

# Revising for and Taking Exams

Last-minute 'cramming' for exams is the worst of all worlds - it is very stressful, is unlikely to lead to good marks and you won't be able to remember much of it within a few days of leaving the exam room.

It makes much more sense to start exam revision in plenty of time - all it takes is a little planning and self-discipline to avoid those late nights, cold sweats and so-so grades.

## Revising for Exams

Here are nine tips on revising for exams:

1. Make use of your learning style when you revise
2. Plan in good time
3. Active revision
4. Old exam papers
5. Pace yourself
6. You're not alone
7. Reward yourself
8. Trust
9. Look after yourself

## 1. Make use of your learning style when you revise

### Tips for Visual Learners

- Rewrite your notes as mind-maps
- Use colour to highlight important things
- Draw diagrams and sketches to help you remember points.

### Tips for Auditory Learners

- Read your notes aloud
- Record yourself on cassette reading key points of your notes aloud, then listen to the tape afterwards
- Revise with other students if you can
- Sing the main points. Linking them with a tune may help you remember them.

### Tips for learners who are readers and writers

- Copy out your notes.
- Read your notes silently.
- Rewrite the key points using different words.
- Write down key points from memory.

### **Tips for Active Learners**

- Move around the room
- Revise while you do kung-fu moves or other physical activity
- Mentally review what you've been revising while you're swimming or jogging.

## **2. Plan in good time**

### **Timetable**

- How much time have you got?
- What do you need to do?

### **A week in hand**

Aim to have your revision completed by a week before your exams. This gives you:

- flexibility in case of illness
- a chance to spend longer on something that proves difficult
- a break before you sit your exams.

### **Select**

- What topics do you need to revise?
- How much time do they need?

### **Targets**

Be realistic about:

- the targets you set yourself
- how much time you will need.

### **Balance**

Aim for a balance between subjects you're strong in and those which you're less confident about.

## **3. Active revision**

It's not enough just to re-read notes, make your revision active! Here's how:

### **Paper**

- Have plenty of paper and a pen handy.

### **Memorise**

- Study a section of your notes, and memorise the essential points.

### **Write**

- Put your notes out of sight, and write down from memory the essential things you learned.

### **Check**

- Check with your notes.

### **Learn**

- Note any points you omitted or got wrong, and learn them.

## **Cards**

1. Reduce notes to essential points, either by highlighting or underlining.
2. Use these points to make memory aids on index cards or similar-sized pieces of paper.
3. Use a separate card for each topic.
4. Write down important points to remember about each topic.
5. Carry these cards with you wherever you go. Review them in your spare moments.

## **4. Old exam papers**

- Look through old exam papers
- Make outline plans for the answers
- Note carefully the slight differences in how questions are asked from year to year.

## **5. Pace yourself**

- Use your time well.
- Don't try to do too much at once. Take a break from time to time in each study period.

## **6. You're not alone**

Revise with other people sometimes; if you don't feel that you've entirely grasped a topic, or don't have any 'new' ideas on it, discussing it with other students can be helpful. This is specially useful for Auditory Learners.

## **7. Reward yourself**

Recognise the targets you have achieved. Mark your progress on your revision plan so that you can see what you are achieving.

## **8. Trust**

- Trust your memory.
- Once you know a subject thoroughly, move on to the next. Don't keep checking your memory to see if it's doing its job.
- It's like a filing system, and it will produce what is required at the appropriate time.

## **9. Look after yourself**

Sorry to sound like your Mum, but...

### **Diet**

Try and eat a healthy diet, not just chips and burgers! Take time out for meals; don't try to work while you're eating dinner.

### **Caffeine**

Too much tea and coffee can increase your anxiety levels and induce insomnia. Caffeine tablets have the same effect.

### **Exercise**

Get some exercise! You don't have to go mad. 20 minutes exercise 2-3 times a week will give you more stamina, help reduce stress and help you to sleep.

### **Rest**

Don't try to work through the night before an exam.  
Go to bed in good time and get as much sleep as you can.

## **Taking exams**

Here are eight tips for helping you cope on the day of an exam:

1. Eat
2. Trust
3. Organise
4. Comfort
5. Nerves
6. Instructions
7. Questions
8. Preparing

### **1. Eat**

Have a reasonable amount to eat before the exam.

### **2. Trust**

Don't get into conversations about the exam just before the start; other people may make you more nervous or start confusing you. If you've prepared thoroughly, trust your own knowledge.

### **3. Organise**

Get to the exam room in good time.  
Make sure you have all the equipment you need.  
Remember that pens run out, and pencils break. Always have spares. Make sure that you know beforehand whether dictionaries, calculators and other pieces of equipment are allowed.

### **4. Comfort**

Remember that you will be sitting still for some hours. Make sure that you will be warm enough.

## **5. Nerves**

If you do get nervous or anxious, take some time out; getting a glass of water or going to the loo can help.

Don't give up. it's always worth going back in and trying again.

## **6. Instructions**

Read through the instructions, make sure you understand them.

Read through all the questions and decide which ones you can answer.

Divide the time available by the number of questions you have to answer, to work out how much time you can give each question.

Allow five minutes at the end of each period for reading through your answers.

## **7. Questions**

If they ask you to answer four questions, they will allocate marks to each one. So there's no point in spending all your time on just two questions, you'll never get more than 50% of the available marks that way.

Attempt the number of questions you are asked to answer.

## **8. Preparing**

If you are giving essay-style answers, spend the first 5-10 minutes of your available time noting down the ideas you wish to include.

Put them in a logical order and write your answer.

It is a good idea to practice writing this kind of timed answer as part of your revision routine.

**GOOD LUCK!**