

Exam Skills

Quick Tip for Better Performance

Exam Skills – Quick Tips for Better Performance

Time is running out and my brain feels like it's going to burst! What can I do to get the information out of my brain and onto the exam paper?

~TIP~

Revise actively. Think up questions about the material before you start and seek answers as you study. Turn statements into questions, and think about how the material relates to what you already know.

Reason: Real understanding comes not when we stuff information in, but when we draw it out. Exams require this same 'drawing out' of information. Learning occurs when new short-term memory material connects or integrates with what you already know (material in your long-term memory).

That sounds easy enough. Is there anything else that might help?

~TIP~

Organise. Look at the subject matter in terms of **facts** (what do I need to learn?), **principles and concepts** (what do I need to know?), and **applications** (what must I be able to do with these facts and concepts to show that I understand them?).

Reason: Packaging, labelling and linking information gives us a set of cues so we can more easily recognise and retrieve information from our memory store.

It's one thing to be able to do this at home, but it's another thing to be able to do it in the exam hall!

~TIP~

Rehearse the exam format. Set your own exam, based on past papers.* Similar questions tend to come up again and again. Practise answering a full exam question in the allotted time.

Reason: A memory crammed with facts, but with no idea of how to write an examination answer is doomed to failure. Practising the exam techniques will also reduce anxiety and save time in the exam hall.

How am I going to keep functioning at peak level until exams are over?

~TIP~

Get appropriate rest, exercise and nutrition. Get at least 6 hours of sleep a night, eat a balanced diet and avoid alcohol or too much caffeine.

Reason: Your mind and body are connected. These things matter and will affect your performance. Just ask any athlete.

I'm still worried that the stress will get to be too much.

~TIP~

Prepare a mental refuge. This only takes seconds. Imagine a scene that is a safe, warm, secure and peaceful refuge, to be used as an emotional air-raid shelter when stress threatens. Imagine this scene as vividly as possible, including sounds, sensations, tastes and smells. Once you have chosen your mental refuge, remember it and practise recalling it when you are not under pressure so that you will be able to conjure it up instantly when you are.

Reason: Stress can appear in one or more forms at exam time, but you can keep it at a healthy level and survive the worst attacks if you prepare a method of dealing with it beforehand.

Only a few days to go and I have loads to do!

~TIP~

Avoid cramming. Start as soon as possible. Review what you know rather than trying to learn lots of new material at the last minute. And start earlier next term!

Reason: Short-term memory hasn't enough space for all you need to know. Also, cramming stupefies long-term memory (where well-learned material lives) and can set you up for panic and "blanking."

If you have worked all term but now have three exams in five days so only an evening to review already learned material –

Write out a course summary. Reviewing the basic course structure will help you remember, comprehend and retain the material.

Go over study questions, main points of notes and assignments, skim read texts, drawing out the information from your memory rather than trying to cram more in.

Stay calm, confident and focussed. Take breaks in your studying, get 6 to 8 hours sleep, and remind yourself that working hard all term really will pay off.

If you have slacked off and are now justifiably worried –

Gather information about what is likely to be on the exam. Find out principle themes, sub-topics and major illustrations. Memorise them!

Use every trick you can, such as word association, rhymes, enumeration and sentences from acronyms. **BE**

SELECTIVE! Memorise major themes, then decide what supporting material to concentrate on. Remember, examiners actually want you to do well. The idea that they are plotting trick questions to catch you out is nonsense. They want to give you a chance to show how good you are.

Rehearse your mental refuge. Try to be kind to yourself. Get at least 6 hours sleep.

Exam day – is there anything else I should know?

~MOST IMPORTANT TIP~

Make the most of your time in the exam and answer the question that you have been asked.

Reason: Poor performance can usually be put down to two things – poor time management, and not reading the question correctly. Take note of key verbs, such as, "discuss," "compare," or "explain." Plan out your time, leaving a little time at the end to check over your answers.

*Note: Past exams are available online from the library at the following link
https://www.mis.nuigalway.ie/regexam/paper_index_search_main_menu.asp

If you are feeling unwell just prior to your exam, contact the Student Health Unit. There are some instances where you may be entitled to sit the exam in the Temporary Special Needs Area.

If you are having difficulty getting down to study or preparing for exams, or you are suffering from anxiety or panic attacks, then a visit to the Student Counselling Service is worthwhile (5, Distillery Road; phone 091 492484; e-mail: counselling@nuigalway.ie). If you are experiencing anxiety or stress on a longer-term basis (i.e. more than one year), considering registering with the Disability Support Service. <https://www.nuigalway.ie/disability/>
More exam tips @ <http://www.nuigalway.ie/academic-skills/assignmentsexams/> [Support Services:](#)
More Info / Supports: nuigstudents.ie

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