



## Surviving the exam

### Before the exam

- Think positive
- Remind yourself of what you do know
- Avoid panic
- Find the exam room ahead of time
- Check the exam time
- Get a good night's sleep and eat something sustaining
- Get an “exam pack” ready

### In the exam (online exam)

#### Step 1: Technical requirements

- Before the exam starts, make sure that your computer or the device to be used for the exam is functioning well, fully charged and plugged in. If possible, prepare a backup device for use just in case.
- If you live with others tell people in your household about the exam time and the need for a dedicated quiet period for the exam. If you have a poor internet connection, then ask others to refrain from using the internet during this time.
- Read the exam information sent beforehand carefully to find out the exam time, how to submit the assessment online, how to begin, how to finish the exam, etc.
- Find out what resources (e.g. course materials, books, software, etc.) you are allowed to use during the exam and prepare the resources well in advance.
- If you will be using any special software for the exam, make sure it is correctly installed and practice using the software to be familiar with its functions. If you are unsure check with your course coordinator.
- It's very important that you ask your lecturer any exam-related questions before the exam.
- Find out who you can contact and what to do if you encounter any technical issues during your exam.

#### Step 2: Check the exam question

- Check the course number to confirm you have the right exam.
- Check the number of questions you should have to confirm that it is complete.
- Make sure that you have any additional materials if specified i.e.
- Formula sheets
- Maths tables


[Example exam papers](#) can be found in the library (although the format may be different, they may give you an idea of what to expect).

- If you have any problems, make contact with the relevant person as soon as possible.

### **Step 3: Read and re-read the instructions**

- Check which questions or sections are compulsory.
- Check for words that indicate options within the exam (e.g. “Either”, “And”, “Choose Two (2)” ). Missing these words can cost you dearly: if you complete both essays where you had the choice of two, you have wasted time and marks.
- Check for any specific instructions, e.g. “All working for calculations must be shown”.

### **Step 4: Allocate your time**

- Allocate your time for each question based on how much it is worth, the type of questions, and whether the section is compulsory.
- If a section is worth 60 marks out of 100, then it should be allocated 60% of your time.
- If that 60 mark section is divided into 3 questions then each question should be allocated 20% of your time.
- Remember too that sometimes multi-choice questions can be done quicker than essay questions.
- Calculate a timeline of when you want to complete questions and stick to it. Remember that if you spend too much time on a difficult question you may not have enough time for easier questions after it. Download an exam time worksheet  (90KB) and follow the steps below for each exam.
- Convert the number of hours into minutes (1 hour = 60 minutes).
- Take off 10 to 20 minutes for planning at the beginning of the exam. Take off 10 minutes for reviewing at the end of the exam.
- Divide the remaining minutes by the total number of marks. This is the total time you have for each mark.
- Work out how much time you have for each question, and when you need to move on to the next one.
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### **Step 5: Choose your order**

- Decide what order you are going to complete your questions in and write it down.
- It is good idea to attempt the questions you feel most confident with first.
- Make sure you complete the compulsory questions.

### **Step 6: Memory dump**

- Write down all the information you can remember for all the questions that you have chosen to complete. Rather than worrying about remembering all the information, you can then focus on writing it well.
- Write down the memory dump on scrap paper; you can use this as a reference within the exam.
- Use mind maps as they are a quick way of getting information down.
- This technique does not work well with multi-choice questions.

### **Step 7: Start writing**

- You have limited time to complete the exam and impress your marker, so write as much as possible in the time you have available.

## **In the exam (physical exam)**

### **Possible exam pack for physical exams**

In a clear plastic ziplock bag:

- Student ID card or other photo ID
- Several pens that work
- Highlighter
- Pencils and eraser for scantron cards (for multiple choice exams)
- Calculator and other permitted equipment
- If open book, text and permitted notes
- Clear plastic water bottle

Organising yourself and your time in the exam are critical to successfully completing the exam.

### **Six steps to surviving the exam**

#### **During the 10 minute reading time**

##### **1. Check the exam paper**

- Check the paper number at the top of the page to confirm you have the right exam.
- Check the number of pages you should have and count the pages.
- Make sure that you have any additional materials if specified, namely:
  - Formula sheets
  - Maths tables

##### **2. Read the instructions**

- Check which questions or sections are compulsory.
- Check for words that indicate options within the exam [for example, “either”, “and”, “Choose Two (2)”. Missing these words can cost you dearly: if you complete two essays where you had to choose one of two options, you will have wasted time and marks.
- Check for any specific instructions, for example, “All working for calculations must be shown.”

##### **3. Allocate your time**

Allocate your time for each question based on how much it is worth, the type of questions, and whether the section is compulsory.

- If a section is worth 60 marks out of 100 then it should be allocated 60% of your time.
- If the exam consists of 4 essays, then allocate a quarter of your time to each.

- Remember that sometimes multiple-choice questions can be done quicker than essay questions.
- Write out a timeframe (for example, 30 minutes multiple choice questions, 45 minutes for each essay) of when you want to complete the questions and stick to it. Remember that if you spend too much time on a difficult question, you may not have enough time for other questions.

