Exams and revision

Students can often feel stressed or nervous about the exam process. This page gives tips and advice on how to make your revision and exam period less stressful.

Planning your revision

The best way to ensure that your revision is successful is to plan your time effectively. This may be especially useful if you are struggling with procrastination. Throughout the term, you can follow your progress using a term planner. It is helpful to look at your exam dates well in advance, and plan out how you will structure your days to ensure you get all of your revision done. You may wish to use a diary to help with this, or you could download a weekly planner from this site.

You may find it helpful to list all of your exam subjects first and allocate how much time each one deserves. They won’t necessarily take an even amount of time each - allow more time for the topics you find more difficult. Make sure that your plan is realistic so that you can stick to it.

When revising, ensure that you take 5 or 10 minute rest breaks every hour. These are good opportunities for making food, exercising, or getting a bit of fresh air. Some time spent in the fresh air outside every day can be invigorating and help keep you motivated.

Where to revise

Being in an environment conducive to studying will help you to get the most out of the time you spend revising. The most important thing is that you are comfortable and not bothered or distracted by your surroundings. This often means finding a good-sized and well-lit desk with a comfortable chair in a quiet room. Studying in an area with distractions may lead to procrastination so many students prefer to keep background noise to a minimum.

Revision strategies

Before you start revising, make sure you have everything you need. This could include paper and stationary, your laptop, snacks, drinks; you will know what works best for you.

There are a variety of revision techniques and each person will have their preferences about which works best for them.

Here is a list of common revision methods and tips:

Flashcards: Turn your notes into portable revision tools that you can carry around with you. You can write the summaries of key concepts on small cards and use these as a prompts for your
memory. Looking at flashcards is a particularly productive way to spend ‘dead’ time when you can’t do much else, for example time spent travelling on a bus.

**Memory aids:** Using diagrams, mnemonics and memory hooks can help when trying to remember specific facts.

**Post-its:** Write things you are trying to remember on post-it notes and place these where they will be frequently visible, such as around your room or house.

**Past Papers:** Testing yourself with past papers can make sure you know what is expected of you in the exam. It is very helpful to know the format in which you will be examined, and the weightings of the questions - you can ask your teacher about this.

**Group studying:** Some students find it helpful to meet with friends to discuss work and test each other. If you are having difficulty understanding a concept, talking it through with a course mate may help.

**Talk to the teaching staff:** Your teacher(s) may be able to offer revision classes, individual guidance, or recommend some helpful reading material.

**Recording:** If you learn well by hearing things, you could record yourself talking through your notes using a microphone, and then listen to it back a number of times to help you remember it.

**Minimise Stress:** Plan your revision at a pace you can keep up with, making sure that you take enough time to eat, drink and sleep properly. Make sure to fit in some time to relax; light exercise every day can help to minimise stress. Many people find it difficult to go to sleep immediately after revising, so an optimal time to relax would be right before bed; this could be as simple as reading a book for half an hour.

**Last minute preparation**

On the day of or night before an exam, time is short, but you can still make a difference to your exam performance if you continue to do what you can:

It is difficult to learn new things at the last minute. Instead, it can be more productive to concentrate on strengthening your existing knowledge.

Use any notes and flashcards that you have made in your previous revision to trigger your memory and remind yourself of key information.

Don’t stay awake all night revising before a morning exam if you can avoid it; being exhausted won’t help your performance.

Maximise your ability to concentrate by drinking enough water to avoid dehydration and eating enough to give your brain cells the energy they need to function at maximum capacity. Avoid having too much caffeine from tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and energy tablets.
Combating Nerves

Try to keep everything in perspective: the exam you are about to sit might seem like the most important thing in your life for the duration of the exam. But in the scheme of your life, an exam is usually only a very small part.

Try not compare yourself to others: By the time the exam is about to happen, all you can do is aim to do your best. Recognise that following someone else’s personal goals may be unrealistic and lead to disappointment.

If none of this seems to be helping and your anxiety levels continue to rise, there is help and support available from the Counselling Unit.

The day of the exam

Preparation the night before will help you arrive to your exam on time and as unstressed as possible, maximising your ability to concentrate. Check that you have the correct equipment and stationary that you need for the exam before you leave the house. You might like to bring a watch to check the time, in case the wall-clock is not easily visible from your seat. Leave plenty of time to get to campus, especially if you live quite far away.

After you the exam is over, relax! It’s easy to fall into the trap of dwelling on how it went and discussing the questions with other students. If you have other upcoming exams, your time may be better spent unwinding for an hour or two, perhaps by being outside, or eating. This will allow you to recover your energy and begin focussing on your next exam. This is an important skill, since it is not uncommon to have many exams close together.