

REVISION TECHNIQUES AND EXAM PREPARATION

You've got exams coming up and you've taken the first step towards success, thinking about how you are going to prepare yourself. You should allow at least 6 to 8 weeks, but the sooner you start the easier it will be. This leaflet is designed to give you some helpful tips on revising and getting prepared for exams. If you would like further advice the Students' Union provides workshops on exam preparation, revision techniques and exam anxiety as part of the SORTED training programme.

REVISION TECHNIQUES

Essentials of revision

- Practice in recalling what you have been taught
- Practice in answering questions
- Practice in assessing answers
- Revision should be an active process

What to revise?

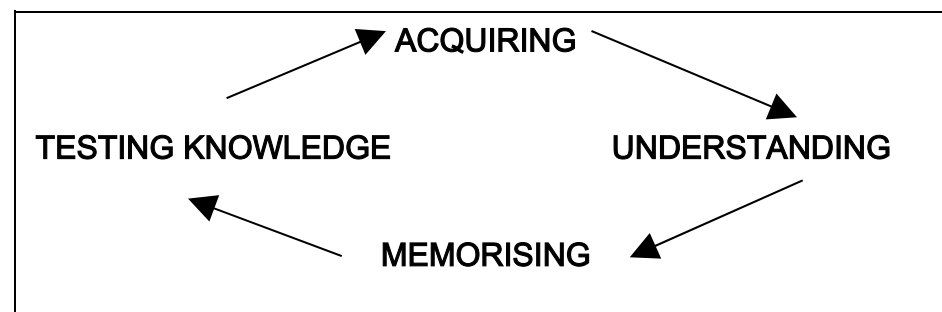
- Find out the format of the exam. Decide how many and which topics to revise. Consider the choice given in the exam – will questions combine topics? Is there a pattern evident in past papers? Think about the emphasis of the course and your own competencies
- There may be overlap between references. Read introductions, summaries and conclusions. If it appears that

the text has 'nothing new' then consider not reading any further.

- Refer to the University on-line catalogue that gives course aims and content to make sure you have a clear understanding of the objectives of the course.
- Are there any relevant publications that mirror the approach to the course? Read 'core' texts – a different publication may give another way of presenting the information

How to revise

- Aim to produce a good set of notes to use as a building block for your revision
- There are distinct stages of learning: **Acquiring, understanding, memorising and testing knowledge**. Each takes time, so allow for this in your planning.



Planning your revision

- **Be realistic – prioritise**

Do not set yourself targets that you can not achieve. Consider what you have to do, taking into account your personal working patterns, how much you realistically have to do and how much time you have. If you don't have enough time go back and re-prioritise the topics you have decided on.

- **Be flexible**

You need to build in time to relax and time for the 'unexpected'. Your timetable may need to alter along the way. If you fall behind in a topic you can catch up on a 'spare' day

- **Fix your goals**

Occasionally set yourself deliberately easy targets, this will make you feel good about yourself, boosting your determination continue working.

When you sit down to revise, make the learning process distinctive. The more specific the learning experience, the more likely you are to remember it at the vital time

- **Colours**

Colours can be used in many ways to add meaning and clarity to your thoughts:

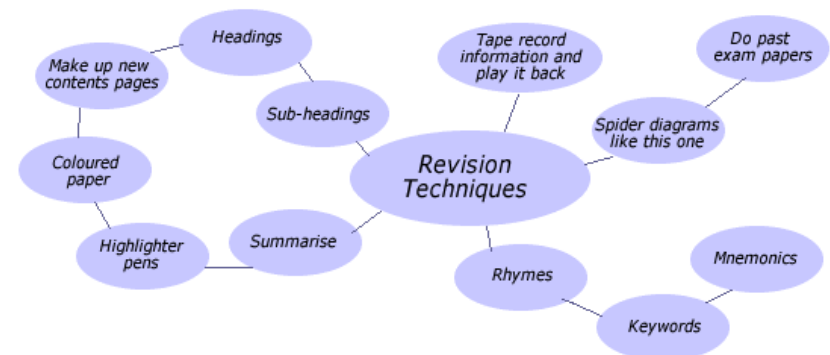
- highlighting important points
- creating visual links to related topics/theories/ideas
- breaking up the page
- drawing pictures and diagrams
- changing the way you record your thoughts

