

EFFECTIVE EXAM PREPARATION

Exams are a certainty for most university students, so here are a few tips on how to prepare for them.

1. Start revising early and space out your study

It's best to start learning the material you will need for your exams early on. Research shows it is more effective to split study time over multiple sessions rather than cramming study into big blocks of time. Importantly, you should keep revisiting the same material. The more often you are exposed to a piece of information, the more likely it will be stored in long-term memory. Keep revisiting the material as it gets closer to exam time.



2. Use effective learning strategies

Did you know that reading over your notes and highlighting are some of the least effective study strategies? Read our survival guide on Memorising so you can employ effective study strategies instead. Some include:

Use **concrete examples** to help you understand and remember abstract ideas. For example, if you are studying a particular theory, you may like to think about how it plays out in practice and generate two key examples.

Focus on understanding the main ideas/concepts you have just studied. Ask yourself who/why/what/how questions and try to answer with as much detail as possible. Use mind maps or flow charts to show links between theories/models/frameworks.

3. Test yourself regularly and practice under exam conditions

Don't just read through your notes. Instead, regularly retrieve information from your memory. The process of calling information to mind consolidates that information in our brains. Active recall is when you put your notes away and test what you know. This will feel hard at first, but you should slowly build up until you can recall a lot of information from memory.

Test yourself at the end of every study session. Use questions provided for you or develop your own quiz for each topic.

TIP

You can find past exam papers for some units, but not all. To check, type your unit code into OneSearch and speak with your tutor to ensure what you find is relevant.

Completing past exam papers shows you the types of questions that might be in your exam. It's also an opportunity to test your knowledge and understanding of definitions, concepts, etc. presented in your units. Furthermore, it will give you experience in answering questions in the time allotted for the exam.

Concentrating and staying motivated

Keep in mind that we are not actually very good at multitasking. In fact, often when we think we are multitasking, we are actually rapidly switching between tasks.

Importantly, research shows that switching like this impairs performance on both of the tasks. It is also best to minimise distractions while you are studying because they can interfere with the memory-encoding process.

Choose a quiet place to study, turn off your phone or leave it in the next room, close down any web browsers and focus on the task at hand.

If you are struggling to concentrate, try the Pomodoro method: study for 25 uninterrupted minutes, then take a short break. After four of these blocks, take a longer break. Short bursts are more achievable and effective.



Look after yourself

The study break and exam period is a stressful time for most people. Therefore, it is really important that you focus on your wellbeing. While you are studying:

- Take regular breaks to help manage stress.
- Leave some time each day for enjoyable and relaxing activities, e.g., spend some time outdoors, take a hot bath, meditate, play with a pet, or call a close friend or family member for a chat.
- Maintain good nutrition for consistent energy and general wellbeing.
- Avoid all-nighters. Sleep is essential for memory consolidation and mood management.
- Exercise regularly to relieve stress and improve cognitive function.

TIP

If you feel anxious on the day:

- Take deep breaths (breathe in for 3 and out for 4 counts a few times) — taking deep breaths counteracts the body's stress response;
- Start with the sections of the exam you feel most comfortable with; and
- Say something positive and encouraging to yourself.

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