

EXAMINATION PREPARATION STRATEGIES

Curated by



Examination preparation strategies

Both studying and preparing are vital when it comes to success in exams. It is, however, also difficult to know how best to manage your preparation time until you have some experience. This guide, therefore, offers some ideas, based on experience and expert opinion, to help those still relatively new to exams. Some of these tips and tricks might sound like 'common sense', and yet still relate to the importance of looking after yourself. The others are more about how you do, approach, your studying. Both of these types are important and will help you to study better and perform better in the exam. Below is a list of strategies that you can utilise to help you students prepare for the exam period:

1. Start your revision early

There is no substitute for starting early with revision. You need to give yourself enough time to review everything that you have studied and make sure that you understand it (or to read around the subject or ask for help if you are struggling). Last-minute cramming is much less productive.

Ideally, review each subject as you go, and make sure that you understand it fully as this will make revision much easier. Ultimately, the best tip is to study hard and know your subject, and starting early is the best way to achieve this.

2. Organise your study time

You will almost certainly find some subjects easier than others. You will also find that you have more to revise for some subjects than others. It is worth taking the time to plan your revision and consider how much time you might need for each subject. It is also helpful to consider when and how long you plan to spend studying each day. How much time will you be able to manage each day? What other commitments do you have during your study period?

Plan your revision to ensure you use your time to your best advantage. When is the best time of day for you, morning, afternoon or night? Can you do more reading at particular times? This will help you plan what you intend to do, although you should always make sure that you leave it flexible enough to adapt later if circumstances change.

3. Take care of yourself during study and exam time

You will be able to work better if you eat a healthy diet and get enough of sleep. This applies both during your exam period and when you are revising. Surviving on junk food is not a good idea.

It is also a good idea to take regular exercise when studying. Training will get your blood moving and ensure that you are better able to concentrate.

4. Vary your revision techniques

They say that variety is the spice of life, and it certainly helps to improve your studying. Always doing the same thing, for example, reading over your notes on a subject, is likely to be dull over time. Spice up your revision period by trying different exercises and techniques. Alternatives to reading your notes over include:

- Doing practice papers and questions to test your understanding (your teachers or tutors will probably be very happy to mark these for you if you ask them nicely)
- Drawing mind maps or other summary diagrams to test what you can remember, and then check them against your notes. Notice where you have left out a detail, or there are gaps, and go back and review those areas; and
- Organising a discussion group with some friends to consider a particular issue or area.

5. Change your locations

Changing the location in which you study for example, your room, the library at school or a quiet café, or someone else's house, is also good. Research has found that this can help to improve memory retention. It is unclear why, but the suggestion is that the

brain makes connections between the background and what you are studying. More different connections makes things easier to remember.

6. Take regular breaks

You cannot work solidly for 8 hours. In fact, it is very hard to work in a concentrated way for more than about an hour. You may find that some days you can do more, but mostly, one to one and a half hours is likely to be your limit before you need a break. Take 10 minutes periodically to go and get a drink and walk around a bit.

7. Know your exam

Make sure that you have looked at past papers. This will ensure that you are prepared for the type of exam you will be sitting, whether multiple choice, short answer or essay. Know what you are expected to do: for example, how many questions from each section will you have to answer? Of course, you still have to read the instructions on the paper itself and make sure that they are the same, but this will help you to feel comfortable with what will be expected. Even more important, make sure that you have practised the right type of questions and know what will be expected of a 'good' and 'bad' answer.

8. Make sure you know the practical details about your exam

For example:

- Where will the exam be held?
- What time does it start, and when do you need to get there?
- If you have to travel some distance, what time will you need to leave?
- What do you need to take with you?

Make sure that you know what to do if something goes wrong. You might, for example, be sick on the day, or get held up on your way there, and you need to know who to contact. Take a bit of time at least a week beforehand to ensure you know the answers to all these questions.

This will help you to stay reasonably relaxed, and ensure that you know what to do if something goes wrong, as well as minimising the chances of something going wrong.

Finally...

We all have different ways of working, and that includes preparing for exams. As you get more experienced in taking exams, you will find the best ways for you, and learn how best to prepare. In the meantime, these tips should give you a good starting point for studying.

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