

Revision for Exams

Revision means going over work in order to:

1. Check your understanding.
2. Make links between different topics to see how the whole subject fits together.
3. Remind yourself of material you have forgotten.
4. Reinforce your learning.
5. Identify and fill gaps in your knowledge.

Revision techniques

There are countless ways of revising. The least effective ways are those that involve just reading through notes over and over. The most effective ways are those where you interact with the material, making it meaningful to yourself, for example:

1. Using your material to answer a question or address a problem you have not previously tackled.
2. Reworking the material into a chart or diagram.
3. Summarising material under headings onto index cards.
4. Discussing the material with other people.
5. Make links, comparisons and contrasts between different areas of your programme.
6. Evaluate different theories.

Seven tips for exam revision

1. Start early.
2. Make a revision timetable. Avoid wasting time re-writing this over and over again.
3. Answer questions from past papers.
4. Identify the key points, examples and evidence for each topic- you will not be able to write very much on each in the exam.
5. Prepare for questions that combine two different topics.
6. Prepare for unusual questions or angles for your 'best' topics.
7. Go over the same material quite quickly several times rather than spending a long time on one occasion.

Revision Tips

How to work out how long each revision session should be:

1. Make a revision timetable at least a week before you intend to begin your revision.
2. Divide your time between subjects, not necessarily equally.
3. Work on an unfamiliar area and see how much you can do in the first half hour.
4. Compare this to the work that you cover in the second half hour.
5. As long as your work rate remains constant, keep going! When it dips, take a break.
6. Expect to cover more recent work at about 50% faster than less familiar work.

7. Always take a short break when you get tired, however pushed for time you feel.

Ten tips that can help to keep revision productive

1. Reduce your lecture and reading notes to brief notes and key words on index cards.
2. Vary the material that you revise: from the difficult to the more familiar.
3. Read your essays to get yourself into the right frame of mind.
4. Study alone for some of the time, but also in a group occasionally if this suits you.
5. Make yourself take regular breaks, and be strict about returning to the revision.
6. Give yourself treats to keep you going.
7. Mark off your achievements on your revision timetable as you progress.
8. Plan answers from past exam papers to assess how well you are doing.
9. Sign up for an exam technique workshop if you need more help.
10. Vary your style of revising as you go along to keep yourself motivated.

Group revision

Pros:

1. You will have the support of a group of friends at a stressful time.
2. You can compare how well you are doing with how your group is progressing.
3. You can talk through your ideas rather than just thinking about them.
4. It can save time if you can discuss a section of work rather than just planning essays.
5. It can be fun, relieving the tension as exams approach.

Cons:

1. If the group is too competitive you might become demoralised.
2. It can be difficult to keep on track once a general discussion begins.
3. You can waste a lot of time organising meetings and revision topics.
4. You might find that you are helping others rather than helping yourself.
5. You need to vary your revision methods rather than relying on one approach.

Before the exam

1. Focus on being practical.
2. Make sure you know exactly where each exam will take place. Visit the room if possible.
3. Plan to leave much earlier to get to the exam than the journey usually takes. If something makes you late, this will not be taken into consideration by examiners. You are expected to plan for transport delays.
4. Check you have spare pens, pencils and any other permitted equipment.
5. Take water to drink.
6. Do not take notes or luggage with you unless you have somewhere to leave them outside the exam room.
7. Stay positive. It is easier to revise and remember when we are in a positive state of mind. Avoid people who make you feel anxious about the exams.
8. Get enough sleep.

Before you look at the exam paper

1. Relax your shoulders: make sure that they are not up around your ears!
2. Relax your tongue: it is a large muscle and will help relax your whole upper body.
3. Breathe deeply for a few seconds: concentrate on breathing out fully.
4. Check the obvious: are you in the right room, at the right desk?

5. Run through in your mind the last minute facts that you need to remember.
6. Breathe deeply again once more just before you look at the paper.