#### **4. Choose your question order**

Decide what order you are going to complete your questions in and write it down.

- It is good idea to attempt the questions you feel most confident with first.
- Make sure you complete the compulsory questions.

#### **At the start of the exam**

Candidates are permitted to read the examination paper ten minutes before the exam starts, but must not write in their answer books or make notes until the supervisor announces that they may commence writing. Ask for spare paper during the reading time.

#### **5. Memory dump**

On a spare piece of paper, write down all the information you can remember (for the questions that you have chosen to complete). You can then focus on writing well, rather than worrying about remembering all the information. This is a particularly useful technique for essay or short answer exams.

- Write down the memory dump on scrap paper; you can use this as a reference within the exam.
- Use mind maps as they are a quick way of getting information down.

#### **6. Start writing**

You have limited time to complete the exam and impress your marker, so write as much as possible in the time you have available.

- Avoiding writer's cramp
  - Before the exam: Practice writing or typing quickly and for increased periods.
  - During the exam: If handwritten, try gripping your pen loosely, or using a fatter pen. Put down your pen and flex your hand between questions.

### **Strategies for answering questions**

- Essays
- Multiple-choice
- Short answer questions
- Solving problems
- Open book

#### **Essays**

- Choose the questions you will answer during reading time.

- During the first 5 minutes, write down the relevant points you can remember on the essay questions you will answer.
- Understand the question. Examine key words and command words – understand what aspect of the topic you have been asked to write about.
- For the structure of the essay, follow the structure of the question.
- Develop a thesis statement from the question and include it in your introduction.
- Structure the points in the body paragraphs so that one point follows the other logically and clearly.
- Generally, one paragraph = one point, supported by an example, explanation and evidence.
- No need to provide references and citations but do acknowledge theory and research using relevant names.

### **Common command words**

Analyse: break the subject up into its main ideas and evaluate them.

Compare: show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects.

Define: give the meaning of a word or term distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes by examples and illustrations.

Describe: give a detailed account of the characteristics of a subject.

Discuss: investigate and present the different aspects of a problem or subject and come to some conclusion.

Examine: inquire into and consider a problem carefully.

### **Multiple-choice**

- Do not read through the test during the reading time.
- If the correct answer looks obvious, still check to make sure that it is correct.
- Read the questions carefully and highlight key words.
- Go through and answer the easier questions first – come back to the tougher ones later.
- Answering multi-choice questions can be very difficult, as often more than one answer seems to be correct. The underlying skill in answering these types of questions is to be able to choose the most plausible/right answer from a number of options. Try the following:
  - Cover the answers and try to answer the question yourself.
  - Once you have an answer, look at the options and choose the one which most closely matches your answer.
  - Try eliminating any answers which you know are definitely wrong.

### **Short answer questions**

- Keep your answers short – usually a paragraph, but sometimes only 2 or 3 sentences are required.
- Answer the questions given – do the easiest questions first. Think of what points, key words, phrases and ideas the examiner will be looking for. Don't fall into the trap of trying to write down everything you know.
- Leave 1 or 2 lines after each answer in case you remember something else important later.

- Stick closely to the time you have allocated for each question – you will gain more marks if all the questions are attempted.
- Short answer questions often focus on key terms and concepts emphasised during the semester, so definitions and examples are an important aspect. Sometimes you might be asked to compare or contrast terms. Identify important key terms and build up links and relationships between them.
- If you do start to run out of time, write key words or phrases as they will likely still gain you some marks.

### **Solving Problems**

- Write down relevant formulas, equations, or rules.
- Clearly show the steps you have taken in working out the answer(s).
- If necessary (and appropriate) write some notes to explain your answer(s).
- For numerical problems involving computation, make sure you include the appropriate units (for example, ml, cm, N, m/sec) in your final answer(s). Underline your final answer(s) if this is appropriate and will help clarity.
- Go through and solve the easier problems first – come back to the tougher ones afterwards.
- Problem and computational questions require you to perform some calculations to provide the answer. Sometimes you may be required to use multiple calculations to arrive at an answer. Practice is the key to success in these exams. Know the theories and when and how to use them.
- In maths, be prepared to show your workings. If the answer is wrong or incomplete, you can still get credit for your workings by demonstrating your mastery of the process.

### **Open Book**

- Open book exams are not an easy option and can be more demanding than a closed book exam.
- Know what type of information and how much will be allowed into the examination room.
- You may be limited to your own notes or just to the textbook.
- You will need to be able to retrieve information quickly and effectively in this sort of exam.
- Be familiar with the layout of the text.
- Have relevant sections marked and practice locating material quickly.
- Don't just copy directly from the textbook.
- Ensure that you correctly reference any material.
- Ensure you use the correct information/theory.

## **Academic writing and study skills support**

### **1. Academic Q+A**

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

## **2. Consultations**

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

## **3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)**

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) website from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

## **4. Pre-reading Service**

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

## **5. Workshops**

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).