

# STUDY GUIDE

The following document contains suggestions on the following topics.

- How to study,
- How to prepare for exams,
- Combating Exam stress.

*(The system we have suggested may not suit some students.)*

How to study:

Time Management Tips:

1. **Write down weekly goals, plans, activities and objectives.** This kind of a tentative to do list will get the wheels rolling and make further planning and scheduling easier.
2. **Prioritise tasks according to importance.** After writing down these activities, give them a priority ranking: top, high, low or least.
3. **Plan schedules in an organised manner by using a calendar, appointment book or planner.** These tools are organised in a way that makes scheduling and planning easy, effective and manageable.
4. **Schedule demanding tasks during periods of high energy.** There are morning, noon, and night people. Scheduling in this manner will allow you to do your best on the most important assignments.
5. **Eliminate time wasting activities.** Eliminate all the things you do every day that are unnecessary. Put them at the end of the list.
6. **Finish one task before starting another.** Some of us can handle several things at the same time; most of us can't. Assign a priority rating to each task and eliminate the tendency to postpone.
7. **Write it down.** Taking good notes supplies you with information reminds you of priority and provides you with a backup to your calendar. Always keep a pencil and small note pad available and get in the habit of using it.
8. **Learn to say no.** Of all time management techniques, learning to say no is one of the best ways to avoid scheduling problems, eliminate time wasting activities and stay in control of day-to-day planning.
9. **Leave some of your schedule open.** Never fill up your schedule completely. By leaving yourself available time for emergency meetings or unexpected jobs, you'll be less anxious about your ability to schedule.



**10. Develop and keep deadlines.** Don't put off projects. Delaying just makes deadlines harder to meet. Know when your deadlines are and keep them.

**11. Don't put off making decisions.** Effective decision making doesn't necessarily mean waiting until you have every fact and figure. Write down the decision you have to make. List the primary facts and figures that you need, get them as quickly as possible, and make your decision.

**12. Improve reading and writing skills.** Effective communication, including the ability to read quickly and write coherently, is basic to all effective time management.

**13. Develop an effective reminder system.** No one can remember everything. Without a reminder, follow-up material and attention to small details suffer.

**14. Be in control.** Being in control is as important in time management as in stress management. In any time management situation, the telephone can be your worst enemy.

Avoid unnecessary calls or long conversations. If at all possible, avoid answering your own phone.

Avoid unnecessary socialising. Avoid getting involved in events not concerned with your job.

Avoid unorganised meetings or discussions.

It's not the things we do during the day that creates time problems. It's the way we do them. More often than not, the reasons for our inability to manage time are improper behaviour patterns and attitudes. Behaviour and attitudes can be both be changed through proper techniques and conditioning. Both can be used as positive reinforcers that make us more efficient at utilising the time we have. As a first step however, we need to recognise those things about ourselves that cause time-related stress.

Revising, (Why?)

The most important purpose of revision is to pull together all the work you have done in studying the course. Revision is not primarily a massive memorising task, as people sometimes think. It is a much more constructive activity than memorizing. It serves the function of rounding off the course. While you are studying the units you are constantly challenging your existing ideas and throwing them into disarray. Revision is the process of tidying up the mess and getting your ideas back into a usable shape. Without this period of revision the course would just drift away from you. Revising provides you with the opportunity to reconstruct the course for yourself so that the ideas you have developed as you studied are rendered more coherent and put in working order. The consequence of this is that revision has to be made into an active process - not just a mechanical scanning through pages hoping something will stick.

It needs to be planned in a decisive way and to be designed around activities which are meaningful, engaging and thought-provoking, not repetitive, tedious and mind-numbing. Revision is a substantial and time-consuming part of the course which you have chosen to study, so you should make sure you get some pleasure and value out of it. Don't just do it for the sake of the examiners. What kinds of things, then are worth doing, given the strictly limited time you have available and the importance of making all your efforts count? We shall now consider some of the key strategic questions.

When should you start your revision for the exam?

There is no 'correct' answer to this question. Basically it is something you have to work out for yourself.

The right time for you depends on:

- Your personal commitments in addition to studying, and the time you can spare for the revision process.
- Your personal style of studying (whether you are more capable of short intensive bursts of effort, or longer sustained periods.)