- **'Mind Maps'**

More commonly known as spider diagrams. A creative way of pulling together related topics and thoughts that interconnect. By reviewing your work and collecting key words together to form the map, you are making connections within your brain

Key points to follow when creating a mind map:

- use landscape paper
- start in the centre with the main topic
- imagine sub-sections of the topic as your main branches, write one word on the line and link topics
- draw more branches for greater details
- Try to make it colourful and fun – if you can make it enjoyable you will be more likely to remember it
- When in the exam and 'go blank' drawing out the map (or just imagining it) will bring back your thoughts



- **Memory Magic**
Mnemonics – a way of remembering information by putting it into a different context, e.g. ‘Never eat shredded wheat’ for remembering points on a compass – it may sound silly but it really does work
- **Test each other**
Try incorporating your social life with your revision. Once you are confident on a topic, meet up with friends and cover areas together. They may be able to bring fresh thoughts to any problems
- **Reward yourself**
When you’ve worked hard and achieved one of your goals (even if it’s an easy one) reward yourself. Whether this is going out, having a relaxing bath, reading a book or speaking to a friend, look after yourself and give your brain a rest!

EXAM PREPARATION

LONG TERM

- **Devise a timetable**
Preparing for an exam is not just about revision. It’s about preparing your body and mind for a stressful experience. This requires planning. Be realistic and stick to the timetable. Don’t forget to allow time for relaxing, exercising, socialising and unforeseen circumstances.
- **Divide your work into topics**

Allocate time to revise each topic

- **Find out the location, time, date and duration of the exam**
Know well in advance the date, location, duration and type of exam – although this may sound obvious, a number of people each year miss their exams because they didn’t realise they were in the morning/afternoon etc!
- **Go over past exam papers**
Do this early on, not to spot questions to revise for the exam, but to understand the format, style, and type of exam you are revising for. Do you have to answer all the questions? Do you have to write an essay? Understand and plan how long it will take to answer each part of the exam
- **Find out the exam format**
Exam format changes from year to year, sometimes without being mentioned in lectures. Find out from the lecturers if there are any changes this year.
- **‘Healthy body, healthy mind’**
 - Make sure you eat well, get sufficient rest and exercise. Take care of yourself.

SHORT TERM

- **Take time off to relax**
As the exam gets closer this becomes even more important. Pushing yourself too hard may do more harm than good.

Strategies for coping with stress:

- Relaxation/meditation
- Daydreams/visualisation
- Increased assertiveness
- Talking to friends and family
- Effective time management
- Tension release (e.g. shouting 'arrrrgghh!')
- Exercise
- Diet
- Creative problem solving

- **Don't panic**

Try not to panic about what you haven't covered during the final waves of revision. Concentrate on what you do know and polish it up

- **Prepare your materials**

The day before the exam collect the materials and equipment you will need (i.e. pens, pencil, ruler, calculator etc). This means you will not have to worry about it right before the exam

- **All work and no play ...**

Some people take the day or the morning before an exam off to relax and destress. Although you may decide that this is not for you, follow the principle. Set aside some time near the exam to do this.

- **Get plenty of sleep**

On the night before the exam make sure you get plenty of sleep. This means you will be refreshed and ready for the stressful experience ahead. If you do not manage to get a restful night, do not worry.

ON THE DAY OF THE EXAM

- Remember your materials – check you have everything necessary with you before you leave
- Arrive early
- Relax
- Avoid exam conversation – if you know it will worry you do not discuss the exam with anyone

IN THE EXAM HALL

- **Read the paper carefully**

When you sit down read the paper and understand what is required of you

- **Answer the question**

Take the first few minutes to read the question carefully and pick out the ones you think you can answer. Take a deep breath, relax, concentrate and start. Focus your answer exactly to the question.

- **Plan your answers**

In some cases you may find it useful to spend a few minutes planning your answer. For example, if you have to write a long essay you will need more details than for the shorter answer.

- **Keep within the time limits**

Try to keep within the time limits for each question.

- **Remember**

Everyone finds exams draining. Spread the load by starting early and getting into a routine. Your time will be more effectively used if you tackle your workload in small, regular amounts.