

Exam day tips

The secrets of exam preparation are to have revised effectively and as early as possible (see Exam revision tips flyer). Exam day tips will give you some clues about how to perform successfully on exam day. Remember the examiners are on your side and they want you to succeed!

Some exam preliminaries

- Check exam timetable, date, time and room. Also check for any last minute changes.
- If you have a disability or ongoing medical condition, you should consult with the Disability Liaison Unit for alternative exam arrangements early.
- If you have experienced exceptional personal circumstances which you believe will affect your exam performance you should apply for Special Consideration through your Faculty office.
- Deal with YOUR stress early! We all respond to stress differently, some may feel restlessness, sleeplessness, fatigue.... A little bit of stress is normal and allows you to perform well. If your stress becomes severe then you will need to seek help from the Student Health Service or the Counselling Service. Take up yoga, relaxation, meditation, aromatherapy, sport..... Visualise success and completing the exam and doing well. Use slow deep breathing to control your anxiety.
- Practise under exam conditions and learn as much as possible about the exam environment.
- Preview the exam. Know the format, types of questions and the content. Find out about any exam hurdles.
- Also find out what can be taken into the exam, eg. calculators, dictionaries, water, food....

The night before the exam

- Set priorities – what are the most important topics (not necessarily the hardest)?
- Concentrate on a few topics and know them well.
- Don't spend the night before exams trying to cram in more revision.
- Work, rest, and review your progress.
- Prepare your exam kit and what you will need to take in with you for the next day.
- Get a good night's sleep.

On exam day ...

- Have a healthy meal, preferably a protein one rather than carbohydrate so you don't get sluggish during the exam.
- Take water supplies with you, chewing gum and barley sugar to sustain you through the exam. The chewing gum can also help relieve stress and nerves.
- Arrive in good time. Read through your summaries briefly, but don't engage in discussion about the topics with others. This can confuse you and increase your anxiety. You are as prepared as you can be.
- Use relaxation techniques and focus on calming your breathing.

During the exam reading time

- Keep an eye on your watch.
- Get an overview of the entire paper by scanning through it. Read the instructions VERY carefully, eg. "Answer two questions from section A and only four questions from section B."
- Calculate the time to be spent on each question relative to the marks, if it hasn't been done for you already as shown below.

Pacing yourself in an exam		
Examination A	Time	3 hours
Question 1	(10 marks)	15 minutes
Question 2	(20 marks)	30 minutes
Question 3	(20 marks)	30 minutes
Question 4	(50 marks)	75 minutes
Total time available		180 min
Reading exam paper		15 min
Tidying up time		15 min
Total time left to answer questions		150 min
Time for each question = (marks for the question/Total marks)* Total Time left to answer question		

- Decide on the order of question response by starting on the comfort-zone questions and the ones worth most marks first. Leave the not-so-obvious ones till later.
- Analyse each question:
 - What exactly is it asking?
 - What information is available?
 - What does it mean in simpler terms?
 - How does it relate to the semester's work?
 - Are any of the other questions similar?
 - Are there clues elsewhere in the paper?
 - Start answering the multiple choice questions by using your thumb nail to etch the answers onto the paper (see the The secrets of doing multiple choice questions flyer).

During exam writing time

- Firstly, before attempting any questions, list the order of questions that you will be doing.
- Jot down notes, formulae for each question before starting.
- Follow the order you have decided on. Stick to the allocated time only, then move on to the next question. You can always come back to it later (eg. during tidying up time as shown in the time calculations above).
- Make regular checks of time and calculations.
- If you run out of time, jot down point form responses, they may still be worth marks.
- Use all the time – never leave early!

Strategies for multiple choice questions

- Analyse the question by isolating the stem, topic, category and qualifier.
Which of the following is a *major symptom* of anaemia?
- Here are some multiple choice clues if you feel you don't know the answer:
 - Don't guess too soon.
 - Select the most correct answer.
 - Be wary of unqualified absolutes (eg. never, always).
 - Favour options containing qualifying phrases (eg. *may, sometimes, can occasionally* result in...).
 - Be wary of extra-long jargony answers.
 - Make intelligent guesses.
 - Use your knowledge of common prefixes to make intelligent guesses (eg. hyper, macro, hydro, pyro).
 - Use information from other questions.

Strategies for problem-solving questions

- Write down the formulae you will need.
- Note what you've been told and what you need to work out.

- Make a rough estimate of the order of your answer.
- Draw a diagram of the process to clarify the information.
- Check your calculations after a break.

Strategies for essay exam questions

- Analyse the direction words (eg. discuss, outline, describe...); topic words (main content or theme, eg. music), and limit words (eg. two perspectives, 19th Century), for example:

Discuss the **development of French opera** in the 19th century.

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Direction word Topic Words Limit words

Some examples of direction word meanings:

Analyse: Investigate and explain the nature and relative importance of the component, definitions or concepts of a question and explain the way they are interrelated and why certain outcomes occurred.

Discuss: Consider a topic from various points of view. This is likely to entail both descriptions and interpretation. Your opinion should be supported by arguments and evidence.

Evaluate: Pass judgement on the worth of something. Such judgments should be supported by pertinent evidence.

Outline: Briefly identify and outline systematically the most important aspects or elements of a topic.

- Determine the pattern of your essay and do a rough plan (include the rough plan in case you run out of time). Some common patterns include:
 - description
 - classification
 - chronological narration
 - cause-effect
 - definition
 - assertions with examples.

Strategies for short answer questions

- Be aware of the weighting.
- Read and analyse the direction, key and limit words carefully.
- Make every sentence worth marks.
- Use only the calculated time for each question – you can leave it and return to it later.
- Conclude with a relevant point.

Debriefing after the exams

- Avoid exam post mortems.
- Plan to spend time unwinding. Have that gelati or go for that coffee or walk.
- Remind yourself that there is more to life than exams. You are a person beyond your mark!
- Review your schedule for the next exam!

Life after exams

- Think about what have you learned about yourself and your study strategies.
- Write a letter to yourself to remind you of how awful or how good this time has been; look at your letter when your results come out.
- Make plans for next semester, but have a REAL break. Make it count!

Finally, the golden exam rules are to stay: COOL, CALM and COLLECTED!
Good Luck!

EXAMS



Exam day tips

See other flyers in the LSU 'Secrets of exam success' series:
Exam revision tips; Multiple choice exams; Open book exams;
Problem-solving exams; Take-home exams; plus
Catching up clues and Stress Management flyers



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