

## 'EFFECTIVE EXAMINATION PREPARATION'

### Step 1: In the Classroom

Examination preparation begins in the classroom. The way you listen, concentrate and participate in the class has a direct bearing on your understanding and depth of knowledge of your subjects. Just listening or taking a few notes isn't enough. You need to *actively* take notes to retain up to 90% of what you are hearing a month later. This means concentrating on the discussion, asking questions both to the class and to yourself, taking notes, looking for links to earlier work, thinking about what will come next. Be involved in the classroom, sit up, look at the speaker and benefit from the experience and knowledge of your teacher. Of course, it is impossible to do all of this if you are talking.

- listen, concentrate, participate
- involve yourself

### Step 2: Getting Organised

1. Have a folder for each subject with dividers for each topic. Within each topic sort it into things to *learn* and things to *practice*.
2. File away all sheets, handouts, past essays etc.
3. Further sort each topic into things you will need to learn, and material you either already know well or don't need to learn. File this stuff under your bed.
4. Each time you finish a topic, make a summary or set of study notes for that topic. Start reducing the material in your folder by condensing it into the essential elements ie the key points.

#### *Why Make Summaries?*

Every time you start a summary you are actually studying as you have to think about how the topic is arranged, what it means, the best way to make it clear rather than just copying out notes. It improves concentration and memory and is a selective process helping you gain the main ideas and facts. It helps you translate information into terms that are meaningful for you. The mind flinches from scrappy data. The better you organise your notes into groups and sub-groups of connected ideas the better you will be able to learn them. It gives you a fantastic time advantage closer to the exams if your notes are well organised and you can start studying straight away.

#### *How Do You Make Summaries?*

Go through all the resources you have to make sure your summary includes everything you should know. This helps you work out what you do and don't understand. Write things in a logical order and only have the minimum number of important words to read through, no lengthy sentences. This eliminates excessive notetaking by forcing the use of key words or phrases rather than sentences. It must be easy to read and well organised. Mind mapping is a method you can use for visualising information in a kind of map or diagram. It gives you an overview of a large amount of information. By organising the information clearly and logically it focuses attention on essential information and helps establish the link between all supporting points. The organisation, neatness and legibility of the notes made is very important to help support the brain in making and retaining patterns for memory. Use highlighting, colour, headings, boxes, bullet points to help your memory retain it.

### **Step 3 : Fact Finding**

You need to ensure you know exactly what is in the assessment / exam, the format and any other information you can find out about the task. Use the grid provided.

### **Step 4 : Managing Your Time**

1. Overloaded? Write a list of all the work you have to do and allocate it into your diary. Prioritise and make decisions about what you can do when, estimate how long it will take to complete these tasks. Map out each day, time, evaluate and update. Write in your diary when you are going to DO it, not when it is DUE.
2. Assessments - Put all assessments etc on a wall planner so can clearly see them and put a 2 week reminder in your diary. Then plan out what you are going to do to prepare and write this in your diary too.
3. Exams - You need to make a study timetable. Start with the grid where you collected information and decided what you need to do to prepare, then plan out when you are going to do each piece of work. Ideally - do summaries and study notes etc as you go, as much as you can at night. But make a full plan at least 4-6 weeks prior to the large exam period.

A month or so before:

- complete your fact finding
- finalise summaries and notes highlighting key words and phrases
- identify which particular skills are being examined
- identify main concepts, themes and issues you are expected to know
- DO A PLAN!
- Draw up a timetable of the available time you have to study
- Use the grid to plan out when you are going to DO each piece of preparation.

### **Step 5 : Now study!!**

#### **LEARNING**

- Make and refine summaries
- Write it, Speak it
- Test yourself, Have someone test you
- Teach it, Explain to someone else
- Flashcards, Mnemonics, Mind maps, Acronyms
- Tapes, Tables
- Definitions, lists
- Write in own words
- Over learning

#### **PRACTICE**

- practise essay writing / planning by doing typical exam questions : focus on being relevant and answering question
- read examiners reports and sample answers, note the significant points, look at marking criteria
- do as many past papers as you can under exam conditions (plus old tests, essays, exams)
- quiz yourself to find out what you really know, not what you think you know
- do as many different questions and types of questions you can find.
- keep a list of common mistakes and things to ask your teachers about.
- clear up any doubts or insecurities about your understanding

