

### **Preparing for Examinations**

Most students dread exams and associate them with hard work, stress and anxiety. Often fears of the unknown or previous stressful experiences in formal assessments raise anxiety levels, but with careful examination preparation there is a lot you can do to increase rates of success and reduce unnecessary anxiety.

#### **Take care of yourself**

- *Get adequate rest.* Make sure that you are temperate in your sleep habits – you need rest if you are to cope with the workload at this time of semester.
- *Eat healthy food.* Avoid junk food or eating large 'heavy' portions or sugar intensive foods and drinks. Eat simple foods regularly, including salads, fruits and vegetables. Drink plenty of water to remain hydrated as your brain is largely water. Foods such as chocolate bars may give an energy boost, but within an hour your blood sugar levels will drop, which will make it hard to concentrate.
- *Exercise regularly.* You need breaks from study. Walk, swim (the College pool is heated), or spend some time on the basketball court or gym. Exercise will re-oxygenate your brain and stimulate your mind.
- *Avoid unnecessary stresses and emotional turmoil.* You do not need any other issues in your life for the few weeks before examination if you can avoid it. Spend some time with supportive friends. Take time out to quietly meditate, perhaps while walking. Or, you may prefer to just take time out with friends, or spend time in God's Word for a brief interlude.

#### **Manage your time**

The time for exams comes with a certainty, just like death and taxes! Delaying revision only makes the task more difficult when you start. Time management is a key to examination preparation. Your schedule is busy, so you will need to organise your priorities. Know your deadlines and plan to meet them. Make a list, write them in your *Minder*, and remember to:

- Prepare a weekly plan organising your study time up to the examinations;
- Know how much your exam counts in your overall assessment for that subject and allocate a proportionate amount of time to study for that subject's examination;
- Be realistic in the time you allocate to revision study;
- Timetable breaks for rest, relaxation and exercise;
- Achieve specific review tasks each study period;
- Break big topics into smaller components;
- Mix hard revision topics with easier ones;
- Limit your review immediately before the exam. All night and extended study before an examination is seldom helpful.

#### **Manage space**

- Find a regular study space that works for you, and keep that spot for study only. Avoid eating, sleeping or socialising there.
- Ensure that no distractions are present (such as emails, mobiles etc).

- Make the study spot similar to the examination room environment, which will aid recall of information.

### **Manage your motivation**

- Remember why you are here and what you wish to achieve through your study program. While it may seem a long way off, finishing your degree will happen soon.
- A small, focused amount of anxiety can be helpful – use adrenaline as a motivator!
- Rediscover the interesting parts of your study and use revision as an opportunity to rediscover why you are studying that particular subject.

### **Manage the unknown**

- Ask your lecturer for information about the structure of your upcoming exams.
- Be sure you know:
  - Where and when the examination is held;
  - How much time you have to complete the exam;
  - How many questions there are;
  - The style of questions in the exam (essays, short answer, multi-choice, problems etc);
  - How much the exam mark contributes to the overall mark of the subject;
  - What you can bring into the examination;
  - If past papers are available for review.

### **Manage your revision**

- Focus your exam preparation on practising and testing recall: cover your notes and recite or rewrite what you can remember as exams test recall, not recognition.
- Organise and group your revision notes in a meaningful way, and use your subject outline as a guide.
- Make connections between information, and focus on sections of related material.
- Use a method that works for you in connecting and condensing information, such as idea maps, mnemonics, dot points, or diagrams.
- Sift out and emphasise the main ideas, theories and arguments, as understanding is the key to recall.
- Re-read your notes and concentrate on the main points and ideas.
- Focus on learning and understanding the areas you do not recall easily.

Regularly review your lecture notes and associated readings each week. This will help you retain essential information and clarify key ideas. Write a brief summary of each lecture in point form at the end of each week, as such summaries can be used as the basis for examination revision. By doing them each week you will review ideas while they are fresh in your mind and you will have the essential information for review before the exams. The more effort you take at this time of the semester the easier it will be later on. The following headings for lecture notes and key reading summaries may be useful:

- The main idea
- Key information/facts – a concept map is a useful tool to use to help you immerse yourself in the topic

- Issues and debates – draw connections between topics and think how issues relate to one another
- Concepts – try teaching these to someone, as this will help you clarify the key ideas
- Key terms and mnemonics (aids to memorising such as acronyms)
- Key authors/contributors.

### Seek support

Do not hesitate to ask for help. Work with a study buddy, ask your lecturer for guidance, talk to library staff, or seek the additional tutorial assistance that is available in the Library in the afternoons and evenings.

If you feel that you are sinking, remember there are other support services available. Seek support from fellow students, the Director of Student Services, the Residence Directors, College Counsellor and Chaplain as they all understand what you are going through and are here to help.

### Types of exam questions

- *Multiple choice.* Aim to understand and recall information, focus on main points in your notes, carefully read the questions and the options presented, and use elimination to narrow choices.
- *Problem-solving.* Do as many sample problems as possible (previous papers, textbooks etc are helpful), and concentrate on understanding the theories and formulae that have been covered in class.
- *Essays.* Write sample essay outlines, and identify likely topics by looking at past papers and major topics in your notes.
- *Short Answers.* Only directly relevant information is needed for short answers, so identify likely topics from past papers and major topics in your notes, write down key information in dot points or in a diagram, and look at how you can shorten and clarify any answer.
- *Practical exams.* Practice what you will be required to do and buddy with a partner and take turns being examiner and examinee. Also, complete an old paper under test conditions to test your knowledge and understanding of the material and your examination skills and techniques.

### General Hints

- Revise – you should not leave initial learning until this time!
- Use your own notes, as your own words are the easiest to remember.
- Study topics from a range of perspectives. This helps you handle questions that look at a topic in a way that is different from how it was first presented.
- If your concentration slips, take a break.

### Practical Issues

- Double check the times and locations of your exams.
- Be familiar with the location of the examination venue.
- Establish how much time you should allow for travel to the venue – this is important if you are using public transport.
- Review the examination structure, previous papers if they are available, and the lecturer's comments regarding the paper.

- Ensure you know what materials you need to take into the venue.
- Be familiar with the published examination conditions.

### **The Examination**

- Have all necessary materials with you. You cannot borrow items such as pens, rulers, pencils or special equipment while in an examination. Also, ensure that you have spare items.
- Make sure that you comply with the published examination conditions.
- Scan the entire paper before beginning. Where you have choices, decide which questions you plan to answer.
- Read instructions carefully.
- Plan your time and written responses. For essay type answers, draft a quick plan in dot point format, and analyse the wording of the question.
- Write as quickly and as clearly as you can.
- Jot down ideas as they come to you.
- If you have a memory lapse, go to another question.
- Answer all questions, and use note format if you run out of time.
- Avoid leaving the room early – use extra time to go over your work and add information.
- Use your time wisely – do not spend too long on multiple choice questions.
- Never omit an entire question.
- Occasionally pause to stretch your hands, as the intensity of writing can be physically challenging.
- Try to save time for the end of the examination to read over your answers. Correct poor expression or spelling or check your calculations.

### **After the examination**

- Avoid post-mortems, as they often only achieve negative feelings.
- Take time to relax (if the next examination is already coming into focus).
- Remember others may be still studying.
- After intense mental activity, it is often helpful to engage in a session of physical exercise such as a swim or gym workout.