



How to avoid exam stress

Nobody likes exams, nobody normal anyway, and it can be a really worrying time especially if your university place or job is dependent on your results. However, fear not, help is at hand! This is a quick guide to help you get organised, offer some revision tips, suggest a few ways to beat exam nerves and still have time for a social life!

It's all in the planning

- make a timetable
- keep it realistic
- factor in breaks
- don't look at more than two topics in one day
- alternate a favourite subject with a more difficult one

timetable your hardest topics first - this gives you more time to get help or come back to it

General revision tips to get you started

- start early
- don't revise in an area where there are distractions
- revise with a friend, test each other
- revise often, even the odd half hour will make a difference
- identify your strong and weak areas so you know where to concentrate your efforts
- get help, if you don't understand something get your tutor to explain

Look after yourself – you need to rest as well as study, eat well, drink lots of water and make sure you pace yourself. The more tired you are the less efficiently you'll work. Don't over-revise by doing too much too soon and burning yourself out.

Revision Techniques

When you're revising the trick is to be active - not jumping around or anything, but don't just read your books and hope it will sink in, actually do something with the information.

Here are a few ideas:

Revision check lists or syllabuses ► use these for each subject as a starting point. Look at what you need to know and identify any gaps in your knowledge.

Summarise ► try to get the whole topic onto one side of A4 paper. It's the act of making the sheet which fixes the information in your mind. Then try to condense it yet again onto an A5 sheet and then finally onto memory cards.

Past papers ► not only will these help you to know what to expect in the exam but by attempting to answer these you'll see how much you're actually remembering and also what you're not. So you'll know where to concentrate your efforts.

Remind yourself over and over ► if you revise something tonight, by this time tomorrow you'll have forgotten at least some of it. So take another quick look at it tomorrow to "top up" your memory. Take another quick look next week, and keep "topping up" until the night before the exam. This doesn't take long to do, and because it's quick, you can easily fit it in with all your other revision.

Word Power ► make a list of key words for each topic, these can act as triggers to help you elaborate on the topic. If you practice this you'll be amazed at how much you can remember from one little word!

Remembering labelled diagrams ► draw a copy of the diagram - but without the labels. Then try to fill in the labels from memory.

Memory Cards ► are a great way to condense your revision notes and help you remember all those important facts for the exams. The great thing about these is that you can carry them round with you and have a look at them when you have a spare moment, like when you're stuck in a queue or waiting for a bus.

"Look, Cover, Write, Check" ► this is probably the way you learned spellings at Primary School! This technique is good for spellings, diagrams, equations, lists of facts and a whole lot more:



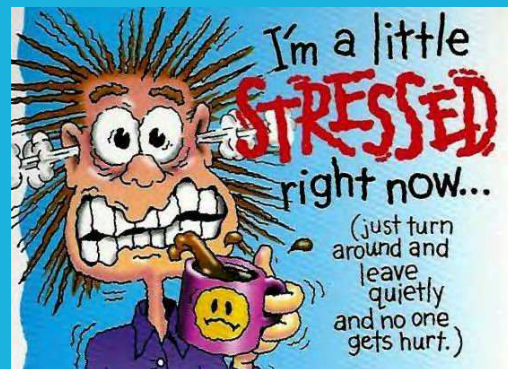
Read the information

- Cover it up**
- Write it out**
- Check to see if you got it right** (if you didn't, just keep trying!)

Change the subject ► you may find it useful to Change from one subject to another at your 'break', or alternate a favourite subject with a more difficult one. It helps to build in some variety and can help you feel positive again if you've been struggling with a more difficult subject.

Change techniques ► keep yourself more alert by changing revision methods during a session. For instance, try switching from note taking to memorising; from reading to asking someone to test you.

Hopefully, some of these techniques will be helpful. The important thing is to find techniques that work for you. Try different ones, but if they don't work for you, forget that method and try another.



Exam time

So, you've been following your revision plan. You may also have tried out different revision techniques and hopefully settled on a couple that really suit your style of learning. You've put a lot of hard work in so far to prepare you for the main event, so here are a few more tips to get you over this final hurdle.



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Some of these tips might seem a bit obvious, but when the time comes you may be a little stressed and might be glad of being reminded of the basics!

