

Online Exams: Strategies

Be prepared. Act now to enjoy the benefits of less anxiety at exam time.

Many students express concern at the thought of sitting examinations. Remember that the study you do during semester will contribute to the knowledge that will be tested. Build on it as you go, starting at the very beginning of semester. This will help to reduce the stress of exam period.

Advance planning

As soon as the dates and times are announced, start preparing an **exam timetable**. Include:

- When your exam will take place (e.g., is it at a set time, or any time within a 24-hour period?)
- Times for domestic activity (e.g., sleeping, travelling, chores etc.)
- Time for recreation and physical exercise
- Study time for when you feel most alert (are you a morning or afternoon person?)
- Back-up study time (in case things go awry)

Try to set adequate amounts of time for each of your subjects, and allocate extra time for those you find difficult. If your exams are scheduled close together, a sensible strategy is to cover the work for the later exams as soon as possible so that this is "filed away". This will reduce the amount of reviewing required after you sit the first examination.

To maximise your study time, try to ensure that your study time is free from interruptions and distractions. Ensure your space is well-organised with all the materials you need.

Active learning

Revise thoroughly. Try to predict what questions will be examined, but not at the expense of revision.

- Look at your course outlines/ handouts
- Take note of material likely to be examined
- Locate previous exams online
- Prepare brief sample answers in skeleton form
- Pick a key concept in each line
- Use a 'memory key' (e.g., acronyms. See below section, 'Recalling')

In the month leading up to the exam, learn sample answer lists / memory keys. It is essential that you know and understand the course terminology or formulae when answering questions in an exam. Learn the terminology and know how to correctly spell key terms.

Revising

You want your knowledge and memory to be reliable in the examination. Get assistance early with any weak areas you identify. Understanding and active revision are vital to learning and remembering.

Systematically review your material

Use "active" learning techniques like **SQ3R** which stands for...

Survey: Scan through your notes and texts.

Question: What is this topic about?

Read: Try to answer your questions. Take notes.

Recall: Answer the questions without your notes.

Review: Re-read your notes whenever you can.

Revise material in small chunks

Different subjects have different absorption rates. Don't try to take in too much at one sitting. Break regularly and use this time for "Recite" or "Review". A 15-minute burst with a five minute review is often more effective than a one-hour session. Test yourself regularly to ensure that you are remembering.

Recalling

Develop "keys" to memory. Keys work particularly well in times of stress, thus allowing you to unlock stored information and apply it under exam conditions. Some examples of keys are:

Language memory aids

Acronyms: A word comprising the first letters of a series of other words, for example 'ROY.G.BIV' represents the spectrum colours: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet.

Mnemonic: A verse or rhyme to help memory. Another example for spectrum colours is 'Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain'. Another example of a mnemonic is 'I before E except after C' to remember a particular spelling.

Humour: For example, to remember the order of the planets, use 'My Mother Jumped Straight Under Nelly's Very Enormous Pantaloon'. NB: Pluto has been relegated, therefore the Pantaloon is outdated.

Summarise your notes to a keyword or phrase which you can recall easily, and devise your own acronyms and mnemonics.

Visual memory aids

Visualise or draw images to associate with the main points. Graphs, tables, coloured highlighting pens, doodles, flow diagrams, mind maps etc. are also useful in promoting memory. Draw the main points, say the main points and then write the main points.

Motor memory aids

Try walking, dancing, throwing or kicking a ball while repeating the main points out loud, then proceed to write them down.

Auditory memory aids

Record the information you are trying to remember and play it back whenever possible. This allows you to exercise and study simultaneously! Try singing the information you are memorising to the tune of your favourite song. Beware of interference between similar subjects. Examples include; Physics and Electronics; Psychology and Sociology. Avoid studying subjects with similar content consecutively, as things can become muddled.

Practise & rest

- Practise using the exam information: Talk to others about your course material. Lecture your dog!
- Try out old examinations: Use these to simulate exam conditions, but not to predict questions.
- Don't study excessively the day before the exam. Do something relaxing, or exercise to change focus.
- Get a good sleep the night before your exam. Think ahead and prepare your materials (e.g., calculator, notes etc.).

On the day

- Make sure the space in which you will take your exam is clear of distractions.
- Ensure you have a reliable internet connection.
- Ensure your device is fully charged, preferably plugged in to a power source.
- If your exam is open book, have your materials at arm's length and well-organised.
- Have scrap paper handy if you prefer to write out ideas and plan your answers.

- Read each question carefully. Make sure you understand what is expected of you in each question.
- Answer the question being asked, not the question you would like to answer!
- For many online exams, you will not be able to go back to review your answer. This makes reading the question, and your answer, very important! Double-check your answer before you move on.
- For essay questions, create a brief essay plan in note form. This will help if you run out of time – notes will be better than leaving it blank.
- If you are asked to calculate answers, show your working. If you run short of time, show the examiner in point form how you would have solved the calculation. Credit is often possible despite the absence of totally correct computations.
- If you have multiple-choice questions, always look for the most correct answer.

What the examiner wants

- Answers that are clear and simple
- Concise answers (they are easier to mark)
- A demonstration of your knowledge of the subject
- Concrete examples as evidence to support your answer
- All parts of your answer are related to the original question
- NO personal opinion, name-dropping and generalisations in your answers

Recognise anxiety

- Acknowledging you may be worried is a positive step: It is normal to feel this way in exams.
- Stress can be a motivator and can help you perform well.
- Think positively and support yourself through the exam with affirming thoughts (“I can do this”).
- If you are worried, control your breathing by taking long deep breaths.
- Do the best you can.
- Refer to other FedUni helpsheets below about managing exam anxiety.

Realistic stress

- If you have not prepared well, then you have every reason to feel nervous; that’s normal and rational. Accept that your results, on this occasion, may not be good.
- Remember that your grade does not reflect your worth. Don't confuse yourself with your results.
- Use the experience to motivate you to prepare more thoroughly in the future.

Consider your attitude

- Study at a moderate pace; vary your work when possible and take breaks when needed.
- Don't neglect your basic biological and emotional needs while you are revising for exams.
- Continue the habits of good nutrition and exercise, recreation and social activities; they contribute to your emotional and physical well-being.
- Remember you are a whole person, not just a test taker.
- The most reasonable expectation is to demonstrate your understanding of the subject.
- Reward yourself after the test - see a movie, go out for dinner, visit friends.
- Plan ways to improve your work next term.

Other helpsheets available

- Online Exams: Multiple Choice Questions
- Online Exams: Managing Anxiety
- Short Answer Questions
- Time Management
- Five-step Planner