*Don't forget*

- Good study environment: no TV, good lighting, ventilation etc
- Music : Baroque (60 beats per minute) vs today's music which has 140 beats per minute and lowers your brain's ability to retain info.
- Study Breaks: most people can concentrate for about 45 mins to 1 hour. 5 min break, drink water, clear your head
- How much time? 3-4 hours, 4-5 on Sat , 2-3 on Sun

Step 6 - In the Exam

- The morning of the exam ensure you have had a decent breakfast and you arrive well on time with correct equipment.
- At the start of the exam read through all instructions / criteria and look through the whole paper taking note of choices. Remember your strengths and plan your attack. Some students like to jot down points for all their plans first.
- You can memory dump formulas or things you think you might forget, but don't spend too long doing this.
- Which questions first? Depends on your style, play to your strengths and do the questions that will help you build confidence and momentum. Some recommend leaving the multiple choice till last - ask your teacher what is best in their subject.
- The marks are an important guideline for the depth of response required by the examiner. Don't just write everything you know - answer the question!
- Avoid liquid paper, it takes time, you may forget to go back and even worse, you might have been right!
- Write neatly so examiners don't waste time deciphering and then feel your work is disjointed.
- Allocate and plan out your time before you start. Keep a watch in front of you at all times and don't spend too long on just one question.
- If you finish early, check and check again, especially the details. Attempt EVERY question - don't leave anything out.
- If you have a mental blank, leave it and come back : let your subconscious work on it. Stay hydrated though, dehydration causes massive reduction in short term memory.

*Common Mistakes*

- Not showing all working
- Careless adding up
- Leaving out an answer
- Copying question incorrectly
- Making diagrams too small
- Leaving out or not attempting a question
- Telling everything you know without answering the question
- Not concentrating on small details ie significant figures etc
- Not reading the question carefully

*Stress*

- Recognise the causes and symptoms.
- Decide to do something positive about your stress - you are in control. Moderate stress before an exam is normal and can improve your performance Makes you feel vital, alive, invigorated.
- Give yourself permission to relax.

- If you feel tension building up do something active to relieve the stress.

1. **QUALITY SLEEP:** destress, remove negative thoughts
2. **EXERCISE:** burn off stress hormones
3. **HEALTHY FOOD:** avoid caffeine and sugar
3. **MANAGE YOUR EXAMS :** be thoroughly prepared, plan study time.

#### *Active Strategies*

- warm bath, peace and quiet
- 10 minute afternoon siesta
- laugh, smile
- talk to someone, write to self, journal
- breathe deeply, relax muscles one by one

#### *Mental Strategies*

- Perspective, don't make mountains out of molehills.
- Visualise and imagine it all going well. Systematic desensitisation. Imagine the situation, make it seem really real. Mental rehearsal.
- Chill out, sit out, meditate, withdraw from problems and have a quiet time to calm your mind.
- Change your self talk. How stressed you become is directly related to what you are telling yourself in your head. You can reprogram that. Are you negative in your self talk?
- The Catastrophe scale. Imagine a ruler marked 1 to 100. Reminds us that reality is not as bad as it seems
- Focusing change the focus from the negative thing to positive things.
- Guided Imagery : see self in beautiful place in control of life, affirmations.

#### Step 7 - Post Exam Evaluation

- keep comments
- redo and resubmit
- update notes and summaries
- check you understand
- **LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE**

#### WHAT YOU NEED TO DO NOW:

1. Assess your application in class. Make **CHANGES** to make your learning more effective.
2. Organise all your notes and draw up a grid to keep track of what topics you have organised and summarised. First of all catch up on your summaries, then do this on a regular basis, during the topic and as you finish the topic.
3. Find out all information about the examinations asap.
4. Manage your time by using your diary to write in when you are going to **DO** things, not just when they are due. Draw up a study timetable at least a month before examinations.
5. Now study! Think about how you learn and practise for each subject and what ways you could try to make this process more effective.
6. What are the areas you need to focus on with respect to examination techniques?
7. Learn from each experience, assess and evaluate your understanding and take steps to rectify any gaps in understanding.