

Preparing for exams

Exam preparation really begins the day your course begins because your success will depend on your day to day study habits as much as it will depend on the more concentrated periods of study in the weeks leading up to the exam. If you have well-organised and complete notes, and you have regularly revised your work at the end of each topic or section, you are already on the way to success. You will be well-prepared to study efficiently and effectively in the weeks before the exam.

1. Organise your time.

You need to find at least one extra hour a day for each subject. Be realistic. Plan to do no more than six hours of study on one day. Do not plan to study any subject for more than one hour without a break.

2. Organise your space (physical and mental).

Tidy your desk so that you can work comfortably. Try to eliminate distractions. Brace yourself for the task ahead and be confident about achieving your goal. Preparing for exams means working longer hours, but for a relatively short period of time.

3. Organise your material.

Make sure that you have all the relevant material for each topic you must study.

4. Do some research.

Find out as much as you can about the exam. Past exam papers can be found on the first floor of the Dixon Library near the photocopiers. They are also available electronically through Dixon Library. Copy at least three past exam papers for each subject. Study the instructions and take note of the types of questions and the topics covered.

5. Make a study plan.

Decide how much time you need to spend on each subject. Some subjects will require more work than others because of the level of difficulty, the quantity of material or the nature of the content. Think about the best time of day for focussing on a particular subject. Early morning is often recommended for subjects or topics which require a lot of memorisation.

6. Revise.

The sort of revision you do will be determined by the subject you are studying, but it should always involve more than simply reading your text book or your notes. Try to vary how you revise. You could record information and then listen to it while you are out walking. You could use wall posters, cards, mindmaps, mnemonics and other memory aids, or repeat information aloud.

Always bring your revision back to writing. After all, this is what you will be required to do.

7. Test yourself.

Once you feel you have mastered a topic, practise on the past exam papers. This will help to reinforce what you know. It will also help to identify any gaps or weaknesses. If you cannot get your answers checked, or check them yourself, you might find it useful to form a small study group. Answers can be compared and discussed, usually to everyone's benefit.

8. Make your final preparations.

Make sure that you know the time and place of the exam. If the location is unfamiliar, do not wait until the day of the exam to find the room or building.

The night before the exam, look over your notes and review what you have done. If you have studied efficiently, you have every right to be confident. Make sure that you have all the necessary equipment. Try to get a good night's sleep, and give yourself enough time to get to the exam without rushing.