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Exam survival guide

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Contents

Exam preparation	1
Exam plan	1
Exam timetable.....	1
Exam study	1
Collect information	3
Memorise and revise	3
Summarising and understanding	3
Storing and retrieval activities.....	5
Tips for surviving the exam.....	8
Before the exam.....	8
In the exam	8
Check the exam paper.....	8
Read the instructions.....	9
Allocate your time	9
Choose your question order	9
Memory dump	9
Start writing	9
Strategies for answering questions	10
Essays.....	10
Multiple-choice	10
Short answer questions	11
Solving Problems	11
Open Book	12
Centres for Teaching and Learning	13
Student Counselling Services	14

Exam preparation

Step 1: Plan

Step 2: Collect information

Step 3: Find out what types of topics and questions will be covered

Step 4: Memorise

Step 5: Revise

Exam plan

Being systematic and organised with your time will benefit your exam preparation. Complete an exam timetable, and create a good study environment.

Know when and where your exams are, and when and where you will study for them.

Exam timetable

- Write down exam dates
- Block out study times
- Decide on the amount of time needed to study for each exam
- Have regular breaks
- Break each session into topics that you will study and practise
- Review timetable every week

Exam study

- Create a dedicated study area
- Understand your working style (playing music, clear work space for example)
- Select and stick to regular study periods
- Use “to do” lists to focus on particular study activities

Work early or work late – find the best place and time for you. While studying, remember to eat, sleep and get regular exercise.

Example timetable

Weekly schedule

Week Beginning :							
Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12pm							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							

Collect information

Go back to the information you have gathered throughout your course:

- Lecture notes
- Study notes
- Assignment preparation notes
- Notes from books and readings
- Stream information and discussions of the courses
- Past exams

Go And look At the exAMs for the lAst couple of yeArS. They Are All on the MASsey website:

https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/exams/before-your-exams/past-exam-papers/past-exam-papers_home.cfm

Check the topics and types of questions

- What topics are repeated?
- Which themes are emphasised?
- What type of questions will you be asked (essay questions, short answer, multiple choice)
- What is the allocation of marks for each section/question?

Memorise and revise

Phase one: Summarising and understanding

Study summaries, lists, flash cards etc.

Phase two: Storing and retrieval activities

Acronyms, rhymes, talking out loud, verbal associations

Phase three: Practice and application

Practice answering questions (speaking out loud and/or practising writing down answers)

Helpful strategies for phase one and two are provided below. Phrase three is up to you!

Summarising and understanding

Condense the information you have gathered using study summaries. Use your own words, or present the information visually. There are a number of different ways information can be presented. Below are examples of linear notes, mind maps/diagrams and charts.

Linear notes

Linear notes present a summary outline, break the subject sequentially into topics, and use different techniques such as bullet points and abbreviations.

Global varieties of Eng. Lang.

Inner circle

USA, UK, Canada, NZ, Aus – last 3 controversial
All public functions. > Eng.

- Gov; media, creative pursuits; edu.

