

Revision and exam skills

This study advice sheet offers some essential tips for efficient and effective revision and exam strategies.

By following these simple suggestions you will make sure you are getting the most from your revision and adopting an informed approach to your exam questions.

Exam time is often arduous and difficult. However, with effective planning and thorough revision you can take more control of the exam process. Revision time is the key time for you to optimise your learning, develop an overview of what you have learned, and apply your knowledge to a broad range of themes and issues.

Revision – *What is revision?*

Revision is more than simply cramming everything you have studied into an overcrowded brain. Whilst you will need to remember important issues, techniques and theories it is more important that you can apply these to a broad range of questions.

Revision is the process of identifying key themes and issues, identifying what is really important and how this can be interpreted and applied. You will need to adhere to these, focusing your thoughts into a short essay may require careful consideration.

Active Revision

In order to develop an active mind, a mind that interprets rather than regurgitates, we would recommend that you plan an active revision strategy pushing your learning through the exploration of questions:

- What is the cause and effect?
- How can I justify this conclusion?
- How do these areas relate to each other?

Questions like these will help you to think independently and broadly.

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Key Benefits

Exams can be of great benefit for a number of reasons. Throughout the examination process you will:

- pull together all the various strands from your studies
- set individual topics in a wider context
- identify specific themes
- apply your knowledge
- reach conclusions

Examinations give you a chance to make sense of your learning.

Highlighting key topics

If you have worked steadily during your studies you will have avoided the need to start carrying out large amounts of new work at exam stage.

You cannot read every note you have ever made or books you have used and hope that the information sinks in. Whilst remembering is an important aspect of exam revision you should avoid learning in an unstructured manner. In order to apply your knowledge you will need to have it clearly structured in your mind.

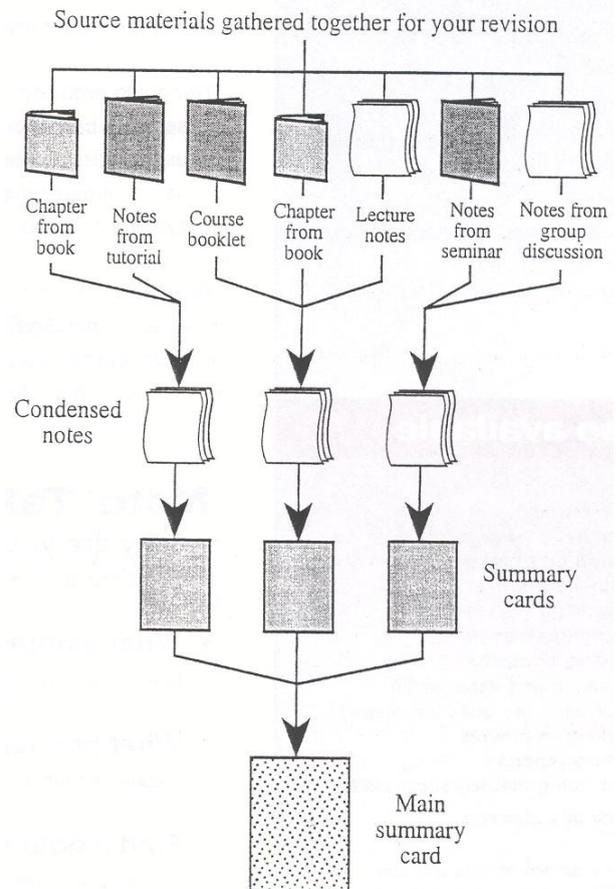
Picking out the key topics and summarising the information will help you clarify the wider subject areas.

Key revision tips

Revision should be a continuous process. Read through your notes after your lectures, at the end of the week and at the end of term. This will leave you with less work to do in the period before your exams.

- Don't leave your revision until two or three weeks before the exam
- Plan well in advance of the exams
- Look at your course material and list the topics to revise for each subject
- Draw up a revision timetable. Start off with a smaller number of hours and increase these week by week
- Break up the day - remember how you need to stimulate your mind to help boost your concentration span
- Condense your notes into brief summaries of the main points of the topic
- Make your revision active - ask questions when you are reading. You may find the study advice sheet Reading Efficiently helpful with its suggestions for making your reading active.

