

Key Exam Tips and Techniques

Before you go in...

- Avoid the pre-exam 'huddle' outside the door – it's too late to do anything differently, so hearing other people's comments about how much they've revised just undermines confidence
- Have enough to eat before you go in

First Things

- Read the whole paper carefully first
- Divide your time equally among questions with similar marks
- Note times you'll start each question

Choosing questions

- Read each question very carefully
- Work out what is expected for each question
 - which part of the course does it refer to?
 - which issues/ideas does it refer to?
 - do you feel confident about enough knowledge to answer it?
- Tick all the questions you can attempt
- Tick the best ones twice – take your time! It's a crucial decision!
- Go back and make your choice

Next Steps

- Highlight key words in the title
- Use spare paper and start jotting down any ideas/issues connected with the question
- Make a rough plan/mindmap of the main themes, issues and ideas
- Sort through and number them/group them in the order you will write them up
- Add any evidence/examples for each point if you have time

Write from a Plan

- Sort out structure – intro., main body, conclusion
- Clear structure really helps the examiner – so helps you!
- Write up a point at a time and tick it off your plan.
- Stick to the time.
- Don't risk missing out a question – you are more likely to pick up points if you attempt all the ones you have chosen

Remember

An exam essay is not like writing a typical course assignment.
Exam essays are:

- Shorter
- You need less evidence and examples
- You can miss out details
- You don't need references (although you can put some in if you can)
- Grammar and spelling are less important

Key points about writing exam essays

- ✓ Read the questions carefully
- ✓ Use spare paper and plan your points
- ✓ Get to the point when you write.
- ✓ Use short sentences – try to avoid drifting off the point
- ✓ Keep looking back at the question – keep asking yourself “Is this relevant? Do I need this bit?”
- ✓ Have a clear introduction and conclusion – you could always write the intro last...
- ✓ ‘Signpost’ your structure
- ✓ e.g. ‘This essay will first look at x.... the second key point to look at is.....in conclusion, it has been shown that...

What if I go blank?

- Keep writing on spare paper, jot down thoughts, questions, names you remember from the topic....and you’ll gradually ‘unfreeze’
- Don’t try too hard if you can’t remember something – leave a space and come back to it
- Draw diagrams of how your points and ideas might fit together – take each point and write a sentence for it
- Try to breathe deeply! Glucose tablets and water are good for extra energy

What do examiners look for?

Basically, not nearly as much detail as in your other assignments

Examiners tend to:

- Read fast without very close attention to detail
- Skim your introduction and conclusion to get the gist of your argument
- Skim sections for relevant points in the argument
- Ignore irrelevant material
- Check you are using relevant material from the course
- Evaluate a rough grade
- Only notice very bad grammar or spelling if it gets in the way

This helps tell you what to focus on in your exam essays:

- ✓ Clear structure
- ✓ Lots of short points
- ✓ Clear introductions and conclusions
- ✓ Clear numbering and labelling of scripts
- ✓ Reasonably clear handwriting

Finally...avoid 'post-mortems', they only create anxiety and make you feel less confident about the next exam.

Try to give yourself short breaks, a bit of exercise and decent food during exam time, and not revise late as it disrupts sleep. Above all, find a pattern of revision and 'time-off' that suits you – everyone's different.