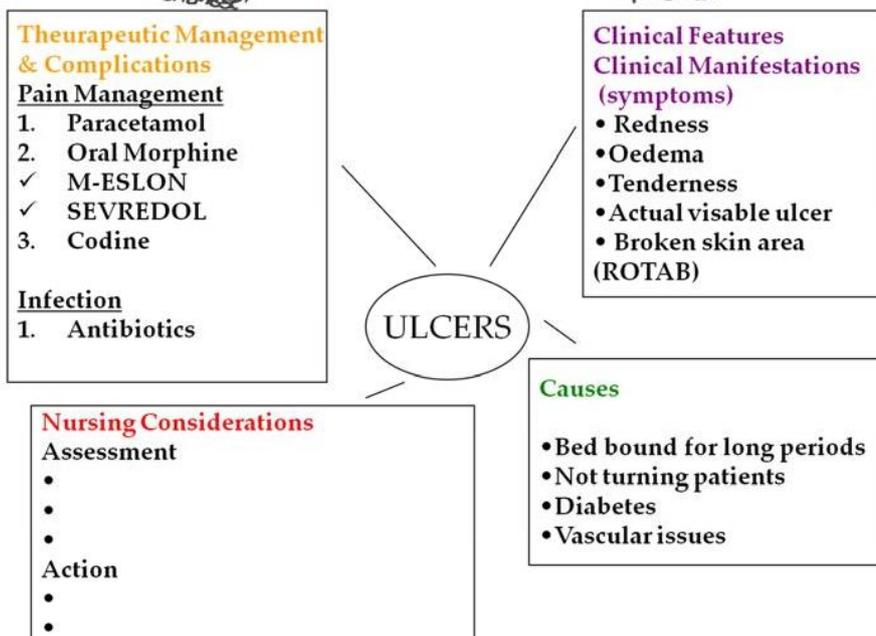
Outer circle

India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Zambia
Long history as institutionalised lang. & has cultural role

- Literary creativity / pop cul.

Mind maps/diagrams

A mind map is a diagram in which ideas, concepts, and images are linked together around a central concept, keyword, or idea. The sub-concepts may be organised into sub-groups or branches with more important concepts closer to the central core. Two examples are below.



Chart

Charts are especially good for comparing and contrasting theorists and/or issues.

3 Basic issues	Piaget	Vygotsky
Continuous or discontinuous development?	Discontinuous – stages of development	Continuous – gradually acquire skills
One course of development of many?	One – stages are universal	Many possible courses
Nature nurture most important?	Both nature and nurture	Both nature and nurture

Storing and retrieval activities

There are a range of memory strategies and tactics designed to help you study as efficiently and effectively as possible. However, that there is no single memory method that suits all situations. Four strategies are presented below: 3Q3R, acronyms and acrostics, Roman room, and talking out loud.

OverAll, the key to good memory in exams is to present your information in A WAY that works for you, And revise, revise, revise.

SQ3R

This study strategy encourages you to carry out the following sequence of activities:

Survey: Look over the set of notes you are about to revise. Read headings, diagrams, graphs. This step acts as an advance organiser as it activates relevant vocabulary.

Question: Generate some questions about the content which will help you focus your study, e.g. What are some the differences between the two main theories? What are some of the examples of...?

Read: Read the notes using a slower in-depth reading style. Pause frequently to think about what you have just read. Then read on. Read with a pencil and make margin notes or underline words or phrases which are important (like definitions).

Recite: Make notes on the sections you have just read from memory. If you are going over study notes you have already made – make lists of main points or ‘talk aloud’

Review: Check your recalled notes against the section that you read. Add in anything that you omitted. Put an * by it so that you can attend to this point when you go through these notes the next time

Acronyms and acrostics

Use these to remember a set or sequence. Acronyms use the initials of a word, term, or for studying purposes a series of words. Acrostics are poems or sayings, where the first letter of each word (or line) is a cue to help you remember particular terms.

Example acronym:

BEDMAS -

Brackets
Exponentials
Division
Multiplication
Addition
Subtraction

Example acrostics:

Every good boy deserves fruit always
(The notes on the lines of the treble clef)

Happy Henry likes beans, butter, carrots, nuts or fruit now
(First 10 elements of the periodic table)

Roman room

You need to be able to conjure up the room and all its parts and furniture in your mind easily. Links are then made by associating sets of information with each part of the room, the furniture and furnishings. Other images can work just as well, try imaging the toppings on your favourite pizza, for example.



Talking out loud

Go through a topic and speak it out loud, as if you were giving a speech or lecture to someone.

- How fluent is your explanation? Did you have to stop and start?
- Are you using the right terms or having to use less clear, less precise words?
- Did you cover all the parts of a topic or did you miss bits out?

