

## WHERE TO START WITH EXAM STUDY

The most important thing with exams is to start studying early. This will reduce your stress and increase your chance of success.

### STEP 1: CHECK YOUR EXAM DETAILS

Before you begin your study make sure you know:

- When and where your exam is.
- What proportion of the total course mark is represented by this exam.
- What you need to take with you when you sit your exam and what you can't take into the exam venue.

### STEP 2: FIND OUT THE EXAM FORMAT

Finding out the length and format of the exam will help focus your study. Find out:

- What is the format of the exam e.g. essay, short answer, multiple choice or a combination?
- What topics will be covered in the exam?
- How long is the exam?
- How many questions will you need to answer?
- Do you have to answer all the questions or are you given a choice?
- Do the questions require factual or analytical answers?
- Will this be an 'open book' exam?

You can learn the answers to these questions from your tutor, reading your course information, previous exams if available and attending review sessions if provided by your tutor.

### STEP 3: MAKE A STUDY PLAN

Creating a study plan will help you get organised for study and keep you motivated.

Use a diary, calendar or study timetable to plan when and what you will study.

- Write down when your exams are. Plan to start your study early. Starting your study late is stressful and affects your ability to take in information.
- Consider what time of the day you learn best and focus on this as your most effective study time.
- Divide your time according to the number of subjects you need to cover. Think about which subjects need the most study and revision.
- Include specific tasks to be completed and the time each is expected to take. This way, you can ensure that you will cover all the required information before the exam.
- Set realistic goals of what you want to achieve in each study session.
- Include in your study plan time for practice exams where you complete an exam in exam conditions.
- When creating your study plan remember to include short 10-15 minute breaks every hour to improve your focus and boost your intake of information. Be disciplined in the length of your breaks.
- Include in your study plan classes, meals, exercise, relaxation and if applicable work. You will not be able to study effectively if you do not look after yourself. So make sure you get adequate food, exercise, sleep and relaxation.

### STEP 4: REVIEWING YOUR COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

As well as reading through your course materials and notes to study for exams, there are a number of ways to help you remember what you are reading. Here are a few ways to revise information:

### Mind Maps

Mind maps are a visual form of note taking. By focusing on key ideas and looking for links between them, you can 'map' knowledge that will help you better understand, organise and retain information. Mind maps are a great way to revise for exams. To create a mind map:

- Position your paper to landscape to provide space for your mind map to grow. Write and/or draw a picture of the central topic in the centre of the page.
- Add main branches that connect to the central topic. These main branches represent the key ideas/concepts that stem from the central topic.
- Next, you add more detail to your mind map by adding sub-branches. These expand the key ideas, providing more details.
- You may need to add even smaller branches to your sub-branches to expand ideas further.
- If any ideas from different branches link together, connect them with a line or arrow.
- For detailed notes and an example of mind mapping look at the mind mapping study sheet.

### Flash Cards

Flash cards are two-sided study aids that have a term, question or concept on one side and the answer on the other side. Studying with flash cards helps to retain knowledge. They force you to think about the material, link information together and develop active recall. To make flash cards:

- Review your course material and notes identifying any questions you think could be asked in the exam. Also, write down any terms, concepts or formulas that you need to learn.
- Write each question, term, concept or formula on a separate flash card.
- Write the answer or explanation on the other side of the card, using your own words whenever possible.

From there shuffle the cards then pick the top card and try to answer the question or explain the term. If you know it, put the card at the bottom of the pile. If not, look at the answer and insert the card a few cards down in the pile so that it will come up again soon. Keep working through the flash cards until you know all the answers.

You can carry your flash cards wherever you go so you can take advantage of any spare time you have like waiting in a queue or on a bus. You could also use your flash cards with fellow students to test each other's knowledge. To make it fun you could make it a competition keeping score of every correct answer.

### Read Aloud

Reading aloud may sound like a strange idea but it has been proven to increase memory retention. By moving your lips and speaking it out loud you are retaining more information and making it easier to recall it at a later date.

### Princeton Method

This method is a great way of sorting and summarising information. It is a good way to combine notes from lectures and readings. This method has three columns. The first is for headings and main points, the second is for a summary of your notes and the third is for adding extra details, examples and ideas that you find in readings and when you review your notes. The table will look like this:

Headings and main points	Summary of notes	Extra details, examples and ideas from reviewing notes and readings

## Mnemonics

Mnemonics is a memory aid that is amongst the easiest methods for test/exam preparation. They are silly songs or sayings that remind you of important information and the order of information. You most likely have encountered mnemonics before. For example, Roy G. Biv is a mnemonic for the colours of the rainbow red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Another example of mnemonics is My Very Educated Mum Just Served Us Nachos. This mnemonic helps you remember the order of the planets, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. You can create your own mnemonics to help you remember information for your exams.

## Post-it Notes

A good way to review and remember important facts or key words is post-it notes. Stick them in places where you won't miss them e.g. on the fridge, next to the coffee/tea containers or on the toilet door and every time you see a post-it, review the information. So that you don't become used to seeing the same post-it notes in the same places and start to ignore them, move them around. Also, use post-it notes that are different sizes and colours, write in different colours and use images and symbols. You might even like to colour code them by topic. Variation in your post-it notes will help you notice them and remember the information you are revising.

## Study with Others

Working with a fellow student or study group is a great way to study. It provides the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another, get help with difficult concepts and it helps motivate you to study. When working with others some ways to study are:

- Each person creates a list of questions to ask someone else. To make it fun keep score and see who is the most knowledgeable.
- Create mind maps together for complicated concepts.
- Teach each other. Not only is it a good way to learn, it also helps you practice explaining a topic in your own words.

If you don't have anyone to study with, talk about your studies with a family member or friend. By talking about a topic it clarifies your thinking and reveals any gaps in your knowledge.