What you are trying to get out of the course? It would be a shame if you panicked too early and spoiled the latter parts of the course by being obsessed with revision. On the other hand, it is a grave mistake to avoid all thinking about the exam until the very last moment and then just hope for the best. You will get far less out of the course and you will suffer in the exam itself, if you leave yourself no time for revision. It is a good idea to begin to have some thoughts about revising a couple of months before the exam even if you don't actually start the revision itself until later. If you were just to jot down a first attempt at a plan of the last weeks of the course, sketching out how you might try to fit in some blocks of revision time alongside the normal course work, It would be a useful start. It doesn't matter if you have to scrap the plan and draw up a new one (or have to keep scrapping plans and drawing up new ones). The effort of making a tentative start on a revision plan on the back of an envelope will set in process the necessary shift in orientation as you move towards the final stages of the course

**Remember the facts and revise your answers.**

Revise all your subjects using this easily mastered Key-Card method. That way you'll enjoy rapid retention and accurate recall of all those vital facts - even under exam pressure.

Here's how to do it step by step.

1. You'll need: several dozen plain cards, a large storage box, coloured pens:
2. Select revision subject. Identify major topics - use past papers, teacher's advice, and texts to guide you.
3. Identify key facts within each topic. Better too many than too few. Write down ONE fact on ONE side only of each card.
4. Keep facts brief. Use abbreviations, thumbnail sketches, symbols. Write words in RED, drawings in GREEN, symbols, figures, formulae etc in BLUE. Colours will help boost memory.
5. Sort facts into a logical sequence.
6. Place cards from a single topic (maximum 25 at a time) in a circle on table - all but one face down. Read that card then try recalling facts on either adjoining card. Don't strain to remember. Stay relaxed. Think of the first thing the fact you've just read brings to mind. Check by turning over card. Repeat until all cards have been recalled.
7. Continue until memory is faultless. Check by writing out facts from cards. Focusing on symbols may help recall.
8. After revision keep topic cards together in storage box. Use dividers to identify subjects and topic areas
9. During exam recreate Key-Cards on scrap paper. Remembering any one fact will bring all the others to mind. Use rough notes as blue print for constructing a logical, well-argued answer.

*Key-Cards can be used for most subjects, but are less useful for learning maths, chemistry and physics formulae, or foreign languages. These need to be clearly, understood, that's memorised by constant practice.*

## Key Points.

### Strategies for revising for an exam

- Study old exam papers and specimen papers thoroughly.
- Carefully select the parts of the course you intend to revise.
- Make a timetable for revising.
- Seek out the central questions in each of the parts of the course you have chosen to revise.
- Condense the content of your chosen sections into very brief summarizing notes.
- Think up questions you might be asked.
- Practice jotting down outlines for answers to questions.
- Practice writing out one or two answers in full against the clock
- Keep in touch with other students and with your tutor to broaden your ideas and maintain contact with reality

## How to prepare for "THE EXAM":

Getting yourself 'geared-up' in the last day or two. Is it a good idea to relax and get plenty of sleep and outdoor exercise in (the day or two immediately before the exam) That last day or so is when you should gradually building yourself up to a peak of preparation. You can concentrate wonderfully when it's too late to worry about the frills. You can forget your plans for re-reading that book, or the thorough going over you were going to give to that theory you never really understood. With all those possibilities left behind, you are in a position to concentrate all your energies on making the best job you can of marshalling what you do know. 'Relaxed' is the last thing you want to be when you enter the exam. Calm and unruffled - possibly (if you can manage it) but you should be keyed-up like a tennis star at a tournament, or a stage performer on the first-night, ready to give your big performance of the year. transcending your normal limits by force of all that nervous energy and your single-minded concentration.

## Get your thinking in before the exam.

How will you do Justice to everything you have learned in months of study, when you only have three hours in the exam. How long do you spend on an essay Three hours, Ten hours a week? How on earth can you condense all those writing processes in to four 45 minute bursts? Clearly you can't. Consequently exam answers don't look like essays. They are shorter, more fragmented, and much less polished than ordinary essays. You can be sure that most students are glad that their work is thrown away when the marking is over. On the other hand. It is surprising how much you can get into an exam answer in spite of the time constraints. What you can't do is gradually work out a carefully considered response, as you do for your essays. You have to be able to pitch in after spending only a few minutes deciding on what line to take. This means that you have to have done a lot of your thinking prior to the exam itself.