During the exam

1. Write down the time you must move onto the next question so that you have time to answer the right number. It is easier to pass if you answer the right number of questions rather than to write a few good answers. Leave about five minutes each to check through essay answers at the end.
2. Number each question. Leave space between each answer so that you can add in points later if necessary.
3. Read the questions slowly. Highlight key points. Ensure you have really taken in what each question says as it is easy to misread questions or miss parts of questions when you are in an exam.
4. Check the back of the paper to see if there are further questions – many people forget to do this.
5. Write answers to the questions you have selected. Avoid regurgitating answers you gave for coursework. You will only get marks for material that answers the question.
6. Structure your answers just as you would for coursework. Essays should have a clear line of reasoning, a well structured argument, an introduction and a conclusion.
7. If you go blank, brainstorm words and ideas onto a sheet of rough paper or onto the back page. These will eventually begin to stimulate your ideas. Leave a space and go onto something you can do rather than sitting with the same problem. The information will probably come back to you later – and if it doesn't, it may not be critical. Find a point of calm. Breathe slowly.
8. Include references in the text. You do not need to write a list of references or to give the titles of works as your tutors will usually know the works to which you refer.
9. Check through your answers at the end. You will find parts that do not make sense because you have missed out a key word or point. Add these in neatly in the text or at the bottom of the page.

For further information please see Chapter 14 of *The Study Skills Handbook* and *The Exam Skills Handbook* by Stella Cottrell.

7 tips to help you cope with exam stress

A little stress can be a good thing: it can be the motivational push that we need to get things done. However, sometimes, dealing with stress (especially during exam season) can be a difficult thing to do. And, with an estimated 20-50% annual increase of university students seeking help for studies-related mental health issues, it's clear that we're under more pressure than ever before. So, here to your rescue are seven tips to help you through the stressful exam period.

1. Remember to breathe

Setting aside a couple of minutes every day to practice mindfulness techniques, such as breathing exercises or UCL's 10 Minute Mind, helps you to calm down your body's stress response and shift your attention back to the present moment. In turn, this gives you time to rationally think through the anxieties you have, rid yourself of unhelpful thought patterns and enables you to deal with a large number of exams and begin more effective revision.

2. Eat, sleep and exercise well

Pulling all-nighters, surviving on a poor diet, and getting minimal amounts of movement into your day can increase symptoms of anxiety. For your body's best performance, make sure you're getting 8/9 hours of sleep, enough slow-release carbs, less caffeine and more water, and at least half an hour of exercise per day.

3. Set realistic goals

Setting realistic goals, whether you have several weeks, days or hours before your exam, helps you to put everything into perspective. Acceptance of your situation and working within the realms of what you have maximises your productivity without the risk of burning yourself out.

4. Don't go it alone

In 2004, a research paper published in *Linguistics and Education* saw that revising with peers is an effective study technique as it allows individuals to better absorb their own notes. Furthermore, the emotional benefits of social support tend to include a better sense of confidence and autonomy.

5. Pace yourself through panic

Panicking before, during or even after an exam is common among university students. If you experience it at any point, take six deep breaths, hydrate yourself, and then go back the problem at hand, being sure to break it down into several, manageable chunks. Remember that there is usually a rational solution to every problem, even if you can't see it at first glance.

6. Believe in yourself

When being constantly faced with new challenges, we often forget to look back at how far we have come and how much we have already achieved. Given that you have prepared well, there should be no reason for you to worry. Therefore, when experiencing a negative thought, try to replace it with a positive one. For example, instead of thinking 'If I don't get at least a 2:1, I am a failure', think 'Whatever I get, I will be proud of myself and value how much I have already achieved'. You can do this!

7. If you feel like you are struggling, talk to someone

Asking for help is never shameful. In the most extreme cases, it can help save a life. When struggling, talk to friends, family, or your personal tutor about how you are feeling. Alternatively, don't be afraid to seek professional help and support.