

Revision and Exam Skills

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section you will be able to:

- React positively to examinations
- Develop efficient revision strategies
- Plan your revision programme
- Prepare yourself for examinations
- Devise strategies for working in the exam hall
- Revision and Exam Skills

CONTENTS

Revision

- Active revision
- Structuring your revision
- Key revision strategies
- Other useful sections

Exam skills

- Know your exam paper
- Before the exam
- During the exam
- Each question
- After the exam

Revision and exam skills

Examinations

Examinations can be of great benefit to the learner for a number of reasons. Throughout the examination process you will :

- pull together all the various strands from your studies
- set individual topics in a wider context
- pick out particular themes
- apply your knowledge
- reach conclusions

Examinations give you a chance to make sense of your learning.

Revision

Revision is often depicted as the even more arduous process of preparing for exams, from which the exam itself forms a relieving end point. However, revision needs to be more than simply cramming everything you have studied into an already overcrowded brain.

Revision is the process of identifying key themes and issues, identifying what is really important and how this can be interpreted and applied.

This next section will explore the process of revising effectively and how this can lead into an assured examination technique.

Active revision

Examinations require a high level of subject knowledge and understanding. However, if you are to achieve your best in university level exams you will also need to be able to challenge, apply and extend that knowledge in the exam hall,

You can prepare for this through the development of active revision techniques.

Active revision pushes or restimulates your learning. This can be achieved through the adoption of a **questioning** rather than **absorbing** approach to your revision. For example questions such as:

- *What is the cause and effect?*
- *How can I justify this conclusion?*
- *How do these areas relate to each other?*

... will help you to think independently and broadly.

Structuring your revision

When revising you cannot read every note you have ever made or book you have referred to and hope that the information sinks in. Whilst remembering such factual information is an important aspect of exam revision you should avoid learning in an unstructured manner.

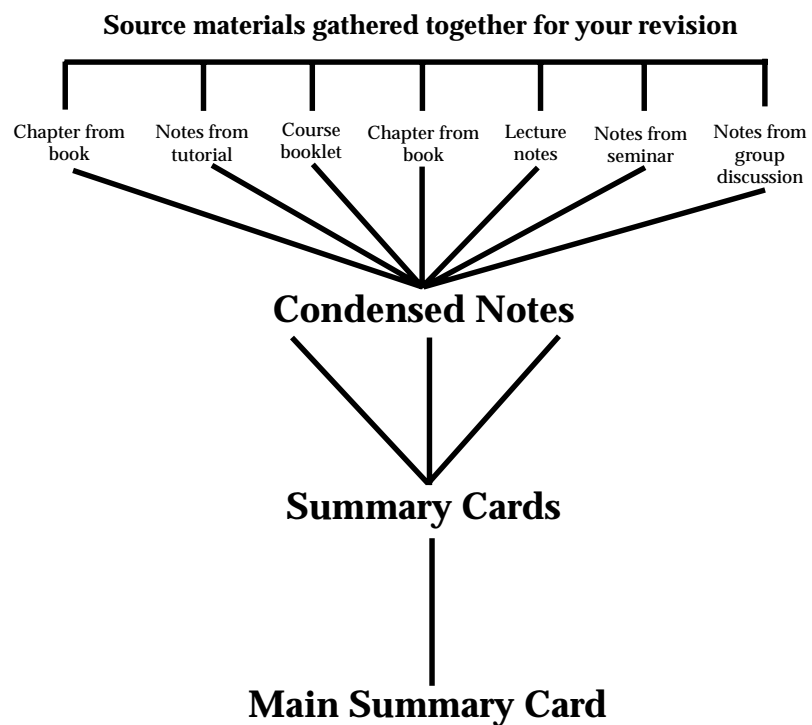
In order to apply your knowledge you will need to have it clearly structured in your mind. The following suggestions provide you with some useful strategies that will help you do this.

Key revision strategies

- Don't leave your revision until two or three weeks before the exam. Revision should be a continuous process. Read through your notes after your lectures, at the end of the week and at the end of term. This will leave you with less work to do in the period before your exams.
- Plan well in advance of the exams.
- Look at your course material and list the topics to revise for each subject.
- Draw up a revision timetable. Start off with a smaller number of hours and increase these week by week.
- Break up the day - remember how you need to stimulate your mind to help boost your concentration span.