Set up a card system on which to condense your notes. Summarise the main points:



- Draw 'spider' diagrams to summarise information on a topic or to test yourself
- Practise answering questions from past exam papers
- Write some answers under timed conditions
- For every hour you work take ten minutes off. Don't work longer than three hours at a time. Do something completely different. Go for a walk, listen to music, take part in a sporting activity
- Prioritise topics nearer the time of the exam but don't gamble on particular questions coming up in the exam
- Work with other students in group revision sessions. Discuss topics, share information within the group
- During revision time maintain a normal routine. Eat well, take exercise, don't go straight to bed after revision. Try to relax

Exam skills

The most common mistake in any exam is for a student to misunderstand an essay question or even an entire set of instructions. The sense of uncertainty, that we can't truly predict what is going to happen in the exam, can be partially overcome through good technique.

Know your exam paper

- How many questions are there?
- How many questions are you required to answer?
- How much time do you have to answer the questions?

Decide how you are going to plan your time during the exam. Include time for:

- Reading the paper
- Deciding which questions you are going to answer
- Checking your answers

What type of questions are there?

- Short answers
- Multiple choice
- Structured questions
- Essays

Also consider:

- Is the paper divided into sections?
- Are some questions compulsory?
- Do you have to answer questions from each section?

For each question you may like to:

- Read the question carefully 2 or 3 times
- Highlight the key words indicating the required approach
- Brainstorm the question - what do you know?
- Ask how does this information relate to the question?
- Write your answer
- Reach your conclusion, summarise what you have written
- Review your work

Further reading

Read through the study advice sheet: What Does the Question Mean? This will help you to analyse and interpret questions so that your answer does not include superfluous and unrelated information.

Further information

This Study Advice Sheet has been produced by Student Services at UW.

We support student learning across the University through the publication of materials such as these.

Other study advice sheets that you may find useful include:

Essay writing

Learning at university

Learning journals

Making oral presentations

Minimising stress

Organising yourself

Reading efficiently

Study at a distance

Taking notes

Using feedback to improve your work

What does the question mean?

Working in groups

Writing reports

All study advice sheets are available to view and download on the following website:

www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills

or you can follow the links from your SOLE page.

Contact: studyskills@worc.ac.uk

Before the exam

Try and reduce any uncertainties you may have by preparing in advance:

- When is the exam?
- Where is the exam?
- What time does it start?
- What will you need to take into the exam hall?
- What are you allowed to take into the exam hall?

During the exam

- Write clearly and legibly
- Listen to the instructions given
- Read the instructions on the paper
- Read through the paper carefully
- Decide which questions you are going to answer and in what order

You might feel better starting with the question you feel most confident about.

- Don't just write everything you know about a topic
- Be selective from the information that you know:
 - Analyse the question
 - Underline or highlight key words and phrases
 - Ask yourself what the question is asking
- Plan and structure your answer. Does it have an introduction and a conclusion? Does it answer the question?
- Look carefully at the mark allocation for each section. This will help you to apportion your time correctly
- Answer the required number of questions. Keep to time
- Remember, you don't get marks for questions you have not attempted
- Allow five minutes at the end of each question to read through your work

After the exam

Avoid a prolonged post-mortem outside of the exam hall. It is too easy to convince yourself that, from the evidence of others, you have done badly. Remember that there is always more than one way to answer each question! You should, however, review your exam technique. Use each exam to learn about how you performed and to identify what preparation you may need to do for future exams, for example:

- Had you revised efficiently?
- Did you learn the key topics in such a way that they were easy to recall?
- Were you clear about the exam procedure?
- Did you run out of time?
- Did you fulfil all of the exam's requirements?

If there are any aspects of the exam that you were unhappy with, discuss these with others who weren't in the same exam. Try and find ways of quickly and simply rectifying any problems for your next exam.