Sitting Exams

Preparing well, over a long-term and a short-term period, is vital for success in exams; remember the saying ‘Fail to Prepare, Prepare to Fail’! Setting up a revision timetable with clear, achievable goals is the first step towards success. Sticking to the timetable throughout your revision period is the next step and developing good memorisation strategies is another. However, the way that you prepare for the actual day of the exam mentally, organisationally and physically can also have a significant impact on your level of success.

The day before the exam

- **Double-check** the date, time and place of your exam, and check that you know exactly how to get there.

- **Avoid panicking**, it won’t help the situation at this stage. Many students work themselves into a state of panic the day before an exam which only results in negative feelings about sitting the exam. Think positive, confident thoughts and tell yourself you CAN do it!

- **Forget revising new topics**; if you haven’t covered all the topics by now, you’re not going to. Look over your revision notes which you should have put into small, memorable chunks i.e. on index/note cards, mindmaps. Imagine yourself in the exam writing out the information you have learned. You can use this mental association in the exam to help you remember.

- **Drink plenty of water**. Make sure you are fully hydrated; you will feel healthier and, most likely, sleep better as a result.

- **Pack your bag**! Take several different coloured pens - one to write with and a spare - one to highlight/underline parts of the questions (if necessary), a pencil, water, student ID card and a wristwatch to the exam.

- **Have plenty of rest** the night before. Try to relax your mind by doing some physical exercise, having a bath or curling up with a good book or DVD, whichever suits your mood. Avoid alcohol, caffeine or any other drug. If you cannot sleep, don’t lie in bed wide awake panicking; lie with your eyes closed
resting and listening to your favourite music, or switch on a lamp and try reading a novel, not a study book.

- **Breathe deeply** in and out through your nose if you feel panicky. Practice this technique regularly and develop it as a skill to use whenever you feel stressed or anxious.

**The morning of the exam**

- **Wake up in good time**; if you rely on public transport, listen to or watch the news to check for any delays or problems. Plan to leave plenty of time for your journey.

- **Eat breakfast if you can**, preferably something light and healthy e.g., cereal, yogurt, fruit and/or juice; try and avoid too much caffeine. If you don’t usually eat breakfast, drink some water or water mixed with fruit juice. It is strongly inadvisable to smoke or have caffeinated drinks on an empty stomach before an exam (or any other time!). Take a banana or cereal bar (slow release energy food) with you in case you get hungry on your journey to the exam or immediately after. If your exam is in the afternoon, have a later breakfast or a light healthy lunch.

- **Give yourself plenty of time** to get to the exam - you don’t want to arrive flustered and panicking because you are late.

- **Take a moment**; if, at any time, you start to feel panic rising in you, or those negative thoughts start creeping into your head, stop or slow down for a moment and deal with it. Use nasal breathing and positive thinking strategies.

**When you arrive at the exam room**

- **Avoid negative chatter**; stay away from other anxious classmates **UNLESS** they really are good friends who care about how **YOU** feel, in addition to how they are feeling. Negative talk promotes negative thought and negative energy; that’s the last thing you need as you walk into an exam room!
• **Be quiet**; quieten your mind, your thoughts about anything not related to the exam and your emotions. Breathe deeply through your nose to calm yourself and raise your positive energy levels and focus entirely on what you are **going to achieve** in the next couple of hours.

• **Pay attention** to any instructions that you are given *before* you enter the room; **make sure your mobile phone is switched off** and that you have everything you need to take to your desk.

**In the exam**

• **Read the instructions** on the front of the paper *carefully* and complete any relevant boxes with your student number, name etc. You will be told by the invigilator when to open the exam booklet.

• **Scan read** through the whole exam paper first then go back and **close read** the paper again. Make sure you know exactly which questions you *must* answer, and which you can choose.

• **Don’t rush** to tackle the very first question on the paper. Identify and answer the questions you find easiest first to build your confidence.

• **Plan your time carefully**; you should know the exam requirements - number of questions to answer over time constraint - before you enter the exam room. Remind yourself of this as you plan which questions to answer, and in what order.

• **Spend more time on questions that carry more marks**; they will require longer answers. Questions that carry a small number of marks are still significant but require brief, succinct answers.

• **Analyse and choose questions carefully**; allow time and careful thought for this. Identify the topics you are most familiar with and make sure you understand *exactly* what the question is asking you to do with the topic.

• **ANSWER the QUESTION**; the most common mistake students make in exams is not answering the question. Do *not* just write down everything you revised or remember about the topic; you must *apply* your knowledge to the
question that is being asked in order to get a good grade - do this explicitly by referring back to the question in your answer.

- **Plan your answer;** don’t be afraid to spend time thinking and writing a brief essay plan containing the main points you want to cover. This plan will help to guide your writing and keep your thoughts flowing while you are writing the essay in full. If you run out of time, the examiner will usually mark the essay plan.

- **Don’t get stuck on one question.** If you really can’t answer it, move on to the next one and try again if you have time left at the end. However, if you have spent some time planning your answers, this shouldn’t happen.

- **Allow time to read over your answers when you have finished;** check your spelling, numbering of questions and that your student/candidate number is on all papers.

- **Forget tippex!** If you make a mistake, clearly cross it out and write the correct word/answer next to it or, if you notice the mistake at the end, above it.

- **Don’t be intimidated.** Other people in the room might be writing pages and pages; don’t let this undermine your confidence. Focus on your own efforts, no-one else’s as it is only your efforts that will get you through the exam.

**After the exam**

- **Avoid pointless post-mortems;** they can leave you drained and anxious that you’ve failed, especially if they’re led by someone who claims to know all the answers! If you have other exams to sit, go home and focus on the next one. The exam is done and, even if you feel you didn’t do very well, there is nothing you can do about it now. If you have to re-sit, deal with it when the time comes and learn from the experience.

**GOOD LUCK!**