

How to Develop Successful Examination Techniques

Study Skills – Exam Preparation

One of the biggest challenges when facing university life is to present international and final exams we are not prepared to sit; mainly because we do not develop examination techniques through our academic life and we just do something a couple of hours before the real exam takes place. This document gives you a clear guide of the techniques you need to master to improve your performance in any kind of examination.

First, evaluate your general perception of examinations

Self score each question on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is low and 10 high.	
1. <i>How confident are you about taking examinations?</i>	
2. <i>How organised are you in terms of revision?</i>	
3. <i>How good are you at managing your time in the revision period?</i>	
4. <i>How effective have your revision techniques proved to be in the past?</i>	
5. <i>How easy do you find it to visualise your own success in exams?</i>	
6. <i>How well do you pick the right question in the exam hall?</i>	
7. <i>How good are you at organising your thoughts into answers in the exam?</i>	
8. <i>How competent are you at developing your answers in the exam hall?</i>	
9. <i>How good are you at managing your time in the exam hall?</i>	
10. <i>How confident are you about getting the grades you want?</i>	
Total Score	
Interpretation	
What did you score?	
Less than 50%	There are plenty of tips you can learn
50%-75%	There is still room for improvement
75%-100%	You are confident- check the tips to confirm your understanding

**Adapted from how to succeed at University, Smale, B & Fowlie, J, 2015*

Why do people fear examinations?

Hardly anybody likes examinations and we all suffer from a certain level of anxiety, sitting at a desk in a large room in complete silence is not comfortable at all and not very common in our daily practices. There are several reasons why students at any level become nervous before and during exams.

1. **Inadequate preparation-** Inadequate preparation is one of the ultimate fears built into students' mind when an examination is approaching. This in most cases occurs with students who have not covered a vast area of the course or subject syllabus. It also affects those who are not active in classes or a class of students who are not properly taught. This could be due to their lack of understanding or the ineffective way they are been thought in the class.
2. **Lack of understanding the exam format-** Some people under-achieve in examinations because they do not know the format of the exam or they have not practiced enough, in spite of their English level or subject knowledge. Students should know what is expected from them during the exam, what type of questions they will have and how they can structure their answers in the best way possible.
3. **Seek for effortless, short-term solutions-** The strategy of cramming at the last minute often fails because students have to assimilate and integrate vast quantities of information in too short a period of time. You are likely to feel overwhelmed and overloaded with details and ideas that do not seem connected and by the end you will feel even more frustrated.

To succeed in examinations you need to plan for success, include positive thinking and visualisation, you should start from the position that you have the capability of passing and then create study habits, set up clear goals for your exams and overcome your fears.

What happened in the past may condition our mind to future outcomes, that is why some people who take exams many times feel shocked every time they need to do it again. Remember the past does not necessarily determine the future; finding your weaknesses and working on them will be the difference in the final result.

Setting up a positive approach to examinations requires:

Recognising anxiety as normal- Anxiety can be controlled by simple exercises such as breathing slowly, meditating and visualisation. Remember that exams measure what you can demonstrate about your learning thus far in a course of study, not your worth as a person.

Eliminate negative thoughts- Try to eliminate negative self-statements such as "*I'm going to fail this exam for sure because I'm such a big dummy.*" Whether negative statements are accurate or not, they work to convince you that they are accurate and

this has an impact on your behaviours and self-concept. This negative thinking may limit your ability to perform to a high standard on an exam. Replacing negative statements with genuine positive statements like *"I'm studying hard and I did great during the mock tests, I should do similarly well on this exam."* may help curb anxiety and bolster your sense of confidence.

Organising your Study

Many students spend a great deal of time revising, not all their valuable time is well directed. Check these steps to help you organise your study sessions:

Know what you are going to be asked to do- Make sure you understand what is expected from you. Get ready to understand the different type of questions you will have in the different sessions (speaking, writing, reading and listening) some exams may have integrated skills where you need to do

Inspect past papers- These will give you a clear indication of what the type of questions are, so you can prepare in advance and save time when the real exams come. Make sure you are familiar with instructions and the criteria.

Make a realistic revision schedule- Once you have clear what you are expected to do and a date, create a revision schedule that fits the rest of the activities you do during the day. Try to stick as much as you can to it, but if something unexpected happens, make sure you catch up the next day.

Review all your notes and handouts- Check your notes and study the material in a chronological order. This will help you to remember the scope of the course you have taken, and thus make you aware of what might come up to the examination. When checking notes, some people may not understand everything that they say; give yourself some time to check the material again and complete your notes if necessary.

Reduce complicated concepts to key words or mind maps- When you are studying your brain will be more efficient if you give tags to the important information you want to remember. In using mind maps you are teaching yourself to see an image of what you are reviewing and thus a better and clear understanding of the concepts.

Set up a study circle- Group work can bring benefits for your study habits if it is done within a specific schedule. Discussing a topic may clarify ideas or help you find better arguments that are in favor or against concepts.

Don't do too much- Cramming the exams last minute, not sleeping and drinking lots of coffee is a bad combination. When you are studying do little by little and review



what you studied before. Give a balance to the daily activities you do including social interactions and sport.

**Adapted from how to succeed at University, Smale, B & Fowlie, J, 2015*