You need to have decided which parts of course you are going to choose to answer on. You need to have the central issues of the sections of the course you have revised clearly held in the forefront of your mind. You need to have practised setting up arguments between the main points of view in the course. And you need to have decided exactly how you are going to use your time in the exam. Then, in the exam you pick your question you settle after a few minutes on a particular way of using what you know to answer it, and you stick to it for better or worse. In other words, you have to get yourself into a very particular frame of mind for the exam. A highly organized efficient and pragmatic one. One in which, having stopped worrying and wondering, you have focused on making the best of the immediate tasks in hand, cutting every corner you can and generally using your native cunning.

On the day itself, try to approach the exam calmly. Go about the normal business of getting up and starting the day in an unhurried way. Take a short stroll perhaps, or do a few exercises, to get yourself tuned up and functioning properly. Don't attempt any last-minute revision or even glance over your notes. It will only disturb your carefully stored ideas. Get to the exam in good time and keep walking around if you have to wait to get into the exam centre. Don't let the other candidates disturb you. Remain aloof if you need to. When you are in the exam room, find your desk and calmly settle yourself in your seat. Set out whatever you have with you on the desk and check that you have everything you need.

The exam room always seems a strange place, full of people all locked away in their own thoughts - but don't let the strangeness distract you. Just keep your mind 'ticking over in neutral, ready to slip into gear when the lights change. If you have prepared yourself sensibly there is no point in worrying. In fact, once the exam has started you may find it surprisingly exhilarating and challenging. It's astonishing how much you can do within the allocated exam timer when you have keyed yourself up to a peak of mental fitness.

## Combating Exam Stress.

If your heart starts beating rapidly, mouth goes dry and you feel unable to cope"- don't panic! Relaxation Exercises will banish needless anxiety and help keep exam nerves well under control. The following exercise will help in combating stress. First, calm the body. Sit or lie down in a quiet place. Remove shoes. Loosen tight clothing. Tense your muscles like this: clench fists; try touching front of wrists to shoulders; hunch shoulders; frown hard; clench jaws; press tip of tongue to roof of mouth; take a deep breath; flatten stomach, stretch legs and point toes. Notice the tension. Hold for slow count to five. Now Just let go.

Flop out like a puppet whose strings have been cut. Feel tension flowing freely away from your body. Next relax your mind, remain sitting or lying. Eyes closed. Breathe slowly and deeply, imagine being on a tropical island. Blue sky and seas, warm sun, a golden, sandy beach. See yourself lying there, very quiet and peaceful. Hold this image for 20 seconds (or longer if you like). Now open your eyes and go calmly about your work. Do this relaxation exercise last thing at night to ensure a good night's rest.



It is possible that, as the exam draws closer, you will begin to find the tension gets on top of you. There are several varieties and levels of anxiousness which can develop at exam time. As previously mentioned, you may experience a general uneasiness about the task ahead That builds up gradually over a long period until (very usefully) it provides the spur to getting down to a really intensive burst of work. This is a

normal precursor to any kind of performance. What you need to do is to make sure you use this tension productively. Set yourself practical tasks in preparation for the exam so as to keep yourself busy. Remind yourself from time to time that this is your exam; you are doing it because you have chosen to. and because the tension it creates is a very productive force which will help you with Home difficult learning. In other words, the ideal situation is that you learn to live with the pressures and to use them to achieve things for yourself. Your anxiousness may however, develop into a pall of gloom which spoils the last part of the course. You may find that all your thoughts income cantered on the exam. In this case, you will find it useful to keep talking to other students and to your tutor. You need to share your thoughts about the exam and about your plans for tackling It. Talking to others will release tension and will help you to keep things in a realistic perspective. For a few students though, this is not enough. Their anxiety in the period immediately before the exam builds up to a point where sleep is difficult and their health begins to suffer, or where work or family and friends begin to be affected.

If you find this happening to you, then go to your doctor for advice. Some people find breathing exercise helpful, or meditation, or some other way of focusing.

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE: "EXAMS ARE NOT EVERYTHING"**

It is not uncommon for students to experience a great deal of pressure form friends and especially relatives, "You have to do well" is the general statement that is cemented into the students brain resulting in added pressure (often having serious consequences). Our advise is to do the best you can and that's it. At the end of the day it is you and you alone that is of any importance with regarding the Leaving Certificate.