Before The Exam

- ▶ Last-minute revision – use your revision tools; prompts, diagrams, memory cards etc. to check final facts, but don't stay up all night revising - being overtired will not help you do your best
- ▶ Keep calm and consolidate your existing knowledge rather than trying to learn new topics
- ▶ Find out what is involved in the exam: where and when it will take place; how much time is allowed; how many questions you need to answer etc.
- ▶ Make sure that you have everything you need e.g. pens, pencils, calculator, ruler etc.
- ▶ Take a watch so that you can easily keep an eye on the time and pace yourself
- ▶ Organise yourself the night before and get plenty of sleep. Easier said than done I know, but that's what you're aiming for!
- ▶ Leave for the exam in plenty of time

The Exam Itself

Ok, the big day is here, but no need to panic! Relax and take some deep breaths, you've been preparing for this, you can do it!

Make your way **slowly** to your seat and sit yourself comfortably, this will help you feel calmer and more relaxed.

Make sure you listen very carefully to any instructions that are given. If anything is unclear, ask questions before you start as this may save you valuable time later.

Set out your pens etc. and your watch so that you can see it easily.

Make sure that you have everything necessary – question paper, answer papers, additional sheets etc. Ask the invigilator if something appears to be missing.

Once you have been told to turn over your papers...

- ▶ Read all the instructions carefully – check that you know exactly how many questions you have to answer and carefully note instructions such as; answer one question from each section; show all workings; in no more than 200 words etc.
- ▶ Speed read the paper to get an idea of what questions are in it, but then read each question carefully and thoroughly make sure you understand what it is asking. Read all parts of the question before deciding whether or not to answer it.

▶ Pace yourself and allow enough time to answer all the required questions, but allow some time for reading and checking at the end.



► If you get stuck on a question, don't waste time on it – move on and come back to it later.

► Look at the marks available:

don't write huge chunks for one-mark questions
if a question is worth two marks, you need to say two different things – not the same thing in two different ways

for longer answers, take a minute before you begin to produce a structured plan of what you are going to include

► Do the questions you feel most confident about first - it doesn't usually matter which order you answer the questions. This will help build your confidence and you may find yourself remembering more things.

► If you get stuck on a question, don't waste time on it – move on and come back to it later.

► Write as neatly as possible to help the examiner to mark your work, if they can't read your writing you might miss out on essential marks!

► If you are doing a maths question always show your workings – even if you get the final answer wrong you may get some marks if some of your workings have been correct.

► If, after reading a question, you genuinely think it is ambiguous or too broadly based, state this in the first part of your answer and explain briefly your reason for trying to answer a question in a particular way. The examiner will then have a better chance of empathising with your answer.

► Relax as much as possible – I know this sounds daft, but it will really help if you can!

Try to think clearly and keep confident. Stay positive and do the best you can, you can't do anymore than that.

After The Exam

It's easy to fall into the trap of wondering how well you did and to discuss this with your fellow students, but try not to compare your answers – easier said than done I know – but this can create negative feelings and won't help you in the slightest!

Don't rush to your text books to check your answers either – there is no point at this stage!

Have some fresh air and food and take time to relax before you start revising for the next exam. If you feel it didn't go very well, think about how you might be able to improve your exam technique, stay positive. Have a quick look at

your revision plan. Do you need to adjust it?

Still worried?

It's natural to be nervous about exams. However, if your college work or anything else is causing you distress or anxiety and you would like some help to deal with this, there is lots of help available in college. Speak to your personal tutor or make an appointment with a college counsellor, mentor, college nurse or the Student Advice Centre at the Students' Union.

Remember, the more time you spend worrying, the less time is left for revision. So even if you think you're starting your revision way too late, concentrate on what you can revise and not on missed opportunities or regrets.

If you experience any unusual physical symptoms or if stress is leaving you too tired, manic or depressed to study, see your doctor straight away, not only to get treatment but also because the doctor could be your best source of evidence should you need to make an 'extenuating circumstances' application.

Try this relaxation routine...

Sit or lie somewhere comfy.

Close your eyes and breath slowly and deeply.

Locate any areas of tension and try to relax those muscles; imagine the tension disappearing.

Relax each part of your body, starting from your feet, slowly working your way up to the top of your head. As you focus on each part of your body let go, feel yourself becoming heavy and more relaxed.

After about 20 minutes, slowly open your eyes, take some slow, deep breaths and then stretch.

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