Retrieval strategies

- ✓ Be active!
- ✓ Own words!
- ✓ Set time! Set place! Set task!
- ✓ Choose a study method that works (e.g., type of summaries, memory strategies)

Tips for surviving the exam

Before the exam

- ✓ Think positive
- ✓ Remind yourself of what you do know
- ✓ Avoid panic
- ✓ Find exam room ahead of time, check exam time
- ✓ Get a good night's sleep
- ✓ Get an "exam pack" ready

Possible exam pack

In a clear plastic ziplock bag:

- Student ID Card
- ~~Several~~ pens at work
- Highlighter
- Calculator and other permitted equipment
- If open book, text and permitted notes
- Clear plastic water bottle

In the exam

During the ten minute reading time	
Step 1:	Check the exam paper
Step 2:	Read and re-read the instructions
Step 3:	Allocate your time
Step 4:	Choose your question order

At the start of the exam	
Step 5:	Memory dump
Step 6:	Start writing

Check the exam paper

- Are you in the right room? (Check the paper number at the top of the page to confirm you have the right exam).
- Does your exam have all the pages it should have.

Read the instructions

- How many questions do you have to answer?
 - Are all sections compulsory or do you get to choose from different options?
 - Check for words that indicate options within the exam, e.g. “Either”, “And”, “Choose Two (2)”.
- Check for any other specific instructions, e.g. “All working for calculations must be shown”.

Allocate your time

- Allocate your time for each question based on how much it is worth, the type of questions, and whether the section is compulsory.
 - For example, if you have to write four essays in three hours, allocate 45 minutes to each.

Choose your question order

This is a strategy for essays and short answers. If you can, consider deciding what order you are going to complete your questions.

- It is good idea to attempt the questions you feel most confident with first.
- Make sure you complete the compulsory questions.

Memory dump

Not for multiple choice, but useful for essay and short answer exams.

- Write down all the information you can remember for all the questions that you have chosen to complete.
- Rather than worrying about remembering all the information, you can then focus on writing it well.

Start writing

Write as much as possible in the time you have available.

During the reading time, Ask the exam supervisor for A spare piece of paper. Use this for the “memory dump” when you Are Allowed to start writing.

Strategies for answering questions

Essays

- Choose the questions you will answer during reading time.
- During the first 5-20 minutes write down the relevant points you can remember on the essay questions you will answer.
- Understand the question. Examine key words and command words – understand what aspect of the topic you have been asked to write about.
- For the structure of the essay follow the structure of the question.
 - Develop a thesis statement from the question and include it in your introduction.
 - Structure the points in the body paragraphs so that one point follows the other logically and clearly.
- As a general rule, one paragraph = one point, supported by an example, explanation, and evidence.
- No need to provide references and citations, but do acknowledge theory and research using relevant names.

Common command words

Analyse: to break the subject up into its main ideas and evaluate them.

Compare: to show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects.

Define: to give the meaning of a word or term distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes by examples and illustrations.

Describe: to give a detailed account of the characteristics of a subject.

Discuss: to investigate and present the different aspects of a problem or subject and come to some conclusion.

Examine: to inquire into, and consider a problem carefully.

Multiple-choice

- Do not read through the test during the reading time.
- If the correct answer looks obvious, still check to make sure that it is correct.
- Read the questions carefully and highlight key words.
- Go through and answer the easier questions first - come back to the tougher ones later.

Answering multi-choice questions can be very difficult, as often more than one answer seems to be correct. The underlying skill in answering these types of questions is to be able to choose the most correct answer. Try the following:

- Cover the answers and try and answer the question yourself.
 - Once you have an answer, look at the options and choose the one which most closely matches your answer.
- Try eliminating any answers which you know are definitely wrong.

Short answer questions

- Keep your answers short –usually a paragraph, but sometimes only 2 or 3 sentences are required.
- Answer the questions given.
 - Think of what points, key words, phrases and ideas the examiner will be looking for.
 - Don't fall into the trap of trying to write down everything you know.
- Leave 1 or 2 lines after each answer in case you remember something else important later on.
- Stick closely to time you have allocated for each question - you will gain more marks if all the questions are attempted.