- Condense your notes into brief summaries of the main points of the topic.
- Make your revision active - ask questions.
- Set up a card system on which to condense your notes. Summarise the main points:

Condensing your notes



- Draw 'spider' diagrams to summarise information on a topic or to test yourself.

The use of structured notes is further explored in the section **Taking notes**.

- Practise answering questions from past exam papers.
- Write some answers under timed conditions.
- For every hour you work take ten minutes off. Don't work longer than three hours at a time. Do something completely different.

- Prioritise topics nearer the time of the exam but don't gamble on particular questions coming up in the exam.
- Work with other students in group revision sessions. Discuss topics, share information within the group.
- During revision time maintain a normal routine. Eat well, take exercise, don't go straight to bed after revision. Try and relax.

Other useful sections



Other useful sections of this guide include:

- **Organising your time** - time management, planning a day, planning a week
- **Taking notes** - different note-taking techniques and ways of organising your notes
- **Reading efficiently** - reducing reading time, increasing reading efficiency
- **Essay writing** - structuring your essays, writing for others, writing introductions and conclusions
- **Information gathering** - active searches, maximising efficiency, minimising effort

Exam skills

The most common mistake in any exam is for a student to misunderstand an essay question or even an entire set of instructions. Indeed one of the most common fears about exams is that they are unpredictable. We can never truly know what we will be asked to write about or do.

This sense of uncertainty can be partially overcome. The following suggestions explore your role within the three key stages of exam work:

Before • **During** • **After.**

Know your exam paper

As you near the final stages of your revision, prepare for the exam by exploring exactly what it is you will be asked to do. This can be done through discussions with your tutor and examination of previous papers.

NB. Ensure that all the past papers are in exactly the same format as the paper you will be sitting.

- How many questions are you required to answer ?
- How long do you have to answer the questions ?
- What type of questions are there ?
 - short answers
 - multiple choice
 - structured questions
 - essays
- Is the paper divided into sections ?
- Are some questions compulsory ?
- Do you have to answer questions from each section ?

It may be helpful to establish a preliminary plan for your time during the exam based upon your answers to the above questions. Include time for reading the paper, deciding which questions you are going to answer and for checking your answers.

Before the exam

Try and reduce any uncertainties you may have by preparing in advance for the examination itself. Clarify the seemingly obvious procedural details to avoid any last minute anxieties affecting your concentration.

- When is the exam ?
- Where is the exam ?

- What time does it start ?
- What will you **need** to take into the exam hall?
- What are you **allowed** to take into the exam hall?

Familiarise yourself with the university's exam procedures long before you set foot in the exam hall. This will give you time to clarify any queries that you may have.

During the exam

- Listen to the instructions given.
- Read the instructions on the paper.
- Read through the paper carefully.
- Decide which questions you are going to answer and in what order. You might feel better starting with the question you feel most confident about.
- Don't write everything you know about a topic. Be selective from the information you know. Analyse the question. Underline or highlight key words and phrases. Ask yourself what the question is asking.
- Plan and structure your answer. Does it have an introduction and a conclusion ? Does it answer the question ?
- Look carefully at the mark allocation for each section. This will help you to apportion your time correctly.
- Answer the required number of questions. Keep to time. Remember, you don't get marks for questions you have not attempted.
- Allow five minutes at the end of each question to read through your work.

Each question

For each question you may like to:

- Read the question carefully 2 or 3 times.
- Highlight the key words indicating the required treatment.
- Brainstorm the question - what do you know?
- Ask how does this information relate to the question?
- Arrange your points accordingly.
- Write your answer.
- Reach your conclusion, summarise what you have written.
- Review your work.

After the exam

Avoid an immediate post-mortem outside of the exam hall. It is too easy to convince yourself that, from the evidence of others, you have done badly. Remember that there is always more than one way to answer each question!

You should, however, review your exam technique. Use each exam to learn about how you performed and to identify what preparation you may need to do for future exams.

- Had you revised efficiently?
- Did you learn the key topics in such a way that they were easy to recall?
- Were you clear as to the exam procedure?
- Did you run out of time?
- Did you fulfil all of the exam's requirements?

If there are any aspects of the exam you were unhappy with, discuss these with others who weren't in the same exam. Try and find ways of quickly and simply rectifying any problems for your next exam.

Examination summary

Exam time is often arduous and difficult. However, with effective planning and thorough revision you can take more control of the exam process. Revision time is the key time for you to optimise your learning, develop an overview of what you have learned, and apply your knowledge to a broad range of themes and issues.

