examination. Annotation is better carried out near to the examination, as comments, etc. put in during the year or when starting revising may not be needed.