Short answer questions often focus on key terms and concepts emphasised during the semester, so definitions and examples are an important aspect. Sometimes you might be asked to compare or contrast terms. Identify important key terms and build up links and relationships between them.

Solving Problems

- Write down relevant formulas, equations, rules, etc.
- Clearly show the steps you have taken in working out the answer(s).
- If necessary (and appropriate) write some notes to explain your answer(s).
- For numerical problems involving computation, make sure you include the appropriate units (e.g. ml, cm, N, m/sec, etc) in your final answer(s). Underline your final answer(s) if this is appropriate and will help clarity.
- Go through and solve the easier problems first - come back to the tougher ones afterwards.

Problem and computational questions require you to perform some calculations to provide the answer. Sometimes you may be required to use multiple calculations to arrive at an answer. Practice is the key to success in these exams. Know the theories and when and how to use them.

In maths, be prepared to show your workings. If the answer is wrong or incomplete you can still get credit for your workings by demonstrating your mastery of the process.

Open Book

Open book exams are not an easy option and can be more demanding than a closed book exam.

- Know what type of information and how much will be allowed into the examination room.
 - You may be limited to your own notes or just to the textbook
- You will need to be able to retrieve information quickly and effectively in this sort of exam
 - Be familiar with the layout of the text.
 - Have relevant sections marked and practise locating material quickly
- Don't just copy directly from the textbook
- Ensure that you correctly reference any material
- Ensure you use the correct information/theory

Centres for Teaching and Learning

The Centres for Teaching and Learning provide a range of support services for all students.

Online academic Q & A

Ask our consultants a question online about planning and writing assignments, referencing, or study skills.

Pre-reading service

The pre-reading service is available to all distance students (and internal students in their first year of study, enrolled in non-research papers).

We can:

- Provide feedback and advice (within 3 working days) about any difficulties we identify within your draft.
- Respond to your questions with relevant information as to how these matters can be overcome.
- Comment on one or more of the following features: focus, style, presentation and referencing.

Please note, it is not a proof-reading service and we cannot identify every mistake or error in your draft. To submit an assignment, complete the pre-reading submission form in the Academic Writing and Learning Support Stream course.

One-on-one sessions

Any student (distance or internal) near a Massey campus can make an appointment with a writing or learning consultant to talk about an assignment or their study. For more information, see <http://learning.massey.ac.nz/>

Services offered through one-on one consultations:

- Academic writing (planning and structure, writing style, paragraphing, grammar, punctuation and referencing).
- Types of assessment (reports, essays, tests, exams, presentations).
- Study and learning skills (memory strategies, time management, strategic reading, note-taking).

Study resources

The Centres for Teaching and Learning publish learning resources on a number of different topics (academic writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and tests and exams). Extensive information is also available online on the OWLL website (Online Writing and Learning Link): <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/>

Student Counselling Services

Being a successful student isn't just about academic work, you need to look after yourself as well.

Emotional and psychological issues can impact on our ability to perform in exams by interfering with sleep, concentration and memory. Juggling work, family, life and studies is seldom easy. The Student Counselling Service is here to assist you maximise your potential under sometimes difficult situations.

Individual Appointments

Each campus has a dedicated team of professionals, including highly skilled counsellors, nurses, doctors and a physiotherapist who are able to assist you. We have skilled practice nurses available full time for appointments and telephone advice. Appointments can be arranged by accessing an on-line questionnaire from: <http://pncounselling.massey.ac.nz>

On-Line Resources

A range of useful self-help brochures, downloads and links is available from <http://crow.massey.ac.nz>

Ways of Wellness (WOW)

WOW seminars are specifically designed to support student development, growth and academic success. The seminars are on a range of wellness topics, including dealing with exam anxiety, sleep, managing mood, procrastination and time management. They can be accessed live (via Adobe Connect) or after the event through the CROW website.