

Success at Crunch (Exam) Time

Hints and tips to help get you over the line

The following information is provided to help you strategically plan for your exams.

BEFORE EXAMS

The best way to handle the stress of exams is to be so well prepared that you don't get stressed in the first place. The more prepared you are the more confident you will be.

- **Plan your study schedule** ahead of time.
- Develop a **study schedule that reflects your subject load** and also your strengths and weaknesses. Some subjects may require more time and effort.
- **Check your exam timetable** and document in your diary or study planner when you exams will be.

Find out what your exams will cover

- **Ask your teacher** what the exam will cover.
- Get **copies of past exams** for each of your subjects to practice.
- **Practice all the techniques you will know are in the exam.** If you know there will be essays, practice writing essays around the topic. This will also be a great way to revise the content.
- **Talk to friends** or other students who are doing the subject.

Review your material

- **Make a list** of what you need to know.
- **Prioritise your list**, and put what you consider most important at the top.
- **Review your notes**, key reading material and past exam papers continually in the weeks leading up to the exam.
- **Make notes on key issues** as you do your review.
- **Make flashcards** if you have to remember key information.
- **Vary what you study** so you can maintain interest.
- **Use memory tools** like mnemonics and acrostic to help you remember key facts (see the Memory Matters section for memory activities).
- Make sure you have all of the **key information** ready for each subject (formula sheets, key dates and places, etc).
- **Practice answering exam questions.**
- Consider forming **study groups** with friends.



DURING THE EXAM PERIOD

Exam time is here but you can't relax yet. This is when all of your hard work will pay off (or you will experience the consequences of not studying hard or smart enough).

Here are some tips to get you through exam week.

Dealing with tension

- Try and stay positive. Imagine yourself in the exam room easily completing the exam paper.
- Keep away from people who are anxious or overly worried because they can make you more anxious.
- After each exam review how you went and make a note of what you need to modify before the next exam.

Taking care of yourself

- If you have trouble sleeping or are tense try some **relaxation exercises**.
- **Reduce the use of stimulants** like coffee, cola and energy drinks to try and "keep you going" while you are revising.
- Start the day with a **good breakfast**. (See the sheet "Eating before exams" to get some healthy eating tips).
- Keep yourself **hydrated** in the lead-up to the exams and especially during exam week.

Managing your schedule

- **Take time off your part-time job** if you can (if you have one) while exams are on.
- **Don't watch TV, play computer games or spend time on other hobbies** until after the exams **BUT**
- **Make sure you take regular intervals to stretch, walk, take deep breaths and snack on healthy food.**
- Schedule **short review periods** just before each exam.
- **Plan rewards** such as movies, games, visiting friends or a meal out when exams are over.



BE PREPARED FOR EXAM DAY

- Make sure you have a **good night sleep** the night before an exam. Don't stay up "swatting". This is not effective and makes you tired for the following day.
- Try to **drink water** before you go into the exam so your brain is hydrated. If possible also drink water during the exam.
- **Eat a good breakfast.** If your exam is in the afternoon make sure you eat a light lunch that is full of protein. Don't eat heavy foods that will make you drowsy. This will affect your concentration.
- **Know the time and place for each exam** and make sure you get there in plenty of time. Getting there late will have you stressed before you even start!
- **Check what you need to bring** for each exam and have it ready the night before.
- Don't leave the preparation of **formula sheets** until the last minute. Don't use formula sheets that have been prepared by someone else.....make your own.

BEFORE YOU GO INTO THE EXAM

- Stay calm. Do some deep breathing exercise, stretching and brain exercise just before you go in.
- Avoid talking to others if you know this makes you nervous. Last minute discussion about what may or may not be in the exam will not be helpful.
- Approach the exam with energy, enthusiasm and determination to do your best.

IN THE EXAM

- Read the directions carefully. If you do not understand anything ask a supervisor.
- Skim over the whole paper and see how it is organized and what questions are being asked.
- Take note of the marks you could get for each question and plan the time you will spend on each one.
- Set your priorities. It is usually best to do the easy questions first to give you confidence.
- Depending on the length of the exam, it might be helpful spending 15 minutes making quick notes (key words or phrases) on each question before you start.



WORKING THROUGH THE QUESTIONS

- Give your **attention to the question** at hand.
- Look at the **keywords**, verbs etc that give you a hint at what is expected. You should know what things like “Compare and contract”, “Describe”, “explain” etc mean.
- **Note key points , draw rough diagrams**, etc on scrap paper before you start writing your answers.
- **Re-read your answers** and make any changes needed, especially spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- **Tick off the question** o the exam paper as you complete it.
- Keep an **eye on the clock** to make sure you leave time to answer compulsory or high value questions.

STAYING CLAM DURNG THE EXAM

- **Focus on the exam** and not what other people are doing. Ignore people who finish early. It may NOT be because the exam is easy.
- **Don't worry about what you don't know** or what you should have revised. Instead focus on what you know and how you can maximize the opportunity to score marks with that knowledge.
- **If you go blank**, move on to another question and come back to it later. If it is an essay question, jot down what you remember on scrap paper. Hat might help you remember things.
- **If you feel tense or anxious**, put your pen down for a moment and try to relax – maybe stretch your muscles. Take some slow deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing, then go back to the exam paper.
- If you are **running out of time** and you haven't done an essay question write down in point form the things that you would have included in the essay. You may receive some marks for this information. If possible write and introduction and inclusion around the points you make.



POST-EXAM REVIEW

If you experienced any of these things look at the suggestions of things you can do to improve them next time.

Felt rushed

- Plan your time before you start. Monitor as you go.
- Slow down. Use positive self-talk. Tell yourself that you have time.
- Leave 5-10 minutes at the end to check for careless mistakes.

Ran out of time

- Skim over the exam first to get a feel for what is required and where the marks are concentrated. Mental note what is required for each question and how much time you think it will take.
- Allocate time for each question. Give more time to the questions worth more points.
- Answer the easy questions first to help build your confidence.
- Mark the questions that are difficult and come back to them later.
- Don't spend too much time on a single question.
- Monitor the time you are spending on each question.
- If you run out of your allocated time for a question, leave space to come back to it later and move on to the next question.

Misread or misinterpreted question

- **Slow down** and read the question carefully.
- **Underline key words** in the question to help you focus.
- Know what the main **instructional verbs** are in exams for that topic (For example: Compare and contrast, Explain, Describe, Define, Analyse)
- **Write down your ideas** before you write your answer.
- **Review** the question and your answer before moving on. Make sure you have actually answered the question.

Blanked out, felt very anxious

- Put your pen down and take a few breaths. Concentrate on your breathing then try again.
- Don't worry about what other students are doing in the exam. Don't look around, stay focused on the exam.

